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Social License to Operate of Kittilä mine:  
**Genuine Tourism Benefit or Corporate Illusion?**

**University of Lapland**

Master's Thesis

Tourism research

Spring 2026

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

**Title:** Social License to Operate of Kittilä mine: Genuine Tourism Benefit or Corporate Illusion?

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**Degree programme / subject:** Tourism Research, TourCIM (Tourism, Culture and International Management)

**The type of the work:** Master's Theses

**Number of pages:** 68

**Year:** 2026

## **Abstract**

The mining boom has ascended in Finland, especially Lapland due to rising need for minerals globally. This study research social license to operate of Kittilä gold mine and its impacts on the local tourism industry in Levi. Social license to operate (short in SLO) means approval from key stakeholders for company to perform its activities. SLO is usually required when company operates in a way that causes damage to the local community and its environment. In exchange for social licenses to operate, companies aim to benefit key stakeholders by providing benefits such as economic benefits through sponsoring and cooperation. This theses recognizes tourism industry of Levi, Kittilä as a main stakeholder of Kittilä mine, therefore impacts, benefits and social license to operate from Kittilä mine are researched toward tourism industry in Levi.

While previous quantitative research has been conducted previously of Kittilä mine and SLO from community, the SLO between tourism industry and Kittilä mine has not been previously researched. However, SLO between mine and tourism industry exists in the tourism literature, with various research acknowledging the importance of SLO in the coexistence of these two industries. This theses research if the tourism industry in Levi benefits from the SLO of Kittilä mine. Therefore, the research questions are, R1: what ways do the tourism sector in Levi benefit from the SLO of the Kittilä mine, R2: what kind of negative impacts tourism in Levi experience from the Kittilä mine and R3: what is the state of social acceptance toward Kittilä mine from tourism industry.

Research of SLO in Kittilä is important because mining affects communities and environments negatively, causing deforestation and social issues. Mining can have serious negative impacts to nature-based tourism in Levi, which municipality of Kittilä economically relies on. This research was conducted with qualitative research method, and data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis process, which involved analyzing transcription of data with recognition of emerging codes and themes.

The results of this research show that Kittilä mine is generally accepted due to its positive impacts such as creation of job opportunities and economic benefits to the entire Kittilä municipality. However, the negative impacts to environment and uncertainty toward Kittilä mines' sustainable narratives cause ambivalence and conditional acceptance in SLO within tourism professionals. The findings suggest that the tourism industry in Levi does not depend on direct benefits from the Kittilä mine, but instead places greater importance on the mine's environmental responsibility, because clean nature is essential for nature-based tourism.

**Keywords:** Mining, Tourism, social license to operate, coexisting, socioeconomical impacts, stakeholders

## Contents

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>4</b>
1.1 Background of the research phenomenon .....	4
1.1.1 Case of Kittilä mine / Agnico-Eagle Finland Oy / Suurikuusikko mine .....	5
1.2 Literature review .....	6
1.3 Theoretical framework .....	9
1.4 Methodology and research ethics .....	10
1.5 Structure of the thesis .....	12
<b>2. SOCIAL LICENSE TO OPERATE AS AN EMPIRICAL PHENOMENON</b> .....	<b>13</b>
2.1 Social license to operate .....	13
2.2 Coexistence of Tourism industry and Kittilä mine .....	16
2.3 Nature-Based tourism .....	18
<b>3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY</b> .....	<b>21</b>
3.1 Stakeholder theory .....	21
3.2 Stakeholder theory approach in tourism research .....	23
<b>4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>25</b>
4.1 Qualitative research as an approach .....	25
4.2 Data collection .....	27
4.3 Thematic analysis as an analysis method of research .....	29
4.4 Research ethics .....	29
4.5 Analysis process .....	30
<b>5. ANALYSIS</b> .....	<b>33</b>
5.1 Ambivalent and Conditional Acceptance of Kittilä mine .....	33
5.2 Environmental aspects regarding Nature-based tourism in Levi .....	42
5.3 Kittilä Mine's Sustainability Narratives .....	48
<b>6. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>7. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH</b> .....	<b>57</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>59</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDE IN ENGLISH</b> .....	<b>65</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2. LETTER OF CONSENT SAMPLE</b> .....	<b>66</b>
<b>APPENDIX 3. PICTURE OF KITTILÄ MINE</b> .....	<b>67</b>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the research phenomenon

This theses research social acceptance of Kittilä mine. Due to increasing need for mining and resources from the environment of Lapland, it is increasingly important to have local stakeholder acceptance for operating mines (Lesser et al., 2017). Social license to operate (short in SLO) means approval from stakeholders for companies to operate in a way that can harm the natural and local living, in exchange for economic or social benefits from the operating mine. Effective SLO includes trust and open communication through all stakeholders (Kotilainen et al., 2022).

Relating strongly to SLO, is the coexistence, which refers to two different industries operating in the same area, in this case the tourism industry and mine of Kittilä (Della Corte & Aria, 2014). SLO is essential for effective coexistence of two industries (Della Corte & Aria, 2014). In this research a “benefit” refers to any positive effect or impact resulting from mining activities that enhance the economic status, social welfare, infrastructure or environmental sustainability of the local tourism industry (Heikkinen et al., 2016). Benefits include economic benefits that can have direct or indirect positive impact toward the tourism industry for example, employment opportunities of mine, local business growth due to people moving to area and infrastructure investment. Social benefits can include education programs, whereas environmental benefits involve land rehabilitation, biodiversity conservation and improved resource management (Heikkinen et al., 2016).

For the purpose of this study, a “benefit” is recognized when mining activities lead to a measurable or perceived improvement, in this case, in tourism well-being, as reported by tourism entrepreneurs or tourism company managers (Heikkinen et al., 2016). This research’s aim is to investigate and show, what is today’s state of positive and negative impacts of “social license to operate” to the local tourism entrepreneurs and tourism managers in Levi. The research questions are R1: what ways do the tourism sector in Levi benefit from the SLO of the mine R2: what kind of negative impacts tourism in Levi experience from the Kittilä mine and R3: what is the state of social acceptance toward Kittilä mine from tourism industry.

Without a social license to operate, resistance of local stakeholders could prevent mining operations from beginning, therefore social license to operate is essential to obtain (Lesser et al., 2017). If SLO has not been executed well, society can vote against the mines of the Sámi area, natural reserve, national park or fragile ecosystem (Eerola, 2024a). This is why it is important to create sustainable and responsible mines together with tourism companies, mining companies, society and the government (Eerola, 2024a). Conflict from the local tourism industry depends on the level of risks that mine will bring locally to the natural landscape (Eerola, 2024b). The mine can affect the tourism industry negatively because its operations require considerable use of land and is changing Lapland's landscapes in a negative way.

The Kittilä mine is located near tourism center Levi, which relies heavily on its clean and pure environment, offering mostly nature-based tourism to its visitors (Lesser et al., 2017). The municipality of Kittilä relies on the tourism industry with sufficient revenue. If the tourism industry is affected negatively by Kittilä mine, it can cause losing revenue which can further affect entire municipality's economics negatively. Therefore, tourism entrepreneurs worry about the environment and aim to protect the sensitive nature nearby tourism center Levi (Lesser et al., 2017). The topic of mining raises a lot of discussion amongst population and can cause division in the community and amongst tourism companies, because the impacts experienced from the mine can differ between individuals (Wessman et al., 2014).

Suurikuusikon mine operated by Agnico-Eagle Finland Oy (Kittilä mine) is presented and introduced next. Kittilä mine is located near Levi Ski Resort and is Europe's largest gold mine, started in 2008 (Herva et al., 2020). The case study of Kittilä mine was selected because the mine operates near the tourism industry in Levi, a region which is experiencing significant growth in tourism. According to Kivinen et al. (2021), the Kittilä mine has successfully obtained a social license to operate (SLO) from the local community. This makes it a fascinating case for examining whether a similar level of acceptance has been achieved within the tourism sector.

### **1.1.1 Case of Kittilä mine / Agnico-Eagle Finland Oy / Suurikuusikko mine**

Kittilä mine, Suurikuusikon gold mine is Europe's largest gold mine which is operated by Canadian Agnico-Eagle Finland Oy (Herva et al., 2020). It is situated about 35 km from the center of Kittilä municipality with approximately 5800 inhabitants and 40 km from Levi Ski Centre (Heikkinen et al. 2013). Suurikuusikon kaivos gold mine which was found in 1968,

started its operation in 2008 (Kivinen et al., 2021). The estimated life cycle of mine continues until 2034 (Herva et al., 2020). The Community Liaison Committee was created by the operating mine to connect with residents and stakeholders to improve approval toward the mine (Kivinen et al., 2021). Agnico-Eagle Mines Limited is a good example of a mine that engages social licenses to operate with its stakeholders. Agnico-Eagle Finland Oy recognizes Kuivasalmi reindeer herding co-operative, local village associations and residents in nearby villages to its stakeholders (Agnico Eagle, 2025). Further, Levi Tourist Office, the Kittilän Luonto association for environmental protection, the local parish, the local government of Kittilä, and Lapland Vocational College are important stakeholders of the mine (Agnico Eagle, 2025).

Kittilä mine has maintained social license to operate within community over several years, but SLO among tourism industry is unknown (Lesser et al., 2017). It is considered as a leading operator in the mining industry in Lapland when considering stakeholder involvement (Heikkinen et al., 2016). The Kittilä mine has additional strategies that have been employed to obtain social license including supporting and sponsoring community activities, donations, the formation of cooperation group, creating cooperation with the tourism sector and municipalities, and improving communication overall (Heikkinen et al., 2016). In the research of et al. Koivurova, (2015) it was found that majority of locals in Kittilä thought that Agnico Eagle is a trustworthy operator (Koivurova et al., 2015).

Because of the nature-based tourism, tourism industry and the mining industry in Lapland have tension, that the Agnico Eagle is trying to solve by increasing cooperation between the tourism industry in Levi and the Kittilä mine (Heikkinen et al., 2016). As a result, the tax base (the total amount of income, property, assets, consumption, transactions, or other economic activity subject to taxation by a tax authority) has also increased and is more diversified, bringing economic benefits which has enabled the municipality to develop more social services and infrastructure (Heikkinen et al., 2016).

## **1.2 Literature review**

As the need for minerals is growing globally, the social license to operate is an important factor of mining operations in Finland to maintain their operations in harmony with all stakeholders

such as tourism industry (Koivurova et al., 2015). The social license to operate is linked to both social and environmental impacts (Heikkinen et al., 2016). Mining operations negative impacts for the environment include degradation, pollution, food insecurity, and loss of livelihoods and land (Eerola, 2024a; Lassila, 2025). Because of the concern on the environment by local tourism industry, it is vital for mine managers to consider social licence to operate and open communication to mitigate the socio-environmental issues in the long term (Heikkinen et al., 2016; Wessman et al., 2014). The concept of social license to operate is realized in multiple literature such as mining, forest management, tourism research and infrastructure development (Koivurova et al., 2015). Although there are multiple different definitions of social license to operate in mining, this research focuses on the definition of SLO, found in the research of Suopajärvi et al (2017), which is that to gain approval for mine to harm the local environment, in exchange, it needs to provide actual benefits to local community and stakeholders on top of transparency and good communication (Suopajärvi et al 2017). These benefits of mine need to be either social, economic or environmental and need to be accepted by all stakeholders (Lesser, 2025). Stakeholders are considered to be everyone that affects or are affected by the mines actions, behavior and policies (Orr, 2014). Mining and tourism industry are coexisting in Levi, Kittilä, both rely on natural resources or ecosystem services (Similä & Jokinen, 2018). Coexistence implies two sectors existing in the same area, competing for resources (Della Corte & Aria, 2014). Successful coexistence is the key for maintaining SLO (Della Corte & Aria, 2014).

In the 1980s locals started to realize the environmental and social burden of mining as a result social license to mine was discovered by mining executive Jim Cooney in the late 1990s (Komu, 2020). After, mining companies started to gain interest in locals' opinions as their approval was needed on top of a formal license, to operate a successful mine (Komu, 2020). Positive social impacts of mines were realized in the early 2000's as mines created well-paying jobs in the area, as well as improved the infrastructure development in the municipality (Komu, 2020; Lesser, 2025). Infrastructure that mines can provide includes, for instance, new roads and train tracks.

The benefits of SLO to operating mines are sufficient found in research of Hurst & Lane, (2020), which found that SLO can enhance company reputation, have successful business long-term, improve market competition and reinforce stakeholder relationships (Hurst & Lane, 2020). If SLO is not obtained in the beginning of mining projects, it could prevent mining operation from starting (Hurst & Lane, 2020). Further, SLO can be lost after years of successful

mining. If SLO is lost during operations, it can have serious consequences such as loss of reputation, higher costs due to delays, protests and boycotting by community, regulation increase and in the most extreme case, the failure of project or mine (Hurst & Lane, 2020).

