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THE ROLE OF ASIAN SEASONAL WORKERS IN SHAPING THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN ROVANIEMI, LAPLAND

Tourism, Culture and International Management

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the role of Asian seasonal workers in shaping the tourism industry in Rovaniemi, Lapland, focusing on how the imported labor from Asia contributes to the tourism experience and operational capacity in Rovaniemi. Furthermore, the influence of the presence of Asian seasonal workers in service delivery, as well as cultural representation will be analyzed. The study explores key concepts including reasons for labor migration, using the push-pull framework. Additionally, tourism mobilities, explaining how people and services flow across borders to support tourism, are going to be analyzed and positioned in Rovaniemi´s tourism industry. Moreover, the transcultural interactions in tourism are going to be included as frameworks in the study. Overall, the thesis is focusing on the research question of how Asian seasonal workers contribute to the operational capacity and service experience of the tourism industry in Rovaniemi, Lapland with a deeper look on their motivational factors and intentions during their stay and work, as well as the role of recruitment and staffing agencies. The thesis is based on a qualitative research method in form of semi-structured interviews with nine participants who are employers or are currently employed in the tourism industry in Rovaniemi. The outcome of the interviews shows how the tourism industry in Rovaniemi is dependent on Asian seasonal workers, but also the variety of motivations which bring seasonal workers to work in the destination. These outcomes and conclusions are of importance for the seasonal labor market sustaining Rovaniemi´s tourism, as tourism operators should recognize the strategic importance of this workforce and consider ethical long-term collaborations.

Keywords: Tourism, seasonal work, Labor migration, Asian seasonal workers, Rovaniemi

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AI *Artificial Intelligence*

DMO *Destination Management Organization*

LMR *Linear/Multi/Reactive*

PAMFI *Finnish Service Union United*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research phenomenon and aim of the research

The tourism numbers in Rovaniemi are steadily increasing after the drop during the COVID-19 crisis (Visitory Insights, 2024) and are already exceeding the pre-COVID numbers. Since Rovaniemi has a heavy seasonality in tourism, with its peak during winter, there is a higher need for seasonal workers, rather than permanently employed workers. When observing the numbers of first applications for residence permits for seasonal workers, it can be seen that same as the tourism numbers, the number of first applications has been increasing over the years (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.). In the time frame between 2018 and 2025, 54,82% of applicants are between 18 and 34 years old, marking the biggest group of applicants, closely followed by 44,85 % of the applicants between 35 and 64 years (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.). The majority of the applicants between 2018 and 2025 were male (62%) and originating from Ukraine with overall 4.508 applications (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.). But also, citizens from Eastern Asia are showing large numbers of first applications between 2018 and 2025, such as Viet Nam (1.535), Thailand (1.386), Cambodia (374), Philippines (214) and Nepal (199) (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.). In 2023, around 12.000 people were expected to be employed in the tourism industry in Lapland, out of which about half of the number have come to the region from abroad (Browne, 2023). Staffing agencies in Rovaniemi like Eezy are calling for international professionals, focusing their recruitments on Filipinos; the selection criteria include professional competence, as the right kind of work experience and English language skills, as well as a personality that is suitable for the Finnish work culture (Eezy, 2024).

Therefore, this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role that Asian seasonal migration plays in sustaining and developing the local tourism industry. The study will cover the phenomenon of growing tourism in Rovaniemi and the therefore growing demand for seasonal workers, as well as the importance of labor migration. Further, it will highlight challenges and implications in the seasonal work compared to local employees.

1.2 Literature review

This section reviews literature on seasonal labor in tourism, as well as migrant work specifically in Rovaniemi, Lapland. The aim is to contextualize the increasing employment of seasonal workers from Eastern Asia in Lapland and to identify gaps in the existing research. Covered literature includes seasonal and migrant labor in the growing tourism industry in Rovaniemi, as well as cross-cultural interactions in hospitality.

In 2024, 563 million Euro were spent by tourists in Rovaniemi, out of which 97% was spent during leisure trips (Visit Finland, n.d.-a). On average, the trips were booked four months in advance and the average length of stay lays at five days (Visit Finland, n.d.-a). The probability of return to Rovaniemi is higher for the winter season than the summer season, which once again proves the high winter seasonality in the tourism sector (Visit Finland, n.d.-a). Following the increase of European tourists, the Asian segment has been steadily growing after the COVID-19 crisis, with 263.055 visitors in 2024 (Visit Finland, n.d.-b). Considering different industries, such as accommodation, restaurants and program services, which are all part of the tourism sector, all industries have been growing several years before COVID-19 (Lapland – Above Ordinary, 2021).

This growth in tourism leads to a growth in employment in the tourism sector as well; in 2021, 4,9% of all the employees in Finland were employed in tourism (Ministry of foreign affairs and employment, n.d.). Still, the tourism employment in Finland overall has a mismatch problem, meaning that there are a lot of vacancies and demand for workers, but the supply, the unemployed workers, do not meet the expectations required for the employment position (Larja & Peltonen 2023, p.9). Furthermore, situations occur where no labor force is available for the occupation at all, which leads to a need for foreign employment (Larja & Peltonen 2023, p.9). Mostly in the food and beverage industry, including cooks and waiters, the need for additional labor force from abroad is necessary (Paksuniemi & Heikkilä, 2022, p. 58). In general, the existing literature lacks focus on where this additional labor force from abroad should be sourced from and how these could be potentially attracted and recruited to the respective destinations. Moreover, it is not clearly opened up which specific requirements and expectations the open positions hold, and how the employment mismatch from inside the country could be met.

The Lapland education center (REDU) is implementing a project to permanently attract foreign seasonal workers, in order to meet the demand for skilled labor in the region (Elbers, 2025). This process should happen in collaboration with Lapland´s tourism employers, supporting the workers´ social integration and the equipment with necessary skills to succeed in the local tourism industry (Elbers, 2025). The approach includes the growing number of Asian seasonal workers, who are being actively recruited by agencies. In the tourism and hospitality industry, frontline service workers fulfil a role beyond traditional customer service – they become cultural mediators, who build bridges between the tourists´ cultural backgrounds and the host destinations culture (Yu, et al., 2004, p.7).

In the context of tourism work, as well as cross-cultural service interactions, the topic of emotional labor is relevant to the study as well. The concept of emotional labor was first introduced in 1983 by the sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild in her work "The Managed Heart". Hochschild defined emotional labor as the process by which workers manage their emotions to fulfill the emotional requirements of a job, by surface acting and deep acting (Hochschild, 2012, p. 51). Surface acting describes how people try to change their outwards appearance by controlled body language (Hochschild, 2012, p. 51). Deep acting displays the natural results of a real feeling that has been self-induced, with emotions that are expressed spontaneously (Hochschild, 2012, p. 51). Especially in service-oriented sectors, such as the tourism and hospitality industry, emotional labor is an essential part of the job, as workers are expected to appear friendly and welcoming, even under stress or personal discomfort. Hochschild defines the term "emotional labor" as the "management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*" (2012, p. 40).

Tourism, especially in the hospitality and experience sector, demands a high level of emotional engagement; when looking into the winter tourism in Rovaniemi, this can be reflected on hotels, guided tours or running Christmas experiences. The workers are expected to welcome the guests with enthusiasm, respond positively to different kinds of demands, as well as handling complaints diplomatically, while maintaining the friendly surface even in stressful situations. Xu et al. (2020) confirm that emotional labor within the tourism and hospitality industry is heavily influenced by factors such as personality traits, emotional intelligence and perceived social support (p. 24). While surface acting can experience emotional exhaustion and in long-term lead to job dissatisfaction, deep acting can have a positive effect on the service

performance and customer-oriented behavior (Xu, et al., 2020, p. 22). Overall, especially the frontline service roles in tourism demand a high level of emotional regulation, due to the high amount of customer interactions and service expectations. These findings can be reflected in migrating tourism workers, who have to manage cross-cultural misunderstandings and eventually must respond to racialized customer expectations by suppressing personal emotions conforming to local service norms. Furthermore, after changing their cultural and social environments, people need the local language, in order to integrate and understand the way of life (Žigo, et al., 2017, p. 160).

