

Vilma Helimäki

**Long-Distance Hiking in Finland: Perspectives of Tourism Stakeholders**

**University of Lapland**

Master's Thesis

Northern Tourism, Tourism Research

Spring 2026

## **University of Lapland, Faculty of Social Sciences**

Title: Long-Distance Hiking in Finland: Perspectives of Tourism Stakeholders

Author: Vilma Helimäki

Degree program/subject: Northern Tourism, Tourism Research

The type of the work: Master's Thesis

Number of pages: 69 + 4 appendices

Year: 2026

### **Abstract**

Long-distance hiking is a growing trend. It is an old form of tourism and means hiking for several weeks or months, distancing hundreds of kilometers or more. Long-distance hiking is simultaneously physically demanding, meaningful for oneself, adventurous and a way to be with nature. Finland has many shorter hiking trails, and additionally some long-distance trails. Long-distance hiking is a low impact activity, but its mentality and extended time and distance could have a lot to offer for developing tourism further in the North.

This thesis studies long-distance hiking from the lens of stakeholder theory. Stakeholders consist of various roles, such as local businesses, destination managers, environments and tourists. Stakeholder theory recognizes three important roles in long-distance hiking: the collaboration with tourism stakeholders in general, the nonhuman nature and environment, and the long-distance hikers. Working with long-distance hiking and trail management in Finland can benefit from purposeful stakeholder interaction as a basis for all development.

In this thesis, the main research question was: "How do tourism stakeholders in Finland perceive long-distance hiking and its potential for tourism development?" Complementary sub-questions were: 1) How do hiking-related stakeholders perceive long-distance hiking and trails in Finland? 2) What kinds of understanding and knowledge do stakeholders have regarding long-distance hiking? 3) What are the barriers and enablers to establishing and maintaining long-distance hiking trails in Finland?

Research was conducted in qualitative, social constructivist approach. I interviewed nine stakeholders who were related to hiking and trail management in Finland. Using thematic analysis and applying stakeholder theory, I found that stakeholders perceive long-distance hiking popular internationally, but small in Finland. Long-distance hiking trails could offer opportunities for livelihood in local communities, if developed in Finland. Stakeholders understand long-distance hiking through pilgrimage, hiking in the wilderness, adventure for leisure and low consumption tourist behavior. Finland was seen as a great hiking destination for its peacefulness, safety, rurality, mellow nature and open outdoor culture. Stakeholders mentioned that long-distance hiking in Finland depends on the maintenance and future development of trails and services along the way.

In conclusion of this thesis, I suggest that long-distance hiking should be studied further in Finnish context, to expand understanding of the segment. For developing long-distance hiking trails in Finland and to tackle issues regarding resources, maintenance, caretaking, marketing, national and international interaction, a central manager should be named.

Keywords: long-distance hiking, hiking, pilgrimage, thru-hiking, hiking trails, stakeholder theory

## **Lapin Yliopisto, Yhteiskuntatieteiden tiedekunta**

Otsikko: Pitkän matkan vaellus Suomessa matkailun sidosryhmien näkökulmasta

Tekijä: Vilma Helimäki

Koulutusohjelma/oppiaine: Matkailuntutkimus, Northern Tourism

Työn laji: Pro gradu -tutkielma

Sivumäärä: 69 + 4 liitettä

Vuosi: 2026

### **Tiivistelmä**

Pitkän matkan vaellus on kasvava trendi. Pitkien matkojen vaeltaminen on vanha matkailun muoto, ja tarkoittaa tässä työssä useampien viikkojen tai kuukausien sekä useiden satojen kilometrien kulkemista. Pitkän matkan vaellus on samanaikaisesti seikkailullista, fyysisesti haastavaa, mutta merkittävää vaeltajalle. Se on myös tapa olla luonnossa ja luonnon kanssa. Suomessa on useita lyhyempiä vaellusreittejä sekä muutama pitkän matkan vaellusreitti. Vaellus aktiviteettina kuluttaa vain vähän, mutta syvemmät merkitykset sekä pitkä aika ja matka voivat mahdollistaa kehityskohtia pohjoisen matkailulle.

Tässä gradussa tutkin pitkän matkan vaellusta matkailun sidosryhmäteorian kautta. Sidosryhmät toimivat matkailualalla useissa eri rooleissa, kuten paikalliset yrittäjät ja toimijat, matkailuorganisaatiot, erilaiset ympäristöt sekä itse matkailijat. Sidosryhmäteoria tunnistaa kolme merkittävää pitkän matkan vaellukseen vaikuttavaa roolia, jotka ovat: yhteistyöverkostot matkailun toimijoiden kesken, monilajinen ympäristö sekä pitkän matkan vaeltajat. Pitkän matkan vaellusreittien kehittämistyö voi hyötyä merkittävästi tarkoituksenmukaisesta sidosryhmäyhteistyöstä.

Tässä työssä päätutkimuskysymys oli: “Kuinka matkailun sidosryhmät Suomessa näkevät pitkän matkan vaelluksen ja sen potentiaalinen matkailun kehittämiseksi?” Apukysymyksiä olivat: 1) Miten vaellukseen kytkeytyvät sidosryhmät näkevät pitkän matkan vaelluksen ja reitit Suomessa? 2) Minkälaisia näkemyksiä ja ymmärrys sidosryhmillä on liittyen pitkän matkan vaellukseen? 3) Mitkä ovat esteitä ja mahdollistajia pitkän matkan vaellusreittien kehittämiseen ja ylläpitoon Suomessa?

Tässä laadullisessa tutkimuksessa haastattelin yhdeksää sidosryhmien edustajaa, jotka olivat kytköksissä vaellukseen ja vaellusreitteihin Suomessa. Teema-analyysin ja sidosryhmäteorian avulla havaitsin, että sidosryhmät näkevät pitkän matkan vaelluksen suosittuna ilmiönä maailmalla, mutta pienenä Suomessa. Se voisi kuitenkin mahdollistaa vaellusmatkailun kehittämistä, jonka kautta edistää paikallisten yhteisöjen elinvoimaa Suomessa. Sidosryhmien edustajien ymmärrys pitkän matkan vaelluksesta pohjautui pyhiinvaellukseen, erämaavaellukseen, seikkailunhakuisuuteen sekä kestävään matkailukäyttäytymiseen. Sidosryhmien edustajien mukaan Suomi nähtiin hyvänä vaelluskohteena mm. hiljaisuuden, etäisyyden, helppojen luonnonolosuhteiden sekä avointen retkeilyrakenteiden takia. Pitkän matkan vaelluksen edellytyksinä nähtiin reittien ja palveluiden kehitys sekä ylläpidon varmistaminen.

Tutkimuksen pohjalta totean, että pitkän matkan vaellusta tulisi tutkia lisää Suomessa. Vaeltajasegmentin ymmärrys sekä keskeisen organisoivan tahon nimeäminen voisi lisätä kestävämpää reittikehitystä, huollon varmuutta sekä kansallista ja kansainvälistä yhteistyötä.

Avainsanat: pitkän matkan vaellus, vaellus, pyhiinvaellus, thru-hike, vaellusreitit, reitistö, sidosryhmäteoria

## Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.1 Thesis background for long-distance hiking.....	6
1.2 Literature review.....	8
1.3 Research approach and questions.....	9
1.4 Structure of the thesis.....	12
2. LONG-DISTANCE HIKING.....	13
2.1 Long-distance hiking in practice.....	13
2.2 Why people hike? – the hiking trend.....	15
2.3 Finland for long-distance hiking.....	17
3. STAKEHOLDER APPROACH.....	21
3.1 Stakeholder theory.....	21
3.2 The nonhuman stakeholders and environment.....	23
3.3 Hikers as stakeholders.....	25
4. METHODOLOGY.....	26
4.1 Qualitative social constructivist approach.....	26
4.2 Semi-structured interview.....	27
4.3 Thematic analysis.....	31
5. ANALYSIS.....	34
5.1 Understanding of long-distance hiking.....	34
5.2 The environment for long-distance hiking in Finland.....	38
5.3 Collaboration and competition of the stakeholders.....	42
5.4 Discussion.....	47
6. CONCLUSIONS.....	55
REFERENCES.....	59
APPENDIX 1.....	70
APPENDIX 2.....	71
APPENDIX 3.....	72
APPENDIX 4.....	73

**List of tables**

Table 1. The share of the interview participants between regions in Finland..... 28

**List of figures**

Figure 1. Category tree based on the coding and stakeholder theory..... 33

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Thesis background for long-distance hiking

In this thesis, by using the term long-distance hiking, I mean hikes that are properly long. Long-distance hiking in this work means hikes longer than 200 kilometers, or more than one week in time. Less than that and in a general speech, I use the term hiking. By hiking, I mean traveling on foot, mainly in nature. This definition is applied merely due to the reasons of filling a gap in Finnish hiking context. Hiking as an activity is rather popular, but the view of it is limited.

In Finland, there are several well-known hiking trails that are about 50 to 150 kilometers in length, which are categorized as long together with all trails longer than 10 kilometers (e.g., Metsähallitus, n.d.). But knowing that there have also been a couple of trails or accomplishments of about 500 to 1000 kilometers in Finland, although partially in questionable conditions (e.g., Cahoon, 2025; Cahoon et al., 2025), the definition of long should be refined. Recently, Laaksonen and Mattila (2024) released a guidebook specifically about long hikes (*Pitkät vaellukset*). The book discusses the basics about hiking for longer distances or time, keeping 500 kilometers a starting point for what is considered as long (Laaksonen & Mattila, 2024, p. 14). There are other definitions, such as that a long-distance trail is 50 to 1000 plus kilometers (Knopp & Sievänen, 1992). Definitions are used differently depending on the case.

The golden middle path and similarly the even longer trails are lacking and require further investigation. When talking about the longer than 1000-kilometer hikes on an international scale, I apply the term thru-hiking, which means hiking a long-distance trail within one hiking season (Laaksonen & Mattila, 2024, p. 105), completing a path between defined starting and ending points, often through a country or a region. Long-distance hiking therefore covers a scene in hiking that currently is sparse in Finland but could be applicable for further extend.

The history of modern long-distance hiking takes more than a century back in time, until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when an idea of Kungsleden in Sweden started brewing (Svenska Turistföreningen, n.d.). It continued in the 1920's when The Appalachian Trail in United States was put on map (Laaksonen & Mattila, 2024, p. 14-15) and later in 1968 when the National Trail System Act set a goal of having a nationwide network of trails in United States (Knopp & Sievänen, 1992). Even before that and until the present, one of the first forms of tourism mobilities has been pilgrimage, which means hiking for various distances for religious and spiritual

purposes (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). For example, hiking the 3000-kilometer Via Francigena from Canterbury, England to Rome in Italy dates as early as the late 10<sup>th</sup> century (Associazione Europea delle Vie Francigene, n.d.).

When writing my thesis, I am aware that my background to this topic comes from the field. Having spent a lot of time on hikes has proved to me that one main thing is the journey itself. I have hiked three long-distance trails: The Eastern Finland hiking trail of 400 kilometers in summer 2020, skied Vita Bandet for 1350 kilometers in Sweden in 2021 and thru-hiked the entirety of 4250 kilometers on the Pacific Crest Trail in United States in 2023. These trails are quite different to each other but share the common idea of spending multiple weeks and months hiking and living outdoors.

I recognize this topic timely as I have often heard the question whether there are long-distance hiking trails in Finland. In the beginning of the thesis process, I already had personal interest in studying the topic, as it would be great to be able to hike a long-distance trail in my home country. At first sight, there are plenty of naturally occurring nature destinations, chained forests, wilderness areas and national parks located on the map especially in the Eastern and Northern sides of Finland. But are there actual trails suitable for long-distance hiking and tourism purposes?

I took a chance to research this phenomenon deeper. The decision only strengthened during the first preliminary literature reviews, and I found only sparse research related to the phenomenon of long-distance hiking in Finland. Therefore, I recognized a clear research gap. For planning a suitable thesis framework, I reviewed possible tourism applications from theoretical side and learned that the networks of stakeholders could help investigating the phenomenon. With stakeholder involvement and voices, long-distance hiking could be explained in tourism field. An early aim for my thesis was to study how the potential of long-distance hiking for tourism could be empowered. I had a wish to tell the reader and tourism industry a message that says: “Hey, Finland could also exist on the map of globally unique long-distance hiking trails, with outstanding characteristics like nowhere else.” The next literature review shows what kept me going.

## 1.2 Literature review

With this literature review, I contribute to explaining how the phenomenon of long-distance hiking has been studied in previous research. Further discussion of the phenomenon of hiking and literature related to it will be presented in chapter 2. I used the search terms of long-distance hiking, thru-hiking, hiking and names of iconic trails to find out the existing academic literature related to the topic. Both English and Finnish languages were used in the search process, to widen the scope of the search.

Long-distance hiking can be seen as a growing trend, with a growing social environment related to the trail too (Dustin et al., 2020). Similar thoughts about trends and horizons for the growth of hiking in Europe have been studied by Capsi and Esteve (2020), who argue that hiking tourism products should be rethought, as hiking has potential for many kinds of tourism. There is also growth among young people for domestic nature tourism, especially for hiking and experiencing nature (Sola, 2023). The interest towards destinations that are closer, easier and more affordable affects to the decision to travel (Heikkilä, 2020). Both hiking and long-distance hiking are showing signals of potential growth in tourism, both near and far, and proximity tourism to mundane environments could be of significance for sustainable development (Nousiainen, 2022).

Finnish hiking trails have been studied from various perspectives, like marketing (Rautio, 2025), trail mapping (Repo-Kajokulma, 2020), and trail condition assessment (Kuorikoski, 2015), but many of the trails cover one trail or a region with trail networks. Also, critical side of hiking adds to the conversation. Hiking affects the surrounding environments by for example, causing erosion of paths on protection areas (Ilkka, 2014). Nonetheless, by planning the trails according to natural features and intended use, the harmful effects on nature could be decreased (Tiainen, 2020). Heikkinen (2020) studied that trails should be in good condition for different users, and making of new trails should regard these groups. But as stated through a process of marketing planning for a trail in Southern Finland, the work does not stop when a trail physically exists but requires consistency for reaching the right audience (Rautio, 2025).

Social world of hiking has been studied to be one of the major factors that affect hiking popularity, for example on the Pacific Crest Trail where hiker numbers are increasing, thus forming the social trail life further (Lum, Keith & Scott, 2019). And Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail, where social aspects are core to the hiking experience, but that long-distance hiking

should be further studied (Cole, 2018; Cole & Thomsen, 2021). Hiking is about seeking adventure on the journey (Schilar, 2015) while learning about the landscape and oneself (Ahmetović, 2025). Additionally, the meanings of a wilderness experience to the hiker are complex and affect hiking also on shorter hikes (Sievälä, 2019). Regardless of the length of a hike, the social impacts of hiking extend outside of the hiking activity too.

Widening the literature search for pilgrimage adds that hiking on a pilgrimage route is done for spiritual as well as for physical and life-changing reasons (Lindgren, 2018). Pilgrimage can per se make a positive impact on people and their life (Roine, 2024), and it offers experience especially through the detachment from everyday life and interaction to others (Mäkinen & Törhönen, 2015). Pilgrimage is a form of hiking and a form of tourism, which seems to be close to the mentality of long-distance hiking too.

In Finland, a strong non-academic field has contributed to building the understanding and practical traditions related to hiking. For decades, major source for studying the topic have been practical, desktop sources, like books about hiking and trails (e.g., Laaksonen & Mattila, 2024) or visitor data (e.g., Latja, 2022), but the academic research has evolved slowly. Thus, the visible gap in terminology and limited understanding of the long-distance hiking phenomenon in tourism field. Long-distance hiking has been studied from some perspectives, but further research, especially in Finnish context should be implemented.

### **1.3 Research approach and questions**

As can be read from the previous literature section, the phenomenon of long-distance hiking requires studying, and further explanation in relation to tourism. The trails, social aspects, local surroundings, communities, business, hiker perspective, environment, and management all link to stakeholder theory, which will form theoretical background for this thesis.

Stakeholder theory is like a philosophy, a normative base for all work that concerns working in the networks of multiple operators (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Stakeholder theory and its aspects on long-distance hiking will be discussed in Chapter 3.

That being said, the aim of this thesis is to study long-distance hiking in Finland from tourism stakeholder perspective to find out whether it could be developed for tourism purposes as well as to support local livelihoods. The main research question I study in this thesis is: “How do

tourism stakeholders in Finland perceive long-distance hiking and its potential for tourism development?”

That will be explored through the following sub questions:

- 1) How do hiking-related stakeholders perceive long-distance hiking and trails in Finland?
- 2) What kinds of understanding and knowledge do stakeholders have regarding long-distance hiking?
- 3) What are the barriers and enablers to establishing and maintaining long-distance hiking trails in Finland?

Above-mentioned questions will help to look at long-distance hiking and trails from tourism stakeholder perspective. By grasping the stakeholder perspective, it is possible to see how long-distance hiking and trails currently are seen and why, and what are the possible factors for developing them. It is important to discover the previous literature, when looking for a research topic. Pointing a gap in research justifies the choice of the topic and perspective from where it is studied (Juuti & Puusa, 2020, p. 12). Together with well-justified research topic, aim of research and research questions, the background for methodology, and thus reaching for the aims of the research are set (Juuti & Puusa, 2020, p. 12).

In this thesis, I am using social constructivist qualitative approach, which believes that meaning comes from stories and words that are socially constructed (Kekäle & Puusa, 2020, p. 47). Empirical material will be gathered with semi-structured interviews that allow freedom for discussion but have a preliminary structure or themes for assistance (Puusa, 2020a, p. 111). Interview participants will be selected purposefully by inviting hiking-related tourism stakeholders for solo interviews. Participants consist of people who are working in different tourism destinations, organizations or companies, and work with tourism development, land-use or hiking trail-related topics in Finland. In qualitative research, it is preferred to find a variety of perspectives rather than one singular truth to the topic (Juuti & Puusa, 2020, p. 14). In addition, the researcher must know the topic well so a wide spectrum of material can be gathered without guiding too much towards a pre-determined outcome (Juuti & Puusa, 2020, p. 14).

Analysis part of research starts already in the planning phase and continues throughout data collection and until the final discussion (Silverman, 2005, p. 152). I used thematic analysis

method, for it can reflect stories and themes through the material (Hecker & Kalpokas, n.d.). Using the interview material to create narratives is a way to describe how meaning of the phenomenon is constructed (Silverman, 2005, p. 168). Analysis includes quotations from the interviews which can help to justify the findings but should not work as analysis on their own (Juuti & Puusa, 2020, p. 14). Therefore, the findings consist of both combining the empirical material and the previously known literature and theory (Juuti & Puusa, 2020, p. 13).