The example of Hannukainen mine shows why SLO is essential to obtain and maintain from tourism industry. Hannukainen mine, located in Kolari, near Ylläs ski resort was rejected due to not obtaining SLO. Similarly to Levi, the tourism industry of Ylläs ski resort is highly relying to its natural environment as it is needed to operate successful tourism in the area (Satokangas 2013). The mine was planned to be established 10 km away from the Ylläs ski resort, and initially, the attitudes toward the starting of the mine were positive (Suopajarvi et al., 2017). It was not until the mine published its environmental impacts assessments (EIA) when the local tourism industry as well as local population began to be more resentful toward the opening of the mine (Suopajarvi et al., 2017). This is because the municipality relies economically to the tourism industry in Kolari, Ylläs (Suopajarvi et al., 2017). The tourism industry explained that the tourist that visit the Ylläs ski resort expect clean nature and clean air and if dust from the mine is visible in the snow, it is ruining the expectations and experiences of the tourists (Suopajarvi et al., 2017). Because of the resistance of local tourism industry, society and the government, the social license to operate was not obtained and the mine never started its operations (Suopajarvi et al., 2017).

Although it is suggested that the mine provides benefits to stakeholders, Kotialainen et al., (2022) argue that SLO is simply a way for mining companies to gain positive image through locals and media and it has no guarantee bringing real value to the stakeholders (Kotilainen et al., 2022). While SLO can be effective when practiced in the right way, SLO can be lost due to ineffective practices and loss of trust of stakeholders (Heikkinen et al., 2016). Kotilainen et al., (2022) in their research therefore argue that alone, SLO is not effective enough in ensuring benefits to locals and that alternative way to ensure that the stakeholders will receive benefits from the mines is needed (Kotilainen et al., 2022). SLO is a privilege of the most outspoken and well-organized groups in society as it is argued by Lesser et al., (2017). This means that the groups or individuals must actively question the actions of the mine or demand changes or benefits if they are unhappy with current impacts of the mining company (Lesser et al., 2017).

Koivurova et al. (2015) conducted qualitative research on the level of acceptance among residents toward the Kittilä mine, finding that a large quantity of local citizens accepts the mining activity. However, local community does not represent all stakeholder groups. Different

stakeholders such as tourism industry represent a specific stakeholder group whose economic interests, needs toward environment and sensitivity to destination reputation may lead to perceptions that are different from the perspective of the residents.

So far, there has been no similar research examining the tourism industry's acceptance of, or perceived benefits from Kittilä mine. Therefore, the social license to operate (SLO) between the mining sector and the tourism industry remains unresearched. This study addresses this gap by investigating the Kittilä mine's SLO, as well as its perceived benefits and impacts on the tourism industry in Levi, Kittilä.

### **1.3 Theoretical framework**

This theses research social license to operate (SLO) of Kittilä mine, focusing on benefits and social impacts perceived by key stakeholder group, local tourism industry. To analyze these relations, this theses draw on stakeholder theory, which offers a framework for understanding how companies cooperate and create value for different kinds of stakeholder groups (Heikkinen et al., 2016).

Stakeholder theory, developed by Freeman (2000), spreads beyond traditional shareholder focused approaches by realizing that companies have responsibility of a wider range of stakeholders who affect or are affected by the activities of company. These stakeholders include for example local communities, industries such as tourism, employees, suppliers and regulatory bodies such as the government (Harrison et al., 2019). Within this framework, the tourism industry is realized as distinct stakeholder group whose wants and needs may differ from rest of the community.

Stakeholder theory highlights the importance of identifying stakeholder groups with an understanding of their various needs and to effectively engage stakeholders by building trust and legitimacy. This is relevant in the SLO context, which particularly relies on acceptance and approval from stakeholders. Failure to effectively apply SLO and consider stakeholder interests may lead to disapproval, damage to reputation and economic losses (Eerola, 2024a).

In this study, "benefits" refer to positive impacts of mining operations on the tourism industry, such as economic growth, social well-being, infrastructure and sustainability of environment. By applying stakeholder theory, this research analyses in what ways Kittilä mine benefit or fails

to benefit tourism industry and how this influences the state of social license to operate from tourism industry toward Kittilä mine.

#### **1.4 Methodology and research ethics**

Interpretivist social sciences paradigm fits this research the best because Interpretivism sees reality as subjective and explores people's lived experiences (Jenning, 2010). SLO is fundamentally about perceptions, trust, genuineness, and social acceptance which are all social constructs. Tourism actors have subjective, diverse, and context-dependent views. Stakeholder theory emphasizes relationships, meanings, and negotiated value, which aligns with constructivist thinking. An interpretivist paradigm allows the researcher to understand how different tourism companies as a stakeholder group construct their views of mining impacts, acceptable behavior, and legitimacy (Jennings, 2010).

A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study because it allows a deeper investigation of social license to operate, which is socially created and phenomenon that depends on the context. SLO emerges from the stakeholders' perceptions, experiences and interpretations of mining activities and is not fixed nor easily measurable concept. Therefore, qualitative methods allow for a deeper understanding of how trust and legitimacy are perceived and exchanged between the mining company and the tourism industry (Jennings, 2010).

This approach enables examining of how different companies within the tourism industry experience the impacts and benefits of the Kittilä mine, and how their experiences affect to the acceptance and disapproval of mining activities. With focus on the perspectives of participants, the study can ask questions which find how acceptability is formed and why participants appreciate certain benefits over others.

In contrast, complexity and nuances of these perceptions would be more difficult to capture with a quantitative approach. While quantitative methods can measure attitudes or levels of acceptance, they may not fully explain the underlying reasons, meanings, and contextual factors that shape stakeholders' views. As this study aims to explore these deeper factors of SLO, a qualitative approach is considered more suitable (Hannam & Boranic-Zivoder, 2010).

Semi-structured interview was selected to collect empirical material. Eight local tourism company owners or managers, residents of Levi or Kittilä, were chosen to participate to the

study. This is because non-residents might not experience the full extent of possible negative or positive impacts emerging from mine due to less time spent in the municipality. The participants in the semi-structured interviews were from different age groups, different genders and from different sizes of tourism businesses. The empirical material was analyzed through thematic analysis process. This involved analyzing transcription of data with recognition of emerging themes and categories (Naeem et al., 2023). The analyzing of data also included giving sense to the data, explaining patterns and trends in related context, reflecting to previous empirical research (Naeem et al., 2023).

Research ethics are an important factor of research, because they exist to protect the individuals that participate in research (Oliver, 2010). Ethics needs to be considered when planning and conducting research. Ethical considerations are central throughout the research process, including data collection and the reporting of results (Oliver, 2010). This study follows ethical guidelines, particularly the principle that participation should not cause harm or distress to participants (TENK, 2025).

Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the research process, and the role of the researcher. They were also told how the data collected is used and why they have been selected to participate (Comstock, 2012). Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions at any stage of the research, and the researcher is responsible for answering them fully and transparently (TENK, 2025).

Informed consent was obtained before the semi-structured interviews began. Participants received a consent form which is shown in Appendix 2. It includes the researcher's contact details, the purpose of the study, and an explanation of how anonymity and confidentiality are ensured. Anonymity means that identifying information, such as names, workplaces, and addresses, will not be disclosed in the research outputs (Comstock, 2012). The consent form also emphasizes that participation is voluntary and that participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

Attention was given to the design and conduct of the interviews by preparing research guide shown in Appendix 1. Because the concept of social license to operate may not be familiar to participants, technical terminology is avoided or clearly explained in accessible language. The topic of mining and tourism can be sensitive and may evoke differing opinions or emotional responses (Oliver, 2010). Therefore, interview questions were carefully designed to be neutral and non-judgmental, allowing participants to express their views freely.

The researcher also prepared to respond to unexpected or challenging questions during the interviews while maintaining a neutral and non-biased attitude. This included ensuring that personal opinions do not influence the interaction or the interpretation of responses. Careful planning of the interview guide, combined with flexibility during the interview process, supports the collection of rich and reliable qualitative data (Comstock, 2012).

## **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

Chapter 2 explains social license to operate as an empirical phenomenon, introducing the concept of SLO and importance of coexisting of tourism industry and Kittilä mine. Additionally, the chapter discusses the significance of nature-based tourism in Levi, explaining how tourism industry stakeholders can experience both positive and negative impacts from mining activities.

Chapter 3 presents the stakeholder theory, which is the theoretical background of this study. Principles of stakeholder theory are explained in connection to tourism research, providing the analytical lens to investigate relationships between Kittilä mine and tourism industry in Levi. Chapter 4 presents the research methodology, justifying the use of qualitative research approach and describing the process of data collection process with semi-structured interviews. Further, the chapter also explains how thematic analysis was applied, specifies the analysis process and focuses on issues of research ethics and reliability.

Chapter 5 presents the analysis which consist of three key themes, the ambivalent and conditional acceptance of the Kittilä mine, environmental concerns related to nature-based tourism, and sustainability narratives associated with the mining operations. Chapter 6 presents discussion and findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the study by summarizing the main findings, and outlines the limitations of the research, as well as provides suggestions for future research.

## **2. SOCIAL LICENSE TO OPERATE AS AN EMPIRICAL PHENOMENON**

### **2.1 Social license to operate**

SLO has gained academic interest only in recent years, extending to contexts of different industries such as forestry, pulp and paper manufacturing, wind energy and aquaculture as SLO is often the key concept of company's sustainability reports (Dumbrell & Wheeler, 2021).

Social license to operate in relation to tourism has been studied to a great extent, including arctic tourism, ecotourism, arctic cruise tourism, event tourism and animal tourism (Bickford et al., 2017). The idea of SLO started from the mining industry and ever since, it has been since adapted as a concept in other industries, such as tourism industry. SLO has become an important tool for other industries to realize the interests of others relating to impacts of their business (Woźniak et al., 2022). Social license to operate is associated in tourism industry as also certain companies of tourism industry need SLO to successfully operate in the local community (Bickford et al., 2027). SLO is very closely operated in tourism practices that include affecting communities, animals, indigenous groups and natural preserves. This research recognizes tourism industry as a key stakeholder of the Kittilä mine and aims to research the state of social license to operate between tourism industry of Levi and Kittilä mine

Mines cause both positive and negative impacts but are often presented in the media negatively due to foreign owners of mines, environmental issues, management issues, accidents of employees and poor connection with local residents and companies (Mononen et al., 2023). The social license of mines to operate in the mines industry was realised in 1980's due to rising resistance toward mines from the locals (Komu, 2020). Mining companies started to realise locals as well as companies who rely on nature as stakeholders and gain interest of locals opinions as their approval was needed on top of a formal license, to operate a successful mine (Komu, 2020). Although several mines promote SLO in their operations and importance of local benefit, often the mines that are owned by international companies receive sufficient economic benefits and local population are left to deal with the negative consequences of mines, such as deforestation (Wessman et al., 2014).

The impact of mine have been previously studied within community of Kittilä by Komu, (2022) which found that majority of the community accepted the mine. However, the current state of social license to operate in Levi amongst the tourism industry, have not been studied.

Terms such as *trust* and *social acceptability* of SLO have been found from the tourism research literature since the 1980s, for example in research of community-based tourism which gave the community possibility to manage and benefit from tourism (Ólafsdóttir et al., 2024). However, the model of social license to operate was established in the late 1990s as result of mining industry noticing social risks toward the mining operations due to failing to fulfill social expectations and expectations of community (Woźniak et al., 2022; Komnitsas, 2020). Still, there is little evidence that SLO has influenced planning of projects which focus on the perceptions of the community (Glückler & Gutiérrez, 2025), therefore Kotialainen et al., (2022) argues that the benefits and value toward stakeholders is not guaranteed with SLO.

Although SLO implicates that it was established primarily for the benefit of the local community, Suopajarvi et al., (2023) & Parsons et al., (2014) argue that the business risks of social resistance from the public toward the mining was the main reason to introducing SLO, to ensure continuity of operations (Suopajarvi et al., 2023). Which is agreed by Williams et al., (2007) that highlights the importance of CSR strategies (Corporate Social Responsibility) in starting stable community centered SLO, which allows businesses greater access to vital incomes for improving their competitive advantages (Williams et al., 2007).

Social license to operate described by Komnitsas, (2020) means that the mining impacts in the area are accepted or approved by the local community and its stakeholders. SLO is not a physical contract, but social agreement between mine and stakeholders such as tourism industry and local community (Dossa et al., 2025; Kokko at al., 2014; Jartti et al., 2020). Acceptance and approval are two different stages of SLO as proposed by Jartti et al., (2020), claiming that lower stage is acceptance and much higher lever is approval. Stage “acceptance” is merely implication of allowing mine to exist with its activities, whereas “approval” stage is encouraging the continuance of the mine and its operations (Jartti et al., 2020).

Mining companies should aim to achieve the higher stage of stakeholder acceptance, as it reflects a change from passive tolerance to active support. At this level, stakeholders may begin to identify with the mining operation and perceive its outcomes as personally or communally relevant. This stronger identification can lead to increased engagement, interest, and willingness to support the continuation of mining activities (Jartti et al., 2020). Further, Breaky

et al., (2025) agree that the mining operations should reach the approval level of SLO which emphasizes that the mining activities are not only tolerated but supported and respected with feelings of trust.