The Finnish Immigration Service provides numbers and statistics of the first applications for a residence permit, which are necessary for seasonal work (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.). Still, also the data by the Finnish Immigration Service does not show specific data on seasonal employment in Rovaniemi, Lapland but also overall Finland; It is unclear where seasonal workers from abroad originate from and how large the number is (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.). Further, the provided numbers only reach back to 2018 and compromise seasonal workers from the tourism industry, as well as seasonal workers in agriculture. This makes it harder to differentiate how many first applicants belong to the tourism industry and clarify their demographics.

Furthermore, previous publications by Larja & Peltonen (2023) and Paksuniemi & Heikkilä on the topic of seasonal workers in the hospitality industry do not specifically explore the role of Asian seasonal workers in Rovaniemi, as well as their impact on operations, and the visitor experience. Ziemniewska´s study about the employee Well-being in Tourism Seasonal Work in Finnish Lapland (2024) includes semi-structured interviews with seasonal tourism workers in Lapland, such as guides and office staff, which reflect on wellbeing, working conditions and seasonal labor realities. A report from 2019 by the Finnish Service Union United (PAMFI) shows the narrative and insights from a safari guide working in Rovaniemi for the winter season. Still, there is a lack of published direct interviews with workers from the industry, regardless of the origin, which leads to a gap in insights into the work of seasonal workers and their working conditions. Recent insights into the working conditions have been given by Auvinen et al. (2026), who published an article on how foreign seasonal workers are being treated “inhumanely” and offered precarious working conditions. Also, Lapin Kansa (2026) added to the topic, pointing out the advantage of taking of seasonal workers. As per the article,

27 percent of seasonal workers have been experiencing signs of advantage taking at work (Lapin Kansa, 2026).

The aim of this thesis is to explore the motivations, roles and experiences of Eastern Asian seasonal workers in Rovaniemi´s tourism industry. The Eastern Asian segment has been chosen for this study, as it is showing the highest increase in migration numbers to Finland for seasonal work (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.). In this context, a particular focus will be put on how they contribute to the operational capacity and cross-cultural service interactions. The study addresses the research gap of origins, intentions and workplace experiences of foreign seasonal workers, in this case Eastern Asian, in Lapland. By generating insights into workers´ migration motivations, duration intentions and interactions with staffing agencies and employers, this thesis supports the long-term workforce planning in the region and an understanding of seasonal labor reliance.

1.3 Theoretical framework

In the following, the theoretical perspectives for this study are outlined. It provides the basis for understanding how labor migration from Asia contributes to the operational capacity of Rovaniemi´s tourism industry and how these seasonal workers influence the industry's future development. The theoretical framework adopts the labor migration theory and opens up on cross-cultural hospitality norms.

Everett Lee introduced in his paper "A Theory of Migration" in 1966 first the idea of "positive" and "negative" factors of a destination, which shape migration decisions; nowadays these are called "push" (negative) and "pull" (positive) factors. It must be differentiated between the area of origin and the area of destination, as well as between people who live in an area and people who migrate to an area (Lee, 1966, p. 50). In short, these factors identify the structural conditions that drive individuals to leave their home countries (push factors) and the conditions that attract them to specific destinations (pull factors). The migration of workers is never based on completely rational decisions and not only on push-pull dynamics, but also by "intervening obstacles", such as distance, regulations, costs or recruitment systems (Lee, 1966, pp. 51-52).

The economic instability and vulnerability for global shocks, makes the eastern Asian countries leads to an increase of labor migration to other countries outside of Asia (OECD, 2025, p. 90-91). Primary concern of labor migration is the overdependence on remittances, which are flowing into private investments (OECD, 2025, p. 90). With over 2 million workers every year (pre-pandemic), the Philippines is one of the major source countries of international migrants, sending workers mostly to high-income countries in Europe and North America (OECD, 2025, p. 91). Remittances, which are mainly transferred to migrants´ families home countries, support the daily consumption and, to some extent, finance investments in real estate and property (OECD, 2025, p. 91). The labor export dependence of the Asian countries, as well as low wages and unstable labor markets present the push-factors, which lead to a labor migration, partially also to Rovaniemi, Lapland.

In rural, as well as urban areas, Finland is facing shortages in labor, especially in the social services and hospitality sector; reasons for that are the overall aging population in Finland, increasing numbers of self-employment and employment itself undergoing a process of transformation (Vihinen, 2024). Half of the seasonal workers in Finland are working in the hospitality sector, especially in Lapland (Vihinen, 2024). Therefore, international recruitment is proposed as a way of targeting the shortages, as well as the cooperation between rural enterprises to improve the attractiveness of the area (Vihinen, 2024). The insufficient local labor supply, high demand of workers in hospitality and the dependence on temporary and foreign workers are pull-factors which lead to an increased labor migration from abroad.

Tourism in Rovaniemi is characterized by a strong seasonality, where the tourism demand peaks during a specific time of the year – in this case in winter (Visit Finland, n.d.-b). According to the tourism numbers, the winter season starts in November and lasts until March, with the peak month in December (Visit Finland, n.d.-b). The seasonality creates a demand for short-term labor, in order to maintain the service capacity, which leads to the recruitment of additional workers from abroad, as the local labor supply is insufficient. Demographic, globalization and economic factors in Europe lead hotel operators to hire new employees from less developed and transition economy countries (Baum, et al., 2007, p. 230). Approximately 60% of all workers in Lapland were employed seasonally, meaning their contracts lasted only for short-term (Paksuniemi & Heikkilä, 2022, p. 34).

Those temporary workers are essential for the operational sustainability of the industry, demanded for different services in hotels, restaurants, guiding and activity programs in Christmas and Arctic experiences. Most of the seasonal workers fill the positions of waiters, cooks, front desk staff, housekeepers and maintenance staff, less filled positions are in guiding or equipment rental (Paksuniemi & Heikkilä, 2022, p. 50). When local residents cannot fill the required goals, or do not meet the required expectations, employers turn towards international recruitment (Paksuniemi & Heikkilä, 2022, p. 58). Seasonal employment can be understood as an economic strategy and a social phenomenon; The salaries of seasonal workers are related to changes in tourism demands, while seasonal workers are mainly young people, not looking for a permanent employment, wanting to work flexible in their free time (Radlińska, & Gardziejewska, 2022, p. 2).

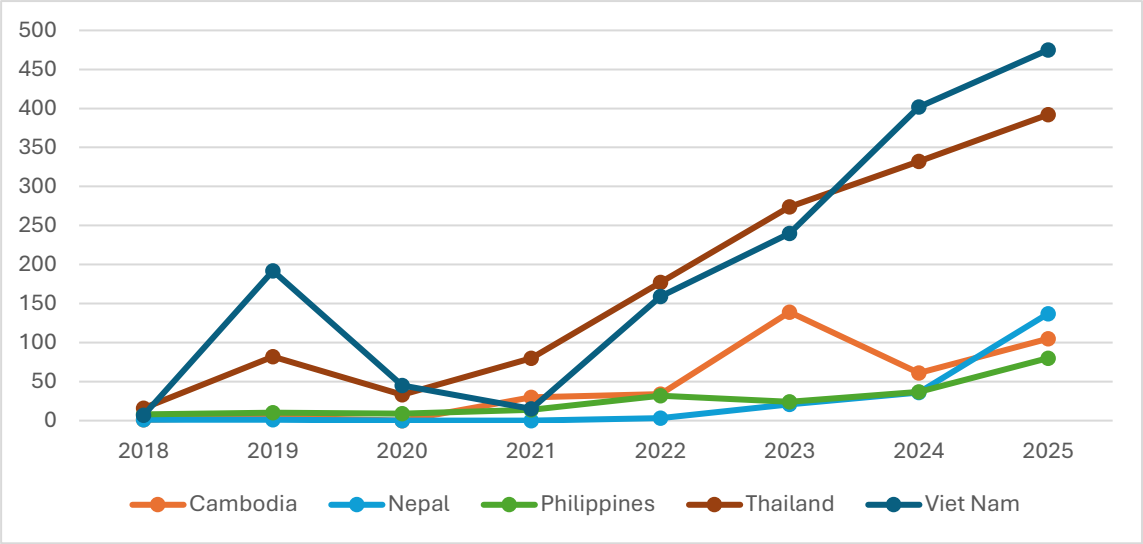

Figure 1: First residence permit applications for seasonal work per citizenship.
Source: Finnish Immigration Service (n.d.)