Part of the research ethics is that the participants are aware of the research aims and that the researcher remains responsible for research, participants and other people (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 130-131), for instance by maintaining anonymity of the participants while keeping the data whole (Richards, 2005, p. 194). Throughout the project, a researcher always influences the making of research, and personal decisions, thoughts and characteristics have value to the study, and they need to be considered reflexively (Richards, 2005, p. 42). I recall this both a benefit and a challenge, as strong background to the thesis topic might affect the way the data is seen and how it will be discussed but add depth and credibility to the study too. I expect that despite knowing this topic well on a personal level, this research will both surprise me in the process and findings and push the limits of understanding forward.

I followed the code of conduct for research integrity, which means that the research aims for reliability, honesty, respect and accountability in all phases throughout the project (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK [TENK], 2023). According to good research practices, the research considers for example other researchers' work, good management of the data and careful documentation of the project (TENK, 2023). Ethics in research show in present actions but also in anticipation of what is coming (Mäkinen, 2006, p. 13), which support the research for being critical but truthful (Mäkinen, 2006, p. 28). Reliability of the research depends on how it manages to impact people with the process and findings (Juuti & Puusa, 2020, p. 11).

Talking about the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in this thesis, I have followed the guidelines of the University of Lapland and the Lapland higher education group (University of Lapland, 2023; University of Lapland & Lapland University of Applied Sciences [LUC], 2025). In this work, I have used AI for checking grammatical and structural enhancements for readability and understanding, information search and for brainstorming in the early phases of the thesis. All the text in this thesis is my own, in addition to the valuable material referenced from other sources.

## 1.4 Structure of the thesis

Introduction chapter of the thesis first presents background to the phenomenon, and research settings before diving deeper into the topic of long-distance hiking. Chapter 2 shares the phenomenon of long-distance hiking and trails in smaller pieces with both the light of academic literature and with practical examples from around the world. The chapter ends by taking the phenomenon to Finland. The purpose of that chapter is to provide the reader with a better image of what long-distance hiking is and how it appears, before heading to the theoretical framework of stakeholders.

What seems meaningful about long-distance hiking in Finland from tourism stakeholder perspective, is presented in Chapter 3. Long-distance hiking is discussed through the lens of stakeholder theory that gives voice from other research to the phenomenon of long-distance hiking. Theoretical framework is also connected to the analysis and discussion later in thesis.

Research methodology is presented in Chapter 4, where also the analysis work is explained. Based on the interview material, analysis and theory, main themes appear, and they are interpreted together with theoretical framework in Chapter 5. Analysis chapter tells the story of long-distance hiking in Finland and the perspectives of tourism stakeholders.

Finally, Chapter 6 then concludes the project and answers the research questions. A few ideas and development points that emerge from this research are suggested for further study. In the end, this thesis also aims to inspire the reader and tourism industry to examine long-distance hiking on a personal level too.

## 2. LONG-DISTANCE HIKING

### 2.1 Long-distance hiking in practice

In this chapter, I am exploring long-distance hiking in tourism, as well as a practice, a meaningful activity on personal level and in the field. The World Tourism Organization (2019) includes hiking under walking tourism, which is a popular way to explore destinations and could be targeted as anything from an easy investment into a valuable economic benefit.

The terms of long-distance hiking or thru-hiking come mainly from the American context, where multi-month hikes are done on various trails, like the “Triple Crown” (Dustin et al., 2020) of Pacific Crest Trail (Pacific Crest Trail Association [PCTA], n.d.), Continental Divide Trail (Continental Divide Trail Coalition [CDTA], n.d.) and Appalachian Trail (Appalachian Trail Conservancy [ATC], n.d.), of which each takes about 4-6 months to hike. In their non-academic book, Laaksonen and Mattila (2024) introduce stories from hikes from all over the world, and suggest commonalities that connect hikers, like the motivation of a getaway from urban life into nature, while explaining how everything practically works during the journey.

This research discusses long-distance hiking, and hikers who are not ordinary tourists especially in the Arctic. Instead, they are travelers who spend a longitude of time on the journey and therefore carry value still unknown and untapped in many destinations. Long-distance hikers are naturally moving, mobile as their purpose for travel. They might not visit only one destination as their main goal, but they move through multiple locations. Hikers might stay a shorter time in one destination, but the style of travel includes less travel in air, more on land, and overall longer time traveling, hence exploring and consuming according to their needs.

There is plenty of practical data available about long-distance hikers, such as demographics, budgets, popular stops on the way, which hiking gear is recommended and about the hiker behavior in general (e.g., Halfway Anywhere, 2025). How are these kinds of long distances practically done, is a question that connects modern tourist’s characteristics, multispecies wonders and high-level hiking gear technology, to say a few.

Gross (2021) has noticed that ultralight backpacks have come to the market and made their part for developing hiking practicalities by convenience and lighter steps. The ultralight hiking gear market has become commercialized, and the development challenges the traditional hiking gear

in lighter weight, better function and mentality of having less gear for more joy. Ultralight backpacking means simply having less on your back and more on your journey.

Another way to success in long-distance hiking is to think about several weeks in a row, one week at a time. In this way, long trails are shared into shorter sections that the hiker can prepare separately. Stopping on the way depends on hiker demands and on the other hand, service offering. Making a plan and decision for stopping on the way depends on the available information on the services. The reason for stopping somewhere varies. Sometimes, it is simply the need for food re-supply, sometimes a craving for a warm meal and a shower. Hiker, who spends multiple weeks and months on a trail, needs and uses several types of services to support their lifestyle along the way. They pass multiple locations during the hike, and occasionally need for instance, restaurant services, grocery stores, health and wellbeing services, bathing places, possible side activities, postal services or accommodation – you name it.

A study mentions that a trail destination can have economic benefits from the trail, as long-distance hiking can work to movement of the heritage in a place and the culture (Reuter et al., 2025). In pilgrimage, many destinations are the main attractions in the region and therefore pilgrimage and hiking carry an important economic role for the destination (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). This applies in popular pilgrimage destinations, whereas in the areas where pilgrimage is not a thing or trails are less used, the economic impact can be minor. This does not mean that the trails should not be there, since the multiple other impacts might be beneficial to the region over time and impact local economy. Having hiking as an option can provide chances for tourism to grow in the area. For example, in China the first official long-distance trail was established so that outdoor tourism could be developed (Jocelyn & Sigley, 2014).

Knopp and Sievänen (1992) contemplate hiking as part of a cultural experience in Finland and point that long-distance trails occupy relatively small area of land in comparison to the vast regions that can be accessed from the trail for recreation purposes. Trail is a visible or imaginary path between points and depending on its length, could consist of a wider network of trails (Teigland et al., 1992). Teigland et al. (1992) introduce a Norwegian model where long-distance trail planning has different trail environments shifting from wilderness trails to facilitated nature environments to almost urban, providing full-service along the trail. All these environments could be on one trail as well as function as separate sections of a longer trail (Teigland et al., 1992), which is also a basic idea for long-distance hiking. According to these trail environments, also services could be integrated in different ways, how it best suits the destination.

## 2.2 Why people hike? – the hiking trend

When looking at the numbers of long-distance hiking, the trend can be spotted. Vita and Gröna Band trail accomplishments in Sweden are organized by an organization that also collects data from hikers. The trail system was started in 2011, and by 2025, the hiker numbers in the summer season have increased from one single hiker to 78 (Fjällfararnas Vita & Gröna Band, n.d.). Another example from Sweden shows growth on the St. Olav Trail that was established in 2013, when in 2025 there was a goal of having already 3000 hikers on the trail (S:t Olavsleden, n.d.).

In the American context, permit numbers for hiking the Pacific Crest Trail have evolved from 1879 to 6840 between 2013 and 2024 (PCTA, 2026). Similarly, hiker survey respondents from 2013 to 2025 have increased from 100 to 790, which shows significant growth in response rate regarding completed hikes (Halfway Anywhere, 2013 & 2025). Same trend is in Europe, where on the Camino de Santiago, hiker number has been estimated to be more than 530 000 per year, which means more than 90% growth compared to a decade ago (American Pilgrims on the Camino, 2026).

On the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), part of the hiking experience is connected to its rich social world and a sub-culture where hikers meet both other hikers and locals (Lum, Keith & Scott, 2019). In the American long-distance hiking scene, similar long trails are linked together through the social world of hiking and a national trail system. Cole (2018) has studied that thru-hiking experience on the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail (PNNST) impacts the hikers with life-long impacts, and that the social hiking culture is part of the experience for dealing with the different phases of a thru-hike (Cole & Thomsen, 2021). Socially active community naturally draws people for companionship and shared experiences, which gives hiking other meanings beyond walking. The continuum of such culture is vibrant in the local economies.

Volunteer work on the American long-distance hiking routes, like on the Pacific Crest trail, forms strong connection to the social community around the trail (McLeod, 2024). The kindness and generosity of the trail-angels, the good-givers, or prior hikers, form connection between the people and trail, and can also be in practical assistance for the hikers and services near the hiking trail (McLeod, 2024). In the European context, this can be seen in the form of hospitality towards pilgrimage hikers (McLeod, 2024).

Thru-hiking can be walking in the landscape while into oneself (Ahmetović, 2025). Polyxeni et al. (2021) made similar findings on a study about Greek hikers, whose motivations for hiking were connected to nature and exploration of new places and civilizations. Simultaneously, hiking would impact positively to the willingness to support natural and cultural environments (Polyxeni et al., 2021).

In addition, Schilar (2015) has studied hiking motivation and hiker's experiences to distance and closeness in solo-traveling. While hiking can be adventurous while outside and on-the-go, the experience constructs the person's adventure-identity on a wider lifepath too, but that adventure is only one factor for hiking (Schilar, 2017). From an educational perspective, thru-hiking can have meaningful impact in learning how to deal with difficulties, different tasks and reflection to one's life (Rohn & Conway, 2022).

Long-distance hiking has also been shown to have great value of adventure for the hiker, regardless of the hike being a wild solo trip or a guided experience (Large & Schilar, 2018). Basil (2022) has studied that hiking can have a variety of motivation behind the action, but it can also include many psychological aspects, for example a way to express self-discovery. Similar findings have been made by Stefanek (2020), who studied that people thru-hike for things, like the simplicity of life, change and personal transformation.

Baker (2019; 2020) has studied the identity of a long-distance hiker. She points that simplicity, purpose, adventure, community and extreme exercise form the essentials of long-distance hiking, and create something meaningful for the person, something identity-like (Baker, 2019; 2020). When a trail ends, the loss of this identity might lead to grief and so-called post-trail depression in the sudden change of daily life, and this is similar to any major grief (Baker, 2019; 2020). Fondren (2015) hiked on the Appalachian Trail and studied if the deep socio-emotional connection that thru-hiking for a longer distance could offer in comparison to shorter hikes, and if part of this experience could be the isolation and social connections of long-distance hiking.

Hiking has also been used as an example in mental health and psychology studies. For example, Kempermann (2022) examines the body-mind connectedness to lifestyle, and suggests hiking, among yoga or playing an instrument, an embodied, lifestyle-based support for healthier aging. Mau et al. (2021) study long-distance hiking for dealing with emotional struggle and mental health and found positive association especially to time consumed for walking and self-reflec-

tion in variable situations. Hiking provides space for overcoming challenges, feeling of accomplishment, testing own limits and comfort zones in nature, alone or with similar-minded group of people, which all are factors that encourage hiking again (Mayer & Lukács, 2021). In a wider picture, long-distance hiking could have effects on healthier lifestyle, increasing movement, and enjoyment of life through physical activity (Goldenberg et al., 2008).

Digitality affects hikers in major ways. Amerson, Rose, Lepp and Dustin (2019) claim in their study from the Pacific Crest Trail that smart phones that almost every hiker carry can both be beneficial for everyday use but also affect how a person attaches to places. Similar findings were made by Delucchi (2021), who argues that using headphones while hiking is common, but could lead to decreased awareness and restraining from the positive effects of nature. Although, hikers look for and adapt to risks and adventure (Heikkilä, 2020). Even though safety is essential part of thinking in every phase of hiking, a study on safety behavior of hikers shows that there is need for safety knowledge and preparation (Järvinen, 2022), which could be one point for tourism stakeholders to consider in their work for creating hiking spaces, products and trails.

### **2.3 Finland for long-distance hiking**

Hiking in Finland has been part of the culture of going in the wilderness on the pathless walks, where trails have only provided easier access (Knopp & Sievänen, 1992). This hunter-gatherer style being in the wild has strong roots that remain. Value of the trails has been in the more practical aspect, than the value itself. Long-distance trails go through separate landowners' lands, which makes them challenging to manage (Knopp & Sievänen, 1992).

One recent example of a project that aimed to establish a network of longer hiking trails in Finland was the concept of Lapland Trails (Lapin Polku) between the years 2020-2023 (Veijalainen & Roininen, 2023). In the project, five municipalities in Lapland region took part in collecting the existing trails and services along them and then planned a complete concept of about a 1000-kilometer hiking trail network (Veijalainen & Roininen, 2023). One challenge that was recognized in the project was that the style of hiking was restricted to multiple day hikes in a row, including accommodation for every night and transportations to and from the trail, especially in the vast, rural sections in Finnish Lapland where no services exist or are possible to establish (Veijalainen & Roininen, 2023). The project still discovered the current

networks of trails and infrastructure, which is a good starting point in scanning possibilities and flaws in Finnish outdoor culture and leisure destinations.

The idea of walking from accommodation to accommodation is rationalized by having only a lighter backpack and not needing to carry equipment for staying overnight outdoors, and on the other hand to support local tourism (Karjalainen, 2023). However, the development of ultralight backpacking gear and mentality is coming more common, which makes hiking with a backpack both lighter and more comfortable (e.g., Järvinen, 2022; Gross, 2022). A shift in the perspective of modern hiking and successful trail development would require reviewing both the hiking perspective in Finland as well as the long-distance hiking phenomenon on a wider, more self-sufficient scale. Clear demand for such longer trails exists elsewhere (Karjalainen, 2023), which makes this kind of long-distance trail projects inspiring early examples of how to approach the phenomenon.

Repo-Kajokulma (2020) mapped a long-distance trail that followed existing paths and roads in Finland. On the way, there were older trail sections, which have been parts of the E-Paths in Europe, but deteriorated due to the lack of hikers (Repo-Kajokulma, 2020). The study also argues that Finnish land management style is not supportive or interesting for the eyesight of a hiker, but with proper coordination and planning, a national trail system could work in Finland (Repo-Kajokulma, 2020).

Recently, also pilgrimage has been developed in the Nordics, for example St. Olav Waterway in Finnish archipelago (Granlund & Olin, 2020). The concept of Saint Olav pilgrimage routes is under development in Finland's Ostrobothnia region, where 500 kilometers of trails have been established to preserve and upgrade the European pilgrimage legacy in Finland, to showcase the unique region of Finnish Coast and Archipelago and to create opportunities for tourism in the area (St Olav Ostrobothnia, n.d.).

In a big and shiny picture, a working trail system that connects beautiful trails to existing and possibly established new hubs or places along a trail would create attractions worth waiting for. In Finland, such trails are radically short yet regarded as long, being only less than 150 kilometers in length. These trails and surrounding national parks or wilderness areas include famous places that a hiker is looking forward visiting, for instance LUIROJÄRVI huts and a wilderness sauna, Finland's highest point Halti or Kevo canyon to mention a few. In comparison to for

example multi-month national scenic trails in America, Finnish trails and rather small attractions are much more humble, closer to ground. Potential of developing long-distance hiking is on a good basis when applying it to the global trend of long-distance hiking.

In the Northern environments, tourism seasonality reflects to all seasons, and regarding long-distance hiking opportunities, the snow-free season is the main one (Rantala et al., 2019). It on the other hand, should not be a restricting factor, but a door-opener for thinking tourism development and seasonal changes, as the snowy season currently is the main tourism season in Northern Finland. Finland is indeed very humble with summer tourism, in comparison to winter tourism. For example, income from accommodation sales in Finnish Lapland between June 2025 and September 2025 was approximately 63 million euros (Visitory, n.d.-a), whereas in the winter, between December 2024 and March 2025 the same number was nearly 300 million euros (Visitory, n.d.-b).

There are no significant faults in summer tourism, but the general aim in tourism development would be to prefer sustainable and responsible options. Traveling for hiking could, for example, support more on-land travel, longer stays and visits to rural, less-known places. While marketing a more like a niche thing, it would also mean to de-market the crowded places or more popular seasons. Therefore, it would be safe to say that developing a trail would not mean that places along it would suffer from immediate overcrowding. But vice versa, the benefit could be greater for local communities which could be developed both prior and post to the trail development. Currently, it would make no harm to add content to summer season.

In practice, every now and then, there are active attempts to walk or go a long-distance trail or a journey in Finland. To mention some completed journeys, Neal Cahoon walked the UKK trail as part of his research project in 2024 (e.g., Cahoon et al., 2025), Helena Kastikainen walked from her front door in Helsinki to Nuorgam in the Northernmost Finland during the pandemic and published a book about the journey (e.g., Kastikainen, 2022; Laaksonen & Mattila, 2024, p. 26), and Tommi Lahtonen, who recorded and carefully constructed a complete list of the Finlandia-trail that goes from Virolahti on the Southern shore of Finland to Nuorgam in the North in 2021 (e.g., Lahtonen, 2024; Laaksonen & Mattila, 2024, p. 30, 203).

To inspect the meanings of a trail, its surroundings and connection between human, community and environment, Cahoon (2025) recorded his journey on the UKK into an artistic work. It beautifully tells the story of the abandoned, once well-thought-out trail, discusses the issues

that have led to its present shape, like lack of maintenance or clear-cut forests, while adding the feeling of a community, other people and species to the plot (Cahoon, 2025). Höckert et al. (2025) further discuss the trail exploration as part of rethinking hiking, a pilgrimage for acknowledging interdependencies between humans, all species, and global issues for better understanding of a common future. UKK trail as a research field and a companion is a notable example of how Finnish trails exist, have been taken care of and then left. Even though UKK trail is not in its best shine after 40 years of environmental forces' influence, the research tells about how important such experiences are, and how there is traffic for several purposes regardless the physical conditions (Cahoon, 2025; Höckert et al., 2025).

### 3. STAKEHOLDER APPROACH

#### 3.1 Stakeholder theory

In the theoretical framework of this thesis, I discuss the stakeholder theory that consists of the different stakeholder networks in tourism and their relation to long-distance hiking. Focus is also on the nonhuman entities, and tourist-host thinking in the long-distance hiking context.

One of the pioneers and foundations for stakeholder theory has been R. E. Freeman and his book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* from 1984, according to for example Sautter and Leisen (1999) and Carroll and Näsi (1997). Freeman himself (2022) revisited his own book almost 40 years later and acknowledged that the understanding of stakeholder management has been evolving in the work of other researchers too and taken especially well into business ethics.