The higher stage of SLO is achieved through trust, transparency and authenticity (Dossa et al., 2025; Jartti et al., 2020; Kokko at al., 2014). Authenticity originates from the standards of local community, which can be legal, cultural, social, or formed inside the community (Kokko at al., 2014; Rodon & Bouchard, 2014). Mining companies need to appreciate and comprehend the standards that demonstrate the local protocol to gain the trust of the community (Kokko at al., 2014). Failing to do so, mining companies can experience conflicts from the community resulting in delay of operations permit process and issues in mine funding (Kokko at al., 2014).

Obtaining SLO from the community is an important step for a starting mine to show for the investors that the mine has an approval, showing less risks toward the investment (Komnitsas, 2020). However, Glückler & Gutiérrez, (2025) argue that lack of conflicts from community toward mine, does not mean that SLO has been attained or that the operations of a mine has been approved. Collaboration with local community is important to continue through the whole mine's existence, as Kokko at al., (2014) explains that the community expects activity and communication from the mine in terms of regular meetings with locals where the questions of locals from the mine could be answered (Kokko at al., 2014). Although SLO focuses on the social aspects, the environment of the operating mine is essential to consider by following environmental legislation, which is agreed in the environmental protection act (Kokko at al., 2014). The sustainability of the mine is important to local community and the resistance toward mine is usually because the mine has concealed the actual negative impacts to environment (Kokko at al., 2014).

Findings reported by Jartti et al. (2020) show several key factors that directly and indirectly influence the social license to operate (SLO). These include the perceived balance between the benefits and negative impacts of mining, the effectiveness of governmental regulation, procedural justice, resource governance, the equitable distribution of economic benefits, and trust in the mining company. Municipality expectations differ from community expectations as municipalities consider creation of new jobs, which brings economic wellbeing to the area, to be the most valued positive impact of mining (Suopajärvi et al., 2023).

Mining activity can lose approval or acceptability at any point if the company ignores the core principles of SLO mentioned previously (Rodon & Bouchard, 2014). Although trust and

acceptability are hard to obtain, regaining them after losing them is practically impossible (Rodon & Bouchard, 2014).

Social license to operate, acceptance and approval have been previously mainly studied between tourism industry and local community or SLO between mining and local community. Social license to operate between two separate industries (mine and tourism) lacks studies. The SLO between tourism and mining has been mentioned more in the coexistence of industries literature, which includes two industries operating in the same area (Della Corte & Aria, 2014). Undeniably, SLO and coexisting are connected because if the coexistence of tourism and mining industry is successful, maintaining SLO and acceptability toward the mine is more possible, and if the coexistence fails, social license to operate also fails (Della Corte & Aria, 2014).

## **2.2 Coexistence of Tourism industry and Kittilä mine**

The concept of coexistence is relevant in this study, as the tourism industry in Levi and the Kittilä mine operate close to each other, both relying on local natural resources. Della Corte & Aria (2014) argue that effective coexistence between tourism and mining can contribute to maintaining a social license to operate (SLO), however, coexistence alone does not guarantee social acceptance. This relationship is particularly complex, as the two sectors may have uneven impacts on one another. For example, Mercer (2000) suggests that while tourism is generally not perceived as a direct threat to mining activities, mining can pose significant risks to nature-based tourism due to its potential negative environmental and landscape impacts.

Coexistence is the relationship of sectors that are forced to live in the same place, is suggested by Dippel (2014). Whereas Everingham et al. (2014) definition of coexistence is the development of partnership between rival sectors such as tourism and resources sector (mining). Recent literature shows that mining can be a worth mentioning source of conflict in regions that depends on the resources (Leonard & Lebogang, 2018; Similä & Jokinen, 2018). These disagreements are not only related to tensions between mining and tourism but can also emerge within the tourism sector itself (Dwyer et al., 2016). This internal deviation is partly explained by the uneven distribution of benefits, as some tourism businesses may gain indirect advantages from mining activities, while others, for example nature-based tourism operators may not experience similar benefits or cooperation opportunities (Dwyer et al., 2016). As a result, the tourism sector may become fragmented in its attitudes toward mining. Acceptance levels vary

depending on factors such as the spatial closeness of mining activities, the type of tourism business, and the visibility of mining impacts in the area (Similä & Jokinen, 2018). From the perspective of mining operations, such division can represent a risk to maintaining a secure social license to operate, as uneven or declining acceptance among key tourism stakeholders may decline overall legitimacy and increase disapproval (Dwyer et al., 2016).

In the research of Dwyer et al., (2016), it was found that some entrepreneurs saw possible positive impacts from the mine such as mine attracting more population to the area as forms of jobs and the employees of the mine would bring economic benefits to the area and possibly use the tourism services. Other tourism entrepreneurs saw the threats to nature and that way to their business (Dwyer et al., 2016). As a result, tensions may arise between actors who benefit indirectly from mining and those who experience primarily negative impacts. This has led some researchers to suggest that the two sectors might operate more effectively in separation, to reduce conflict and minimize uneven distribution of impacts (Huang et al., 2011). However, this perspective is challenged by Everingham et al. (2014), who argue that coexistence does not only generate conflict, but can also enable equal development of both sectors. In this sense, tourism and mining may operate independently while still sharing the same regional space and infrastructure environment. Therefore, to coexist, it is important to create atmosphere of mutual benefit and trust (Nunkoo, 2015). The resources industry should understand its impact on the larger community and tourism and support the tourism industry (Nunkoo, 2015). This can strengthen the partnership and improve coexistence (Della Corte & Aria, 2014). Although Della Corte & Aria, (2014) argue that trust depends on the benefits received (Della Corte & Aria, 2014).

Previous research on the coexistence of tourism and resource extraction has primarily focused on the perspective of tourism industry benefits derived from the resource sector. These studies highlight how tourism can capitalize on mining-related developments, particularly through improved infrastructure, increased tax revenues, and the creation of modern tourist attractions (Ballesteros & Ramírez, 2007; Buultjens et al., 2010). Despite the benefits received from the resources sector, the tourism industry remains worried about the reduced attractiveness of the regions due to becoming too industrial and modern with presence of resources sector (Moyle et al., 2018). Since tourism also affects the environment negatively, it is important that the tourism practices are sustainable (Marques & Cunha, 2022).

Trust has been known in prior tourism literature as key mechanism for tourism industry for gaining support from community toward tourism development and policies, (Dredge, 2010; Nunkoo, 2015) Study by McLennan et al. (2015) found that the tourism industry was perceived as more trustworthy by communities than the mining and resources sector. This perception was largely based on the belief that the resources sector is less reactive to local community concerns and has limited consideration of its impact on the tourism industry. The study further highlights that this inequality in trust may be influenced by structural differences between the sectors. Tourism businesses are often small and local, whereas resource companies are typically larger organizations managed by leadership located outside the local municipality. This can create challenges in achieving balanced power relations and mutual trust between the two sectors (McLennan et al., 2015). Therefore, creation of mutual trust and partnership, as found from the research of Miller et al., (2012), is the key characteristic that creates strong municipalities.

Building on this discussion, this research acknowledges that coexistence is important in regions such as Levi, where tourism is rooted in a regional economy. Although mining may create tension within tourism sector, it can have indirect positive effects on tourism by developing infrastructure, employment and services in the region. Without this contribution, the region's economy would be solely responsibility of tourism industry. Therefore, it is important to understand that coexisting is a complex relationship that influences the long-term survival of both sectors, rather than observing coexistence as either beneficial or harmful for tourism industry.

### **2.3 Nature-Based tourism**

Nature-based tourism can be defined as experiencing outdoor activities or natural attraction in the nature as a form of leisure travel (Tyrväinen et al., 2014). Nature-based tourism in Lapland includes activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, ice fishing and different safaris (Fredman & Margaryan, 2020).

Levi, located in Kittilä is the second largest tourism destination in Lapland, Finland (Kideve, 2026). Nature-based tourism is a central element of the tourism system in Lapland, with the regional appeal strongly linked to the Lappish natural environment (Kideve, 2026). Within this context, Levi represents a key tourism center in the municipality of Kittilä. In 2022, Levi generated an estimated €150 million annual economic impact for the municipality (Kideve, 2026). These figures demonstrate the significant role of Levi within the local economy, where

tourism functions as a major source of employment, income, and municipal revenue. The development of Levi is guided by a long-term tourism strategy (2030), which emphasizes locality, sustainability, authenticity, and year-round tourism development. Therefore, maintaining the quality of the natural environment is a key for sustaining tourism activity in Levi.

The landscapes of Lapland's nature are one of the key pull factors that attract tourists to participate in nature-based tourism in Lapland (Wang et al., 2018). The natural environment is a key tourism resource, and the perceived quality of the landscape plays an important role in shaping destination attractiveness, as it is largely assessed through human perception and visual experience (Wang et al., 2018). In this sense, landscape quality is closely linked to broader perceptions of quality of life in the destination, which is often a central element in tourism marketing and destination branding. If the actual tourism experience does not correlate to the expectations created by the destination image, this may negatively affect visitor satisfaction and the overall attractiveness of the area. As a result, inconsistencies between the marketed image of a destination and its perceived environmental condition can influence tourists' willingness to return or recommend the destination (Wang et al., 2018).

In addition, sustainability considerations are becoming increasingly important in tourism decision-making. Tourists are more aware of environmental impacts and therefore expect destinations and tourism providers to demonstrate responsible and sustainable practices. This means that maintaining both the physical quality of the environment and the perception of sustainability is essential for destinations such as Levi (Wang et al., 2018).

The psychological motivations of tourists visiting and participating in nature-based tourism include sense of escaping the everyday routines and opportunity to relax in the nature, is found by research of Uusitalo, (2010). Similar aspects of motivation were found in Hall, (2004) research where it was noted that the modernization of natural places is one of the reasons why nature-based tourism is failing for the visitor. This is because when escaping the routines of everyday life, these modern structures can remind of the life back in home and ruin the experience of relaxation through nature (Tyrväinen et al., 2008). Hall, (2004) suggests that the modernization of tourist's own hometowns and the lack of natural areas is the key reason for rising interest toward nature-based tourism. Yet, it must be noted that these expectations and preferences of tourists differ and can be influenced by their cultural and social background (Uusitalo, 2010).

Research in Kajan, (2014) found that valued characteristics of nature- based tourism shows that quietness, clean nature, area of land which is not occupied by buildings and sense of relief from stress were the main aspects that the visitors were expecting from nature-base tourism experiences (Kajan, 2014). It shows that nature-based tourism involves personal emotions, senses of fulfilment and calmness withing self, which is also part of one's formation of identity (Kajan, 2014). This proposes that the places visited in nature, are not only areas of fun activities, but also include memories and emotional meaning (Kajan, 2014).

In Northern Finland, tourism industry is quickly growing with other industries such as resources industries (Similä & Jokinen, 2018). Mining and its use of land poses a threat to tourism in Northen Finland because of the nature-based tourism. The land-use of the Kittilä mine is shown in Appendix 3. While there are many tourism activities available in the Arctics, ultimately, they are all types of nature- based tourism (Similä & Jokinen, 2018; Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2017). According to Cameron, (2000), tourism industry can have resistance toward the mine in terms of acceptance because the mining sector can affect tourism to lose resources needed for tourism, such as nature. However, local businesses outside mining industry can benefit from the mine by offering services and products that are consumed by mining community (Komnitsas, 2020).

### **3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

#### **3.1 Stakeholder theory**

Mining industry contains different stages, accountabilities and stakeholders with set of expectations (Kokko et al., 2014). Different needs of stakeholders are required to be recognized to avoid resistance, these needs can vary considerably (Komnitsas, 2020). This research applies stakeholder theory as a lens to understanding stakeholder relationships better. Stakeholder theory is essentially about creating mutual benefits to stakeholders, further, it aims to forecast impacts toward those affected by company's actions. Stakeholder theory fits my research, because I am studying social license to operate, benefits and impacts from the mine, which is important because tourism industry is one of the key stakeholders of the Kittilä mine.

Stakeholder theory was found by Freeman (1984) in business science literature as a suggestion for theory in strategic management of organizations (Wagner et al., 2011). Stakeholder theory has converted to be valued as part of corporate governance, strategic management and business ethics literature (Valentinov & Chia 2022). While traditional theories of traditional economics highlighted competitive advantage in the market as the main reason for social wellbeing, stakeholder theory highlight relationships collaboration (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022). It underlines the importance of business managers to manage networks of different groups and balance their needs (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022). Stakeholder theory is featured in practices and literature such as strategic management, economics, psychology and sociology (Harrison et al., 2019; Wagner et al., 2011).

Stakeholder theory highlights that companies are surrounded and sustained by internal and external stakeholders which the company relies on to be able to accomplish their objectives (Harrison et al., 2019; Valentinov & Chia 2022; Wagner et al., 2011). Stakeholder thinking is an idea which believes that the business is part of relationships among groups that create value for each other, who have authentic interest on the business and its outcomes and who the business relies on to accomplish its goals (Harrison et al., 2019; Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022). Stakeholders imply a network of customers, suppliers, employees, financiers, communities and management who together aim to create value within the network. The responsibility to manage

these relationships belongs to the managers of the company (Harrisson et al., 2019; Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022).