Figure 1 shows the development of the first residence permit applications which are needed for seasonal work from 2018 until 2025. The figure covers the applications from Cambodia, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam, which present the highest numbers in the Eastern Asian region. Even though the numbers do not show the percentage of people who are specifically employed in tourism, they show that the number of applications has been rising throughout the years, except for the drop during the Covid-19 pandemic. This shows that Eastern Asian seasonal workers enter the labor market with the transnational labor flow, proving how tourism economies depend on temporary, flexible and culturally adaptable workforces.

Overall, it can be summarized that the temporal labor migration from Asian countries to Rovaniemi can involve different intentions. These include the intention of gaining income quickly, in order to support the families that were left behind in the home countries with the plan of returning seasonally for several years. Furthermore, the motivation to work in Lapland can be to build a steppingstone for a transition from seasonal to permanent employment which could lead to a longer-term residence in Finland or the EU in general. These motivations are a part of the decision-making process behind the short-term labor and shape how seasonal workers participate in the local economy.

In multicultural destinations like Rovaniemi, intercultural interactions occur in service encounters, where the workers often act as cultural intermediaries. International tourism and cross-cultural communication become the basis for an exchange of different values and experiences (Azarova, et al., 2020, p. 1380). Therefore, Eastern Asian workers might be required to perform the "Finnish hospitality" while still remaining in their friendly and welcoming in their own way.

Tourism and hospitality work is mostly shaped by cultural expectations met by interactions between customers and workers. When Asian workers interact with tourists, as well as Finnish co-workers, they bring culturally embedded service norms that occasionally differ from the Finnish context (Baum et al., 2007, p. 232). Cultures can be categorized in different ways, such as with Geert Hofstede´s dimension model of power distance, collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, & Minkov, 2011, p. 12). Edward T. Hall classified groups as monochronic and polychronic, high or low context and past or future oriented (Kittler, et al., 2011, p. 65). For this thesis the Lewis-model and the cross-cultural approach by Richard D. Lewis will be applied, as it directly reflects on cultural differences in working life (Lewis, 2018, p. 14).

The Eastern Asian culture is described as reactive, meaning people area rather listeners than speakers, almost introverted (Lewis, 2018, p. 29). Moreover, it is a people-oriented culture, where people -even if quietly- care for another (Lewis, 2018, p. 28). In the work environment, tasks are delegated to reliable people and success is based on networks (Lewis, 2018, p. 28). Lewis (2018) describes the Finnish culture and Finnish people as fiercely independent and hardworking (pp. 314-315). As per Lewis (2018), Finnish people are uneasy with foreigners and only learn a foreign language if it is inevitable (pp. 314-315). Still, the Finnish business

climate is described as informal, with honest, reliable and generally loyal employees (Lewis, 2018, p. 313).

In the tourism industry in Rovaniemi Asian seasonal workers, next to their employed position, often serve as cultural mediators, especially with Asian tourists, by aligning service expectations between Finnish businesses and foreign guests. This reflects the broader role of tourism workers in interpreting and negotiating meanings between visitors and host environments (Feldman & Skinner, 2018, p. 6). Further, they assist with communication and linguistic challenged and interpret cultural nuances, which are central elements of cultural mediation in tourism contexts (Yu et al., 2004, p. 85). This mediating work does not only enhance the service quality but also contributes to the diversification and global appeal of the tourism sector in Rovaniemi.

The concepts of seasonal labor and cross-cultural mediation create a framework for analyzing the role of Asian seasonal workers in Rovaniemi´s tourism and hospitality industry. They explain why Asian workers are recruited, emphasizing temporal factors, emotional labor examines how they perform their roles under demanding conditions while sustaining service quality and cross-cultural mediation opens up what cultural and communicative functions they fulfill. This framework presents Asian seasonal workers as active contributors to the operational, emotional and cultural capacity of Rovaniemi´s tourism industry. These workers help to maintain the service quality, develop an intercultural understanding and influence the future development of Lapland´s global tourism industry.

Based on the theoretical framework and its potential implications for the tourism industry in Rovaniemi, this study aims to provide an understanding of the role of Asian seasonal migration in sustaining and developing the Lappish tourism model. By exploring the intersection of labor motivation, recruitment and service delivery, the research seeks to highlight the strategic importance of these workers to the region´s global competitiveness. To achieve this aim, the study addresses the research question of how Asian seasonal workers contribute to the operational capacity and service experience of the tourism industry in Rovaniemi, Lapland. This research question is supported by the look into motivating factors for Asian seasonal workers to come to Lapland and their intended duration of stay. Further, this study shows up the role of staffing and recruitment agencies in mediating the employment of Asian seasonal workers.

1.4 Methodology

This study includes a qualitative research design to explore how Asian seasonal workers contribute to the operational and cultural capacity of Rovaniemi´s tourism and hospitality industry. Qualitative approaches to study social life have become increasingly valued and are considered more as method of research (Philimore & Goodson, 2004, p. 22). Next to quantitative and statistical research, qualitative research helps to understand the human dimensions of society, which in tourism include its social and cultural implications (Philimore & Goodson, 2004, p. 23). In this research case, quantitative data may reveal the numbers of foreign employees or economic contributions, but qualitative data can give an insight into emotional, relational and cultural dimensions of seasonal tourism work. The research follows an interpretivist paradigm, which considers the complexity of the social world and assumes that reality is socially constructed though human experience and interaction (Philimore & Goodson, 2004, p. 54).

Before getting into the deeper analysis of the collected material, it is going to be analyzed using a thematic analysis, following the approach developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). A thematic analysis is a flexible method for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns and meanings (themes) within the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 79-80). It suits the study, as it allows a systematic, but still interpretive engagement with the participants´ accounts, while remaining sensitive to its context and nuance. For this, an inductive, data-driven approach is followed, which means that the themes are developed from the data rather than imposed from pre-existing theoretical frameworks. It aligns with the exploratory nature of the study, which aims to understand how participants of the interviews themselves frame their personal experiences. At the same time, the analysis is informed by a constructionist perspective; It is acknowledging that meanings are not only expressed in interviews but are constructed through language and interaction (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81).

The aim of the research is to generate insights into the seasonal tourism work and the influence of Asian seasonal workers on the tourism industry in Rovaniemi. The conducted semi-structured interviews enable the participants to express their experiences in their own words while ensuring that the key theoretical themes (seasonal labor, emotional labor, cross-cultural

mediation) are addressed. Qualitative interviews within the tourism field function as co-created conversations, where knowledge emerges collaboratively between researcher and participant, and encourages both parties to consider topics and viewpoints they have not before (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p. 254). The document analysis contributes to the qualitative research by providing contextual data on seasonal employment and labor migration. These include statistical reports from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and Finnish Immigration Service, as well as analyzed material by recruitment agencies in Lapland.

Primary data is collected through semi-structured interviews with nine participants, each of whom has a direct experience as an Asian seasonal worker in Rovaniemi´s tourism industry or is employing Asian seasonal workers. Participants are selected using purposive sampling, which ensures that each can provide relevant insights into the study´s themes. The inclusion criteria for the participants are the following:

- As seasonal employed worker: Origin from an Asian country (e.g. Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Nepal, Cambodia, Taiwan)
- Experience working in Lapland´s tourism sector for at least one season
- Employment in service-oriented roles (e.g. hotels, restaurant, guiding)
- Voluntary participation and informed consent

In order to ensure multiple perspectives, not only employees but also employers and recruitment agency representatives are also interviewed. Overall, three company representatives and six seasonally employed workers have been interviewed for the research. The inclusion criteria for the participants from the employer participants are the following:

- Managing position in a company employing seasonal workers from Asian countries (e.g. Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Nepal, Cambodia, Taiwan)
- Company in the tourism and hospitality industry in Rovaniemi, Lapland (e.g. hotels, restaurant, tours)
- Direct touching points in the employment and work with Asian seasonal workers
- Voluntary participation and informed consent

This multi-stakeholder approach reflects that understanding tourism requires examining intersecting voices from within the industry – workers, employers and institutions (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p. 22). The interview guide covers the following five main themes:

- Motivation and background for working in Lapland
- Seasonal work experiences and job characteristics
- Cultural mediation and communication with tourists and colleagues
- Perceived contribution to tourism operations and visitor satisfaction
- Emotional management and wellbeing

The data is analyzed and interpreted through the theoretical lenses of seasonal labor, cross-cultural mediation and emotional labor. Throughout the process, as opened up before, reflexivity, a central point for tourism research ensures that the researcher recognizes how their own positionality, cultural background and expectations may influence the interpretation.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters, where each chapter builds up on the previous chapters, to explore the role of Asian seasonal workers in shaping the tourism industry in Rovaniemi, Lapland.