Also, Carroll and Näsi (1997) mention that stakeholder thinking has been useful for fields like strategic management, business, and society. Stakeholder theory has said to have a normative ground in organizational and corporate management (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Stakeholder theory constitutes of how the stakeholders, the organization or field in question, its management and goals are put into use (Carroll & Näsi, 1997) and thus used as a tool to manage the networks (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

In early stakeholder literature, the stakeholders have been seen as individuals and groups who have interest to the subject or field in question (Carroll & Näsi, 1997). From an organizational perspective, they might be internal, like the business owners or employees, or external, like customers, community and government (Carroll & Näsi, 1997). Whereas according to Byrd (2007), the stakeholders who should be considered in sustainable tourism development are the locals and tourists, at the present time and in the future. In development, the local aspect is significant for maintaining the ability to host tourism, and to do so, the local community and needs must be engaged (Byrd, 2007).

Stakeholder thinking is based on the networks of relationships (Tallberg et al., 2022), where engagement goes both ways. One should be regarded as a stakeholder when they are in proximity to the destination (Driscoll & Starik, 2004), and they then should be included in adequate

ways (Carroll & Näsi, 1997). The meaningfulness of the local actors in decision-making has evolved from power-driven to equal, collaborative inclusion (Byrd, 2007).

The core idea of stakeholder thinking is to manage organizational relationships and make more effective business (Carroll & Näsi, 1997). In tourism, managing key tourism stakeholders means to regard the stakeholder relationships in tourism planning, so that more consistent collaboration can be included in service development (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). Byrd (2007) points out that involving stakeholders in tourism development, the outcome could provide more sustainable tourism products and opportunities. Moreover, success comes for those who manage the stakeholder relationships best (Carroll & Näsi, 1997).

Khazaei et al. (2015) argue that community participation belongs to all the locals that might consist of heterogeneous groups or people, and that the directions for tourism development could lie in multiple sources, also in the marginal prospects. Kulusjärvi (2017) has studied the different development paths in Finnish context among tourism and other industries and found out in the process that the discussions and practical development steps are sometimes challenging to proceed in mutual understanding. Developing one industry could mean stepping on the toes of the other. Besides, as Sautter and Leisen (1999) claim, in tourism destinations, the same stakeholders can present multiple roles. Therefore, also the subtle stakeholders in local communities should be considered in the dynamic tourism field for finding sustainable development paths (Khazaei et al., 2015). Hytönen and Kulusjärvi (2023) add that even though interaction between stakeholders is done effectively, sustainability goals might be set differently, for instance in land-use planning, and thus challenge development processes.

Each destination and its stakeholders are different, so no right or wrong ways of implementing collaboration and community participation exist, if it is implemented one way or another (Byrd, 2007). From the host community perspective, the present and future communities as the stakeholder in tourism development are dependent on sustainable development, by which Byrd (2007) means looking for quality in life, economic growth, and environmental protection. Furthermore, recent tourism stakeholder studies widen that perspective by applying not only humans as locals and travelers, but the nonhuman too (Tallberg et al., 2022). Carroll & Näsi (1997) shortly refer to natural environment together with economy and society as one of the stakeholders, but a strong focus has been in the two lastly mentioned. The next subchapter focuses on the inclusion of all of them.

### 3.2 The nonhuman stakeholders and environment

From business research, Elkington (1997; 2018) uses the term triple bottom line for describing the existence of the environmental, societal and economic fields that surround us everywhere and all the time. Similarly, the share can be done with a term sustainability when recognizing that it includes the three aspects (Alhaddi, 2015). However, it can be seen from businesses and other stakeholders that aiming towards all the three arrowheads is more common on paper than in practice (Elkington, 2018). Oftentimes, reaching economic targets is seen more important for business than maintaining the same intensity in aiming for nurturing the environment and societies (Elkington, 2018). Therefore, this triple bottom line as part of the theoretical framework, is guiding the balancing in planning future and making change, because one bottom line cannot succeed for long without the others (Elkington, 2018).

The stakeholders have traditionally been described as those who are verbally able to join the stakeholder interaction (Tallberg et al., 2022). And positive impacts to growth for the stakeholders have been aimed for, with the thought of minimizing environmental and cultural harm (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). Indeed, one important part of the stakeholders in tourism are the environmental factors and their presence for several purposes, even though they do not use verbal language. Considering the nonhuman nature as part of the stakeholders can show responsible human action in respecting all the co-existing (Kortetmäki et al., 2023).

A noticeable step from talking about abstract ethics (e.g., Carroll & Näsi, 1997) has been taken for the inclusion of practical responsible actions. Even better, Laine (2011) presents that everything that happens among stakeholders, happens in the natural environment, not only in nature. To the hiking context this would mean including the environment, where the activity takes place, and which is one of the core elements of the attractiveness of hiking. Stakeholders in the hiking context need to be identified, and all the aspects integrated in the stakeholder network (Kortetmäki et al., 2023).

Recognition of the nonhuman, like environment, plants and other species, requires interaction and respect towards all the stakeholders (Kortetmäki et al., 2023), and similarly provides a chance for learning from them. García-Rosell and Tallberg (2021) argue that animals in tourism form strong relationships human, so they should be part of the stakeholders. According to Tallberg et al. (2022), applying justice and welfare for animals will support business practices in a

responsible way. As an example, they mention that including the animal voices in tourism business decisions, it can be a better option both for humans and the nonhuman in society (Tallberg et al., 2022).

More broadly speaking this can be applied to nature as a tourism environment too, especially in the tourism field in the North where nature is one reason to travel there to begin with. Being that the voices of the nonhuman are not loud like the ones of humans, the goal of coordinating the stakeholder networks is to manage the various voices with even attention (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). In recent stakeholder research though, the sparsity and gaps in this inclusion have been highlighted (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021; Tallberg et al., 2022).

Specifically in tourism, the network of stakeholders can be complex and challenging to orientate (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). As hiking is an activity that happens in nature, on trails or in a wider natural environment, there might be several destinations and their stakeholders to be considered. Taking care of the hiking environment from the perspective of other species, will in the meantime be taking care of the trails as business environment too (Tallberg et al., 2022). In a wider picture of the management of hiking trails, the maintenance of the infrastructure requires effort and resources. As long-distance hiking trails are naturally connecting destinations, the conversation among stakeholders could offer collaborative approach over competition.

As tourism often includes nature, culture or other people, the challenges are the power hierarchies that orientate decision making and, for example, building infrastructure for human use. The inclusion of the nonhuman as a stakeholder opens the power hierarchy for deliberate decision-making and prevents misuse of power (Kortetmäki et al., 2023). It allows contemplating of what the interest in there is for nonhuman, and for whom the value is intrinsic (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). In the hiking context, the nonhuman nature does not only show to hikers, but also to the businesses that rely on hiking. Since there are many voices and stakeholders in tourism industry, it has to be considered that there are also as many interpretations of the nonhuman voices (Kortetmäki et al., 2023), and not all of them might be equally considerate. However, the environmental bottom line is mutual for all and including it in the stakeholder network can guide the development paths for supporting the ecological lifeline for all species' sake. Hiking and walking tourism opportunities can create a sustainable and authentic development for connecting locals and hikers, when local stakeholders are included in the partnerships (World Tourism Organization, 2019).

### 3.3 Hikers as stakeholders

Thinking about long-distance hikers as the tourists in a destination, they form their experience based on the present by for example using the services, or as future tourists based on marketing (Byrd, 2007). The hikers will affect the future with their choices and experience, and their perspective and understanding should be heard as a stakeholder voice (Byrd, 2007). But as the future stakeholders of local community or hikers in that time cannot be concretely discussed with, one method for reaching their voice could be to monitor trends or to anticipate future preferences (Byrd, 2007). To do this, the stakeholder has to be known. For theoretical addition to this framework, I add the understanding of the long-distance hiker segment in tourism field.

In tourism, it is a basic thing to know the audience. Therefore, national tourism marketing organizations have done work for helping to identify different tourism segments (e.g., Visit Finland, 2023). Working with the segment in mind, the planning process seeks to predict and affect the tourist stakeholders in their travel decisions by listening to them (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). As Nordbø (2017) has studied regarding hikers coming to a destination, the expectations of the visitors might be different from those of the locals, but whether the development outcomes meet the actual visitor demands, is not dependent purely on the product use but the overall understanding of the segment.

Long-distance hikers make a diverse stakeholder for tourism, just as the phenomenon was presented in the previous chapter. As Teigland et al. (1992) describe, there are different hiking environments connected to long-distance trails and trail networks, that could include various business models. Developing trails according to hiker needs and wishes could provide opportunities for businesses inviting hikers. In tourism, the tourists are in the end the ones that bring business. Potential business case means that one stakeholder works to try out a model for sustainable business (Schaltegger et al., 2017).

Hikers and trails included in the stakeholder network could add understanding and then value to working for future tourism development. Tourism routes are multifaceted, and they also have values that are not always considered in tourism development outside trail-related matters (Ward-Perkins et al., 2020). Trails carry meaning for the destination and hikers, and hikers connect to places through trails, which makes the hikers important stakeholders in thinking about the trails and their future (Ward-Perkins et al., 2020; Byrd, 2007).

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Qualitative social constructivist approach

Qualitative research aims to discuss between the empirical material, theory on the subject and methodology and form the findings with guidance from theory (Juuti & Puusa, 2020, p. 11). The researcher seeks to reach depth of the phenomenon for increased analysis and understanding of the topic (Juuti & Puusa, 2020, p. 11). By asking how and why, qualitative research aims to understand, describe and explain the phenomenon that in the end is always linked to the discussion in that time and context (Puusa & Juuti, 2020a, p. 26). In social sciences, the knowledge also links to culture and meanings that humans have (Puusa & Juuti, 2020a, p. 35). Therefore, also the researcher is always part of the studied phenomenon in the hermeneutic circle (Puusa & Juuti, 2020a, p. 36-37), where preconceptions affect the understanding of the studied phenomenon (Puusa & Juuti, 2020b, p. 73).

A paradigm is an underlying philosophy that directs the research (Puusa & Juuti, 2020a, p. 27). It strives to describe the way the world works (Jennings, 2010). In this thesis, the paradigm that guides the research is the social constructivist paradigm. It is based on thinking where things are how they seem to be, and where outer and inner perspectives are connected in continuous interaction (Puusa & Juuti, 2020a, p. 30). Knowledge is constructed from that interaction and cultural context (Mercadal, 2024). The interaction creates mutual understanding and an image of a common, shared world that connects the subjects in it (Puusa & Juuti, 2020a, p. 31-32), and where meaning is created socially (Mercadal, 2024). For research, this means that the analysis has to regard the social structure and look for the things in the background (Puusa & Juuti, 2020a, p. 32).

According to Jennings (2010), in tourism research many similarities can be drawn to interpretive social sciences, sometimes named constructivist paradigm, which aims for empathetic understanding of the research phenomenon, and explores meanings, experiences and context that are socially constructed. From the ontological perception of the world, the paradigm believes that there are multiple realities (Jennings, 2010). Ontology means the basic idea of how something exists (Puusa & Juuti, 2020a, p. 27).

Epistemology means how the knowledge can be reached (Puusa & Juuti, 2020a, p. 34). Social constructivist paradigm, similar to interpretive social sciences paradigm, believes that the

knowledge can be reached with an insider's view to the social settings of the researched phenomenon (Jennings, 2010). Methodology means the choice of the methods that follow the ontological and epistemological perceptions to research, and how to approach the empirical world (Puusa & Juuti, 2020a, p. 37). Interpretive, constructivist paradigm in tourism research uses qualitative methods for gathering empirical material and form analysis that reflects deep understanding of the topic (Jennings, 2010). The knowledge then is subjective in a way to the participants and research setting, but that is from axiological basis, linked to the research process and valued for its intrinsic features (Jennings, 2010).

#### **4.2 Semi-structured interview**

In a constructivist study, the participants are part of the phenomenon, and the knowledge is within them (Kekäle & Puusa, 2020, p. 47). Therefore, I aimed to gather a semi-professional group of people, who could already have some ideas about long-distance hiking and trails in Finland, so that the sample would show discretion and expediency (Puusa, 2020a, p. 106). I had been looking for previous trail projects, hiking destinations and people or organizations who had been involved in them, and in February 2026, I started contacting them for an interview. I sent emails and letters of consent (Appendices 1 & 2) and soon agreed on the first five interviews.

Not all the emails got response, so I decided to use snowballing (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 86) for reaching the participants' own networks on the field in hope for finding further knowledge and professionalism. This method was especially useful, and I received four more people to interview also from organizations that I was not familiar with before. A few more participants signed up after that, but it was time to consider whether I needed to increase the number of participants any wider.

A suitable number of qualitative interviews differs, and the final amount will be determined while the interviews and snowballing proceed (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 85-86). After having the first half of the interviews, it was clear that the choice of participants had been expedient and the material purposeful for the research. That meant that some patterns in the discussion of the themes could be recognized already, but still more insights could be expected from the rest of the interviews (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 87).

In February-March 2026, I interviewed in total of nine tourism stakeholders, who were representatives from different tourism areas in Finland and from organizations, institutions, companies or municipalities that work with tourism, development, hiking trails or land-use. All participants were actively or timely involved in hiking related matters in their region or in Finland. The participants were from Lapland, Kainuu region, Ostrobothnia, Northern Ostrobothnia, Southwest Finland, and Uusimaa region (Table 1). Eight of nine interviews were via Teams connection, and one was face to face. Each interview lasted for 30 to 50 minutes. The participants' jobs represented equally various positions and areas of expertise, as well as different tourism perspectives. In the analysis (Chapter 5), the interview participants' citations are referred as I1 to I9, meaning interviewees from 1 to 9.

Table 1. The share of the interview participants between regions in Finland (Source: Author, 2026)

Lapland	2
Kainuu region	2
Ostrobothnia	2
Northern Ostrobothnia	1
Southwest Finland	1
Uusimaa region	1

Interview is a flexible method for data collection because it allows to organize and plan the questions beforehand yet ask them in varying order or add follow-up questions in the interview situation (Puusa, 2020a, p. 106-107). I decided to plan semi-structured interviews and have a list of questions that can be discussed in free order or be left out of the conversation, depending on the depth of each interview and what comes unexpectedly in them (Puusa, 2020a, p. 111).

The interview questions were organized by three themes that group the questions for easier understanding of the different thematics in the conversation. I knew the topic well in advance but recognized that the knowledge of the terminology is one of the studied subjects, so the

themes or interview questions were not shared for the participants in advance to have as original material from them as possible (Puusa, 2020a, p. 107). The groups of questions for the interviews were the understanding of long-distance hiking, long-distance hiking trails and the future of long-distance hiking (Appendices 3 & 4).

Before the actual interviews, I had one practice interview to find out how the planned questions work (Puusa, 2020a, p. 107). I found out that the interview did not require going through all the questions or following them in any certain order, but the semi-structured question list worked well for picking up keywords and having the conversation relevant (Puusa, 2020a, p. 113). In addition, by not reading the questions straight from paper, a more understandable, everyday language could be used in the discussion (Puusa, 2020a, p. 108). The interviews were then guided by a semi-structured question list, but flowed freely across the different questions and themes, of which the interviewee made their interpretations (Puusa, 2020a, p. 110).

At the mid-point of the interviews, I revisited the research questions to check if the interview conversations had been meeting the intended research questions (Ruusu vuori et al., 2010, p. 12) and the research seemed initially to go in a good direction. I still had the rest of the interviews waiting, which seemed like a good addition. Overall, the process of recruiting the participants and having the interviews went well, except that I did not receive any answer from some of the contacted stakeholders. However, snowballing covered this issue well.

Notes or memos are something that I did regularly during the interview process and stored my own ideas from the discussion, so that I could capture the thoughts about other-than-words too from the data collection (Hirschauer, 2006; Richards, 2005, p. 73-74). After each interview, I wrote some free thoughts based on the hunch of how the results could network. In my mind I started creating the image of the study already during the process, because these thoughts could become useful in the later parts of the analysis (Roulston, 2010, p. 155-156). In this free writing part, I created a red thread through the different conversations and the whole study.

The problematic part in remembering freely or writing whatever comes to mind is the effect of cherry-picking, which is an effective way to choose the most intriguing ideas from the top (Ruusu vuori et al., 2010, p. 21). This helped me to stay on track of the gathered material when still doing the interviews, however for the final analysis it was important to notice all the material to make sure that nothing was left out of the analysis (Ruusu vuori et al. 2010, p. 21-22).

The next step was to save and backup the recording to the University's Microsoft OneDrive, which was one way to make sure that the empirical material stays safe. Interviews were recorded first and foremost to capture the sound and discussion, but most of them were also recorded with video and screen to be able to share content while talking and follow the expressions too. Recordings were either format mp4 or m4a. Some of the video recording files were too large to upload for transcription in Word, so I had to extract the sound from the original video first by using Office's Clipchamp application. All nine interview records were then uploaded to Word by using Office's own Transcribe tool. The voice was converted to text in minutes, and it was then possible to save the text with both speaker information and time stamps, which made working with the text more convenient.

The automated text included errors in the Finnish names, sentencings and sometimes misspelled words, which took the biggest effort to fix when transcribing the interviews. I decided to keep the added words, like *niinku* but removed the repeated words, so that the amount of text would be reduced, while maintaining the moments of hesitation. I also anonymized the text by removing personal information, like name, organization and even location, but kept the material otherwise intact to the context (Richards, 2005, p. 194). Although, the location was in some cases a subject of discussion and a crucial feature for hiking trails, which means that the discussed locations were kept in the data only when attached to a hiking trail context. Nevertheless, I ended up having 118 pages of transcribed empirical material, of which I took a backup copy for further analysis.

The language of the interviews was Finnish, except one that was held in English. Since I am writing the thesis in English, I had all the material available in both languages. Originally, I had written the interview questions in English, from where it was then easier to translate the questions into Finnish and maintain the same meaning in the questions and conversation about the studied subject (Pietilä, 2010, p. 415).

For the analysis part, the transcripts were in their original language, but ready to be translated into English for further writing and results. Using caution in translation was required so that the nuances and meaning of the spoken language would preserve for the analysis (Pietilä, 2010, p. 421). As the researcher in this project, I felt comfortable thinking and writing about the topic in English throughout the project.

### 4.3 Thematic analysis

Ruusuvuori et al. (2010, p. 12) present a figure where the analysis in research does not start after the interviews but already when the research settings are planned. This covers the entire process from planning the methodology and research questions to the preliminary coding and final dialogue with the collected data and existing literature and research (Ruusuvuori et al., 2010, p. 12; Richards, 2005, pp. 62-63). From the beginning of the thesis process to putting together the final thesis topic for our thesis seminar in December 2025, I had a strong feeling that long-distance hiking should be studied in Finland.