Stakeholder theory is applied in this study to analyze the general social and economic impacts of the Kittilä mine on the tourism industry in Levi. The framework is used to examine how different stakeholder groups are affected by mining activities, with particular attention to the tourism industry as a key stakeholder that depends on the local environment. Basic needs of humans include clean air and freshwater without pollution (Harrisson et al., 2019). Simply, without the resources of the nature, no company or human can exist (Harrisson et al., 2019). Industries such as agriculture, fishing, forestry and mining exist because of natural resources (Harrisson et al., 2019). Environmental concerns among stakeholders are increasingly reflected through non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media coverage, and environmental regulation (Harrison et al., 2019). These channels play an important role in shaping public perceptions and, consequently, the social license to operate and reputation of companies. Stakeholders also differ in their expectations and demands regarding environmental impacts, requiring companies to recognize and address these varying concerns (Harrison et al., 2019).

The challenge of stakeholder theory is to acknowledge the borderlines of the firm and determine which groups or individuals belong as stakeholders of the company (Harrisson et al., 2019). The main question of stakeholder theory by Harrisson et al., (2019) is “*for whose benefit and at whose expense should the firm be managed*”? (Harrisson et al., 2019, 163). While traditional strategic management primarily focused on creating value for shareholders, stakeholder theory has expanded this perspective to emphasize value creation for a wider range of stakeholders (Valentinov & Chia, 2022; Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022). However, in practice, organizations do not engage with all stakeholders equally. Instead, stakeholders are often prioritized based on their ability to contribute to or influence organizational value creation. As a result, different stakeholder groups generate varying levels of strategic importance and value for the company.

Lee, (2015) suggests five different stages of stakeholder cooperation that result in creating value: stakeholder awareness work, stakeholder identification work, stakeholder understanding work, stakeholder prioritization work and lastly stakeholder engagement work which is a result of the four different stages mentioned. Stakeholder work is defined as process of purposively being aware of, identify, understand, prioritize and engage stakeholders (Harrisson et al., 2019). Stakeholder theory implies that benefit for stakeholders can be economic, development of infrastructure, products and services (Harrisson et al., 2019; Orr, 2014). Wagner et al., (2011)

suggests that not all stakeholders are equal as the interaction toward different stakeholders can vary from how much power and influence the company has on the stakeholders and how much the stakeholders can influence the company (Wagner et al., 2011). Different stakeholders provide different values to the company, operating company selects the most appropriate stakeholder and what makes a stakeholder valued to the company (Wagner et al., 2011).

### **3.2 Stakeholder theory approach in tourism research**

To better comprehend community's opinions of tourism and to discover successful techniques for engaging them in tourism planning, broad collection of different disciplines has been transferred to the tourism field (Khazaei et al., 2015). Khazaei et al., (2015) found that it is important to realize that not all groups of the heterogeneous community have the same opportunities to contribute to the planning of tourism (Khazaei et al., 2015).

Stakeholder theory is familiar to tourism research as it is often applied to management of tourism (Byrd, 2007). Stakeholder theory is increasingly used in tourism projects which include stakeholders such as community. For destination to achieve competitive advantage, sustainable tourism development is crucial (Song & Fong, 2021). Byrd, (2007) applied the stakeholder theory for development of sustainable tourism within tourism destinations. This research found that responding to the expectations toward tourism from the community is vital. Further, research by Luštický & Musil, (2016) applied stakeholder theory to identify stakeholders and assess the impacts of tourism impact to tourist destination, including social, environmental and economic impacts.

Participation of stakeholders in the development of projects is needed (Song & Fong, 2021). Stakeholder theory can assist in understanding the various elements of tourism with community, history of tourism developments in tourism and managements of tourism in the area (Song & Fong, 2021). Further, it can assist to evaluate the pull factors in the community, how community is impacted economically, and find relations within diverse companies that are involved in tourism (Song & Fong, 2021).

Study of Khazaei et al., (2015) applied stakeholder theory to recognize and include marginalized stakeholder group that was not seen as important (immigrant groups), to the tourism planning with engagement and participation, to better understand their specific needs.

The participation and engagement in tourism planning can be distributed through various of options including community hearings, surveys, panels for residents, participation to policy boards and meetings between residents and community (Khazaei et al., (2015). Complete understanding of stakeholder groups various characteristics are needed to examine with the groups to understand the motives, desires and expectations for tourism companies to be able to meet them in tourism planning (Khazaei et al., 2015; Im et al., 2023).

The normative aspect is central to the stakeholder theory as it emphasizes the ethics and guidelines that the company is structured to act by, it means that company acts through the morals and aims to make the correct decisions based on those company values (Byrd, 2007). Stakeholder theory is based on democracy which means that the involvement of public to decision making allows the community to choose how the community and their government should operate (Song & Fong, 2021). Sustainable development includes concepts such as social, environmental and economic. The goal of these concepts is to answer to the needs of society and provide better quality of life now and in the future (Song & Fong, 2021). Through stakeholder theory, the stakeholders of sustainable tourism project include the current tourists, the future tourists, the current community and future community (Song & Fong, 2021). Indeed, activeness of participation of society is vital in sustainable tourism developments found in the study of Song & Fong, (2021).

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Qualitative research as an approach

Qualitative research methodology was chosen for this research because it attempts to research real-world social phenomenon and collect empirical material of participants' thoughts, perceptions, emotions, feelings and experience (Phillimore et al., 2004). Qualitative research allowed me to collect empirical non-numerical material about characteristics and subjectivity of the phenomenon involved, which quantitative research methodology could not achieve (Phillimore et al., 2004). These social aspects are important to include in my research to be able to answer my research questions. Qualitative research allows me to ask questions why, how and discover the essential attitudes toward the mine of Kittilä and its implications toward tourism in Levi (Mwita, 2020). Qualitative research explores human experiences and viewpoints noticing nuances that could be lost in numerical data collection, such as in quantitative research which explores numeric data with different variables (Lim, 2025).

Qualitative research approach has been adapted in various research of social license to operate. Moffar & Zhang, (2014) research involved interviews and narratives of stakeholders to gain knowledge of acceptance of mining. Research by Franks et al., (2014) showed effects of SLO of mine in cost of projects and continuity of business with qualitative research which involved mixed methods of interviews and case analysis. Similar research was conducted by Kemp & Owen, (2013) which researched communities expects from mining companies, this research interviewed mining professionals as a qualitative approach.

Although phenomenon of SLO can also be studied through quantitative surveys for example in Woźniak et al., (2024) study that explored the knowledge of future mining operations and attitudes toward it. The study received numerical data, which involved questions that one could only answer with "yes, "no" or "I do not know". The research could not answer what was the reason for acceptability and why, as my research is aiming to do.

Research paradigms embody ontological and epistemological norms that guide the research process (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Ontology defines the reality of the research, while epistemology addresses how knowledge about reality can be attained (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Paradigms are essentially overlying interpretation of how the world works (Jennings,

2010). It is a set of viewpoints that guides action (Jennings, 2010). When defining the epistemology for my research, I chose interpretive paradigm as a part of a lens to this research because interpretive paradigm allows researchers to see life from the viewpoint of the subjects by interpreting meanings from the collected data, which relies on non-numeric material (Mwita, 2022). A Researcher interprets what a participant experiences in a specific social phenomenon (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Interpretive paradigm fits my research because I am researching social phenomenon of social license to operate.

Other qualitative paradigms could have been applied, such as constructivism and critical approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, they describe different social realities than those explored in this study. Constructivism is focusing on how personal realities are shaped through interaction, whereas critical approaches focus on issues of power and imbalance between stakeholders (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although these perceptions could be studied, the main aim of this thesis is to assess how stakeholders interpret and experience the impacts of mining, making the interpretivist paradigm the most appropriate framework. Interpretivists believe that the realities and knowledge of participants are not objective but are shaped by their own individual experiences of their life, their beliefs and their point of views of the world (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Instead of relying on one relationship or theory, the interpretivist paradigm offers multiple realities to explain the phenomenon involved (Jennings, 2010). With interpretivist paradigms the interpretations stay subjective and not objective.

Qualitative research is well suited to examine complex social phenomenon like social license to operate. It allows researchers to engage closely with participants and their perception. As is argued by Lim, (2025) that qualitative approach is especially valued when research involves studying real-life context. However, qualitative research is often prone to criticism due to misunderstanding that it lacks accuracy due to its reliance on human interpretation, which could limit the generalizability of the findings (Mwita, 2022). In contrast, quantitative research is often favored in the natural sciences because of its perceived objectivity, consistency, and ability to test hypotheses in a neutral manner (Mwita, 2022). Both approaches have diverse strengths and are equipped for different research purposes. In the context of a rapidly changing social world, qualitative research is increasingly important for capturing nuanced, context-specific insights (Lim, 2025).

Qualitative research method provides numerous options of gathering data such as participant observation, focus groups or discourse analysis (Naeem et al., 2023). Interviews were chosen

to collect data for this research. Three different interview styles were examined before choosing the correct one. Structured interview was not chosen to collect data because it is very formal way to interview without chance to adjust to suit responses and this way would not allow open conversation with participants (Hannam & Boranic-Zivoder, 2010, p.182). Unstructured interview was not selected because it requires a lot of skills and experience to direct the conversation without pre thought questions, experience which I do not have and after all, this type of interview would not be appropriate to the purpose of my study (Hannam & Boranic-Zivoder, 2010, p.182).

Semi-structured interview was chosen because it combines aspects of the two interview styles mentioned above (Hannam & Boranic-Zivoder, 2010, p.182). Focus groups could be an alternative way to collect data for my research because it gathers many participants together to discuss a certain topic (Hannam & Boranic-Zivoder, 2010, p.182). Regardless, this type of data collection was not chosen, because it can create a group effect, where the participants agree or disagree with the group, therefore it often provides group opinions and not individual opinions of matters or issues (Hannam & Boranic-Zivoder, 2010, p.182). Semi-structured interview allows gathering comprehensive information of mindsets, morals and beliefs (Jennings, 2010). Semi-structured interviews of this research consisted of 8 participants, and the interview guide included 10-15 questions that involved questions of for example, about impact, acceptance and benefits.

## **4.2 Data collection**

For this research, I sought local tourism entrepreneurs or managers of Levi to participate to the research, to collect most suitable empirical material for my research of the benefits, impacts and social license to operate of Kittilä mine. I began the process by looking at the tourism companies of Levi from Visit Levi website, which had listed all the tourism companies that operate in Levi. I then started to collect contacts about companies to separate word documents to keep record of who I have contacted and who not. Also, I kept records of who have declined and approved to be part of the research to prevent contacting the same companies again by accident. All the tourism companies involved in this research relies on Levis' nature as their main attraction because of the nature-based tourism services.

**Figure 1.** Information about participants

	<b>Sector in tourism industry</b>	<b>Position in company</b>	<b>Years lived in Levi</b>
<b>P1</b>	Tour operator	Entrepreneur	11 years
<b>P2</b>	Hotel, catering, recreation	CEO	0 years
<b>P3</b>	Tour operator	Entrepreneur	10 seasons
<b>P4</b>	Tour operator	Entrepreneur	5 years
<b>P5</b>	Tours operator	Entrepreneur	Lifetime
<b>P6</b>	Luxury tourism (includes all the services of tourism)	CEO	7 years
<b>P7</b>	Hotel, hospitality and recreation	Entrepreneur	Lifetime
<b>P8</b>	Tour operator	Entrepreneur	10 years

Figure 1 shows participants' position in tourism companies, types of tourism services and years lived in Levi. Once I had contact information, I sent invitations by email to all the companies that I could find. Since I got only two participants via email, I had to call the companies directly. The issue was that the emails that I send went straight to companies' general email, meant for customers rather than going directly to the owners and managers of those companies. This led to several different calls and emails to different addresses. Once I got participants for the semi-structured interviews, I sent them invitations for Teams- meeting as well as agreement letters to be signed off by participants before the interview.

I prepared the interview guide carefully with questions that would be most suited to answer to my research questions. Teams video calls were held during January, February and March of 2026. At the interviews, in addition to the research guide, I asked questions that would specify

the answer without misunderstandings as well as additional questions that would spontaneously come up as the interview went on. Next, the voice records of the interview were transcribed with Word' transcribing tool. This included polishing the transcription and making sure all the interviews had accurate information and I also deleted sensitive information such as participant names, company names, unique products and nationalities to make participants unrecognizable. The participants in this research are described as "P1", "P2", "P3" and so on.

### **4.3 Thematic analysis as an analysis method of research**

Thematic analysis as a methodical approach was selected to analyze the empirical material. This approach includes six different stages: familiarization with qualitative material, generation of codes, locating themes, reviewing of the themes, reporting and narrating (Lim, 2025). This analysis approach allows to locate meanings and patterns from the empirical material, which is vital when studying a certain phenomenon (Lim, 2025). Qualitative thematic analysis is commonly used tool for making sense of empirical material (Walters, 2016). It is more common in psychology studies rather than in tourism studies which favor content analysis more (Walters, 2016).