The first chapter introduces the thesis and gives an overview of the topic, previous literature, the theoretical framework and the methodology used for the research. Chapter 2 covers the tourism and hospitality industry, as well as the labor shortage and mismatch in the industry, first on a global level followed by the focus on Rovaniemi, Lapland. Afterwards, the importance of seasonal workers is going to be highlighted. The third chapter opens up on the topic of cross-cultural interactions, supported by Lewis´ culture types model. In context, the linear-active and reactive culture groups are going to be analyzed deeper. The findings are then compared to each other, similarities and differences are pointed out and then mirrored on the tourism industry with all of its consequences. In chapter 4, the methodology in practice is explained with the research process, the interviews and the analysis of the content with the help of Braun & Clarkes reflexive approach to a thematic analysis. This is followed by chapter 5, which presents the findings of the content analysis, divided into the motivations of seasonal workers, cultural differences in the hospitality industry, estimated duration of the stay, the role of staffing and

recruiting agencies and the contribution to the tourism industry. Chapter 6 adds the findings into the discussion with the previous research. Chapter 7 summarizes the whole thesis, as well as its contribution to the previous research. Lastly, chapter 8 presents the limitations of the research and opens up on a potential extension of the research and future outlooks.

2. LABOR MIGRATION AND THE GLOBALIZED TOURISM INDUSTRY

2.1 Labor shortage in the global industry

Throughout the world, the tourism sector offers a variety of different opportunities for working lives across diverse sub-sectors at different levels (Baum, 2007, p. 1388). The international tourism und hospitality industry is characterized by its labor-intensive nature, high workforce mobility and structural reliance on flexible employment practices. One of the most particular features of the sector is its dependence on migrant or imported labor, especially in developed economies. This reliance is closely tied to broader industry characteristics, including a high employee turnover, low job satisfaction and the perception of hospitality work as low-skilled and temporary.

One main issue within the global hospitality sector is its high labor turnover, which reflects the work environment within tourism, combined with changing demographic structures and increased educational opportunities in developed countries (Baum, 2007, p. 1389). This instability is linked to poor working conditions, unsociable hours, as well as comparatively low wages which are factors discouraging long-term commitment from domestic workers (Duncan, et al., 2013, p. 2). The mentioned image is one of the reasons, why many employees do not take the tourism and hospitality industry as a “career choice” but rather as an opportunity to bridge the gap while looking for “something better” (Duncan, et al., 2013, p. 2). Additionally, the hospitality industry holds perceptions of consisting only “low-skilled” jobs and a negative social stigma (Duncan, et al., 2013, p. 2). The branding and image of the labor play a role in the choice of work, rather than its technical or professional status; “Cool” work is associated with style, fashion and consumer branding, such as bars, night clubs, boutique hotels and creative venues (Baum, 2007, p. 1396). Meanwhile, “uncool” work includes the work in the cleaning or popular service sector. (Baum, 2007, p. 1396). Therefore, employers turn to migrant labor, in

order to fill the labor shortages, especially in roles that are difficult to staff locally (Duncan, et al., 2013, p. 3).

The perception of hospitality work as “low-skilled” exacerbates this dynamic even further; Even though the sector requires a high level of interpersonal competencies, the sector is often associated with minimal formal qualifications and career progression opportunities (Deery, 2002; Deery & Shaw, 1999, as cited in Duncan et al., 2013, p.2). This perception reduces its attractiveness among local workers in developed countries even further, reinforcing the hospitality industry´s dependence on foreign labor more. In advanced economies, hospitality jobs are rarely viewed as long-term careers, unless they involve managerial positions (Baum, 2008, p. 83). Instead, they are frequently seen as temporary employment (Duncan, et al., 2013, p. 2), a perception that contributes to labor shortages and necessitates the importation of workers.

Migrant workers play a key role in sustaining the global tourism industry, particularly in destinations experiencing rapid tourism growth (Baum, 2007, pp. 1389-1390). These workers are often employed in low-paid, low-status positions, including housekeeping, food service and basic customer-facing roles (Baum, 2007, p. 1396). While such jobs are labeled as low-skilled, they do require a high level of “soft skills”, including emotional intelligence, communication abilities and the capacity to create a welcoming atmosphere (Warhust & Nickson, 2007, pp. 113-114). These skills are not only essential for delivering quality service but are missed out in terms of training, compensation and recognition (Warhust & Nickson, 2007, pp. 110-114).

The reliance on migrant labor is also linked to the precarious nature of employment within the tourism sector. Hospitality work is described as unstable, often characterized by insecure contracts, irregular working hours and limited worker protections (Robinson et al., 2019, pp. 1009-1011). Within this system, migrant workers are particularly vulnerable, as their employment is frequently tied to temporary visas or arrangements, increasing their exposure to exploitation. These precarious employment conditions can have massive consequences for the workers, including financial instability and negative impacts on physical and mental well-being (Robinson et al., 2019, pp. 1009-1011).

Moreover, the global tourism model has been criticized for reinforcing social and economic inequalities. Robinson et al. (2019, pp. 1009-1011) argue that the industry´s current structure

prioritizes profit and flexibility over worker welfare, which disproportionately affects marginalized groups including migrants. Further, Robinson characterizes the hospitality industry as “modern day slavery”, often associated with tourism, whether in economically under-developed, developing or developed countries (2013, p.95). Even though this description appears provocative, it highlights the extent to which vulnerable workers can be subjected to abusive labor practices. Migrant labor exploitation is a well-documented issue within the industry. Robinson et al. (pp. 1009-1011) highlight that the employment conditions in tourism affect migrant workers, who are more likely to experience insecure contracts, unstable income and limited access to protections (Robinson et al., 2019, pp. 1009-1011).

Next to the challenges, migrant workers remain indispensable for the functioning of the international tourism industry (Duncan, et al., 2013, p. 3). Their willingness to accept the demanding working conditions and their availability to fill labor gaps make them a critical component of the global workforce. Still, this reliance raises ethical and sustainability concerns; There is a growing need to reorient tourism development towards prioritizing the worker´s well-being by ensuring fair labor practices, as well as addressing systemic inequalities (Robinson et al., 2019, pp. 1009-1011).

2.2 Rovaniemi´s tourism industry

Tourism plays a central role in the economy and identity of Rovaniemi, which is also widely recognized as the administrative and tourism hub of Finnish Lapland. The city is located on the Arctic Circle and combined with the association as the “official hometown of Santa Claus”, it is one of Finland´s most significant international tourism destinations, especially for winter tourism (Visit Rovaniemi, n.d.). The natural environment, including phenomena such as the Northern Lights and the Midnight Sun, forms a key part of its attractiveness and contributes to its global tourism appeal (Visit Rovaniemi, n.d.).

Tourism in Rovaniemi has experiences a strong and continuous growth over the past decades (Visitory, 2024); Even though in 2024, 563 million Euro were spent by tourists in Rovaniemi (Visit Finland, n.d.-a), according to the local destination management organization (DMO) Visit Rovaniemi, the direct tourism revenue reached 360,9 million Euro, growing by 14,9 percent compared to the previous year (Business Rovaniemi, 2025). The city accounts for

approximately one -third of all tourism revenue in Finnish Lapland, highlighting its dominant role within the region (Visit Finland, n.d.-a). Furthermore, Rovaniemi attracts around 950000 visitors annually, out of which 73% are international travelers (Business Rovaniemi, 2024) which demonstrates the global reach of Rovaniemi´s tourism sector.

Rovaniemi has a strong international orientation, attracting visitors from all around the world, including long-distances like Asia, Australia or America (Visit Finland, n.d.-a). This is supported by expanding flight connections and growing accessibility, which have significantly increased the number of foreign tourists in recent years (Finavia, 2025). In 2025, the Rovaniemi airport operated from and to 38 international airports, with the intention to expand the connections even further (Finavia, 2025). The emphasis on internationalization has transformed Rovaniemi into a "growing international tourism city", with tourism as key driver of economic development and regional competitiveness (Business Rovaniemi, 2024).