The research questions were finding their final form until the interviews and word structure slightly refined after as well. Important part in forming the research questions was the forming of interview questions that helped me to focus on extracting the essential out of the many questions interesting in this topic. The analysis was already taking preliminary steps in the planning of the research approach, when defining the settings for how to look at the empirical phenomenon. Similarly, when the data is collected, the researcher should revisit the research problems as a reminder of the perspective prior to the analysis (Ruusuvuori et al., 2010, p. 11-12) and for testing how the chosen method works (Silverman, 2005, p. 152).

As an analysis method, I used thematic analysis, because it can touch the data in a meaningful way while giving the material a power to tell story about the phenomenon through themes that emerge from the material (Hecker & Kalpokas, n.d.). However, I followed the stages of abductive thematic analysis in the initial coding and categorizing the themes (Hecker & Kalpokas, n.d.). I made the decision to bring in stakeholder theory already to the analysis, to draw conversation of the analysis together with the theory, to strengthen the argumentation between the two. Abductive analysis combines themes from the data, and theory that guides the analysis for new directions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 96-97).

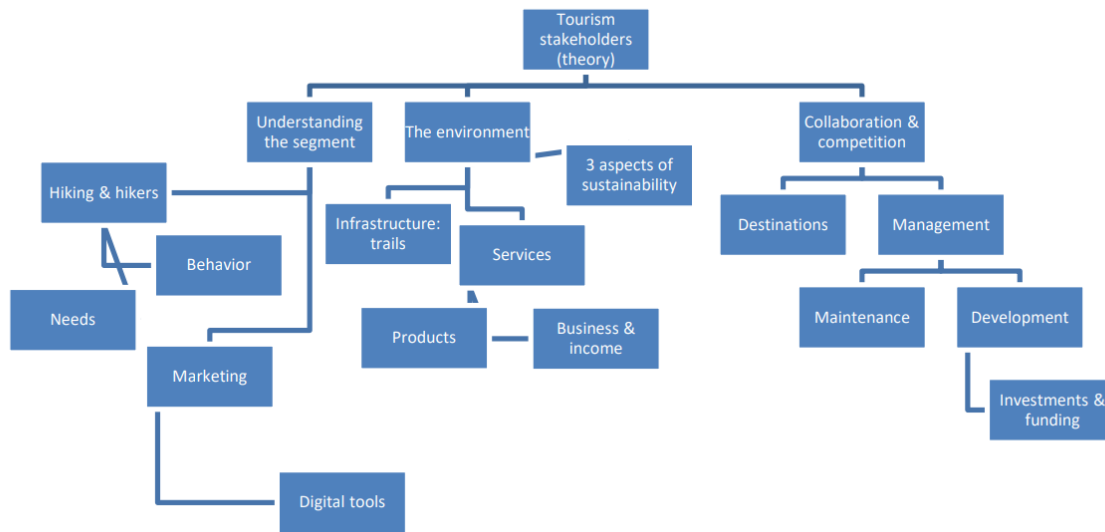
I started by reading through the interview transcripts several times, and I found it useful to listen to the recordings too. Having transcripts is important for easier work and organization of the material (Silverman, 2005, p. 184). Richards (2005, p. 86) puts it well: “The goal is to learn from the data, to keep revisiting it until you understand the patterns and explanations.” While reading the transcripts, I wrote notes and decided on initial codes that could describe the pieces of text (Roulston, 2010, p. 153; Hecker & Kalpokas, n.d.). I decided to conduct the coding and analysis manually in Microsoft’s Word and Excel (Isangula, Kelly & Wamoyi, 2024; Jayasena,

2025; Qualitative Researcher Dr Kriukow, 2020). Silverman (2005, p. 154-157) suggests that analyzing interview data starts with categorizing the different interviewees' thoughts under themes. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) add that using phrases from the interviews for the initial codes includes the participants' voices to the work. This is also important in aiming for reliable research, where systematic and open analysis form verified and justified findings (Puusa, 2020b, p. 145).

By making notes on the margins, i.e., in Word, using the comment tool, I collected preliminary codes that I then took for further organization and combination in Excel (Roulston, 2010, pp. 152-153). At this point I had 42 codes or preliminary themes from the material. The goal was to have a structured codebook for categorizing themes that emerge from the material consistently (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Roulston, 2010, pp. 153-154) and provide structure for writing the analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 99). Categorizing the material into a structure is a base for the interpretation of what the material in the categories means in regard of what is already known of the topic (Puusa, 2020b, p. 154-155). The themes organized from the initial codes described that theme in the material and linked it to the conversation with theory (Hecker & Kalpokas, n.d.). The stakeholders were included in the categorization by recognizing the different stakeholder groups from the discussions and the same ones from theory.

Based on interviews, theory and initial codes, I created a category tree (Richards, 2005, p. 92) that reflected the different themes about long-distance hiking from stakeholder perspective and combined the stakeholder theory to thinking in an abductive way (Hecker & Kalpokas, n.d.). The category tree had the stakeholders on top (Figure 2). Under that, three main themes were 1) the segment of hiking, 2) the environment for hiking, and 3) collaboration and competition that are also important factors in tourism. The first category included hiking, hikers and their needs and behavior, marketing and digital tools. The environment consisted of the factors of sustainability, infrastructure and trails, and services that include products and business. The third category was about the destinations, management, maintenance, development and funding. At this point, there were 15 organized categories left, shared in three main themes that would work as a structure for the analytical conversation to come.

Figure 1. Category tree based on the coding and stakeholder theory (Source: Author, 2026).



Coding and categorization gave the data new forms, words and groups of meanings, in which the content could be understood so that finding similarities and differences from the whole material would be practical and to the point (Richards, 2005, p. 87). Browsing the material and thinking about it under these themes, made me think of new meanings and connections to the discussions in tourism and research (Richards, 2005, p. 96).

Qualitative analysis should be taken on the level, where meanings from the empirical material form something abstract and independent from material itself (Puusa, 2020b, p. 148), while remembering that the knowledge lies in social constructions. Then it is possible for the researcher to interpret the material into coherent findings (Puusa, 2020b, p. 149). In the following analysis chapter, the themes form the structure for discussion, and theory from both the stakeholders and long-distance hiking widens the perspective towards the findings.

## 5. ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Understanding of long-distance hiking

The interviews started with defining the scene of hiking (*vaellus*). All the participants had thoughts on it, which was expected due to the purposeful choice of interviewees. When discussing hiking, there were two main perspectives on what it is: hiking in nature or in the wilderness, or hiking in the cultural, even urban settings or along roads. Hiking in comparison to day hiking (*retkeily*), was defined by the length of the activity. The stakeholders explained that hiking lasts for a longer time, often overnight, whereas day hiking lasts for a day. Additionally, a term for trekking (*patikointi*) was used to define longer hikes. In general speech, all the terms were used to talk about the activity of walking in the interview context. Finnish hiking was understood in two ways: walking on the trails or in the pathless wilderness. Trails exist, and where there are no marked trails, the tradition is to go in the wilderness areas where the landscape is wide for hiking for a longer time.

On the contrary, the stakeholders did not have so clear definition for long-distance hiking (*pitkän matkan vaellus*). In Finnish language the term is more like a descriptive phrase than an established concept. Based on the interviews, long-distance hiking definitions started from one week up to multiple weeks and months. More than half of the stakeholders also named multi-month and year-long hikes. Defining the distance was challenging, because hiking was recognized to include various forms of movement, like running, cycling, horseback riding and kayaking. The interview situation was not limited to handling only walking for the reason of allowing the participant to tell about their understanding. A perspective if there even is a need to define any number for long was addressed. Defining long-distance hiking also caused hesitation and even stress in some of the participants, which could reflect that the term was new and widening the participant's viewpoint.

Long-distance hiking trails that were recognized more than once were, Kungsleden in Sweden, Appalachian Trail (AT) and Continental Divide Trail (CDT) in United States, Camino de Santiago in Spain, St. Olav Trails in Finland, Sweden and Norway, and Urho Kekkonen Trail in Finland (UKK). The most mentioned Finnish hiking trails were Karhunkierros and Hetta-Pallas, but going back to the definition of long-distance hiking, they do not exceed that one-week threshold in any form of hiking. This reflects that the trails are well known, but there are not

enough long-distance hiking trails to mention before the shorter options already overtake recognition. The limitation in the stakeholder perspective could also reflect the limited amount of hiking trails. Although when asking about it, the participants addressed that there are plenty of trails in Finland. New ones are not obligatory, but they would be nice and useful for tourism and recreation purposes.

Pilgrimage became an important topic in the interviews because there is ongoing development of pilgrimage routes in the Nordic countries. The stakeholders did not magnify the difference between hiking and pilgrimage but connected them under the same phenomenon. In Finnish language, the word hiking (*vaellus*) naturally belongs to the meaning of pilgrimage (*pyhiinvael-lus*) that means to visit a sacred place (Kotimaisten kielten keskus ja Kielikone Oy, n.d.). Similarly, in English, *pilgrimage* is described as often a long journey to special or holy place (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, n.d.).

The long-distance hikers were understood with mixed feelings. Hiking as an activity was mentioned to provide peacefulness, allow learning, activity, being in nature and challenge. Overall, it was recognized that hiking can offer deeper meaning on top of the activity. The aspect of challenge was mentioned with caution that it is not the reason for everybody, but it might be tied to a certain point in life. In addition, completing a trail was seen as a smart use of time for the above-mentioned purposes.

The stakeholders described it normal to hike for a week. But when talking about longer hikes than a week, the descriptions of those hikers sounded someone brave, crazy, very adventurous or “*eräjorma*” (I5), someone enthusiastic and skillful in the wilderness. A long-distance hiker seemed to be someone deeply interested in the thing. The participants mentioned that hiking requires time, and in regular work and family context, going out hiking for a longer time is like an investment. Time is a resource, and for a long-distance hike, it has more value. Defining the mindset and motivating factors behind hiking is especially important in long-distance hiking, as it is not in the street picture in Finnish hiking scene yet.

Is it a person who goes to see attractions? Or is it more like a person for whom the journey to oneself, the walking, is more important than a nature attraction? (I1)

A concern about whether hikers use money was mentioned. Investing time in a long hiking trip does not automatically mean investing money as much as compared to those who spend their

holiday at resort or accommodation. Longer time spent on the journey leads to basic human needs. Even though the participants described hiking as budget-friendly and a low-consumption tourism form, the needs remained clear in the descriptions. Hikers would use shelter for sleeping, accommodation before and after the hike, food and water, transportation to town and trail-head, washing clothes and bathing, maybe buying new equipment or sending themselves a package with spare shoes or clothing.

One of the participants mentioned ultralight backpacking (*kevytretkeily*), which is also included in the characteristics of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage was explained as non-religious practice, which happens for cultural aspects, spiritual reasons and with a lighter backpack for reaching those things. Lighter backpack was both cause and effect on why the services are important for hikers, on the other hand, ultralight backpacking is also connected to safety and ability to hike (e.g., Järvinen, 2022; Gross, 2022). Similarly, cycling between towns or trail running were mentioned to quicken the distance between services. Cycling (*pyöräily*) was raised by many participants as an example of recent purposeful development in Finland. And one of the interviewees even argued that hiking has been forgotten from the path of the development of cycling. Although from ideology, cycling for long distances is already a step closer to long-distance hiking. Slower movement ties the hiker to the region for a longer time.

You might have a very small numbers of tourists, and maybe [...] the daily spend is less. But if you think that they're traveling 20 kilometers per day, then actually in the destination in that region, they're staying for their whole holiday. As opposed to someone [...] doing day trips, people stay normally one to two nights in accommodation, and then they go to the next one [...] like 100 or 200 kilometers away. (I9)

An important factor about understanding hiking came from the international field. As the popularity of hiking is growing, there would be more demand for alternative destinations. The interview participants listed the biggest pull-factors for hiking in Finland as quietness, clean nature, safety and cooler climate, in comparison to international scale. Mentioning these reasons reflect that the stakeholders have understanding of what hiking as an activity requires and that Finland in general is a great destination for nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation. Participants showed pride and excitement when describing their experiences on Finland as a hiking destination. Attractions are raised with pride, even though it is also recognized that the market for hiking is rather small, and numbers are not expected to grow rapidly. The peacefulness,

quietness, safety and slowness of travel are well-comparable to one of the motivation factors why people choose to go hiking – seek to separate from the everyday busy rhythm.

However, one of the participants also identified that there is a gap in understanding an international hiker in Finland and secondly applying their demands for the practical hiking environment. Before heading to invite all the international hikers, understanding the segment would be the first step in planning to welcome long-distance hikers according to the promise that the pull-factors reflect.

...we should better understand [...] the challenges in safety and outdoor etiquette. We should better understand them [the hikers] so the message would really reach them. We haven't studied that... (I3)

Another participant anticipated that interactivity in information technologies related to hiking is growing. Almost all the participants mentioned some digital platform that they use or know that is used for hiking related errands. They spoke about digitality naturally, as it was a standard part of hiking activity. The mentioned reasons for use were for example finding and sharing information, using trail maps, communication and inspiration. Some more critical points were that digital tools cannot be trusted in all situations, but on the other hand they can come handy in the situations of urgencies. Social media was mentioned in four interviews and connected to marketing, communication and information tools.

But digital platforms mean that users find the trails. And it means that they can be marketed effectively and give the information to those for whom it is suitable and how. (I6)

For hiking and long-distance hiking there are several apps that offer forementioned services. When traveling to a new place for hiking for a longitude of time and distance, a digital app can be one of the most valuable sources of information. Trails are more or less mapped in digital format anyway, which naturally could work for the other purposes of digital tools too. The stakeholders who had been working with trail development or management gave credit for the national database, from where the trail information is also shared to secondary channels. This Lipas system is a public database, where recreational attractions, facilities and routes can be

stored and distributed, and it is commonly used in Finland by organizations, institutions and municipalities (University of Jyväskylä, n.d.).

Even though it is open data, the places where that information can be found are often used by Finnish authorities, in Finnish language. For international findability, it would be crucial to at least offer the data in English, or consider distributing the data to other, international sources too. There are various segment-driven channels for routes and facilities that support, for example, the needs of long-distance hikers.

## **5.2 The environment for long-distance hiking in Finland**

The environment for hiking on the other hand consists of the destinations and hiking trails, and the service providers who make it possible to arrive and hike the trail. Or in one participant's words, it is "a whole ecosystem around the hiking trail for tourists" (I9).

Currently, the hiking destinations in Finland are quite limited. The participants mentioned a few hiking destinations in Finland, for example Karhunkierros, Kevo, Herajärvi, Halti and Hetta-Pallas Trails. These trails are multiday hikes, not specifically long-distance hiking trails, but all of them also connect to longer trails and areas that could be hiked for several hundred kilometers to other trails and national parks. Even though hiking was seen as an easy-going activity and taking place in nature, it requires resources. There are many requirements from the hiker perspective before having a stabilized culture around a trail. The hiker could visit villages on the way or nearby, but services are expected in places along the journey.

...in Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park, there has been a village-to-village idea, which is like a Central European model [...] they don't just follow the trail but also stop in the villages on the way. But in my understanding, it is very small. People want to hike the trail [...] quite straight forward. Not very many have so much time.  
(I1)

Hiking from village to another combines these smaller points together. Being that hiking is part of tourism, the participants described that it is not the most important thing from the destination point of view to compete about visitors with neighboring destinations. Collaboration is something that the neighbors should consider instead of competition, because the trail in general

could benefit the whole region, and villages support each other when they are working under a common brand or agenda.

...the possibility for collaboration that was different from [...] developing collaboration with entrepreneurs [...] Normally they see the other villages as competitors because they're only going to stay in one place. But if you're hiking, then actually you can collaborate, you can build up same kind of packages and it's kind of like a new way of thinking about tourism development.” (I9)

Most of the participants showed in the conversation that they have experience of the hiker perspective themselves. The discussions were enthusiastic and many were happy to tell personal stories from their hiking experiences. Personal experience-induced conversations seemed to bring the stakeholder perspective closer to the user perspective, which is important to understand too. They described that more important is that the hiker finds the information and services that are being offered in the villages, so they could refill their needs.

...like a hiker or a cyclist, for them the coolest thing might be [...] that they learn to recognize the logo of K-Market, and they know that they will find food from there. So, they could actually be happy that it is the K-Markets on the way. (I1)

Another example from Hetta-Pallas trail mentions that the villages on the way are not very attractive stops but also do not have much to offer. It is both a structural thing of the periphery where small villages in rural areas are dying or disappearing, and no services stay alive, but also a seasonal thing where some places or companies are open only during summer hiking or cottage season. Even though a trail is not a tourism product itself, it could allow innovation for other businesses. But the trail does not support the economy along the way unless there are services to buy or there are enough hikers to stop by. This is like the chicken and egg problem.

For a hiker it is difficult to find the services if they do not know what is on sale and what can be bought. The trail does not do that work, no matter how well maintained the facilities are. The communities and stakeholders around it must be in an active part of trail development. An example from the interviews was about educating the communities around the trail to learn more about how an ecosystem around a trail works, who are the hikers, what kind of products should be available and how to harness the trail into business. Creating a community around a

hiking trail has to start from creating understanding, because “we don’t have that kind of culture yet “(I6).

In the interviews, perspectives on why we do not have long-distance hiking culture were multifaceted. The Finnish climate and seasonality are one core reason. As the summer season is relatively short, the window for making business by snow-free activities is very short. The business is done either in a very short time effectively or in other ways in the snowy season. In addition, Finland is a very small destination in the competition of global summer tourism, and as Finland does not have multiple long-distance trails that could support one another, there are very few hikers too.

On the global level, the history of the trails, like pilgrimage hiking trails is old, which makes them naturally important to be kept alive as part of showing the culture and presenting stories from the past. In Finland, there are old trails but the amount of people, especially international, is low. The international audience might be traveling to Finland for other purposes, but not really for hiking. The reason for this could be marketing or the lack of it.

Other Northern trails, like Swedish ones have existed for a longer time, and are in position to offer pulling help in attracting hikers to the North. Similar development path can be noticed from general summer tourism development, especially in the Northernmost tourism destinations that are working hard developing summer tourism but are at the same time doing the job quite alone, which could be due to lack of proof of tourists. Therefore, knowing your neighbors, let it be the already well-developed trail systems in Sweden, would allow both-sided support for understanding and developing the long-distance hiking segment.

The benefit of having a 500-kilometer trail is to get to compete in the same league with the bigger European trails. The trail has to be comparable to those for digestion. If you have been hiking in Spain, then you would know instantly how it works here. (I8)

Taking the ideas back to the beginning, an important part would be to offer knowledge and practical information for the locals and the hikers, for example by utilizing digital platforms with easy access so that the phenomenon would be commonly understood. Digital platforms could offer solutions for findability and marketing, reaching the right segments.