Some tourism researches have used thematic analysis for example to study beliefs of certain phenomenon (Walters, 2016). Thematic analysis is found good for its ability to explain and discover social meanings in text (Walters, 2016). Inductive thematic analysis was chosen because it fits well with making sense of semi- structured interviews, which this research is using to collect empirical material. As my research studies the possible benefits tourism industry receives from Kittilä mine and social acceptability of the local tourism industry toward the mine, thematic analyses was a flexible way to make sense of the social, cultural and meanings of the participants lived experiences, emotions and attitudes (Naeem et al., 2023).

### **4.4 Research ethics**

This research is following general principles, which the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) conducts. An important part of conducting qualitative research, or any research at this instant is the notion of research ethics (Jennings, 2010). The whole research process should be planned through ethics principles from contacting the participants, collecting the empirical material to the presentation of results (TENK, 2025). Research ethics exist to

protect the participant through anonymity, fair treatment and voluntary participation (Oliver, 2010). When contacting the participants, I informed them who I was and why I wanted them to participate in my research. I also informed them that the material for the interviews would be kept in secure place without anyone else having access to the material except my tutor. All participants received a letter of consent that the participant signed before the interview seen in Appendix 2. The letter of consent included my own information, my tutor's information and notion about the voluntarily as well as possibility to withdraw from the research at any given time, even after participating in the interview.

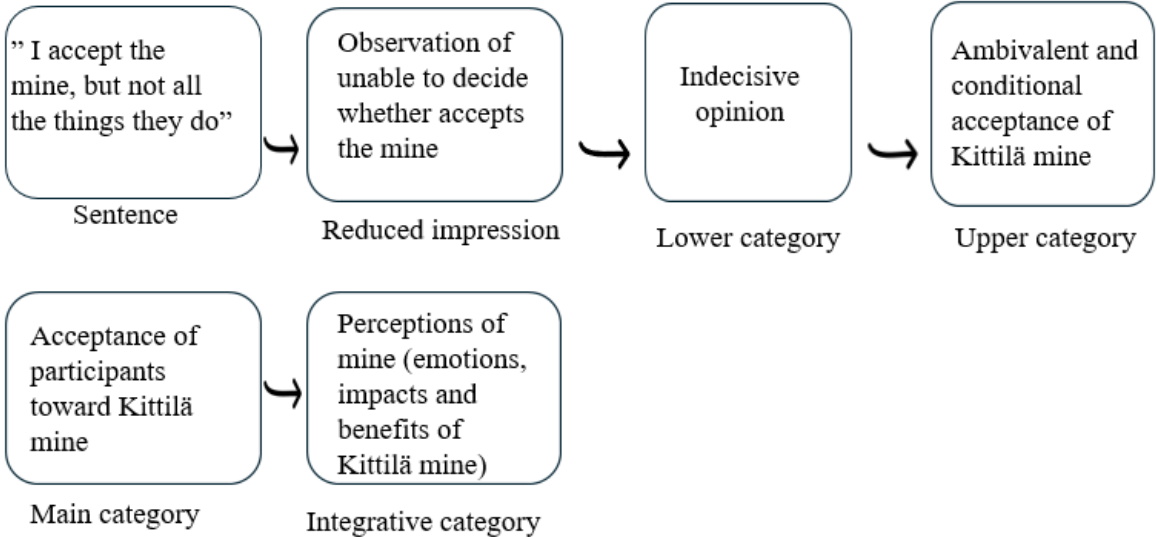
In the beginning of the interviews, I introduced myself and asked for permission to record the interview. I said that the interview is anonymous meaning that I would not include names of the participants or the names of the companies that they work in. This includes also the addresses and contact information of the companies. I also explained that if there are questions that the participant does not want to answer, we could easily skip the question. I acknowledged that not everyone is familiar with terms I am using, so I explained in a simple way for example what social license to operate means in my research and then formed my question for the participant avoiding any misunderstandings and feelings of embarrassment of not knowing the terms I was using.

As a further request of the participants, the unique products and nationalities of participants were left out from the transcript of interviews. This is very important because Levi is very small area and those characteristics of participants could possibly threaten the sense of anonymity. It is important to note regarding to ethics, that artificial intelligence (Claude) was used to translate interview quotes from Finnish language to English language with careful inspections of the correctness of the translate. The translations were edited manually so that the translations matched original sentences.

#### **4.5 Analysis process**

As I started my analysis process, I realized that I had assumption of Kittilä mine acceptance before I started my research. These assumptions generated from my own thoughts of the negative impacts of mine and the often-negative news coverage of mine in general. My initial thought was that there would be some resistance toward mine and that all the tourism companies would be extremely aware of the impacts of mine, especially when it comes to the negative

impacts on the environment. Safety to say that my assumptions of these topics were somewhat correct, but I was surprised by the level of acceptance toward Kittilä mine and how difficult it was for the participants to decide whether the mine has their acceptance. The acceptance was influenced by several things that I did not consider before this research.



**Figure 2.** Examples of phases of thematic analysis, approach by Lim, (2025).

As suggested stages of thematic analysis by Walters, (2016) & Lim, (2025), I started thematic analysis process, reading the interviews multiple times before starting to code and making sense of the interviews. Figure 2 shows the process of thematic analysis, which assisted me in finding my themes. First from the sentence of participant, I realized main category relating to acceptance (finding codes such as partly acceptance, hesitation of being anti-mining, acceptance for mine due to non-visibility). I then observed through their emotions and perceptions the difficultness to know if mine is accepted by participant relating to impacts and benefits. Lower category together with main category led me to theme “Ambivalent and conditional acceptance of Kittilä mine” (see figure 2).

Codes such as mining risks for nature-based tourism and environment, pollution, destruction of nature, negative impact on nature, negative impacts toward tourism, nature-based tourism important, expectation of nature, resistance toward expansion of mine, brainwashing against nature, post-mine solutions led to second theme: “Environmental aspects regarding Nature-based tourism in Levi”. Lastly, a third theme “Kittilä Mine’s Sustainability Narratives” was produced from the codes: mining washing, green washing, sustainability as marketing trick,

illusion for benefits, illusion of support toward tourism industry from the mine undermines impacts towards tourism, unwanted benefits, taking advantage of tourism, hypocrite mine, unethical behavior of mining operations, trust issues toward mine, transparency, social license to operate, responsibility.

I attached sticky notes of the codes to my wall to be able to see the whole picture and to be able to produce the themes. After I produced the themes, I organized all related quotes to the piles of the themes for each participant. After this stage, I sorted the quotes from my transcribed word documents and organized a new document under each topic and participant. This allowed me to clearly see patterns and that the themes were suitable in terms of remaining connected to the main aim of my research to answer my research questions. The theme “Ambivalent and Conditional Acceptance of Kittilä mine” of analysis clearly answers to research question of how tourism sector in Levi benefit from the SLO of the mine. Theme “Environmental aspects regarding Nature-based tourism in Levi” discusses and answers to the research question of if there are negative impacts from mine toward the tourism sector in Levi. Finally, Theme “Kittilä Mine’s Sustainability Narratives” answers to what is the state of social acceptance toward Kittilä mine from tourism industry. Additionally, the research question about mine’s acceptance is also answered in “Ambivalent and Conditional Acceptance of Kittilä mine”. These themes of analysis ultimately investigate and show today’s state of positive and negative impacts of “social license to operate” to the local tourism entrepreneurs and tourism managers in Levi, which is the aim of this research.

The analysis found that there is a high level of acceptance of the Kittilä mine, but the acceptance is influenced by distance of the mine from Levi, visibility of the mine, negative effects of the mine and economics of the mine. Although the mine is generally well accepted, the environmental concerns and Kittilä mines sustainable narratives creates ambivalent and conditional acceptance. This means that although participants would discuss highly of mine, as soon as environment is mentioned, the tone changed. Mine is accepted because it is not seen in everyday life of tourism industry. The acceptance is also determined by how familiar the participant is with mine. The analysis shows that almost all participants have a friend or family member working in the mine, this affects the acceptance of the mine. The mine is accepted but not necessarily approved with all aspects of it. Instead of creating monetary value or support for tourism industry, this research found that the mine can support tourism industry by supporting surrounding nature. This is because all tourism company participants in this research

rely on nature-based tourism. Although there is a level of acceptance in Levi because Kittilä mine implements aspects of SLO (engagement, transparency, cooperation, sponsors, benefits to community) many participants hesitates to trust the mine due to is perceived unethical behavior and sustainable narratives.

## **5. ANALYSIS**

The analysis of the empirical material resulted in three main themes that describe how the tourism industry in Levi perceives the social license to operate (SLO) of the Kittilä mine. These themes reflect the complication of stakeholder perceptions, highlighting both positive and negative aspects of mining activities.

The first theme, ambivalent and conditional acceptance, captures the overall level of acceptance among tourism stakeholders, which is neither fully supportive nor fully opposing, but dependent on specific conditions such as perceived benefits and environmental impacts. The second theme focuses on environmental aspects, emphasizing the role of nature in tourism and the concerns related to environmental risks caused by mining. The third theme, sustainability narratives, examines how the mining company's actions and communication are interpreted by tourism stakeholders, particularly in terms of trust, responsibility, and perceived authenticity. Together, these themes illustrate that SLO is not a permanent state but an active and negotiated process, created by stakeholder experiences, values, and expectations.

### **5.1 Ambivalent and Conditional Acceptance of Kittilä mine**

This theme emphasizes ambivalent and conditional acceptance toward the mine among participants, where mining was not fully supported nor rejected. This theme explains the aspects of acceptance, benefits and impacts that influence the overall perception about the mine and overall state of approval within tourism industry in Levi.

For the coexistence of tourism and mining industry to be successful, maintaining SLO and acceptability toward the mine is essential. If the coexistence fails, social license to operate also fails (Della Corte & Aria, 2014). Kittilä mine is well integrated to the community of Kittilä and Levi. The Kittilä mine is a large employer and brings sufficient economic value to the area. The

familiarity of the mine for the participants was noticed as most participants mentioned relatives and friends working at the mine. The Kittilä mine has integrated effectively to the society of Levi and Kittilä. Participants state that the mining culture exist in the Kittilä because of the mine. Local businesses outside mining industry can benefit from the mine by offering services and products that mining community consume (Komnitsas, 2020). This is true as there is high-end professionals working in for the mine and it creates fluid community. Because mining is not in competition with tourism industry, there is an industrial economic balance, which has made the community healthier.

*So, on our street, we live in a suburban, I'm looking out the window to yellow houses, on our street, I'd say 60% of the people on this street, and they're in separate houses like private house, work for the mine or in an industry related to the mine. So yeah, we're very aware of it. My spouse has family that work for the Kittilä mine as well too (P1).*

The collaboration with local community and key stakeholders such as tourism industry is important for effective SLO, providing trust, transparency and legitimacy. To successfully implement SLO, these actions should continue through the whole mine's existence, as Kokko at al., (2014) explains that the community expects activity and communication from the mine in terms of regular meetings with locals where the questions of locals from the mine could be answered (Kokko at al., 2014). This is similarly found in this research as all the participants agreed to the need for active cooperation with local community.

*It's important to maintain collaboration. The mine must constantly gain community acceptance, and they have been active in working with locals. Any complaints should be heard, and this kind of cooperation should continue. Of course, if the mine was located closer, the risks and resistance would likely increase. (P7)*

Other participants in the research explained that the cooperation of tourism is not necessity but cooperation with locals is. Suopajärvi et al., (2023) argue that municipality expectations can be different from community expectations, because municipalities consider benefits through perspective that notice creation of new jobs, which brings economic wellbeing to the area, to be the most valued positive impact of mining Suopajärvi et al., (2023). From the community part, this statement was true as participants agreed with the fact that the mine brings economic benefit. The benefits to municipality have shown to some extent perhaps most clearly through cooperation with the municipality. Roads and connections have been improved partly because of mine's initiatives, at least in the direction of mine. Participants struggle to identify key improvements by the Kittilä mine in Levi area. The mine has been strongly involved in supporting services in the village and municipality of Kittilä. If the people who work in the mine have families, then the municipality has supported things like sports halls and similar services.

*The mine is a major employer, directly and indirectly through subcontractors.  
Even some of our tourism staff have worked at the mine during the summer.  
In that way, it contributes to year-round economic activity and provides  
stable jobs. (P6)*

Highly relevant aspect of all of the interviews was the acknowledgement of positive impacts that the mine brings to the whole municipality by creating jobs, lessening seasonality in the residents, creating infrastructure and improved services together with tourism industry and supports education programs. Although some participants said that the improvements for the infrastructure development come from tourism especially. This perspective can come from the reason that because participants work in tourism industry, it is easier to see the side of tourism industry. It was found that some entrepreneurs saw possible positive impacts from the mine such as mine attracting more population to the area as forms of jobs and the employees of mine would bring economic benefits to the area and possibly use the tourism services. Other tourism entrepreneurs saw the threats to nature and that way to their business, which was also acknowledged in the research of Dwyer et al., (2016) mining effects to nature-based tourism.