Another important feature of tourism in Rovaniemi is its highly seasonal nature, with peak demand occurring during the winter months. Particularly the Christmas season represents the busiest period, with tens of thousands of visitors arriving annually in December alone: 132800 in 2025, 112000 in 2024, 90200 in 2023 (Visitory, n.d.). While the seasonality creates opportunities for the local economy through the significant revenue generation during the peak periods (Visitory, n.d.), it also creates challenges with its fluctuations in employment. The DMO Visit highlights attractions in Rovaniemi, such as the Santa Claus Village and Christmas Magic, Midnight Sun season, Northern Lights, Inspiring local people, Arctic capital, Sustainability and Luxus in Lapland way (Visit Rovaniemi, n.d.). International tourists do in fact visit Rovaniemi and Lapland for reindeer, winter, northern lights, Santa Claus and Christmas activities (Lapin Kansa, 2020). As the tourism sector in Rovaniemi is characterized by a strong seasonality, the DMO is trying to shift the focus towards all-year-round tourism and the summer and autumn seasons (Visit Rovaniemi, n.d.).

The rapid growth of tourism has also increased the demand for labor, especially during the peak season, which results in the dependency on seasonal and often international workers to meet the labor demand (Lapland Above Ordinary, 2021). Seasonal employment is common in sectors such as accommodation, restaurants and tourism services, where workers are recruited for short periods to handle the increased tourist flows (Lapland Above Ordinary, 2021).

In addition to its economic benefits, the tourism development in Rovaniemi has raised concerns related to sustainability and environmental impacts. The expansion of tourism infrastructure, including accommodation and transport services, has increased pressure on natural environments and local communities (Rovaniemi City, 2006, p.6). Sustainable tourism development has therefore become a key priority; With strategies emphasizing responsible tourism practices and the need to balance economic growth with environmental and social considerations (Rovaniemi City, 2006, p.4)

2.2.1 Labor shortage and labor mismatch

The growth in tourism means that this sector is also becoming an important source of employment (Baum, 2007, p. 1396). Also, the tourism industry in Rovaniemi, as part of the broader Lapland region, is increasingly affected by labor shortages and labor market mismatches. These challenges are closely linked to the structural characteristics of the tourism sector, including seasonality, high turnover and the perceived low attractiveness of hospitality work (Duncan et al., 2013, p.5). Labor shortages in tourism are not merely a question of insufficient workforce supply but also reflect deeper mismatches between job requirements and the skills, expectations and availability of workers.

One of the primary drivers of labor shortages in the hospitality industry in Rovaniemi is the highly seasonal nature of its tourism demand. The hospitality industry is heavily influenced by seasonality (Robinson et al., 2019, pp. 1009), which leads to a short-term increase in labor demand during the winter season. The demand within the industry is particularly high within accommodation and food services, as well as tourism activities (Lapland Above Ordinary, 2021). This results in difficulties in recruiting sufficient staff for peak periods while maintaining stable employment throughout the year (Radlinska & Gardziejewska, 2022, p. 3). Consequently, tourism enterprises often rely on temporary and seasonal workers, which further contributes to workforce instability and recurring recruitment challenges (Radlinska & Gardziejewska, 2022, p. 3).

Labor mismatch in the tourism sector is also strongly connected to the nature of hospitality work itself. Even though the work is often labelled as low-skilled (Duncan, et al., 2013, p. 2), tourism jobs require a range of interpersonal and service-oriented competences, including

communication, emotional labor, and cultural mediation (Feldman & Skinner, 2018, p. 6). This creates a mismatch between the perceived skill level of the work and the actual competencies required, as employers often seek workers who can perform aesthetic and emotional labor that goes beyond formal qualifications (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007, pp. 110-114). Employers have difficulties to find workers who possess the necessary "soft skills", language abilities and customer service orientation, especially in the increasingly international tourism environment (Yu et al., 2004, p. 9).

Additionally, the attractiveness of tourism employment remains relatively low, especially among locals. Factors such as low wages, irregular working hours and limited career progression contribute to difficulties in recruiting and retaining workers (Baum, 2007, pp. 1387-1389). In rural and peripheral regions like Lapland, these challenges are further intensified by demographic factors, including population decline and ageing, which reduce the available local labor pool even more (Vihinen, 2024). This results in labor shortages of structural and regional nature.

To meet these shortages, the tourism industry in Rovaniemi increasingly relies on migrant labor and labor mobility. Seasonal migration, as well as commuting are common practices, with workers moving to Lapland for short-term employment during peak seasons (Paksuniemi & Heikkilä, 2022, p. 20). Migration theories, such as Lee´s push-pull framework, help to explain this phenomenon, where workers are attracted by employment opportunities while accepting less favorable working conditions (1966, p. 50). However, the reliance on migrant labor can also create additional mismatches, especially when worker´s skills, expectations or working conditions do not align with employer needs.

The recruitment of international workers is increasingly seen as a solution to labor shortages in Lapland. For example, initiatives aimed at attracting foreign professionals and improving workforce integration have been developed to respond to growing labor demands (Eezy, 2024). Similarly, training and education programs, such as the ones implemented by regional institutions, aim to enhance the skills of local and international workers to match the labor market needs better (Elbers, 2025). Even though these efforts are made, the challenge to ensure an effective matching between labor supply and demand remains.

The labor mismatch is also evident in the gap between educational outcomes and industry needs. Tourism education may not always match with the practical skills required in the particular workplace, which leads to difficulties for graduates entering the labor market (Hall, 2011, p. 45). Simultaneously, employers may prioritize experience and soft skills over formal qualifications, which is complicating the matching process even further (Baum, 2008, p.80). This contributes to the unfilled vacancies and underemployment within the sector.

Furthermore, the increasing internationalization of tourism in Rovaniemi has intensified the demand for multilingual and culturally competent workers. As tourists originate from diverse global markets, employees are expected to act as cultural intermediaries, enhancing the visitor experience through effective communication and cultural understanding (Yu et al., 2004, p. 9). The shortage of such specialized skills represents one major aspect of labor mismatch in the region.

Moreover, the reliance of migrant labor raises concerns regarding working conditions and potential exploitation. The exploitation of foreign workers in Lapland´s tourism sector has been described as an "open secret", pointing out issues such as unequal treatment and precarious employment conditions (Browne, 2023). These issues reflect also the concerns within the global tourism industry, where bad work conditions and labor insecurity are common (Robinson et al., 2019, p. 1010). Overall, the tourism and hospitality industry is a sector in which poor employment practices persist worldwide (Baum, 2007, p. 1396). These conditions which are paid more attention to by the media can reduce the attractiveness of the sector and exacerbate the labor shortages within the sector even further.

2.2.2 Foreign seasonal workers in Rovaniemi

Due to the highly seasonal nature of tourism in Lapland, local labor supply is insufficient to meet workforce needs, leading to a strong dependence on international labor mobility (Paksuniemi & Heikkilä, 2022, p. 17). Seasonal migration has therefore become a structural feature of the tourism labor market in the region. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on recruiting workers from outside Europe, particularly from Asian countries such as the Philippines. Recruitment processes targeting these regions have become increasingly organized, with companies facilitating international hiring through specialized agencies and

recruitment services (Bondata, 2025). These practices reflect broader global trends in labor migration, where workers from Asia are often drawn to service sector jobs abroad due to economic opportunities and wage differentials (OECD, 2025, p.45). The push-pull theory helps to explain this movement, as workers are attracted by employment opportunities (pull), while responding at the same time to limited perspectives in their home countries (push) (Lee, 1966, p. 50). Still, migration flows are not only shaped by push- and pull dynamics, but also by the work of intermediaries who structure opportunities, channel information and organize mobility within complex regulatory environments (Bastide & Yeoh, 2025, pp. 2-3).