In three of the interviews, the trail was also recognized to work in regional marketing value. Once a trail is found and its name known, it could be used as a branding tool for the whole region. Case examples were from Karhunkierros in Finland or Kungsleden in Sweden, where the whole region and destinations along the trail can utilize the brand for also shorter hikes and products for hikers.

When a trail connects areas to each other, the value of the trail is in supporting the community, whether it was in growth centers or rural areas. A long-distance trail also describes the whole journey, with its nature values, scenery and culture. At best, a long-distance hiking trail could provide the hiker with a view of the whole country, like a thru-hike does. It was obvious from the interviews with representatives from different parts of Finland, that not even the Finnish organizations or regions know each other's features, such as seasonality or nature. Which is why national or rooftop organizations, like Visit Finland, have an important role in connecting the regions to each other too. Long-distance hiking trails could be links between the regions.

In about a half of the interviews, the image of hiking and the facilities to go hiking were located in Northern Finland. Another half of the participants also recognized or knew hiking possibilities in other parts of Finland, like in the coastal Finland. Nevertheless, rural destinations closer to countryside that are less visited are at risk of being removed from maintenance circles, while the most popular trails are experiencing over-crowdedness and nature degradation. Due to the reasons of saving public resources some of the infrastructure will disappear. But a significant worry that came from the participants was that hiking should be available for people, and not all the services should be located in a few spots. For example, Northern Finland is far away for most people, yet Southern Finland where population is located, is either crowded or where the less-visited areas are dying. All of Finland, should have places for outdoor recreation, because the recreation also creates possibilities for business, the livelihood of countryside and rural tourism.

The service environment of long-distance hiking requires a trail or at least natural environment where hiking is possible in that time and the way of hiking. One of the benefits of offering services for hikers in Finland is the year-round perspective that could on the global level be significant for productizing the long-distance hiking. One important aspect regarding seasonality in Finland were the hiking seasons.

The interview participants recognized that developing seasonality is not always up to a single destination and their will, but more like a wider phenomenon. Hiking is done all year-round in Finland. Thinking about this as an opportunity, year-round development in Finnish tourism context could mean both seasons. The participants stated that in the Southern Finland, year-round development would mean having winter tourism in the Archipelago and in Northern Finland, having more summer tourism. There are also differences in the destination level within the regions. In all cases, the lower season is not an easy development task, nor is it even timely to consider. In other words, when taking the low-season tourism development steps, it will level the gap between the income in different seasons, even though the work during the low season is done without profit. Offering year-round employment in exchange, evens the social responsibility with economic compromise.

Climate change will have its own spice to this dichotomic discussion. It was generally recognized by the participants that climate change will have its effects on tourism. Recently, coolcation has come up as a term, and it means that it is to be expected that summer, i.e., warm season tourism is about to increase in the Northern, cooler areas. Hence, summer tourism would support the economic side of tourism even though it was at a cost of warming climate. Although, traveling to a cooler place would contribute to increasing travel consumption. At the same time, winter season suffers from uncertainty. For hiking, this means that summer would be more preferable season for trail and hiking tourism, but for winter, the season might not be so certain for example for ski touring in all places in Finland. This comes back to knowing the area, its limitations and adaptations.

### **5.3 Collaboration and competition of the stakeholders**

More factors that the participants recognized affecting in the characteristics of Finnish hiking from international perspective, were the popularity of having day trip destinations and recreation areas, general safety in Finland, the snow security in the winter season, country that is little less known and a cooler climate. Most of the interviewees experienced that one big attraction in Finland is the wide and free wilderness hut system. But a question remains, how to create business when the services are offered for free?

It was mentioned in the interviews that developing or investing should always be based on an income plan and economic reasons. However, developing tourism in the era of climate change,

growing understanding of wellbeing and ecological crisis, the other benefits of having a trail could have the otherwise not very productive trails in the conversation again.

...from where we get the best possible income for the investment [...] whether we use the private or public money [...] if we think about the cross-country skiing tracks [...] it brings wellbeing for the locals but serves tourism really well. (I1)

To be able to continue the work on long-distance hiking trails in Finland, a leader to coordinate the inter-regional network in Finland is in search. The participants recognized that one main reason for why trail investment is not guaranteed is the lack of continuation in funding and therefore resources to keep the work up. Why resources have not been counted in or accepted is a question of further review. As hiking is seen independent and low consumption, the service model and thus profitability have not been seen viable. As business is not guaranteed from income, the development trusts mainly in public funds, like tax income. But as tax income is not sufficient enough for making bigger investments or stable maintenance, the work is left minimum for a party that should do the required bare minimum work. Accordingly, very few committed actors have been granted the resources so that the hiking trails could be developed with inspired attitude and true understanding of the field. Agreeably among all participants, national and regional coordination is required to collaborate with the various stakeholders in tourism and local destinations.

One key aspect that was mentioned in the interviews was the so-called *ownership* of the trail, which means that some party is responsible for the overall management of the trails. In the cycling scene in Finland, a successful example has been Bikeland that has collected information and trails on cycling in Finland into one data source, and established a Welcome Cyclist stamp, that can be given to partners and companies that are able to support cyclists, for instance, by refilling water, washing a bike or charging the batteries (Bikeland, n.d.). The ideology is very close to what could be applied for long-distance hiking purposes. After all, hiking is a growing trend too, and having a national leader or an organization for such development could make the partnership work easier from the beginning.

Another example from the local news in Central Finland was how a one-man-operation succeeded in reviving the local, old long-distance trail that goes through the region, by walking the trail, paint-marking it, tracking it to digital system Lipas and speaking about the trail with local

landowners and media (Ketolainen, 2025). This example gives hope and inspiration for activism, where local voice can matter for greater good.

An example of an alternative path for funding the management came from one of the participants. It proposes to harness the big-money companies, like wind power companies, to support the trail work, as to compensate for the natural harm but to provide economic support and approval of land-use for tourism purposes. That would build longer-lasting collaboration in the area on social and economic levels, when the seemingly opposing industries play together. The wind power company pays compensation for the trail management and is mentioned openly in approval and common understanding.

A third reason was mentioned. As one of the challenges in development, the temporality of projects and project funding was pointed. A project funded from a national or a global source can be an effective way to get resources to work on a project, but as the nature of a project, it always comes to an end. For example, having the funding for starting a trail, maintaining the path, marking it with signposts, creating a website and hiring a responsible person, the trail however will not even reach its full potential and visitor publicity before the project ends. Is it responsible use of resources? This leads to a need to either have a follow-up project and funding or to find a caretaker for the trail. A trail is not enough on its own, it also needs to be marketed and maintained. Similarly, it was stated about digital tools for marketing, that digital platforms cannot do the online development or trail maintenance on their own. From the viewpoint of marketing and finding the right visitors, on the other hand, it might not even require thousands of hikers to be worthwhile: “we don’t need mass tourism, but we need more tourism” (I7).

It does not mean that developing a trail should aim at welcoming masses for most income, or that a trail would become as popular as some pilgrimage destinations, where mass tourism could be considered to bring also negative impacts to the local community, environment and economy (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). Similarly, even though a shorter day trip destination could be economically more impactful, it does not mean that it should be prioritized in maintenance and investment and leave the longer and less-visited places neglected.

Regarding developing hiking trails and destinations, long-distance hiking and pilgrimage were connected to the phenomenon of regenerative tourism, which aims for societal and environmental targets too on top of economic benefits. International long-distance hiking trails are regardless of their level of popularity for great benefit for the local communities. While negative

impacts have been found to appear in the most popular destinations, a trail always is a reflection of its location, makers and mentality.

It's a pilgrimage route, but it's also quite similar philosophy. They want to [...] keep the numbers down, but they work a lot with [...] storytelling about the history and the culture and so on.” (I9)

Whether it is the case of making business or voluntary work, it is inevitable that hiking and nature-based tourism is in a trendy position on a global level. Harnessing that fact and the amazing opportunities of rural tourism and nature in Finland could open the door for another kind of tourism development. An example could be to combine a network of trails and make a low-maintenance plan for the local communities to develop the trail and service infrastructure and thus tourism too. In exchange, the communities could create value in the work itself for sharing the story, receive recreational areas for supporting wellbeing and build resilient communities.

...business value, but it depends very much on how it is planned. And then the value can come from many perspectives: it is business, but also environmental education value and I'd say that wellbeing effects is a value itself. [...] Also, the value of community [...] the trails are something where you go for social purposes. You get to know, network and meet like-minded people or you can go there with your own group. But especially on the long trips you [...] can make global contacts. (I6)

In recent examples of developing of a long-distance hiking trail in Finland, a common factor has been that in the project groups, there has been at least one long-distance hiker included in the work groups. This is a crucial factor that offers inside knowledge of the segment to the project, and without such knowledge, the mentality of the segment can be difficult to understand and develop in practice. These two examples point out that the users need to be listened carefully too, whether they are in or outside the work group.

One main task for a trail developer or manager is to build understanding of the trail in the surrounding networks of stakeholders, companies and local communities. In this way, local operators can use the trail as they wish, for example, in making new tourism products. A simple trail system can allow potential, especially in the rural areas, where all growth and variety in

business are on the positive side but can be boosted with small and common investment. In the beginning of a lifecycle of a trail, the professionals need to take care of educating the region to understand the trail as a phenomenon and how it practically works. But as the trail grows, its brand and the working system can start to boost the region independently. For instance, when a trail becomes an attraction itself, there is possibility to start making products based on the trail brand. But if something does not exist, it must be started somewhere and worked hard to achieve results.

Sometimes, the beginning is hard, and no common understanding and perspectives are found. One interviewee pointed out that for instance reindeer herding can have opposing wishes for taking people out to nature, especially making trails, because the trail and increased traffic could affect the reindeer herding lands.

... 'you can't do any trails' [...] they are afraid of tourism that it will grow out of control and land use [...] that there are too many tourists [...] and that it's taking too much space from reindeer herding... (I5)

In this case, building perspectives and future images in a both-sided conversation could help us understand the reasoning for either decision. Inspired by modelling tourism in a destination by Sautter and Leisen (1999), openly inviting the reindeer herders' voices to the conversation of tourism and trail development, could help finding a middle ground.

Hiking is a lot about using trails but still walk in the nature that is very sensitive to degradation and loss of species and habitat. One example is to make new nature trails, even though they would need to be made more lasting by adding gravel or duckboards. Another point of view is to look for urban, cultural and social trails that are located near the villages and services. That would allow another kind of audience to go hiking, and to consume services. If the problem is that Finnish hiking trails are so rural, why not to bring them away from the rural and thus support the wellbeing and livelihood of countryside?

I think it first requires an attractive nature environment so it could be started. Then it requires the service environment, especially accessibility. And the more North we go, the harder it gets, but that's where we have the most attractions. I don't know if it's useful to make new long trails. If we could use resources in the development and maintenance of existing trails, then maybe that could be the right way. (I4)

No new trails might be required, but more likely that the tools for development, maintenance and their costs would be solved. Both the high costs of maintenance costs of existing trail infrastructure plus the development of new trails or infrastructure on the protected lands, where degradation of land and species is at high risk, are big questions for the stakeholders in trail management. Similarly, what happens if the saving processes from maintenance costs will affect the existence of this infrastructure that is attractive for hiking, meaning trails, rest areas and wilderness huts.

One alternative solution could be to readopt and reform volunteer work. In the time-centered society, where time is an important asset, volunteer work might be limited. However, as people have the urge to contribute to meaningful action, it could be one direction to review the possibilities of volunteer-based trail maintenance, that simultaneously connects people, meaningfulness and practicality. Even though caretakers, i.e., the volunteers, would receive value in supporting something important or meaningful, something owned, then still a central coordinator would be required to operate whatsoever.

Taking care of a trail is not only taking care of the physical path or a stage for tourism business but also taking care of the nonhuman and the environment for living. One of the participants asked a great question in the interview: “Are we folk who are close to nature?” (I2) This got me thinking, what does it mean to be close to nature? For example, one could argue that they are close to nature when they go biking in a national park, relaxing by a fire and then coming back and realizing that nature is the place where they find sources of wellbeing. But what if that activity first requires that someone walks the trail and then drives loads of gravel on the path so that it can be cycled and then bring expensive firewood from abroad so that a visitor can make a nice fire at a constructed fireplace. Is that person then really thinking close to nature? Or for example, is cutting a forest for opening a better scenery thinking nature’s best? The nonhuman factor outside of the trails and nature was not mentioned by other participants but could definitely serve interesting research paths.

## **5.4 Discussion**

Finnish tourism stakeholders are located sparsely, even though the stakeholder theories recognize the different parts in tourism networks. Every place, destination and region is different with its own stakeholder circles, which requires proactive work within the destinations to tackle

everyday decisions and development in tourism, especially when aiming for including the local features in the work (Byrd, 2007). A development project requires reasoning and a drive to get started.

While arguing that developing long-distance hiking would require one leader for the work, the same multi-place challenge of the hiking destination remains. For making the work possible among the stakeholders, the trail plays an important role in connecting the different stakeholders. Long-distance hiking could both benefit and be affected by good stakeholder work and governance. When the present catalogue of long-distance hiking trails is rather short, it has been practical that smaller project groups proceed on their own. One of the speedbumps in Finnish trail development have been the decisions and urges from national hierarchical level to reduce focus from some trails and infrastructure. The global and national balancing on the triple bottom line for progress (Elkington, 2018) can differ from the abilities, power and resources of the potential hiking trail-based communities.

In the management of the little pieces that are needed in long-distance trail management, I add to the discussion the characteristics from tourism governance, like policymaking, complexity of different communities and networks, and empowering the market (Hall & Saarinen, 2025). Together with normative stakeholder theory (Donaldson & Preston, 1995), both similarly give recognition for tourism networks and markets, but governance theory puts more pressure and responsibility on the decision-making level too (Hall & Saarinen, 2025). Even though Carroll and Näsi (1997) remind that the best manager of this complex network might get the best results, it is a critical downside for smaller communities to live at the edge of the decision-making and power relations (Viken, 2014; Reed, 1997), especially in land-use issues. Related to long-distance hiking in Finland, this would often mean to argue against such industries, like forestry, mining industry, or even nature protection.

Lundén (2025) states that governance on conservation areas is facing times of debate for why and whom they are, and from whom they are being protected. Including conservation agencies in the discussion is crucial when it comes to land-use management issues and funding, but it is not up to only national level discussion anymore. Many hiking trails are naturally close to or on conservation areas, like in national parks, where tourism and its development face certain limitations, but each trail and region is different and could benefit from different strategies of use. The history of protected areas has changed its meaning in present compared to the historical origins (Lundén, 2025).

What it comes to controlling visitation for reducing or preventing degradation of environments also due to hiking (Tolvanen & Kangas, 2016), it is justified that big numbers of day visitors are guided to rather narrow areas, where the environment has been enhanced to last such masses. On the other hand, guiding visitors to places elsewhere too, to less used trails could provide a solution to the problem of some longer trails being cut off from maintenance due to too little use, or where the maintenance depends on active participation of local communities that have little evidence for investment (e.g., Palmqvist, 2020; Maaseutuverkosto, 2019; Kiminki, 2020).

The hierarchical characteristics of governance (Hall & Saarinen, 2025) certainly affect how other actors can act or even take responsibility for working and developing action in conservation areas. Lundén (2025) presents that tourism should in the coming times be in close relation to decision-making regarding protection area use. Protection areas' role in tourism could be linked to the stakeholder theory of including nature into the management and governance in a broader sense as a natural environment (Laine, 2011; Lundén, 2025). The ways to govern are political (Hall & Saarinen, 2025), and in a bigger picture, looking for change and improvement in long-distance hiking trail development in Finland, work on the wider governmental level too is required.

Taking the trails and natural environments into account as stakeholders, it is obvious that following the triple bottom line of economy, environment and society from Elkington (2018), caretaking of the scene for hiking is a logical factor that should be included in the decision-making process, listened and taken care of in equal relation to other stakeholders. But again, as stated in the stakeholder literature, for tourism stakeholders the primary and immediate target often is to consider the economic trade-off (e.g., Tallberg et al., 2022).

Hiking and trails are put to a challenging spot, as taking more people on the trails leads to increased use of natural environment. However, land-use and its management are preconditions for tourism development and investment (Hytönen & Kulusjärvi, 2023). Also, Viken (2014) discusses the growth paradigm, which in destination management and stakeholder interaction shows in the transformation of tourism destinations. Hence, the growth paradigm in long-distance hiking context touches the development and maintenance of hiking trails in a way that regards the local human and nonhuman stakeholders. If the hiker numbers can be maintained at the marginal level as they are, or in a slight growth as the trend expects, the benefits from a trail could meet both the environmental bearing abilities and trade for local tourism.

Not every destination needs or wants to chase masses of tourists or users, but instead to recognize that with smaller numbers of special groups of visitors, directed at the suitable services, they might actually gain something more meaningful. Tourism degrowth is about balancing between the social, economic and ecological aspects of development, but as Tikkanen (2023) studied from multi-stakeholder levels, alternative thinking might not always come into question.

Also, Włodarczyk and Cudny (2022) argue that low-cost travel could indeed be an alternative under the wide umbrella of sustainable tourism. In this thesis' interviews, this low-consumption model of hikers was recognized, but not in the end as a limiting factor per se, when the phenomenon of *slow travel* by hiking was taken into account.

One interesting discussion in tourism research about hiking context, is the concept of *ecological pilgrimage* that means hiking for understanding and repairing the nature relationship (Höckert et al., 2025). A long-distance hike on a trail partially taken by time and nature is in a turning point, where old human handprint of making a trail to connect humans to nature and then footprint of the forgotten maintenance yet alternative use of natural resources meet the hiker who is next describing this experience and thus giving their voice for the future actions regarding the trail. Ecological pilgrimage takes the traditional idea of pilgrimage to the timely discussion of socio-ecological balancing related to hiking trails.

Pilgrimage has an important element of mobility for seeking meaning to life and transformation (Collins-Kreiner, 2020), possibly in the form of hiking. Collins-Kreiner (2020) recognizes the gap in tourism and pilgrimage terminology, which for tourism research could be re-phrased with the deeper meaning. Pilgrimage in its deeper meaning is transformational mobility (Collins-Kreiner, 2020), which also is part of long-distance hiking.