*The negative is that risk of pollution. Also, their pollution with water is a concern. So even they say, yes, the emissions are neutral, they are, but it has changed the pH balance of the waterways. It's changed the environment. So the fish that they're catching where Kittilä mine, releases their water, they're not finding the same species that they did before. Everyone's talking about, you know, fishing common roach. So that's where you start to hear the rumbles in the community saying it's not right.*  
(P1)

This suggests that trust toward mine is challenged by the perceived negative environmental impacts, as participant expressed concerns about water pH and fish populations. This also indicated that if the negative impacts continue to grow, it might create tension within the community in Levi, especially the tourism industry as it relies on the clean environment. This reflects to the argument of Nunkoo (2015) who underlines that mutual trust and benefit are needed for successful coexistence. This is supported by Della Corte & Aria, (2014) who argue that trust is dependent on the benefits received. In this case trust is often challenged as locals question the trustworthiness of the mines' environmental claims. Further, the participants acknowledge the need for both industries in Kittilä, to create overall wellbeing and economical balance within the municipality. Which is questioned by Huang et al., (2011) by suggesting that two industries can perform better separately. However, the findings from research of Everingham et al. (2014) is more consistent with the findings as it suggests that separation of the two industries would not be beneficial long-term to the municipality of Kittilä. The negative impacts to environment suggest that benefits are not distributed evenly in the region as participants experience the impacts in a different way. Coexistence in Levi seems to involve constant balancing of environmental concerns and economic benefits, which both affect the acceptance.

*So, it's probably quite a difficult equation to divide them into separate regions. They are in such different industries that they don't really work if they are not in the same area. They don't function independently because they are so different. But at the same time, well-being comes from work, and industry, mining and other sectors also bring that well-being. (P4)*

The participants understand that the mining industry is needed as well to develop and create well-being and that the separation of the two industries would not be possible. Infrastructure improvement is needed because of high-level professionals coming into a regional area, they expect higher levels of services, therefore that development is making the education system better. The positive impact of mine is that it has given people that don't necessarily have good language skills or good people skills, good jobs in the community, which they probably wouldn't have otherwise. They would have probably continued in less paying jobs cleaning, clearing roads and doing snow work and woodwork, but now they're working in the mine and receiving more monetary value and higher level of living.

*More generally speaking, if a municipality depended entirely on just one major industry, that would be quite narrow. If something happened to that industry, the municipality's vitality would suffer and the shared welfare could quickly decline. So having several sources of income improves municipal services and the economic well-being of residents. (P3)*

Effective coexisting between tourism and mining contributes to maintaining SLO, but coexisting alone does not guarantee social acceptance (Della Corte & Aria, 2014). It is suggested by (Mercer, 2000), that tourism is not a threat to mining but mining is a threat to tourism (Mercer, 2000). Because mining affects economies, environments, and communities globally it is suggested by (Kotilainen et al., 2022); Mononen et al., 2023) that even share of the economic benefit from mines to locals is important to prevent uneven power structures between government and local community. Hence, studying the relationship (SLO) between the two sectors is vital to understanding their synergies and municipality development strategies (Buultjens et al., 2010).

The positive impacts from the mine were acknowledged more, as 4 out of 8 participants recognized the negative impacts from the mine toward the local environment, creating ambivalence and conditional acceptance. Research of McLennan et al., (2015), found that the tourism industry was more trusted than mine by the community, because of the perception of the community that mining sector does not pay attention to the negative impacts of the mines toward community and tourism industry. Only participant 4 did not agree, because tourism is something that keeps evolving all the time. Because it grows and expands, there tends to be more negative discussion around it. Therefore, in the community, there has been also negative discussion about the effects of tourism industry, which is why sustainability is mentioned as an important factor.

The general level of acceptability is formed by the experienced wellbeing from the mine toward the whole community (Kokko et al., 2014). This is because acceptance of the community is built by maximizing benefits and minimizing the negative impacts (Kokko et al., 2014). Mining should therefore aim for the general level of acceptance to prevent social issues (Kokko et al., 2014). This was generally true as the positive impacts created acceptance in participants who accepted the mine only partly.

*have partly accepted the mine, , I think we actually benefit in some ways of the culture of the mine. None of this stiff ending rubbish, but the kind of that it has created this much more open, accepting community that I think a lot of people who have moved here in the last five years don't realize that the mine is actually a part of that environment. It's all for tourism and making their Arctic dreams come true, Lapland dreams. They don't see often that the benefit is because of the economic diversity that the mine has brought this community. (P1)*

Overall, the perception of the general acceptance of the mine agrees that mining does not significantly disturbs tourism. Jartti et al., (2020) indicates that elements affecting SLO directly or indirectly are balance between benefits and impacts, government's ability to manage the country, procedural justice, resource independence, equal circulation of income, and trust toward the mining company (Jartti et al., 2020). Acceptance and approval are two different

stages of SLO as is proposed by Jartti et al., (2020), claiming that lower stage is acceptance and much higher level is approval. Stage of acceptance is merely implication of allowing mine to exist with its activities, whereas approval stage is encouraging the continuance of the mine and its operations (Jartti et al., 2020).

Mining companies should aim for the approval stage of stakeholders which can lead stakeholders to identify themselves as part of the activities and operations of mine, causing increasing interest in the outcomes of mine (Jartti et al., 2020). Further, Breaky et al., (2025) agree that the mining operations should reach the approval level of SLO which emphasizes that the mining activities are not only tolerated but supported and respected with feelings of trust. The main aspect of acceptance was that the acceptance is conditional and if the mine were closer to Levi, opposition would possibly be stronger than now that the mine is not visible to customers or part of daily life. The mine has integrated into society so well that it has already stabilized and become socially accepted.

*Physically you can of course see it. When you go up to the fell you can see the area from there. Sometimes customers ask what that is, or in the evening they notice the lights and ask why there are so many lights there. Then I usually explain that it is the mine. Many of them haven't heard about it or didn't know it exists. (P3)*

Debates linked to mining versus tourism, but also to debates in the tourism industry internally are common (Dwyer et al., 2016). This can be due to some businesses benefitting from the mine more than others. For example, business tourism could benefit from mining whereas nature-based tourism is not receiving benefits or chance of cooperation (Dwyer et al., 2016). This can lead to division within the tourism sector, because the level of acceptance is varying on aspects such as how near the mine is located to the tourism business, what kind of mine and tourism is coexisting together and how visible is the mine and its impacts in the area (Similä & Jokinen, 2018). This is true as some participants expressed their concern about mining ruining the landscape and that way it is a risk toward nature-based tourism but still acknowledge that the cleanliness of Levi remains and attracts visitors and that it is essential to remain clean and unpolluted in the future.

*This also directly affects visitors. Some come from big cities and may experience a kind of ‘head rush’ or disorientation when they spend a full day outside here because the oxygen levels in this pristine environment are so much higher compared to the polluted air they are used to in urban centers. We are still in one of the cleanest natural areas in the world. (P6)*

Therefore, the most important action that the mining company can do is to maintain their site of responsibly. They must prevent environmental damage, whether minor or major, and avoid harming the surrounding villages and residents. If things are done badly at Kittilä mine, it directly affects tourism in Levi. Everything tourism entrepreneurs have done for the sustainability whether certified or not, starts with their own values. Many participants follow a ‘do no harm’ principle which means that earning a living must not harm anyone else. These principles guided the tourism companies long before sustainable green certifications came into play. Tourism is better practiced in areas where mining and economy are less industrialized. This was found due to tourists’ perceptions and expectations which include wanting to see lifestyle originally lived in the area through culture and the attractiveness of nature (Huang et al, 2011). This applies also to this research as acceptance would in some participants radically change if the mine expanded nearer Levi.

*But no, I don’t think it would be acceptable anymore if the mine were right next to us. On this side, we try to be very green and having it that close wouldn’t be acceptable. Because of that fear—what customers would think—it just isn’t acceptable. (P7)*

The visibility of mine and acceptance of tourism industry is tricky because all of the tourism companies participated in this research explained that their companies are almost solely relying on nature-based tourism. The tourism professionals have advertised Levi as magical winter wonderland and the expectations from the customers need to be fulfilled to ensure customer satisfaction. If the nature-based tourism location is too industrialized, it can ruin the whole

experience and cause decreasing visitations. This indicates that acceptance of mining in Kittilä is conditional and depends on the possible risks to nature-based tourism and company reputation. As many participants explained, if the mine were situated closer to Levi, it would become unacceptable due to visible environmental impacts. This demonstrates that SLO is not permanent and stable in Levi, but dependent on maintaining distance from tourism companies and their activities.

The findings are partially similar to argument of Kotialainen et al., (2022) of SLO's inability to transfer actual benefits to tourism industry in Levi. Although participants accepted the indirect benefits to broader community, the lack of direct advantages may influence the overall acceptance, making participants more aware of the negative impacts of the mine. Further, the findings partially agree with Lesser et al., (2017) who argued that SLO is formed by vocal and organized groups. However, the concerns of participants cannot be interpreted as resistance but rather as a boundary of acceptance. This may suggest that also less vocal stakeholders can influence SLO through customer perception rather than direct resistance. Therefore, the findings extend existing literature by showing that SLO can also be shaped indirectly through predicted reactions of external factors, such as tourists who are interested of the mine.

*Well, they surely attempts to kind of fade away from people's awareness, so I wouldn't know that it kind of positive effects to tourism. Of course they want to be involved in many things. Another matter is that, like, whether it is pure polishing of the shield (image-polishing) or whether there is some kind of genuine feeling behind it. But well, —surely it is in contradiction with what people come here to seek. (P5)*

The difference in acceptance and approval could be due to fact that participant 7 was the only tourism company cooperating and receiving benefits directly from the Kittilä mine. Participant 7 was the only one that I would say has approved the mine and effectively supports the Kittilä mine, although the acceptance was dependent on the current location and visibility of the mine. Other participants only received indirect benefits, this could indicate that it is the reason for lower level of acceptance. As described by participant 5, many other participants also expressed

skepticism of Kittilä mine's genuineness when connecting and cooperating with stakeholders. This shows that while Kittilä mine is accepted, it is not fully trusted.

## **5.2 Environmental aspects regarding Nature-based tourism in Levi**

Mining is often perceived as a risk to the natural environment that tourism depends on, creating moral and sustainability tensions. This theme captures concerns that mining contradicts the environmental values and nature-based identity of Levi tourism. Further, this theme reflects environmental values and responsibility of both mining and tourism activities, which consider acceptance and impacts. Although SLO focuses on the social aspects, the environment of the operating mine is essential to consider by following environmental legislation, which is agreed in the environmental protection act (Kokko et al., 2014). The sustainability of the mine is important to local community and the resistance toward mine is usually because the mine has concealed the actual negative impacts to environment (Kokko et al., 2014).

Environment is changed by mining permanently (Kokko et al., 2014). The landscapes of Lapland's nature are one of the key pull factors that attract tourists to participate in nature-based tourism in Lapland (Wang et al., 2018). Because the environment is a resource, the high quality of the landscape is important as the aspects of the landscape are assessed through human observation (Wang et al., 2018). The quality of landscape is essentially showcasing the quality of life in the area, which tourism industry advertises internationally (Wang et al., 2018). All the participants agreed with these statements as in this research, the importance of the mine's responsibility and environmental concerns are the key aspects of effective SLO in Levi, Kittilä. Because of the importance of nature-based tourism in Levi area, environment is the greatest asset of tourism companies. All of eight participants commented or mentioned environment, few had concerns for pollution, protection of forests and healthiness of the waters in Levi and Kittilä.

*Well, I have to say that I'm a bit cautious. I wouldn't really go fishing everywhere once the mine is there. It has made me careful, even though I know that the discharge pipe is over there. I do believe that I wouldn't fish downstream of it. It has had an effect—I guess it even makes me a little*

*nervous—so yes, I'm somewhat concerned about pollution of the waters.*

(P7)

As is suggested by (Mercer, 2000), that tourism is not a threat to mining, but mining is a threat to tourism. This was partly true as almost all the participants mentioned the concern for environment as main negative impacts of Kittilä mine. However, few participants did not think the mine had any effect on local environment or the nature-based tourism that they practice in Levi. This said to be because of the distance of the mine, that the negative effects are harder to see because the mine is not located right next to Levi.

Visibility is a key factor for acceptance, because visitors come to Levi for nature, authenticity, and purity. Finnish tourists may have one perception, but for international visitors, Levi is a winter paradise that is beautiful and unspoiled. Levi has the advantage that most of the activity is concentrated in the village center, which makes it easier for tour operators to let people experience nature genuinely, even though the mine is quite nearby.

Because it is located on the other side of the village, it only appears in the background. Water and noise pollution are also considerable negative impacts which affect by reducing the attractiveness of the area from point of view of tourist (Moyle et al., 2018). Although receiving the benefits from the resources sector, the tourism industry remains worried of the reduced attractiveness of the regions due to becoming too industrial and modern with presence of resources sector (Moyle et al., 2018). Therefore, creation of mutual trust and partnership as found from the research of Miller et al., (2012), to be key characteristics that create strong municipalities. Further, previous research suggests that conflicts between tourism and mining industries are often due to miscommunication between the two sectors (Huang et al., 2011). The topic can create division and arguments within the tourism industry as different companies can be impacted differently by mine (Huang et al., 2011).