International workers have become essential for the hospitality industry, filling positions in the housekeeping, food and beverage and guiding sector (Lapland Above Ordinary, 2021). In 2023, the overall highest employment rates in the Finnish tourism industry were in food and beverage services (74500), in passenger transport (34900), culture, sport and recreation service (18000), accommodation services (16600) and travel agencies (2600) (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, n.d.). Not only do these sectors require basic technical skills, but also cultural and interpersonal skills; In the increasingly international tourism environment, employees are expected to act as cultural mediators, facilitating interactions between tourists and the destination (Feldman & Skinner, 2018, p. 6). Workers from Asian backgrounds may also contribute valuable language skills and cultural knowledge, especially in serving the growing Asian tourist market (Yu et al., 2004, p. 9).

Even though the foreign seasonal labor force is of high importance for the hospitality industry, the workers face challenges related to working conditions and integration. Long working hours, dependency on employers and unequal treatment are factors adding to the “open secret” of the exploitation of foreign workers (Browne, 2023). These conditions are characteristics of precarious employment, which is common in tourism work (Ziemniewska, 2024, p. 28). Due to language barriers, limited knowledge of their rights and reliance on employers for housing and legal status, migrant workers may be even more vulnerable (Zigo et al., 2017, p. 155).

The increasing demand for international workers has also led to the development of initiatives aimed to improve recruitment and workforce integration. When applying for a seasonal work position in Rovaniemi, it can be noticed that agencies such as REDU, Eezy and Barona are playing an important role in recruitment. Recruitment firms and transnational employment agencies serve as a “middle-space” that connects sending and receiving labor markets, in this

case acting as space between seasonal workers and Finnish employers (Bastide & Yeoh, 2025, pp. 3-4). Eezy is emphasizing the need to attract international professionals, also from Asia, and address labor shortages through targeted recruitment strategies (Eezy, 2024). Educational and training programs aim to enhance the skills of foreign workers, supporting them to integrate into the labor market and improving their job matching (Elbers, 2025). Therefore, the agencies supporting the Asian seasonal workers in Rovaniemi can be seen as part of the overall migration infrastructure in Finland, making it possible for workers to reach Lapland through their recruitment pipelines.

Overall, foreign seasonal workers, particularly from Asian countries, are essential for the functioning of the hospitality industry. The rising numbers of applications for seasonal work overall in Finland show that the amount of eastern Asian seasonal workers is passing other international Visa applications (Figure 1). These workers help to address labor shortages, support service delivery and contribute to the internationalization of tourism. On the other hand, their employment is characterized by precarious working conditions and structural mismatches between labor supply and demand.

3. CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTIONS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

3.1 Lewis Model

The so-called Lewis Model is classifying cultures into different categories, helping to predict a culture´s behavior, avoiding giving possible offence and searching for unity between the cultures (Lewis, 2018, p. 23). An important role playing in the definition of a culture, are values and how those are implied through behavior within society (Lewis, 2018, p. 23). For this, the cultures model of Richard D. Lewis from the 4th edition “When Cultures Collide” (2018) is used. The model is meant to provide practical strategies to embrace differences and successfully work across diverse cultures. It aligns with the LMR (linear/multi/reactive) method, of testing, so that individuals can determine their own cultural profiles (Lewis, 2018, p. 34). The categorizations of cultural groups are straightforward, as well as proven comprehensible and user-friendly (Lewis, 2018, p. 34). Even though personality and context make people to hybrids to some extent, in majority of the cases the LMR assessment points towards a sympathetic

relationship with a particular cultural group (Lewis, 2018, p.34). At the same time, it has to be mentioned that while generalizing is a fair guide at the national level, stereotyping is dangerous (Lewis, 2018, p. 20). Richard D. Lewis provides a tool to get deeper into the culture of certain nationalities, still generalizing on national traits breaks down with individuals (Lewis, 2018, p. 20).

Figure 2 shows the color coding of the Lewis Model, classifying three different cultural groups: Multi-Active (red), Linear-Active (blue) and Reactive (yellow). Linear-Active culture groups are characterized by scheduling, organizing and pursuing action chains; They are the ones who plan and do one thing at time (Lewis, 2018, p.14). Multi-Active culture groups are lively, loquacious people, doing many things at once; They do not plan their priorities according to a time schedule, but according to the relative thrill or importance that each appointment brings with it (Lewis, 2018, p. 14). Reactive culture groups on the other hand are quiet listeners who react afterwards carefully to their interlocutors, while prioritizing courtesy and respect (Lewis, 2018, p. 14). In the following, the linear-active and reactive culture groups are going to be analyzed deeper, as the research includes people of Finnish culture (blue, Figure 2), as well as people of Taiwanese, Vietnamese and Philippines culture (yellow, Figure 2).

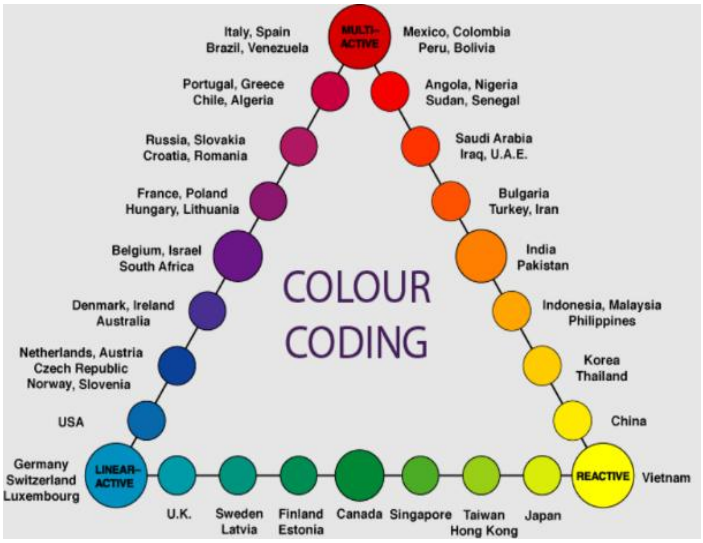

Figure 2: Cultural Types Model
Source: Cross Cultural (n.d.-a)

3.1.1 Linear-active vs. Reactive

The Lewis Model pictures the culture of the linear active family with a blue color (Figure 2), which is a cool color, being discreet but in control, denoting calm and factual planners. Linear active cultures are characterized by organizing everything to the tinies part, sticking to schedules and pursuing action chains, as well as doing one thing at the time, following a linear agenda (Lewis, 2018, p. 14). Linear-active cultures do not fear or avoid confrontation and like to move quickly forward, with a results-oriented working style (Cross Culture, n.d.-a). Speech is meant for information, while feelings are partially concealed and business and personal life are strictly separated (Figure 3). The most linear active nations are Germany, Switzerland and Luxembourg, next to the USA and the UK (Figure 2).

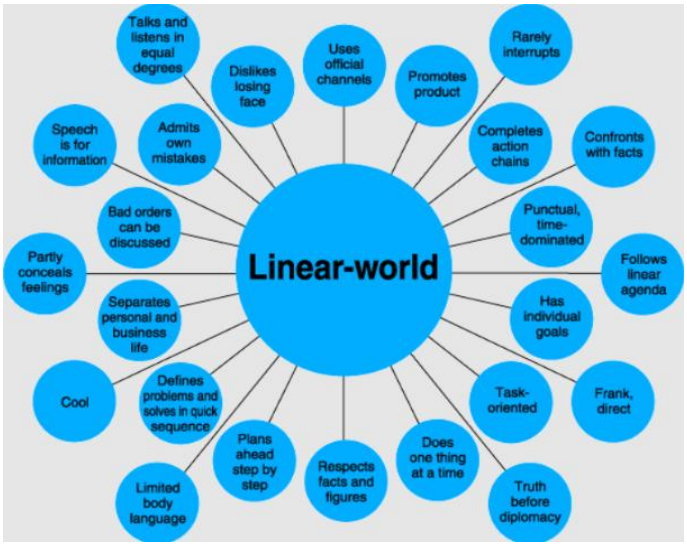

Figure 3: Linear-world
Source: Cross Culture (n.d.-a)

Meanwhile, the reactive, yellow color is indicating soothing harmony, sought by courteous, accommodating listeners (Cross Culture, n.d.-b). The characteristics of the reactive cultures include the priorization of curtesy and respect, listening quietly, and calmly to their interlocutors and reacting carefully to the other side´s proposal (Lewis, 2018, p. 14). Reactive cultures are characterized as introverts and by non-verbal communication, which is achieved by subtle body language (Cross Culture, n.d.-b). Their conversations are not showing in dialogues, like in other cultures, but rather as monologues, followed by reflection and another monologue by the opponent; Silence is regarded as very meaningful and as part of the discourse (Cross Culture, n.d.-b). This also leads to difficulties with small talk, as simple questions are seen as direct

questions, not as politeness (Cross Culture, n.d.-b). In the reactive system, an order is an order, harmony has a high priority and most importantly, actions follow as reactions on other people´s actions (Figure 4). The strongest reactive groups are represented by Japan, China and Vietnam (Figure 2).