Long-distance hiking is a form of slow travel, where the value to both the traveler and the destination comes from the slowness of travel and the mindset that strives towards sustainable thinking (Haapakoski, 2021). Slowness as a term is also one of the seven keywords of pilgrimage that create an overall experience: simplicity, silence, lightheartedness, slowness, spirituality, freedom and sharing (e.g., Pilgrimage Center, n.d.). Pilgrimage has been evolving in the past from purely religious mobility to overall spiritual exploration, and the understanding of the pilgrims as tourists has broadened (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). While pilgrimages can cover long-

distance hiking, it does not fully explain why hiking should be done for longer distances. Distance is a matter of mode of travel, and for example, on a bike or at a faster pace, the same distance naturally takes shorter time than on foot. Multi-day trips and pilgrimage are similar for self-reflection and walking in a natural environment, and pilgrimage more so for the slow travel and inner aspects, but in both the journey is in importance (Vistad et al., 2020).

This comes back to understanding the segment and seeing the potential of that traveler for the whole region instead of just one company or town. The reasons why people go hiking were similarly understood by the participants as well as previous literature, like the aspect of adventure and belonging (e.g., Cole & Thomsen, 2021; Schilar, 2017). Planning a hiking trail that connects towns requires co-creation and collaboration. Thus, developing hiking destinations is and should be different from developing tourism destinations. However, based on the stakeholder thinking, the market of hiking should be a well-known part of the stakeholder network prior to development (Byrd, 2007). One term of this problem could be *myopia*, which means that the tourism destination management organizations might not know the market well enough, and therefore do not see the local opportunities for hiking destination development (Nordbø et al., 2014). The stakeholders included in this study were chosen based on their expected experience of hiking trails, so the future was seen positive for developing hiking. But if the same research setting was conducted on random tourism stakeholders, myopia towards hiking for tourism could lead to different perspectives (Nordbø et al., 2014).

In Northern Finland, where the winter and snow conditions are excellent throughout most of the winter season, seasonality of the hiking trails comes into question – especially on international scale. There is a considerable number of international business operators, who use the Finnish nature, with contract, free or rather cheap use of infrastructure and facilities that are paid from public tax income from Finnish government. They run their business in the settings and landscape in Finland to make money and pay taxes abroad. I wonder, what is left of this to Finland? As a note from this observation, the international field has more resources to use and more hikers to travel, which supports the economic collaboration. But as agreed in the interviews, international field and tourists should be known better, and services and collaboration planned accordingly.

Hiking from hut to hut, or from accommodation to accommodation is a widespread practice in many countries, for example both in Central and Southern Europe (Gross & Werner, 2017). Finland has the culture for wilderness huts, but what is special in Finland, is that the wilderness

hut system is free or optionally reservable, whereas in other places the reservation system is referable to any reservable accommodation (Gross & Werner, 2017). Having the huts has potential firstly for the infrastructure-supported hiking and secondly for having a system for compensating the upkeep.

Furthermore, Tyrväinen et al. (2014) have studied that tourists would be willing to pay for enhancement of forest environment rather than paying for infrastructure. Similarly, labor for the landowner has been studied to be one possible compensation method (Lankia et al., 2014). On the other hand, optional funding methods have been accepted in minor amounts for public amenity building, like outdoor infrastructure (e.g., Partioaitta, 2026; Kansallispuistokauppa, 2026). Both these funding opportunities serve as optional sources for resource management. They feature the importance of putting personal, users' and active hobbyists' value into practice for the good of nature-based tourism. Maybe such practice of donations to otherwise lost infrastructure will be valued in the future too.

As McLeod (2024) has studied, volunteering to do good for the trail and its users, like helping hikers by creating additional infrastructure, can feed the system forward by constructing culture around the trail. Similarly to the example cases in Finland, there has been a study in Japan about contributing to trail maintenance by voluntary donations, as donations are an important solution to protection area maintenance (Kubo et al., 2018). The study found out that knowing the target for where the money goes will encourage the visitors or other interested donators to contribute to area development (Kubo et al., 2018). Furthermore, entrance fees come into question (Kubo et al., 2018), although, in Finland they have not been seen as a viable option (Rossinen, 2024) and would need a shift in generational thinking.

When thinking about the hiking and outdoor culture in Finland, it has been so normal to just go out, do things in our own way, be in serenity with nature and explore the unroamed trails. It would require a big shift in the culture to create services around something so sensitive, even personal, like hiking in nearby nature. But for personal reasons, fundamental connections and closeness with nature, this power could be utilized for volunteer work, i.e., contributing to something personally close or important, which then creates benefit for the hiking scene and supports the connection.

Thinking about the increasing amount of time and money that an increasing population must use the possibilities to go on longer trips are increasing. At the same time, as the studies have

shown, long-distance hiking can offer distinctive opportunities to increase mental health, self-reflection, and general wellbeing (Mau et al., 2021), which are highly valued on societal levels too. While everyday life has low chances to face physical risks, challenging one's limits and adventure elements, a longitude of time and distance outdoors, in physically demanding conditions, can offer the challenge that a human biology and brain desires. More people will also find trails on digital platforms and social media. All these factors could boost the popularity of long-distance hiking in the future.

Finland is a small nation of travelers, with a small audience for specific segments. The language barrier for finding information can be real, even though translator tools are in great shape nowadays. International field needs to be developed, both in language and findability, to build open and profitable services that contribute to making lively countryside and tourism destinations. Hiking is a low-impact activity, and both day trips to nature and longer hikes are trending globally. Another well-trending and developed activity recently has been biking, and it has shown excellent example of the management of the routes and practical development steps (e.g., Bikeland, n.d.). There is a need for new products, innovation, and trails so that outdoor culture can serve the expectations of hungry hikers and travelers.

One of the factors why Finland does not have long-distance hiking trails, is the lack of continuous, scenically beautiful, often untouched, or natural forests and wilderness, like mires. The controversial use of natural resources might not always support nature's attractiveness as a place to connect to it. But turning this image upside down, and trying to find the positive in it, thinking about the ultra-long trails abroad, there is always discussion about alternatives for the trail that might offer more interesting views, places, attractions, scenery or experiences that bring more value to the long hike. The *dramatic arc* or the arc of the story applied to hiking trails, where the arc and moments on the way require both exciting and milder moments. Realistically, for hiking purposes there is no need to make natural scenery more scenic but rather restore and save the original corridors of natural landscape.

Planning a trail should rethink attractiveness. As stated in the interviews, Finland has special characteristics for quiet, peaceful, safe, and clean environments, as well as everyone's rights, wilderness huts and thousands of lakes. What if a long-distance hiking trail was planned from these starting points, creating something that looks like Finland and serves a nice portion of Finnish mentality of simplicity, nature and self-sufficiency that reflect the local values, but also low business too.

A local trail is not only for the locals, but can offer possibilities for larger networks too, such as link the region to inter-regional trail system, like the European Trails (European Hiking Federation [ERA], 2026a), of which an old line plans of E6 and E10 used to go through Finland, but the trail plans have since wrecked, although been revived by private work (e.g., Katila, 2018). Interestingly, until 2017, Suomen Latu has been the Finnish representative for ERA (e.g., Katila, 2018) but quit its membership hence leaving Finland without a leading organization responsible for long-distance hiking trails. An example of a future-oriented development project on hiking engages youth people to planning and leadership in trail management, and as the pillars to development, they recognize communication skills within hiking associations (PATH, 2026 & ERA, 2026b), and that active tourism often contributes to sustainability (ERA, 2026c). This also comes back to knowing the long-distance hikers, who will eventually consist of this next generation, which should be kept in mind when hearing of the users, or other recent ways of development, like the ultralight backpacking becoming more and more common.

By putting focus on longer trail existence and maintenance, there could be another longer-view strategical option for supporting Finnish recreation area offerings and wellbeing. The special thing about hiking in Finland is the year-round culture for hiking, although it would mean to use skis in the winter. By focusing on creating summer hiking trails, it simultaneously provides opportunities for enlarging the season to cater winter too. Winter hiking on the other hand benefits from a well-marked, existing trail network in the quieter hiking season. This takes the topic back to the need for long-distance hiking trails in Finland. In the end, hiking is more of a thing for snow-free seasons, and much smaller in the wintertime. This view could be challenged, for example by creating guided hiking for longer distances in search for adventure, but in more controlled, social and also commercially supporting settings (Rantala & Tuulentie, 2017).

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In my thesis, I studied long-distance hiking in Finland from the stakeholder perspective, and wanted to find out answers to this research question: “How do tourism stakeholders in Finland perceive long-distance hiking and its potential for tourism development?”

I explored that through the following sub questions:

- 1) How do hiking-related stakeholders perceive long-distance hiking and trails in Finland?
- 2) What kinds of understanding and knowledge do stakeholders have regarding long-distance hiking?
- 3) What are the barriers and enablers to establishing and maintaining long-distance hiking trails in Finland?

I managed to capture rich conversation on this topic with nine tourism stakeholders, who already had some idea of long-distance hiking and trails in Finland. Even though they all had experience from various perspectives as professionals, hikers, consultants or developers of hiking and trails, the conversations were not always simple. Professionalism showed well in detailed examples, descriptions and thinking beyond the activity of hiking. As an enthusiastic long-distance hiker myself, I found the conversations fruitful to having a picture of how long-distance hiking is seen in the Finnish context and widen the perspective through research. It was not only the hiking as an activity, but the mentality of long-distance hiking and Finnish specialties for hiking at stake. One part of hiking in Finland embraced the notions of emptiness, mysticality, rurality, safety, and peacefulness, which might be both barriers and enablers for the commitment to develop (3).

Stakeholders in Finland understand hiking well, because it is in one way or another familiar activity to many, starting from day hikes and well-known trails. However, long-distance hiking was not an easy concept. The most mutual understanding (2) of long-distance hiking was that one week is already long. It reflects well the challenge in terminology in Finnish, for example the term hiking was used similarly when talking about day hikes, overnight trips or longer hikes. Long-distance hiking in Finland (1) was linked to the popular hiking trails in Finland that take about a week to hike. Longer than that often was contextualized to trails abroad or connected

to pilgrimage. Although, a few long-distance trails that are longer than one week or 200 kilometers were occasionally recognized by the stakeholders, if they had not been themselves working with one of those trails.

Finland was seen as a potential destination for long-distance hiking (1), for those who take their own trails or are ready to use roads near settlements, do not seek a place to stay for the night, do not seek for the most popular places to hike, want to use wilderness huts and are self-sufficient if a trail is not in glorious condition. Those characteristics described Finnish hiking trails. What was interesting was the idea of rediscovering pilgrimage in Finland. However, it has to be considered that not everywhere in Finland it is possible to reach services every night, like to stay indoors and have a warm meal on a multi-week hike. Near inhabited places, roads or villages, there are excellent places to consider this so-called bedsheet hike (3). But when going to the most well-known Finnish hiking destinations, often located in Eastern to Northern Finland, or on small and distant areas, such facilities are hard to find nor do they exist (3).

Thus, pilgrimage as it shows on the popular European comparison trails, like Camino de Santiago or Via Francigena, was not described something that reflects the traditional Finnish wilderness hiking context but is an excellent product to connect to a wider hiking network internationally (1). Long-distance hiking without such luxury on the other hand, was seen extreme and demanding, and not profitable enough, but as a wonderful way to adventure (2). When taking this problem to the Finnish style of hiking, it does not seem like a problem anymore. The stakeholder viewpoint showed that Finland has an amazing network of day trip trails, multiday hikes and one-week hikes, but the connecting links between them are missing or the parts in between are not attractive to a reason or another (3). According to the mentality of long-distance hiking though, it was not always considered important to be at the peak of excitement but rather looking at the other factors, like inner growth and deeper meaning (2). The reasons why people go hiking were well understood among the stakeholders in this study: being in nature, having adventure, challenge, and learning.

To answer the main research question, this thesis claims that trails and hiking can have great potential for creating new kind of tourism products and economy in Finland but also support the already existing tourism by strengthening a rather marginal segment to the tray. The potential was seen to lie in the existing trails and trail projects. However, the trails in Finland are not long enough for hiking for multiple weeks or hundreds of kilometers. Some of the existing

trails, on the other hand, have positions as legendary trails and carry value that could be elaborated for tourism development. These trails are not everything on their own, which should be remembered in the future development and decision-making for maintenance and management of alternative hiking trails. Trails in general are quite expensive to manage, which leads to inevitable decrease in care and investment (3). There have been and still are several longer trails in Finland, which surprisingly have been forgotten by authorities who could take care of the trail maintenance and marketing of the trail. Without such authority, the development of the trails is barely possible (3).

That takes me to the main finding that was seen by the stakeholders as a restrictive factor for tourism development in Finland based on this research. Finland does not currently have a party, organization, manager, owner, or a caretaker for taking care of the long-distance hiking trails and hiking culture. Oftentimes, municipalities and organizations tend to neglect their trails due to lack of resources and users, and often the trails are not their priority. Along a longer trail, like the Finnish UKK trail, this creates gaps in trail condition. Central interest in cross-border trail development and coordination should be added, possibly both on national and international levels. Trail is not a tourism product, if it is only left behind, neglected. It can only become a profitable tourism product, if the trail, including the nature around it and the communities alongside, as well as the infrastructure needed for hiking, are taken care of. Not only by building new parking lots but also by marketing the trail in modern ways, supporting the creation of new products around it, and identifying its deeper meaning. Additionally, central trail manager could implement maintenance plan, a shared workload, more resourcefully than a single actor. It requires a wide working network of stakeholders to build a system that lasts decades and beyond, so that long-distance hiking could offer valuable opportunities for rural, small destinations and communities.

In this thesis, the focus was on studying the stakeholder perspective, which obviously leaves out one key factor, a stakeholder from the scene, the long-distance hikers. The user perspective would be undoubtedly intriguing to study in Finland, because every year, there are more people going hiking for long distances in Finland too. If looking at the global trends, things usually land with a delay to Finland. However, there are already dozens of domestic hikers in Finland who have experience in long-distance hiking, and in addition, an unknown amount of international long-distance hikers. One important thing in general would be to study the international

hiker audience in Finland, on the way to the expected growth of both tourists in summer season due to warming temperatures and the increasing interest in long-distance hiking along with it.

The stakeholders in tourism are a large network of humans, nonhumans, organizations and structures, which makes the use of stakeholder terminology a limiting factor. Both, in the stakeholder literature and in the analysis part of this thesis, the themes of different stakeholders and their outputs to long-distance hiking were overlapping. This reflects the versatility of the phenomenon in Northern tourism scope. However, in this thesis, the stakeholders in the interviews covered part of the managerial side of tourism stakeholders and were chosen purposefully to examine long-distance hiking currently in Finland. For further research, other stakeholders, like tourism businesses, local communities and long-distance hikers could be included. The stakeholder perspectives on a national level vary, and one study gives only a narrow perspective to the topic, despite the variety in participant qualifications. Comparison between regions, like the pilgrimage possibilities on the West Coast versus trails in the rural Eastern and Northern forest landscape, could give different outcomes.

In the thesis process, I found out that there is a good amount of varying research and secondary, non-academic knowledge on long-distance hiking. Therefore, deeper desk research and literature review should be done on the existing material to investigate and map the common ground of long-distance hiking as a phenomenon for further research purposes. However, any knowledge of the topic is valuable to increasing understanding. Tourism research recognizes long-distance hiking but could conceptualize it in relation to the field. With this thesis, I have only scratched the very surface of the topic of long-distance hiking. The big puzzle of understanding the scene in Finland and developing it is only in the beginning. This thesis brings one piece to the puzzle that still needs active steps to investigate.

Hiking is activity that can support individuals as well as societies for overall wellbeing, physical and mental health. Nature, both as a working companion as well, is giving back as long as it is justly integrated. Long-distance hiking as an extended form of travel makes a leap back in history of tourism and draws naturally places and people together. For experiencing the best out of this, whether it is to create functioning tourism products, lasting trail ecosystems, meaningful travel, deeper connection to environment or oneself, one has to experience it. Finally, based on the long-distance hiking characteristics and advantages for tourism, as well as from personal experience, I'd suggest putting on some trail runners and hitting the trails.

## REFERENCES

- Ahmetović, D. (2025). Walking Through: An exploration of long-distance hiking. Aalborg University. Retrieved December 9, 2025, from <https://demirandir.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Walking-Through-an-exploration-of-long-distance-hiking.pdf>
- Alhaddi, H. (2015). Triple Bottom Line and Sustainability: A Literature Review. *Business and Management Studies*, 1(3), 6-10. <https://doi.org/10.11114/bms.v1i2.752>
- American Pilgrims on the Camino. (2026, January 23). *Statistics for the Camino de Santiago (2025 Edition)*. American Pilgrims on the Camino. Retrieved April 27, 2026, from <https://americanpilgrims.org/statistics/>
- Amerson, K., Rose, J., Lepp, A., & Dustin, D. (2019). Time on the trail, smartphone use, and place attachment among Pacific Crest Trail thru-hikers. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 51(3), 308–324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2019.1680264>
- Appalachian Trail Conservancy [ATC]. (n.d.). *Hike the Trail*. Retrieved May 14, 2026, from <https://appalachiantrail.org/experience/hike-the-trail/>
- Associazione Europea delle Vie Francigene. (n.d.). The Via Francigena. *Via Francigena: road to Rome*. Retrieved May 13, 2026, from <https://www.viefrancigene.org/en/about>
- Baker, A. (2019, October 25). Post-Trail Depression: It's Not What You Think [Blog]. *The Trek*. Retrieved May 13, 2026, from <https://thetrek.co/post-trail-depression-not-think/>
- Baker, A. (2020, April 30). Trail Science: Grief, Depression, and Identity in the Time of COVID-19 [Blog]. *The Trek*. Retrieved May 13, 2026, from <https://thetrek.co/trail-science-grief-depression-and-identity-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>
- Basil, M. D. (2022). Understanding people's motivations for a long-distance hiking trip. *Leisure Studies*, 42(2), 282–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2022.2115108>
- Bikeland. (n.d.). *Welcome Cyclist*. Retrieved May 15, 2026, from <https://www.bikeland.fi/en/welcome-cyclist/>
- Byrd, E. T. (2007). Stakeholders in sustainable tourism development and their roles: Applying stakeholder theory to sustainable tourism development. *Tourism review (Association internationale d'experts scientifiques du tourisme)*, 62(2), 6-13. <https://doi.org/10.1108/16605370780000309>
- Cahoon, N. (2025, April 15). *The UKK hiking trail* [Video]. Vimeo. <https://vimeo.com/1075617586/88e6c0d466?share=copy>
- Cahoon, N. P., Höckert, E. & Vlasov, M. (2025). Sounding bodies along the UKK hiking trail, Finland. *Tourism Geographies*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2025.2600029>
- Cambridge University Press & Assessment. (n.d.). Pilgrimage. In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved April 22, 2026, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pilgrimage>

Capsi, J., & Esteve, H. (2020). 4 Long Trails in Europe: The path to success of hiking tourism products. In P. Vidal-González (Ed.), *Hiking in European Mountains: Trends and Horizons* (pp. 35-50). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110660715-004>

Carroll, A. B., & Näsi, J. (1997). Understanding Stakeholder Thinking: Themes from a Finnish Conference. *Business ethics (Oxford, England)*, 6(1), 46-51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8608.00047>

Cole, T. R. (2018). *Investigating the Thru-hiking Experience: a Study on the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail* [Master's Thesis, The University of Montana]. Scholar Works. <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/11160>

Cole, T., & Thomsen, J.M. (2021). Navigating the Challenges of the Multi-Phase Thru-Hiking Experience. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership*, 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.18666/JOREL-2021-V13-I3-10067>

Collins-Kreiner, N. (2020). Pilgrimage tourism-past, present and future rejuvenation: a perspective article. *Tourism Review*, 75(1), 145–148, <https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-04-2019-0130>

Continental Divide Trail Coalition [CDTC]. (n.d.). *Explore the Trail*. Retrieved May 14, 2026, from <https://cdtcoalition.org/explore-the-trail/>

Delucchi, L. (2021). *Hiking and Well-Being: Does Hiking with Headphones Influence Positive Affect and Attention Restoration?* [Master's Thesis, Prescott College]. Prescott College ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Donaldson, T., & Preston, L. E. (1995). The Stakeholder Theory of the Corporation: Concepts, Evidence, and Implications. *The Academy of Management review*, 20(1), 65-91. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9503271992>

Driscoll, C., & Starik, M. (2004). The Primordial Stakeholder: Advancing the Conceptual Consideration of Stakeholder Status for the Natural Environment. *Journal of Business Ethics* 49, 55–73. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:BUSI.0000013852.62017.0e>

Dustin, D., Rose, J., Amerson, K., & Lepp, A. (2020). The Increasingly Social World of Long-Distance Hiking. *International Journal of Wilderness, Communication & Education*, 26(3). <https://ijw.org/social-long-distance-hiking/>

Elkington, J. (1997). The triple bottom line. In M. V. Russo (Ed.) *Environmental management: Readings and cases*, 2 (pp. 49-66). Sage.