This is true in this research as the only reason for visitors visiting Levi is the nature. For this reason, services must also be in order. The overall experience is heavily influenced by the environment and its nature, sounds, lights, smells. Even if Levi is a beautiful location, if it's ruined by noise, pollution, or garbage, the visitor experience is no longer positive, and tourism suffers as a result. If mine were closer, it would likely impact the customer experience.

Currently, from the top of Levi fell, the mining area is barely visible in the distance, just enough to acknowledge it's there. If it were next to Levi, it would clearly affect how guests feel – that they are interacting with nature while right on top of a mining operation.

Many participants mentioned that mine has practices of SLO that enhances communication and transparency amongst mine and it has integrated itself well to be part of the community. This is partly similar finding to the research of Kokko et al., (2014) which found that Kittilä mine is genuinely interested to exist withing community and as part of the community. As expressed by participants, the mine is actively engaging the community and cooperating with local community, however this is mainly perceived as a trick to maintain SLO, not genuine engagement to community.

*They also try to be transparent. Every year, they organize a 'Kittilä Day,' providing buses for locals to visit the mine, learn about its operations, and see the facility. This is a great way for the community to engage and understand the mine. The company has experienced staff who know that environmental and community acceptance is crucial; otherwise, operations would be difficult. (P7)*

As participant 7 expresses, it would be hard to remain in operation without proper communication and community engagement. This could be because of the increasing use of platforms for sharing information have possibility to reach a lot of people in a short period of time, affecting the reputations of mining companies (Kokko at al., 2014). The open communication about positive and negative occasions builds trust within the community and benefits the mine throughout the years to come (Kokko at al., 2014). Since tourism also affects the environment negatively, it is important that the tourism practices are sustainable (Marques & Cunha, 2022). Tourists are increasingly concerned about impacts of tourism; therefore, tourists today value and require sustainable actions from tourism companies and high quality of destinations (Wang et al., 2018). The importance of sustainable actions of tourism companies was highlighted in this research as every company expressed the need for sustainable actions from every tourism company in Levi.

*In tourism, we operate with small groups and focus on privacy, which allows for more sustainable practices. For example, luxury tourism can be more sustainable than large-group tourism, though all tourism presents challenges. We also choose partners who uphold certain standards, like dog welfare on safari tours, which seems simple but contributes to overall sustainability. (P2)*

The sustainable practices of the tourism companies are of high importance because responsible companies of Levi support and protect the environment that they rely on. Because of the high standards of tourism companies toward sustainability, pressure for mine to remain responsible is high. This is why all of the participants require the mine to invest in maintaining the water quality because that could potentially cause conflict among tourism companies, local community and the Kittilä mine. The concern for nature was similarly found in Study of Heikkinen et al., (2016) which argues that mining consequences to nature can prevent tourists to return to destination, as the image of untouched nature is ruined and the quality of nature is not as advertised (Heikkinen et al., 2016). Further, participants expressed the conditional acceptance which indicates similar findings with Heikkinen et al., (2016) that emphasized that despite the benefits of mining for the local economy and community, SLO can be lost if the mine causes thriving tourism industry in Kittilä municipality to decline.

*I wouldn't say that the mine needs to directly supports tourism, but both the mine and tourism should really take care of nature and also respect the local indigenous culture. Both are major industries, and both consume a lot of natural resources, so they have a responsibility to support conservation. For tourism, this is especially valuable. (P4)*

From the participants, 2 out of 8 proposed that closer cooperation with mine could be a great way to support tourism industry in Levi. However, rest of the participants expressed the need for the mine to support tourism indirectly by protecting the environment of Levi. One notable cooperation offered by the mine is the green sustainable certification which creates division amongst tourism companies due to ethical considerations.

*Many commercial “green” certifications are often meaningless—they mostly serve marketing purposes and give a sense of virtue without significant environmental impact. No certificate can make jet fuel or large-scale operations truly green. I recognize my own limitations as well: even my business isn’t carbon neutral, as customers still travel by plane to reach us. The key is to do what is realistically possible while minimizing harm, rather than relying on symbolic gestures. (P3)*

Sustainable tourism developments are increasingly important found in the study of Song & Fong, (2021). The green sustainable certificate was critiqued amongst participants because acquiring the certificate is very lengthy process and costs a lot of money annually. All the participants expressed that they are taking the proper sustainable actions although they do not have the green sustainability certificate. Only few participate had applied for the certificate and explained that to be able to market their companies to international companies, the Visit Finland organization is requiring green sustainable certificates from those tourism companies. There were few voices that expressed that sustainable green certification is valuable and part of successful tourism operations, showing their responsible actions and company values to tourists.

*Our tourism company acts according to certifications and standards continuously. Multiple certifications have been applied for, depending on the area – whether it’s our snowmobile activities, animal experiences, or accommodation units – all operations are always aligned with the relevant certifications and their values. (P7)*

The post mine practices were considered by the participants, stating that it is essential that the mining company takes responsibility for all environmental impacts, including waste ponds, mine pits, and even after operations cease. Tree planting and natural regrowth should take place after the mine, allowing the landscape and vegetation to recover. Mine site restoration and rehabilitation are absolutely the responsibility of the company and must be closely monitored. The findings are comparable with research of (Kivinen et al., 2018) which highlights that if the mine or Levi ski Resort is expanding its area, there could be real negative consequences to the tourism industry. Therefore, the impact of mine needs to be assessed also in the future. Further, because the mine can create environmental damage after the mine has ended its operations, for participants, it is essential to identify and map stakeholder values and thoughts before post-mine phase

*From what I understand about the company, they have mines in Canada and elsewhere, so it's not the first time they've done a project and then moved on. Surely they have plans for this, and to maintain their image, they definitely have a Plan B, but also a Plan A, so that when the operation ends, the area doesn't just end up as an empty pit with skeletons left behind. Even if the activity ceases, hopefully life will return to the area. Will it be left empty, or will something else be built there? Only time will tell. I haven't really studied mining legislation, so I'm not sure what exactly is legally required to be done there. (P8)*

Certainly, the area must be inspected, but it should be the mine's responsibility to maintain it. The government will probably set the rules for what needs to be done, and inspections must follow, but ultimately, it's the mine's responsibility. The nature rehabilitation is not cheap so it cannot be the responsibility of the municipality, the mine needs to be responsibility. It's essential to have a proper decommissioning plan, ensuring sustainable development and considering how the area could be used after mining operations stop. Such situations would

need larger-scale evaluation to considering landscaping, possible further utilization, or tourism potential of the area once mining ceases. Practically, there's a huge underground area with significant infrastructure.

According to Cameron, (2000), tourism industry can have resistance toward the mine in terms of acceptance because the mining sector can affect tourism to lose resources needed for tourism, such as the nature. The mine pit could potentially be repurposed for tourism or other uses, but future decisions may be in the hands of others when operations end. The company is responsible for managing the aftermath – the environmental damage cannot be left to the local community or Finnish authorities. Locals must be involved in decisions about future use. Over time, the area will recover naturally, with new forests growing, but it must be non-toxic. Any chemical contamination must be removed and nothing harmful can remain. After the mine ends, it can still cause negative impacts on the nature such as degreasing quality of ground and surface water, the mine needs to make sure that these impacts are not reaching tourism industry or the community.

### **5.3 Kittilä Mine's Sustainability Narratives**

This theme captures aspects regarding social license to operate, including arguments toward the mine's claims of sustainability, community benefits, trust and cooperation with tourism. Stakeholder theory is applied to understand the impacts and benefits from the Kittilä mine. The normative aspect is central to the stakeholder theory as it emphasizes the ethics and guideline that the company is structured to act by. It means that company acts through the morals and aims to do the correct decisions based on those company values (Byrd, 2007). The main principle of stakeholder theory is that key stakeholders must receive benefits. In the research however, it was clearly communicated by many participants that tourism does not need to directly benefit from mining. They emphasized the need for responsible environmental actions which would benefit tourism industry in Levi indirectly.

*I don't think the mine needs to support tourism per se, but it should invest in preserving nature and cultural heritage, just like tourism does. This is a very complex issue, but generally, support comes through financial contributions to local projects and initiatives. After all, the mine exists to*

*generate profit, and part of that should flow back into the community, both via taxes and other contributions relative to the profits distributed to owners. (P2)*

Although SLO implicates that it was established primarily for the benefit of the local community, Suopajärvi et al., (2023) & Parsons et al., (2014) argue that the business risks of social resistance from the public toward the mining was the main reason to introducing SLO, to ensure continuity of operations. The importance of CSR strategies (Corporate Social Responsibility) in starting stable community centered SLO, which allows businesses greater access to vital incomes for improving their competitive advantages (Williams et al., 2007). In this research, this is a notable consideration as the mine is actively trying to support tourism industry by sponsoring suitable green certificates and some tourism companies have felt pressured by the mine to get sustainability accreditation.

The tourism companies that the mine has reach out to, are already green and sustainable, even in their fundamental principles. Because of already being sustainable, the tourism companies might not feel the need for the accreditation process. Many of the tourism companies explained that the Kittilä mine is the one that provides stipends for the tourism companies that apply for the green accreditation. Since the certificate is very costly, it might be the way for the Kittilä mine to show support and good practices of SLO toward tourism industry. However, not all participants are pleased with this idea of direct monetary support from the gold mine as they feel that it is purely for the benefit of the gold mine not tourism in particular.

*My impression is that they surround themselves with green companies so that they get support. Those green companies won't say anything and criticize them because the gold mine has been generous enough for them to pay for accreditation. That's my impression and that's why I deliberately did not agree to it I openly. I disagreed with them in a public forum over that one. Like I said, look, I can't justify having a green accreditation system paid for me on behalf of the gold mine for their use (P1).*

The support for certificate from Kittilä mine can be perceived as a trick and is an illusion of support, when in reality Kittilä mine motive for this could be that tourism companies would be more supportive of the gold mine and also identify of them positive in terms of environment. Reason why other companies trust the motives of Kittilä mine could be because they trust the Finnish government. This could mean that although the municipality was distributing the money, the money was a donation from the mining company for the municipality to distribute it. The mine is using that idea that the Finnish communities really trust their government and trust an extension of that. These actions are perceived often as greenwashing and create polarization among tourism companies. Many tourism companies think that providing tourism companies for sustainable accreditation is wrong, affecting the trust and acceptance of the tourism companies of Levi. However, some of the participants expressed that the sponsoring of the green certificate was a good benefit received from the mine, if done correctly.

*Sure, you could say that they support it, and in itself that's a good thing. It's better than nothing. But it has to be concrete—it shouldn't just be a way to ride on others' work. Others do the work to get the certifications and prove they're green, and the company shouldn't be able to buy a small contribution and claim the credit for itself. (P5)*

Although it is suggested that the mine provides benefits to stakeholders, Kotialainen et al., (2022) argue that SLO is simply a way for mining companies to gain positive image through locals and media and it has no guarantee bringing real value to the stakeholders (Kotilainen et al., 2022). Although SLO implicates that it was established primarily for the benefit of the local community, business risks of social resistance from the public toward the mining was the main reason to introducing SLO, to ensure continuity of operations (Suopajärvi et al., 2023). To coexist, it is important to create atmosphere of mutual benefit and trust (Nunkoo, 2015). In this research, the benefits that mine is trying to provide to tourism are seen as a negative part of mining SLO toward tourism industry.

*I think they need to stay away from tourism. They need to focus on continuing their community washing because that's actually much more*

*meaningful, I think. Tourism, it doesn't matter. So it's, they're doing, they're being very strategic in the way that they're going about it by looking at grassroots. (P1)*

Because of the perceived greenwashing, tourism companies are hesitant to cooperate with Kittilä mine. It can be due to being connected to the mine as a real sustainable actor and losing that reputation because of the connection with mine. Tourism companies can have perception of the mine that Kittilä mine is only aiming to hide negative impact and occur as positive and green operator, therefore involve themselves in the green accreditation process of tourism companies. Although the mine is involved on many occasions in the community, many tourism companies question whether it's just superficial PR—polishing the company's image—or if there's any genuine concern behind it. Although some of the participants recognized green certificate sponsoring as greenwashing, few participants explained that for the small companies who need the certification to enhance their operations, it is very costly and time consuming, making it impossible to pursue.

*Paying a thousand of euros a year for a certificate? That's more about having one, but then there are millions of certificates out there with different criteria—how do you even value them? And they generate an enormous amount of work. Achieving that certificate is basically paperwork. It becomes very expensive for companies. And for a small entrepreneur like me, putting all that time into a single certificate is unfair—it's just too costly—especially when we're already doing things responsibly. (P8)*

Kittilä mine is also one of the owners of the Levi Life magazine which they're using as a positioning strategy. The magazine is half Finnish, and the other half is in English and it is delivered to every house in the municipality. To be able to advertise tourism companies in the magazine, contract needs to be signed and costs 2 500 thousand euro for 1/4 page, which is very expensive compared to local newspaper that cost 250 euro for 1/4 page. The cost of the advertisement restricts who can advertise in the magazine and creates resistance because of the

prices. Some of the participants were against the green sustainable certificate because they perceived it as a hypocrite action that is a way to charge more money from the visitors.