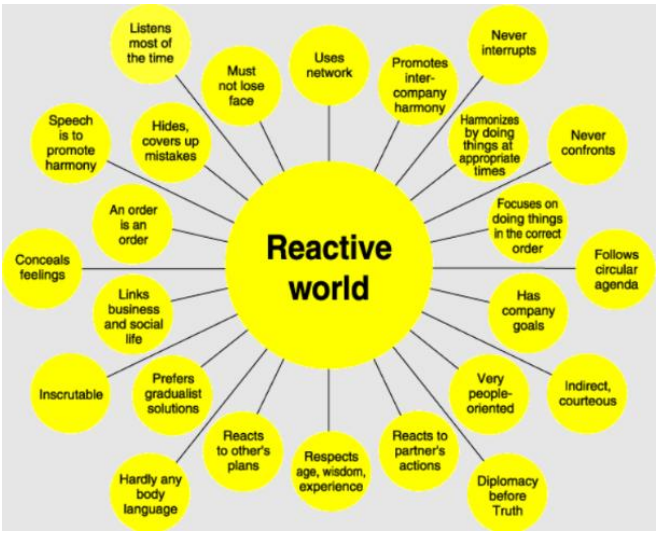

Figure 4: Reactive World
Source: Cross Cultural (n.d.-b)

3.1.2 Finnish cultural aspects vs. Eastern Asian cultural aspects

Finland is described as the “lone wolf of culture” with an environmentally clean, crime-free society without poverty (Lewis, 2018, p. 312). Finns are aware of the special nature of their own culture, which in former times differed though arts and the assertion of political independence, nowadays through the development of and conduct of international business (Lewis, 2018, p. 313). At the same time, it has to be mentioned that this awareness of the own culture is also likely to be a subject for a long discussion, which not always aligns with the reality (Lewis, 2018, p. 313). Communication is a weakness for Finns, speaking little and avoiding confrontation, which suits the characteristics of reactive cultures; Silence in this culture is not equated as failure or as impoliteness, but as part of the social interaction (Lewis, 2018, p. 314). This view on language and communication is isolating Finland from other European countries, but also in international discourse (Lewis, 2018, p. 314). Finnish people work hard if the money is right and care to always to pay their debts (Lewis, 2018, p. 315). Even though the ice is breaking slowly in business and private life, their informal working environment makes Finnish people good team workers (Lewis, 2018, p. 313). While bureaucracy is kept at a minimum, Finnish employees are reliable, punctual and generally loyal

(Lewis, 2018, p. 313). The Finnish people keep the “Arctic survivor” mentality, where stamina, self-sufficiency and powers of invention are needed (Lewis, 2018, p. 315). While this happens through the investment into the newest technologies, Finnish managers also insist on the thorough training for all personnel (Lewis, 2018, p. 315).

While being categorized into the reactive group, the Philippine culture integrates multi-active traits, such as warmth and emotionality into theirs (Lewis, 2018, p. 445). Leadership in the Philippines is based on family name, age and connections, while status can be gained by good education as well (Lewis, 2018, p. 447). Paternalism is common in the culture; Employees may ask superiors for help in different matters (Lewis, 2018, p. 447). Philipinos value dialogue-oriented communication and make good and polite listeners (Lewis, 2018, p. 447). They appreciate warm and modest speakers and rarely interrupt the conversation; Still they will give their opponent ready feedback (Lewis, 2018, p. 447). Politeness in Philippine culture is essential, as well as the tone of discussion, which is generally conciliatory (Lewis, 2018, p. 448). Through the conformist mindset, heated discussions are avoided, while their body language is more overt than other Asians (Lewis, 2018, p. 447). In business, they maintain a considerable power distance and business efficiency is reached through the seeking of contacts in high places (Lewis, 2018, p. 447). Overall, Philipinos are extremely hospitable, love good parties, singing and dancing (Lewis, 2018, p. 447). They expect from their opponents the same modesty, gentleness, warmth and respect that they give (Lewis, 2018, p. 447).

The Vietnamese society is a group-oriented society, ruled by a collective leadership (Lewis, 2018, p 451). Good education, as well as a high rate of literacy lends people confidence in their communication, while emotional factors can be used in arguments (Lewis, 2018, p 451). During conversations, Vietnamese are good listeners and expect speakers to be clear and logical afterwards (Lewis, 2018, p 452). Even though being courteous, they are cautious in discussions, are often willing to use counter-arguments and are giving little away (Lewis, 2018, p 452). Because of their long struggles against China, France and the USA in the past, Vietnamese are being suspicious of all (Lewis, 2018, p 452). Decisions are not made alone, but by consensus, and a high bureaucracy is kept up (Lewis, 2018, p 452). In their culture, elders are respected, which is also reflected in their leadership style (Lewis, 2018, p 452). They have a high self-respect and the loss of face is much in their mind; Vietnamese have a great sense of pride and will not be humiliated (Lewis, 2018, p 453.

In the 4th edition of Lewis, the Taiwanese culture does not have an own chapter, but is included in the chapter of the greater China, therefore, the Chinese cultural characteristics are going to be opened up instead. The Chinese have a sense of cultural superiority and see themselves as the world´s oldest and culture and society (Lewis, 2018, p. 454). They are hardworking, conscientious, patient and undemanding and are generally in harmony with each other; Foreigners, especially Western societies are facing heavy criticism (Lewis, 2018, pp. 455-456). The stability of the Chinese society is based on unequal relationships between people, where authority must not be questioned at all (Lewis, 2018, p. 456). Collectivism is very strong in China, as well as the obligations to the whole society (Lewis, 2018, p. 458). This is also reflected in their leadership; Decisions are not made alone, but by a leadership group (Lewis, 2018, p.459). Chinese have respect for privacy and abhor wasting anyone´s time also in conversations; They are courteous and considerate interlocutors, but are more direct that some other East Asians (Lewis, 2018, p. 460). During negotiations, Chinese rarely say and pay great respect to elders and seniors (Lewis, 2018, p.461). Overall, they are very welcoming people who extend generous hospitality and courtesy, even to foreigners, who they are suspicious of (Lewis, 2018, p. 462). They show courtesy as much as possible, which also involves humility and self-disparagement (Lewis, 2018, p. 462).

3.2 Cross-cultural mediation

Cross-cultural mediation plays an important role in work environments, especially in international environments, where employees and customers come from diverse backgrounds. The LMR cultural types are each characterized by distinct communication styles, values and behavioral patterns (Lewis, 2018, p. 102).

Finland as linear-active culture is characterized by a task oriented, highly organized and structured approach to communication and work. Individuals in linear-active cultures tend to value directness, factual communication and adherence schedules and plans (Cross Culture, n.d., a). Communication here is typically explicit and concise, with a strong emphasis on clarity and efficiency. In contrast to that, reactive cultures prioritize listening, harmony and indirect communication (Cross Culture, n.d., b). Individuals from reactive cultures often avoid confrontation, show respect through attentive listening and respond carefully rather than initiating discussions (Cross Culture, n.d., b). These differences can create misunderstandings

in workplace interactions particularly between direct and indirect communication styles (Lewis, 2018, p. 105). For example, Finnish employees may perceive reactive communication styles as lacking initiative, while people from reactive cultures may interpret Finnish directness as blunt or insensitive. Such misinterpretations highlight the importance of cross-cultural mediation, which involves bridging the differences in communication styles and fostering mutual understanding between cultural groups.