Elkington, J. (2018, June 25). *25 Years Ago I Coined the Phrase “Triple Bottom Line.” Here’s Why It’s Time to Rethink It*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2018/06/25-years-ago-i-coined-the-phrase-triple-bottom-line-heres-why-im-giving-up-on-it>

European Hiking Federation [ERA]. (2026a). E-paths are the European Trails. Retrieved April 6, 2026 from <https://www.era-ewv-ferp.org/e-paths/>

European Hiking Federation [ERA]. (2026b, March 11). *PATH – Promoting Activism Through Hiking*. Retrieved April 6, 2026, from <https://www.era-ewv-ferp.org/path/>

European Hiking Federation [ERA]. (2026c, March 6). *Active Tourism Coalition meets at ITB Berlin* [Post]. Retrieved April 6, 2026, from <https://www.era-ewv-ferp.org/active-tourism-coalition-meets-at-itb-berlin/>

Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK. (2023). *The Finnish code of conduct for research integrity and procedures for handling alleged violations of research integrity in Finland*. [https://tenk.fi/sites/default/files/2023-11/RI\\_Guidelines\\_2023.pdf](https://tenk.fi/sites/default/files/2023-11/RI_Guidelines_2023.pdf)

Fjällfararnas Vita & Gröna Band. (n.d.). *Facts and numbers*. Retrieved May 16, 2026, from <https://www.vitagronabandet.se/en/all-ribbons/facts-and-numbers/>

Fondren, K. M. (2015). *Walking on the wild side: Long-distance hiking on the Appalachian Trail*. Rutgers University Press.

Freeman, R. E. (2022). My Own Book Review. *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach. Management (Paris, France : 1998)*, 25(1), 67-69. <https://doi.org/10.37725/mgmt.v25.8519>

García-Rosell, J.-C., & Tallberg, L. (2021). Animals as tourism stakeholders: Huskies, reindeer, and horses working in Lapland. In J. M. Rickly & C. Kline (Eds.), *Exploring non-human work in tourism: From beasts of burden to animal ambassadors* (pp. 103-121). De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110664058-007>

Goldenberg, M., Hill, E., & Freidt, B. (2008). Why Individuals Hike the Appalachian Trail: A Qualitative Approach to Benefits. *The Journal of experiential education*, 30(3), 277-281. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105382590703000311>

Granlund, E., & Olin, S. (2020). *Uppföljning av en pilgrimsled : Insamling av material för utveckling av St. Olav Waterway* [Bachelor's Thesis, Novia University of Applied Sciences]. Theseus. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2020120826752>

Gross, R. S. (2022). Ultralight: Commercializing Lightweight Backpacks for Long-Distance Hiking. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 39(1), 22-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2021.1917552>

Gross, R. S., & Werner, K. (2017). Hut-to-hut-hiking trails: A comparative analysis of popular hiking destinations. In C. M. Hall, Y. Ram, & N. Shoval (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of walking* (pp. 251-268). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315638461>

Haapakoski, A.-E. (2021). *Hidas matkailu osana matkailun murrosta : Sisällönanalyysi ja diskurssianalyysi media-aineistosta* [Master's Thesis, University of Lapland]. Lauda. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2021061738291>

Halfway Anywhere. (2013, December 13). *The Annual Pacific Crest Trail Thru-Hiker Survey (2013)*. Halfway Anywhere. Retrieved April 27, 2026, from <https://www.halfwayanywhere.com/trails/pacific-crest-trail/pacific-crest-trail-hiker-survey-2013/>

Halfway Anywhere. (2025). *Pacific Crest Trail*. Halfway Anywhere. Retrieved September 29, 2025 from <https://www.halfwayanywhere.com/pacific-crest-trail/>

Halfway Anywhere. (2025, December 29). *Pacific Crest Trail Hiker Survey (2025)*. Halfway Anywhere. Retrieved April 27, 2026, from <https://www.halfwayanywhere.com/trails/pacific-crest-trail/pct-hiker-survey-2025/>

Hall, C. M., & Saarinen, J. (2025). Introduction: theories, scales and approaches to tourism governance. In J. Saarinen, & C. M. Hall (Eds.), *Handbook on tourism governance* (pp. 2-15). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Hecker, J., & Kalpokas, N. (n.d.). *The Guide to Thematic Analysis*. Atlas.ti. Retrieved May 10, 2026, from [https://atlasti.com/guides/thematic-analysis?\\_gl=1\\*1koiia0\\*\\_up\\*MQ..\\*\\_ga\\*MjAwOTE5NjYzMS4xNzc4NDA1NzI3\\*\\_ga\\_K459D5HY8F\\*\\_czE3Nzg0MDU3MjYkbzEkZzEkdDE3Nzg0MDU5MjAkajYwJGwwJGg0NjYzMzcyNjg](https://atlasti.com/guides/thematic-analysis?_gl=1*1koiia0*_up*MQ..*_ga*MjAwOTE5NjYzMS4xNzc4NDA1NzI3*_ga_K459D5HY8F*_czE3Nzg0MDU3MjYkbzEkZzEkdDE3Nzg0MDU5MjAkajYwJGwwJGg0NjYzMzcyNjg).

Heikkilä, E. (2020). *Matkatoimisto Aventura : vaellus- ja vuorikiipeilymatkojen kehittäminen* [Bachelor's Thesis, Laurea University of Applied Sciences]. Theseus. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2020121428091>

Heikkinen, A. (2020). *Vetovoimainen retkeilyalue -kyselytutkimus* [Master's Thesis, Kajaani University of Applied Sciences]. Theseus. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2020121227849>

Hirschauer, S. (2006). Putting things into words. Ethnographic description and the silence of the social. *Human Studies* 29(4), 413–441. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-007-9041-1>

Höckert, E., Cahoon, N., Rantala, O., Vlasov, M. (2025). Ecological Pilgrimage: Repairing Human-Forest Relations. In S. Poole, D. Shcire, & D. Valisena (Eds.), *Mobile heritage: Walking and the environment through future and historical Perspectives* [Conference proceedings], 46-53. One by Walking. [https://www.onebywalking.net/\\_files/ugd/657f18\\_55935614299c45aea46b34b890789616.pdf](https://www.onebywalking.net/_files/ugd/657f18_55935614299c45aea46b34b890789616.pdf)

Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative health research*, 15(9), 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>

Hytönen, J., & Kulusjärvi, O. (2023). Vastuullinen vuorovaikutteisuus matkailukohteiden maankäytön suunnittelussa. In S. Veijola (Ed.), *Matkailunkestävä Suomi? : vastuullinen suunnittelu kulttuuri- ja luontoympäristöissä* (pp. 241-267). (Tietolipas; Nro 283). Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura. <https://doi.org/10.21435/tl.283>

Ilkka, E. (2014). *Polkujen kulumiseen vaikuttavat tekijät Sipoonkorvessa* [Master's Thesis, University of Helsinki]. Helda. <http://hdl.handle.net/10138/144209>

Isangula, K. G., Kelly, S., & Wamoyi, J. (2024). Manual Qualitative Data Coding Using MS Word for Students and Early Career Researchers in Resource-Constrained Settings. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069241299223>

Järvinen, M. (2022). *Vaeltajien turvallisuuskäyttäytyminen* [Master's Thesis, Laurea University of Applied Sciences]. Theseus. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2022062018928>

Jayasena, H. S. (2025, October 12). *A Practical Guide to Thematic Analysis with MS Word and Excel* [Blog]. Aecolution. <https://aecolution.com/2025/10/12/a-practical-guide-to-thematic-analysis-with-ms-word-and-excel/>

Jennings, G. (2010). Chapter 2: Theoretical paradigms underpinning tourism research. *Tourism Research*. Wiley.

Jocelyn, E., & Sigley, G. (2014) "Walking the Ancient Tea Horse Road: The Rise of the Outdoors and China's First Long Distance Branded Hiking Trail", *Journal of Tourism Consumption and Practice*, 6(1), Article 2. Available at: <https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/jtcp/vol6/iss1/2>

Juuti, P., & Puusa, A. (2020). Johdanto. Mitä laadullisella tutkimuksella tarkoitetaan? In A. Puusa & P. Juuti (Eds.), *Laadullisen tutkimuksen näkökulmat ja menetelmät* (pp. 9-20). Gaudeamus Oy.

Kansallispuistokauppa. (2026). *We support the Finnish National Parks*. Retrieved May 20, 2026, from <https://kansallispuistokauppa.fi/en/pages/tuemme-kansallispuistoja>

Karjalainen, T. (2023, November 6). *Lappiin halutaan vaellusreitti vailla vertaa – ”Lapista on mahdollista tehdä yksi maailman tunnetuimpia vaelluskohteita”* [News article]. LeviNyt. <https://www.levinyt.fi/artikkeli/lappiin-halutaan-vaellusreitti-vailla-vertaa-lapista-on-mahdollista-tehda-yksi-maailman-tunnetuim>

Kastikainen, H. (2022). *Kävele, unohda, rakastu* [Book]. Storytel.

Katila, M. (2018, October 3). *E6 kaukovaellusreitti* [Blog]. Nautin elämästä juosten – toimistokunnosta ultraajaksi? Retrieved April 6, 2026, from <https://nautinelamastajuosten.blogspot.com/2018/10/e6-kaukovaellusreitti.html>

Kekäle, J., & Puusa, A. (2020). Tiedesodat. Realistinen ja konstruktionistinen maailmankäsitys. In A. Puusa & P. Juuti (Eds.), *Laadullisen tutkimuksen näkökulmat ja menetelmät* (pp. 41-56). Gaudeamus Oy.

Kempermann, G. (2022). Embodied Prevention. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 841393. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.841393>

Ketolainen, P. (2025, October 5). *Takavuosilta tuttu maakuntaura aukesi jälleen Keski-Suomessa – ”Reitin voi ajaa läpi vaikka polkupyörällä”* [News article]. KeskiSuomalainen. <https://www.ksml.fi/paikalliset/8894571>

Khazaei, A., Elliot, S., & Joppe, M. (2015). An application of stakeholder theory to advance community participation in tourism planning: the case for engaging immigrants as fringe stakeholders. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 23(7), 1049–1062. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2015.1042481>

Kiminki, T. (2020, September 17). *Osin rapistuva UKK-reitti täytti 40 vuotta – satojen kilometrien retkeilyreitti on jäänyt paikoin liki unohduksiin, mutta korjauksiakin tehdään* [News article]. Iijokiseutu. <https://www.ijokiseutu.fi/osin-rapistuva-ukk-reitti-taytti-40-vuotta-satojen/2887922>

- Knopp, T. B., & Sievänen, T. (1992). Project Plan for International Investigation of Long-Distance Hiking and Skiing Trails. In T. Sievänen (Ed.), *Nordic Outdoor Recreation: International Comparative Studies* (pp. 32-37). Finnish Forest Research Institute. Research Papers 439. Helsinki.
- Kortetmäki, T., Heikkinen, A., & Jokinen, A. (2023). Particularizing Nonhuman Nature in Stakeholder Theory: The Recognition Approach. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 185, 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05174-2>
- Kotimaisten kielten keskus ja Kielikone Oy. (n.d.). Pyhiinvaellus. In Kielitoimiston sanakirja. Retrieved April 22, 2026, from <https://www.kielitoimistonsanakirja.fi/#/pyhiinvaellus?searchMode=all>
- Kubo, T., Shoji, Y., Tsuge, T., & Kuriyama, K. (2018). Voluntary contributions to hiking trail maintenance: Evidence from a field experiment in a national park, Japan. *Ecological Economics*, 144, 124–128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2017.07.032>
- Kulusjärvi, O. (2017). Sustainable destination development in northern peripheries: A focus on alternative tourism paths. *Journal of Rural and Community Development/Revue du développement rural et communautaire*, 12(2-3).
- Kuorikoski, T. (2015). *Pirkan Taival vaellusreitien kuntokartoitus* [Bachelor's Thesis, Häme University of Applied Sciences]. Theseus. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-201503293685>
- Laaksonen, J., & Mattila, P. (2024). *Pitkät vaellukset – Kuukausiksi retkelle* [Book]. SKS Kirjat.
- Lahtonen, T. (2024, December 20). *Finlandia-vaellusreitti /Finlandia-trail* [Site]. Hazor, Tommi Lahtonen. Retrieved November 20, 2025, from <https://hazor.iki.fi/finlandia/>
- Laine, M. (2010). The Nature of Nature as a Stakeholder. *Journal of business ethics*, 96(Suppl 1), 73-78. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0936-4>
- Lankia, T., Neuvonen, M., Pouta, E., & Sievänen, T. (2014). Willingness to contribute to the management of recreational quality on private lands in Finland. *Journal of Forest Economics*, 20(2), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfe.2014.04.001>
- Large, J., & Schilar, H. (2018). Understanding the meanings and interpretations of adventure experiences: the perspectives of multiday hikers. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 18(4), 330–342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2018.1522724>
- Latja, P. (2022). Pallas-Yllästunturin kansallispuiston kävijätutkimus 2021. *Metsähallituksen luonnonsuojelujulkaisuja. Sarja B 266*. Metsähallitus. <https://julkaisut.metsa.fi/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/b266.pdf>
- Lindgren, M. (2018). *2000-luvun vaeltajien motiivit Camino de Santiagon pyhiinvaellusreitillä* [Bachelor's Thesis, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences]. Theseus. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-201805249990>

- Lum, C. S., Keith, S. J., & Scott, D. (2019). The long-distance hiking social world along the Pacific Crest Trail. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 51(2), 165–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2019.1640095>
- Lundén, A. (2025). Tourism governance in conservation areas. In J. Saarinen, & C. M. Hall (Eds.), *Handbook on tourism governance* (pp. 204-218). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Maaseutuverkosto. (2019). *Juuan ympärysreitti -selvityshanke* [Project description]. Retrieved April 9, 2026 from <https://maaseutuverkosto.fi/projects/juuan-ymparysreitti-selvityshanke/>
- Mäkinen, M., & Törhönen, M. (2015). *Pyhiinvaellus elämyksenä : Unohtumaton Camino de Santiago* [Bachelor's Thesis, Tampere University of Applied Sciences]. Theseus. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2015120319253>
- Mäkinen, O. (2006). *Tutkimusetiikan ABC*. Tammi.
- Mau, M., Aaby, A., Klausen, S. H., & Roessler, K. K. (2021). Are Long-Distance Walks Therapeutic? A Systematic Scoping Review of the Conceptualization of Long-Distance Walking and Its Relation to Mental Health. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(15), 7741. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18157741>
- Mayer, K., & Lukács, A. (2021). Motivation and mental well-being of long-distance hikers: A quantitative and qualitative approach. *Heliyon*, 7(5), e06960. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06960>
- McLeod, K. M. (2024). Wild Generosity: The Role of Trail Angels in Shaping Community on America's Long-Distance Hiking Trails. *AD LIMINA. Research journal of the Way of St. James and the pilgrimages*, Vol. XV, 169-198. <http://dx.doi.org/10.61890/adlimina/15.2024/06>
- Mercadal, T. (2024). *Social constructivism*. EBSCO Research Starters. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/religion-and-philosophy/social-constructivism>
- Metsähallitus. (n.d.). Hiking and outdoor activities. *Luontoon.fi*. Retrieved May 14, 2026, from <https://www.luontoon.fi/en/activities/hiking-and-outdoor-recreation/map?filter=route-over-10km>
- Nordbø, I. (2017). Hiker's preferences and DMO strategies: Contrasting perspectives and conflicting views. In C. M. Hall, Y. Ram, & N. Shoval (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of walking* (pp. 312-323). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315638461>
- Nordbø, I., Engilbertsson, H. O., & Vale, L. S. R. (2014). Market Myopia in the Development of Hiking Destinations: The Case of Norwegian DMOs. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 23(4), 380–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2013.827608>
- Nousiainen, M. (2022). *Mundane mobilities in mundane places? The role of proximity tourism in place attachment in the rural north* [Master's Thesis, University of Lapland]. Lauda. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2022021519287>

Olsen, D. H., & Timothy, D. J. (2006). Tourism and religious journeys. In D. J. Timothy & D. H. Olsen (Eds.), *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys* (pp. 1-21), Routledge, London and New York, NY.