*There's no way that the consumer should have to pay extra just because someone is doing things responsibly. That should be a given. I don't see it in my company as a selling point, because we already do things responsibly—it comes through in everything, in every part of our process—but we don't advertise it as this is our sustainability effort. Instead, it's gradually embedded in how we operate, what we do, and why we do it. (P6)*

While SLO can be effective when practiced in the right way, the SLO can be lost due to ineffective practices and loss of trust of stakeholders (Heikkinen et al., 2016). This is relevant in this research as the trustworthiness of the mine is questioned by several tourism company entrepreneurs. The mine has both environmental and social responsibility in the community and some actions of Kittilä mine are not tolerated.

*For example, when the price of gold went up, people were let go from the mine because of the tax rise. The idea was that profits would be lower—but nonsense! The price of gold had risen so high that they were likely compensated many times over. I can't say exactly how much, but the sum lost under the mining law was almost certainly returned. So, the notion that the mine is genuinely trying to support the community or be beneficial is misleading. Mining, as an activity, is not sustainable, no matter how it's done. (P5)*

Even if it causes them financial loss, if it brings social or environmental benefits to the community, the decisions should be made ethically, sacrificing part of their own profit. Mining could theoretically operate in ways that benefit others, but it requires real commitment from the company and oversight from the municipality. It can't just be assumed that everything is fine because taxes are being paid. The operation itself must be ethical, and someone has to ensure it, including external supervision if needed.

As Kittilä cleans their funding through the municipality, it goes through kids as the mine is sharing stipends to kids in front of school yards annually. This might be how they're investing in other industries. General opinion is that mine need to do practices connected to the environment instead of to other industries that also take the natural environment and make money from it. These actions can blind community as the mine is very clever about it. The strategic positioning can be due to fact that Kittilä mine is Canadian company, a foreign company, who knows how to integrate to the local communities. When providing benefits such as building sports halls, sponsoring schools, no one complains when they get something in return.

*Yeah, it's all token. It's like, and it's presented like it's a gift. in front of the school, in front of all the other parents that are there for the report presentation. It's a marketing tool and it's a very ground roots marketing tool. (P1)*

From these actions of Kittilä mine, it can be understood that money and networks give influence on the mine. It is not a surprise that the mine wants to get into the community and implement effects. But the overall perception is that it is for pure business, far from actual nature conservation or environmental thinking. The mine might not be truly connected to tourism, even though they give the impression of sponsoring certifications. While some critique is present toward the sustainability and ethicality of the mine, some other participants see them as legit operations.

*From what I've seen, the company treats its workers well and is strongly involved in the community in Levi and Kittilä. From my perspective, this gives them a "social license" to operate, which wouldn't exist if the municipality wasn't also engaged. I can't see anything particularly negative about them. Some mines worldwide destroy nature and leave waste, but this one has only been operating*

*for a few years, and the municipality has set clear expectations about how the area should recover afterward. (P8)*

The perceptions of the participants are depending on how they view the mine with its actions. The perceptions are relying on the morality and own experiences attached to the mine. When negative impacts of the mine are not visible or heard, it is easy to perceive mines sustainable narratives as positive and benefitting toward tourism industry. On the other hand, if the negative impacts are visible and resistance loud in daily life or in business, the perception of mines' sustainable narratives and sponsoring of green certifications can feel offensive. The ones that are not at all connected to the mine or do not hear anything related to the mine can be easily manipulated by the good actions of the mine. If the mine is perceived as not sustainable and as something that is destroying the nature, why would tourism company be part of that. This could potentially ruin the reputation of sustainable local tourism company.

Further, the motivations behind the actions of Kittilä mine toward benefitting tourism industry can be perceived as an illusion and not real genuine benefit. This can be influenced by the fact that Kittilä mine is a huge international corporation with sufficient yearly revenue. If the company would be Finnish, it might be more trusted in the eyes of the community and tourism industry. Kittilä mine needs to evaluate its impacts toward different tourism companies and offer benefits to tourism companies that they value. It should be because the mine really cares about tourism industry as an important stakeholder and not because it benefits the mining company.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

This theses examined the current positive and negative impacts of social license to operate on tourism industry in Levi. The findings align with existing literature and extend the existing literature by showing that the relationship between tourism and mining is complex and is dependent on the context. The findings indicate conditional acceptance rather than straightforward support or disapproval.

In relation to R1, the findings confirm that the benefits of mining for the tourism sector are mainly indirect, also found in earlier research as a global phenomenon as global cases of mining and tourism coexisting show identical findings from Australia, China and Brazil (Moyle et al., 2018; McLennan et al., 2018) Tourism stakeholders in Levi acknowledged overall economic growth in the municipality, upgraded services and infrastructure as main indirect positive benefits from the Kittilä mine. However, cooperation between mine and tourism was insignificant and most participants did not want to associate with the Kittilä mine. This finding reflects criticism of SLO suggesting that it may be applied for reputational reasons rather than as a genuine tool for creating value (Kotilainen et al., 2022). Further, the findings agree with this as it found that indirect benefits from the mine such as benefits to the community can influence acceptance in positive way.

Regarding R2, previous research suggested that negative impacts are usually related to environmental risks and its effects on nature-based tourism (Eerola, 2024b). In Levi, such negative impacts on nature were perceived as minimal because of the mine's low visibility and distance from Levi. This indicates that the possibility of a risk without actual impact is influencing attitudes. Although impacts to environment were perceived low at the moment in Levi, there were concerns among participants about pollution, environmental degradation and possibility of mining expanding its operations. This was also found from global research of Yunnan, China and Brazil's Cerrado (Huang et al., 2011; Marques & Cunha, 2022), where environmental degradation and loss of authenticity threaten tourism. This supports the claim that negative impacts are not only experienced but predicted for the future, which can create worry and uncertainty within tourism industry although the impacts are not visible at the moment (Wessman et al., 2014).

In terms of R3, the findings reveals that social acceptance of the Kittilä mine within tourism entrepreneurs is not simple but a mixture of ambivalent and conditional acceptance. This was

similar to previous research where closeness of the mine, visibility of the mine affected social acceptance (Similä & Jokinen, 2018). The “out of sight, out of mind” attitude found in this study shows how the spatial distance decreases the perceived negative impacts and causes approval for mine to coexist with tourism industry in the same area. However, at the same time the findings suggest that acceptance is irregular and is highly influenced by one’s personal circumstances such as connection to the mine through relatives who work at the mine. This supports the assumption that there is a distinction between individual and general acceptance (Kokko et al., 2014). This results in attitudes where the mine is tolerated because of its positive impacts but only partly accepted because of the negative impacts.

The findings of the theses demonstrate the different levels of participant morals relating nature-based tourism. This was found as many tourism entrepreneurs expressed that they do not want to visibly cooperate or engage with the mine due to risk to reputation and validity of their companies’ sustainable actions. Some actions of mine were perceived as not ethical and marketing tricks, such as sponsored green certificates. Similarly to Levi, tourism entrepreneurs in Australia question the mines legitimacy and recognize some of mines’ actions as solely reputational, not genuine. This adds critique to existing literature as acceptance does not necessarily implicate that the mine is trusted and legitimate, instead SLO can exist without its main components if there are significant benefits to broader community.

Overall, the findings of this research show that Levi tourism industry experiences more indirect benefits than direct benefits, forming an acceptance that relies on the low visibility and continued responsible actions from the mining operations. This supports the study’s aim by demonstrating that while Kittilä mine has the acceptance of the tourism industry in Levi, it does not have full support, and the level of acceptance is low and easily affected by mines’ actions. The findings are similar to existing literature as uneven distribution of benefits, risks to environment and imbalances in power, influence the tourism and mining relations but this study extends beyond existing literature by showing that coexistence in Levi is functioning but remains uncertain. These results highlight the need for continued research of how SLO can change from tolerance to stronger trust, transparency and equal creation of value. This will be important in the future in destinations such as Levi, where tourism industry is dependent on nature-based tourism and because even small changes to the visibility or impact of the mine can significantly affect the perceptions and social license to operate.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this master's theses was to discover today's state of social license to operate of Kittilä mine, as well as its possible positive and negative impacts towards tourism industry in Levi, Kittilä. The findings suggest that the mine is neither accepted nor rejected, but acceptance is conditional and ambivalent. Although participants underlined the positive impacts of the mine within community, the concerns for environmental degradation, risk of pollution and future expansion balanced the level of acceptance from reaching the approval level of acceptance. This shows that acceptance is not stable and requires continuous negotiation between benefits and risks.

Although half of the participants expressed conditional acceptance, the overall level of acceptance is still significant for sustaining mine's social license to operate. Direct benefit or cooperation between mine and tourism companies were very limited with only one participant indicating active cooperation with Kittilä mine. The key factor for mine to acquire social license from tourism industry was the perceived indirect economic benefits such as improved vitality in the region that the mine provided. The acceptance and SLO from tourism industry was influenced highly by the visibility of the mine, the distance of the mine and the fact that the mine does not show in one's everyday lives.

The study showed that mines' sustainable narratives, risk to environment and protection of nature-based tourism were the main reasons for conditional and ambivalent acceptance. Because tourism in Levi relies on the natural landscapes and quality of environment, any threat to these assets increased tension between tourism industry and Kittilä mine. Yet, the findings suggest that at present, the positive impacts of the mine outweigh the negative impacts, therefore it is essential for the mine to continue contributing to overall economic wellbeing and environmental responsibility.

This theses contributes to existing research by providing a local, tourism-centered standpoint on SLO in the context of mining. Multiple limitations of this research should be noted. The research consisted of only small sample of eight participants limiting the generalizability of the findings. Further, some participants were not permanent residents of Levi, and seasonal workers may not fully experience the year-round impacts of mine, potentially influencing their perceptions. The translation of interviews from Finnish into English can result in minor loss of

nuance. Future research would benefit from a larger and more diverse sample, as well as include aspects of temporality to better capture changes in perceptions over time.

The findings of this study provide practical implications. For mining companies, maintaining a social license to operate requires continuous engagement with local stakeholders, transparent communication, and environmental responsibility. For policymakers, the study underscores the need to balance economic development with environmental protection and to consider the uneven distribution of impacts across sectors. For tourism entrepreneurs, the results highlight the need for active measurement of mine's impacts toward tourism and communicating the concerns to mining executives. Understanding and strengthening the social license to operate for the mine will be essential for ensuring long-term sustainability. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that SLO is not stable, but a continuous process that must be actively maintained to balance economic, environmental, and social interests of entire community among tourism industry.

The global examples of SLO and coexistence highlight the gap in current SLO approaches, especially its limited capabilities to bring direct benefits in exchange of social license to operate. Further, future research is essential because mining cause degradation of nature and provides uneven benefits to stakeholders. Therefore, research for identifying SLO is essential to capture these dynamics, critically assess claims of trust and legitimacy, and support ecologically responsible and genuine relationships between tourism and mining industries.

Future research of SLO and its implications are needed as environmental concerns are increasing among stakeholders, which today, are mediated through NGO's, in social media and regulations (Harrison et al., 2019). The increase in visibility of the mines' negative impacts is shaping public's perceptions and social license to operate. However, meeting the needs of all key stakeholders is difficult due to different expectations, preferences and influence which creates uneven demand among stakeholders. This makes it difficult to choose whose needs the Kittilä mine should focus on. Therefore, further research is needed to know how these networks shape stakeholder impacts and how mines should act more transparently and beyond its own reputational concerns.

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## APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDE IN ENGLISH

### Interview Guide

1. Can you tell where you work at?
2. Can you tell what kind of services your company provides?
3. How long you have lived in Kittilä / Levi?
4. How familiar are you with Kittilä mine? What you know about it?
5. Do you feel that there has been improvement in facilities or infrastructure in recent years since the starting of the mine (2008/2010)?
6. In what ways you think the mine impacts the local tourism in positive and negative way? can you give examples?
7. Does the mine have your personal approval to operate / do you accept the mine and its operations? Why you approve or disapprove?
8. What actions should the mine take in the future to support tourism industry in Levi / Kittilä?
9. How important you think the nature-based tourism is in Levi and the landscape we currently have in Levi?
10. Is your company taking any sustainable practices / actions? If yes, what actions?
11. If Kittilä mine would expand its operations near Levi, how would you think that would affect the Levi tourism industry and its appeal to tourists?
12. What you think the mining operatives or the Kittilä municipality should do with the mining area after the mine ends its operation in 2034?

## APPENDIX 2. LETTER OF CONSENT SAMPLE



LAPIN YLIOPISTO  
UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND

### LETTER OF CONSENT



Dear participant,

My name is Jessica Karlén. I am Master student at University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland under the supervision of Senior Lecturer Linda Tallberg (email). You are invited to participate in my master thesis study entitled "Social License to Operate of Kittilä mine: Genuine Tourism Benefit or Corporate Illusion? The purpose of the study is to Research the impacts that Kittilä mine has on tourism industry in Levi. The result of the study will be published as part of my master thesis. The thesis is conducted as part of the Master's Degree Programme in Tourism, Culture and International Management (TourCIM).

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

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

Sincerely,

Jessica Karlén  
TourCIM Master student  
phone  
email

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

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Signature

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Date

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Print Name

### APPENDIX 3. PICTURE OF KITILÄ MINE



Photo by Mikko Jokinen, 2020