Pacific Crest Trail Association [PCTA]. (2026). *PCT visitor use statistics*. Retrieved May 14, 2026, from <https://www.pcta.org/our-work/trail-and-land-management/pct-visitor-use-statistics/>

Pacific Crest Trail Association [PCTA]. (n.d.). *Discover The Trail*. Retrieved May 14, 2026, from <https://www.pcta.org/discover-the-trail/>

Palmqvist, K. (2020, August 8). *Ränsistynyttä, pian 40-vuotiasta UKK-reittiä kunnostetaan Sallassa – Tavoitteena purkaa Oulangan kansallispuiston ruuhkaa pohjoiseen* [News article]. Koillissanomat. <https://www.koillissanomat.fi/ransistynyttä-pian-40-vuotiasta-ukk-reittia-kunnos/2730810>

Partioaitta. (2026, February 16). *Ympäristöbonuksella uusia ja korjattuja retkeily- ja luontokohteita Suomen päästä varpasiin*. Retrieved May 20, 2026, from <https://www.partioaitta.fi/yritys/uutiset/2025-ymparistobonuksella-uusia-ja-korjattuja-retkeily-ja-luontokohteita/>

PATH. (2026). *E-paths campaigns* [Booklet pdf]. Retrieved April 6, 2026, from <https://www.era-ewv-ferp.org/path/>

Pietilä, I. (2010). Vieraskielisten haastattelujen analyysi ja raportointi. In J. Ruusuvuori, P. Nikander & M. Hyvärinen (Eds.), *Haastattelun Analyysi* (pp. 411-423). Vastapaino.

Pilgrimage Center. (n.d.). The Key Words of a Pilgrim. *Pyhiinvaellus Suomi*. Retrieved May 13, 2026, from <https://pyhiinvaellussuomi.fi/en/pilgrimage-in-finland-2/the-key-words-of-a-pilgrim/>

Polyxeni, M., Mylonopoulos, D., & Terzoglou, E. (2021). Hiking tourism – motives and behaviours. A case study. *TIMS Acta*, 15, 13–22. <https://doi.org/10.5937/timsact15-31825>

Puusa, A. (2020a). Haastattelutyypit ja niiden metodiset ominaisuudet. In A. Puusa & P. Juuti (Eds.), *Laadullisen tutkimuksen näkökulmat ja menetelmät* (pp. 103-117). Gaudeamus Oy.

Puusa, A. (2020b). Näkökulmia laadullisen aineiston analysointiin. In A. Puusa & P. Juuti (Eds.), *Laadullisen tutkimuksen näkökulmat ja menetelmät* (pp. 145-156). Gaudeamus Oy.

Puusa, A., & Juuti, P. (2020a). Laadullisen tutkimuksen tieteenfilosofinen tausta. In A. Puusa & P. Juuti (Eds.), *Laadullisen tutkimuksen näkökulmat ja menetelmät* (pp. 25-40). Gaudeamus Oy.

Puusa, A., & Juuti, P. (2020b). Organisaatiokulttuurinäkökulma esimerkkinä laadullisen tutkimuksen yleistymisessä. In A. Puusa & P. Juuti (Eds.), *Laadullisen tutkimuksen näkökulmat ja menetelmät* (pp. 61-74). Gaudeamus Oy.

Qualitative Researcher Dr Kriukow. (2020, July 31). *Qualitative coding and thematic analysis in Microsoft Word* [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOYhkUC21wQ>

- Rantala, O., & Tuulentie, S. (2017). On the beaten track: How do narratives from organized hiking differ from “real” hiking narratives? In C. M. Hall, Y. Ram, & N. Shoval (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of walking* (pp. 196-208). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315638461>
- Rantala, O., de la Barre, S., Granås, B., Jóhannesson, G.T., Müller, D.K., Saarinen, J., Tervo-Kankare, K., Maher, P.T., & Niskala, M. (2019). *Arctic tourism in times of change: Seasonality*. <https://doi.org/10.6027/TN2019-528>
- Rautio, K. (2025). *Hämeen Ilvesreitin markkinointisuunnitelma 2025-2027* [Bachelor’s Thesis, Kajaani University of Applied Sciences]. Theseus. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-202505079799>
- Reed, M. G. (1997). Power relations and community-based tourism planning. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24(3), 566-591. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(97\)00023-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(97)00023-6)
- Repo-Kajokulma, T. (2020). *Vaellusreitti läpi Suomen* [Bachelor’s Thesis, Lapland University of Applied Sciences]. Theseus. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2020112023464>
- Reuter, S., Kemmerling, T., Schmalenbach, T., & Brözel, C. (2025). Economic impacts of trail destinations: The case of the Peaks of the Balkans trail. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, 52, 100928. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2025.100928>
- Richards, L. (2005). *Handling Qualitative Data: A practical guide*. Sage Publications
- Rohn, K.C., & Conway, P.F. (2022). Thru-hiking and Thriving: Exploring College Student Experiences on the Appalachian Trail. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 46(2).  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10538259221115825>
- Roine, S. (2024). *Pyhiinvaellukset ja pyhän maan matkat suomalaisessa matkailuliiketoiminnassa* [Bachelor’s Thesis, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences]. Theseus. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2024061022525>
- Rossinen, E. (2024). *Practices and funding opportunities of national parks in Northern Finland : a future oriented approach on entry fees* [Master’s Thesis, University of Lapland]. Lauda. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2024061553166>
- Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. Sage Publications.
- Ruusuvuori, J., Nikander, P., & Hyvärinen, M. (2010). Haastattelun analyysin vaiheet. In J. Ruusuvuori, P. Nikander & M. Hyvärinen (Eds.), *Haastattelun Analyysi* (pp. 9-36). Vastapaino.
- S:t Olavsleden. (n.d.). *About St. Olavsleden*. Retrieved April 27, 2026, from <https://stolavsleden.com/about-st-olavsleden/>
- Sautter, E. T., & Leisen, B. (1999). Managing stakeholders a tourism planning model. *Annals of tourism research*, 26(2), 312-328. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(98\)00097-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(98)00097-8)
- Schaltegger, S., Hörisch, J., & Freeman, R. E. (2019). Business Cases for Sustainability: A Stakeholder Theory Perspective. *Organization & Environment*, 32(3), 191-212.

Schilar, H. (2015). *OUT THERE - A Phenomenological Approach to Solo-Hiking in Northern Scandinavia*. Master Thesis, Umeå University.

Schilar, H. (2017). The solo-hike: A journey of distance and closeness. In C. M. Hall, Y. Ram, & N. Shoval, *The Routledge International Handbook of Walking* (pp. 338-351). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315638461>

Sievälä, S. (2019). *Vaeltaen erämaassa : polku erämaan kulttuurimaantieteelliseen käsittämiseen* [Master's Thesis, University of Oulu]. OuluREPO. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:oulu-201906202589>

Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing qualitative research*. Sage Publications.

Sola, T. (2023). *Luontomatkailun kiinnostavuus suomalaisten nuorten aikuisten keskuudessa kotimaassa* [Bachelor's Thesis, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences]. Theseus. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2023102427930>

St Olav Ostrobothnia. (n.d.). *St Olav Ostrobothnia*. <https://stolavostrobothnia.fi/en/home/>

Stefanek, K. (2020). *Why do people thru-hike? Motivations for thru-hiking the Pacific Crest Trail* [Master's Thesis, Uniwersytet Jagiellonski w Krakowie]. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Katarzyna-Stefanek/publication/363653821\\_Why\\_do\\_people\\_thru-hike\\_Motivations\\_for\\_thru-hiking\\_the\\_Pacific\\_Crest\\_Trail/links/6328345970cc936cd31d812a/Why-do-people-thru-hike-Motivations-for-thru-hiking-the-Pacific-Crest-Trail.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Katarzyna-Stefanek/publication/363653821_Why_do_people_thru-hike_Motivations_for_thru-hiking_the_Pacific_Crest_Trail/links/6328345970cc936cd31d812a/Why-do-people-thru-hike-Motivations-for-thru-hiking-the-Pacific-Crest-Trail.pdf)

Svenska Turistföreningen. (n.d.). *The Kungsleden trail*. Retrieved May 13, 2026, from <https://www.swedishtouristassociation.com/trails/kungsleden/>

Tallberg, L., García-Rosell, J.-C., & Haanpää, M. (2022). Human–Animal Relations in Business and Society: Advancing the Feminist Interpretation of Stakeholder Theory. *Journal of business ethics* 180, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04840-1>

Teigland, J., Anderson, D. H., Lime, D., & Sievänen, T. (1992). Long Distance Trails and Trail Systems: Basic Concepts. In T. Sievänen (Ed.), *Nordic Outdoor Recreation: International Comparative Studies* (pp. 38-46). Finnish Forest Research Institute. Research Papers 439. Helsinki.

Tiainen, I. (2020). *Kulutuskestävyys ulkoilureittien suunnittelussa* [Bachelor's Thesis, Häme University of Applied Sciences]. Theseus. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2020100420944>

Tikkanen, J. (2023). *To grow or to degrow? : discourse analysis on degrowth and socio-ecological justice in the futures of Arctic tourism* [Master's Thesis, University of Lapland]. Lauda. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2023061656143>

Tolvanen, A., & Kangas, K. (2016). Tourism, biodiversity and protected areas – Review from northern Fennoscandia. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 169, 58-66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2015.12.011>

Tuomi, J., & Sarajarvi, A. (2009). *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi*. Tammi.

- Tyrväinen, L., Mäntymaa, E., & Ovaskainen, V. (2014). Demand for enhanced forest amenities in private lands: The case of the Ruka-Kuusamo tourism area, Finland. *Forest Policy and Economics*, 47, 4-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2013.05.007>
- University of Jyväskylä. (n.d.). *Lipas sport facility GIS-database*. University of Jyväskylä. Retrieved April 24, 2026, from <https://www.jyu.fi/en/node/129134/lipas-liikunnan-paikkatietojarjestelma>
- University of Lapland & Lapland University of Applied Sciences. (2025). *Tekoälyn käyttämistä opetuksessa sekä tutkimuksessa koskevat ohjeet lapin yliopistossa ja lapin ammattikorkeakoulussa*. <https://ulapland.oncloudos.com/aski/2025171707.PDF>
- University of Lapland. (2023). *Use of Artificial Intelligence-Based Tools at the University of Lapland*. <https://ulapland.fi/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2026/01/Use-of-Artificial-Intelligence-Based-Tools-at-the-University-of-Lapland.pdf>
- Veijalainen, T., & Roininen, T. (2023, October 19). *Lapin Polku – esiselvityshanke: Suunnitteluraportti* [Report]. Sodankylä municipality. <https://www.sodankyla.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/reittisuunnitelma-raportti.pdf>
- Viken, A. (2014). Destination discourses and the growth paradigm. In A. Viken & B. Granås (Eds.), *Tourism destination development. Turns and tactics* (pp. 21–46). Surrey, United Kingdom: Ashgate.
- Visit Finland. (2023). *Research Report: How to reach Finland's full potential? Visit Finland, potential, position and segmentation study for Finland* [Pdf]. <https://www.visitfinland.fi/globalassets/visitfinland.fi/vf-julkaisut/2023/research-report.pdf>
- Visitory. (n.d.-a). *Lappi, Majoitustilastot ja Matkailutilastot, Kesäkuu 2025 – Syyskuu 2025*. Retrieved December 9, 2025, from <https://visitory.io/fi/public/lapland/2025-06/2025-09/>
- Visitory. (n.d.-b). *Lappi, Majoitustilastot ja Matkailutilastot, Joulukuu 2024 – Maaliskuu 2025*. Retrieved December 9, 2025, from <https://visitory.io/fi/public/lapland/2024-12/2025-03/>
- Vistad, O. I., Øian, H., Williams, D. R., & Stokowski, P. (2020). Long-distance hikers and their inner journeys: On motives and pilgrimage to Nidaros, Norway. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, 31, 100326. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2020.100326>
- Ward-Perkins, D., Ellis, J., & Beckmann, C. (2020). *Tourism routes and trails: Theory and practice*. CABI.
- Włodarczyk, B., & Cudny, W. (2022). Individual Low-Cost Travel as a Route to Tourism Sustainability. *Sustainability*, 14(17), 10514. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141710514>
- World Tourism Organization. (2019). *Walking Tourism – Promoting Regional Development*, UNWTO, Madrid. <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420346>

**APPENDIX 1****LETTER OF CONSENT IN ENGLISH**

Dear participant,

My name is Vilma Helimäki. I am Master student at University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland under the supervision of Professor Outi Rantala. You are invited to participate in my master thesis study entitled Long-distance hiking in Finland from tourism stakeholder perspective. The purpose of the study is to find out how tourism stakeholders understand long-distance hiking as a phenomenon and long-distance hiking trails in Finland. The interviews will be recorded, and the result of the study will be published as part of my master thesis. The thesis is conducted as part of the Master's Degree Programme in Northern Tourism.

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

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

Sincerely,

Vilma Helimäki

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

Signature    Print name    Date

**APPENDIX 2****TUTKIMUSSUOSTUMUS / LETTER OF CONSENT IN FINNISH**

Hyvä tutkimuksen osallistuja,

Olen Vilma Helimäki, matkailuntutkimuksen maisteriopiskelija Lapin yliopistossa Rovaniemellä. Kutsun sinut osallistumaan haastatteluun osana pro gradu -tutkielmaani, jonka tarkoituksena on tutkia pitkän matkan vaellusta ja vaellusreittejä Suomessa matkailun toimijoiden näkökulmasta. Tutkielmani ohjaajana toimii professori Outi Rantala.

Haastattelut nauhoitetaan ja vastauksia tullaan käyttämään tutkimustarkoitukseen pro gradu -tutkielmassani, joka on osa Northern Tourism -maisteriohjelmää.

Tutkimus noudattaa tutkimuseettisen neuvottelukunnan määrittelemiä vastuullisen tutkimuksen periaatteita. Aineisto käsitellään nimettömänä. Osallistuminen haastatteluun on vapaaehtoista ja mikäli myöhemmin haluat vetäytyä tutkimuksesta, voit tehdä sen ilmoittamalla asiasta alla mainitulle yhteyshenkilölle.

Ole hyvä ja ota yhteyttä minuun tai ohjaajaani, jos haluat tarkempaa tietoa tutkimuksesta ja tutkimusaineiston käytöstä.

Ystävällisesti,

Vilma Helimäki

Suostun haastatteluaineiston käyttöön tutkimustarkoituksessa.

Allekirjoitus

Nimenselvennys

Päivämäärä

## APPENDIX 3

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH

Introducing the interviewer + Aim of Research

Background of the participant: name, hometown, job, hobbies

Understanding of long-distance hiking

- 1) How familiar are you with long-distance hiking?
- 2) Could you name examples of long-distance hikes? What about different ways of hiking?
- 3) How does long-distance hiking show in your hometown and work?
- 4) How would you define long-distance hiking?
- 5) How would you describe long-distance hiker as a tourist?
- 6) What kind of services do long-distance hikers need and use?
- 7) Why do you think people hike for long distances and times?
- 8) Is long-distance hiking popular?

Long distance hiking trails in Finland / Finland as a destination

- 9) What is hiking like in Finland?
- 10) Where do people go hiking in Finland?
- 11) Could you name examples in Finland, what kind of trails or destinations are suitable for long-distance hiking?
- 12) Where are they located geographically in your opinion?
- 13) Are the trails suitable and are there enough of them?
- 14) What makes a trail suitable for long-distance hiking?
- 15) How would you evaluate the current services and infrastructure of the trails?
- 16) Why would people choose Finland as a hiking destination?
- 17) Why would people not choose Finland as a hiking destination?
- 18) How would you evaluate Finland as a hiking destination for an international tourist?

The future of long-distance hiking

- 19) What could the future of long-distance hiking look like?
- 20) What things from the past and present impact to its future?
- 21) How could long-distance hiking be developed socially and culturally in Finland?
- 22) Should hiking trails (environment/infrastructure) be developed in Finland and why so?
- 23) Who is doing or could be doing the development work?
- 24) How would the development of trails affect the destinations along the trail?
- 25) What are the pros and cons of developing hiking trails?
- 26) Could long-distance hiking be a 'tourism product' in Finland?

Is there anything else you would like to add to the discussion?

Can you name other tourism stakeholders who should participate in this study?

## APPENDIX 4

### HAASTATTELUKYSYMYKSET / INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN FINNISH

Haastattelija esittäytyy + tutkimuksen tavoite

Haastateltavan taustat: nimi, asuinpaikka, työ, harrastuneisuus

Ymmärrys pitkän matkan vaeltamisesta

- 27) Kuinka tuttua pitkän matkan vaellus on sinulle?
- 28) Osaatko nimetä esimerkkejä pitkän matkan vaelluksista? Entä eri tapoja vaelttaa?
- 29) Miten pitkän matkan vaellus näkyy paikkakunnallasi tai työssäsi?
- 30) Miten määrittelisit pitkän matkan vaeltamisen?
- 31) Miten kuvailisit pitkän matkan vaeltajaa matkailijana?
- 32) Minkälaisia palveluita pitkän matkan vaeltaja tarvitsee ja käyttää?
- 33) Miksi ajattelet, että ihmiset vaeltavat pitkiä matkoja ja aikoja?
- 34) Onko pitkän matkan vaeltaminen suosittua?

Pitkän matkan vaellusreitit Suomessa / Suomi kohteena

- 35) Millaista on vaeltaminen Suomessa?
- 36) Missä ihmiset vaeltavat Suomessa?
- 37) Millaisia pitkän matkan vaellukseen soveltuvia kohteita ja reittejä tulee mieleesi, voitko antaa esimerkkejä Suomesta?
- 38) Miten ne mielestäsi sijoittuvat maantieteellisesti?
- 39) Ovatko reitit sopivia ja onko niitä riittävästi?
- 40) Mikä tekee reitistä sopivan pitkän matkan vaellukseen?
- 41) Miten arvioisit reittien palveluvarustusta nykyisellään?
- 42) Miksi ihmiset valitsisivat Suomen vaelluskohteeseen?
- 43) Entä miksi ihmiset eivät valitsisi Suomea vaelluskohteeseen?
- 44) Miten arvioisit Suomea vaelluskohteena kansainvälisen vaeltajan näkökulmasta?

Pitkän matkan vaeltamisen tulevaisuus

- 45) Miltä pitkän matkan vaeltaminen voisi näyttää tulevaisuudessa?
- 46) Mitkä tekijät menneestä ja nykyisestä vaikuttavat siihen?
- 47) Miten pitkän matkan vaellusta voitaisiin kehittää sosiaalisesti ja kulttuurisesti Suomessa?
- 48) Pitäisikö vaellusreittejä (ympäristö/infrastrukturi) kehittää Suomessa? Miksi niin?
- 49) Mikä tai mitkä tahot tekevät tai voisivat tehdä kehitystyötä?
- 50) Miten kehitystyö vaikuttaisi matkan varrella oleviin eri matkakohteisiin?
- 51) Mitä kehitystyö vaatisi/haitat? Mitä se antaisi/edut?
- 52) Voisiko pitkän matkan vaellus olla ”matkailutuote” Suomessa?

Onko sinulla vielä jotain muuta lisättävää keskusteluun?

Pystytkö nimeämään muita matkailun toimijoita, joita voisin haastatella tähän tutkimukseen?