Power distance and attitudes towards hierarchy also differ between these cultural types and therefore influence workplace dynamics. Reactive cultures tend to place a stronger emphasis on respect for hierarchy and authority (Cross Culture, n.d., b), while Finland, as a linear-active culture is characterized by relatively low power distance and more egalitarian workplace relationships (Cross Culture, n.d., a). This can lead to challenges in communication, particularly in situations where employees from reactive cultures may be less likely to question authority or express disagreement openly. Such misinterpretations highlight the importance of cross-cultural mediation, which involves bridging communication styles and fostering mutual understanding. Cross-cultural communication is especially relevant in international tourism context where individuals with these diverse norms and expectations interact (Azarova et al., 2020, p. 1378). Lewis emphasizes the importance of cultural empathy, active listening and flexibility in communication as key competencies for successful cross-cultural interaction. By fostering these skills, organizations can reduce misunderstandings and improve collaboration between employees from different cultural backgrounds (Azarova et al., 2020, p. 1379). The differences in communication styles, attitudes towards hierarchy and approaches to interaction can create challenges and opportunities, but by promoting mutual understanding, cooperation and more effective communication across cultural boundaries can be ensured.

3.3 Reflection on the tourism industry

The contemporary tourism industry is increasingly shaped by globalization, labor mobility and cultural diversity, which requires a deeper understanding of cross-cultural interaction and communication. As tourism continues to expand internationally, workplaces such as those in hospitality are becoming more culturally heterogeneous, bringing together employees and customers from diverse cultural backgrounds (Baum et al., 2007, pp.230-232). This diversity

creates opportunities for enriched service experiences, but also challenges related to communication, management and workplace cohesion.

One of the main reflections on the tourism industry is the growing importance of cross-cultural communication as a core competency. Effective communication across cultures is essential for providing high-quality service and ensuring customer satisfaction in an international context (Azarova et al., 2020, p. 1378). Employees are not only expected to perform technical tasks but also to navigate cultural differences, adapt their communication style and demonstrate cultural sensitivity. This aligns with the concept of cultural mediation, where workers act as intermediaries between different cultural groups, facilitating understanding and interaction (Feldman & Skinner, 2018, p. 6).

The increasing reliance on international labor further highlights the importance of these cultural dynamics. Recruitment practices targeting workers from Asian regions reflect the growing demand for labor in tourism destinations, particularly in areas experiencing shortages (Bondata, 2025). This trend aligns with global patterns of labor migration, where workers move across borders to fill gaps in service industries (OECD, 2025, p. 45). While this contributes to the sustainability of the tourism workforce, it also intensifies the need for effective cross-cultural management and integration.

On one hand, cultural diversity enhances richness of tourism experiences, allowing more authentic and meaningful interactions between visitors and hosts; Employees with diverse cultural backgrounds can provide unique insights and contribute to more inclusive service environments. On the other hand, cultural differences may lead to communication barriers, workplace conflicts and challenges in teamwork if not addressed properly (Baum et al., 2007, p. 235). This leads to the importance of training and education in addressing these challenges. Developing intercultural competence among tourism workers is essential for improving communication and reducing misunderstandings. It includes adopting skills such as cultural awareness, adaptability and empathy, which are necessary for effective communication across cultural boundaries (Azarova et al., 2020, p. 1379). Specifically, this means that understanding the differences between linear-active and reactive communication styles can help employees adjust their behavior and expectations in multicultural environments. Furthermore, the role of employees as cultural mediators underscores the complexity of tourism work. Workers are not only service providers, but also facilitators of cross-cultural exchange, shaping the experiences

of tourists and influencing perceptions of destinations (Feldman & Skinner, 2018, p. 7). This responsibility requires a interpersonal skills and cultural understanding, which may not always be adequately recognized or supported within the industry.

In the context of hospitality work, cross-cultural mediation is particularly important, because employees must interact not only with colleagues but also with international customers. Effective mediation requires an awareness of cultural norms and the ability to adapt communication styles accordingly. For example, Finnish workers may need to adopt a more patient and indirect approach when interacting with colleagues or customers from reactive cultures, while reactive culture workers may need to adjust to more direct communication styles. This process of mutual adaptation is essential for ensuring smooth interactions and high-quality service delivery. The mediation of cultures is also considered as emotional labor, as the workers possibly only represent the local culture, but not actually originally belong to it (Feldman & Skinner, 2018, p. 3). This might lead also to a blur between daily life with own interests and a move of the cultural representation into private life (Feldman & Skinner, 2018, p. 7)

4. RESEARCH DATA AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Interviews

For the research part, the qualitative method has been chosen to get deeper insights into the role of Asian seasonal workers in the tourism industry in Rovaniemi. This approach is particularly suitable because qualitative research focuses on understanding meanings, experiences and social processes rather than measuring predefined variables (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p. 4). In this study, semi-structured interviews are used to explore how both employees and employers make sense of their experiences, emphasizing meaning-making rather than the identification of the objective truth. As Hall argues, qualitative methods are particularly appropriate in tourism research when the aim is to capture the perspectives and interpretations of participants within their specific cultural contexts (2011, p. 10). Using qualitative interviews helps to explore how participants articulate their motivations and evaluations in their own words, making it possible to analyze not only what is said, but also how it is expressed. This aligns with the view that qualitative research seeks to understand the interpretative practices

though which individuals construct meaning (Phillimore & Goodson, p. 37). Furthermore, a qualitative approach enables attention to the relational and discursive dimensions of the data, allowing an analysis of the participants perspectives, rather than aiming for statistical generalization. A qualitative approach in this case is suitable for this study because the research focusses on understanding how employees and employers make sense of their experiences, rather than measuring predefined variables. It is not aimed to quantify the role of Asian seasonal workers in the tourism industry, but to explore how employers and employees construct meaning around work and life in an Arctic tourism context.

The interviews were conducted between the 28th of January 2026 and the 19th of March 2026, in person in Rovaniemi, or online through the Microsoft Teams meeting platform, as well as via phone call, depending on the participants´ schedules. Each session lasted approximately 15 to 45 minutes based on the participants' willingness to discuss. Notably, the participants who have been working for a longer time in the industry and have more experience were more communicative and ready to share their insights. The participants who just came into the industry or worked their first season in Rovaniemi remained scratching the surface of the topics.

Initially, ten tourism companies in Rovaniemi were contacted via E-Mail, out of which three agreed to an interview. For the seasonally employed participants, the personal network of the author was used. It was reached out to friends, current and former colleagues; further, a "snowball system" was used, animating also friends of friends, or colleagues of colleagues to participate in the interviews. This approach may introduce a selection bias, but to address that concern, participants from different backgrounds were contacted. Out of eight workers contacted, only two declined their participation due to time management issues, therefore six participants took part in the interviews. Including the employers alongside employees was a deliberate choice to capture multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon, enabling a comparative understanding of how the role of Asian seasonal workers is constructed (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p. 37). The number of employers is appropriate for qualitative research, where the focus lies in depth rather than representativeness, and where smaller samples can provide sufficient analytical insight (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97).

The final participants included three workers from Taiwan, two workers from the Philippines and one worker from Vietnam (Table 1). From the employer side, two employers originated from Finland, and one from Brazil, who has been working in the Finnish tourism industry for

over eight years (Table 1). The majority of employee participants were working as front desk and sales staff, only one was on the food and beverage side (Table 1).

Table 1: Profiles of Participants

Interview	Acronym	Country of origin	Employer/Employee	Work position
1	Audrey	Vietnam	Employee	Front Desk & Sales
2	Bertha	Finland	Employer	Hotel Manager
3	Caro	Taiwan	Employee	Receptionist
4	Liz	Philippines	Employee	Bartender
5	Georgina	Philippines	Employee	Reception Shift leader
6	Carl	Finland	Employer	Chief Operating Officer
7	Dave	Brazil	Employer	Sales Manager
8	Eddie	Taiwan	Employee	Chinese administration co-working agent
9	Finja	Taiwan	Employee	Front Desk & Sales

Primarily, the interviews were conducted in English language. From the employer side, when needed participants were encouraged to express ideas in their own language, in this case in Finnish. The participants were provided with the questions three days in advance in order to prepare accordingly and to avoid misunderstandings. Further, a written informed consent from the participants was obtained in advance. As the interviews were held in two languages, the Finnish contributions were translated for the analytical part of the paper.

While the interviews were held, the Windows audio recorder was used to record the participants and Microsoft Word to transcribe the audio document. The transcription was compared to the audio file and adjusted to that accordingly, to stay truthful to the original outcome of the interviews.

4.2 Research Ethics

Throughout the work, the artificial intelligence (AI) platform “Zotero” is used, in order to organize the literature and sources in an online library, as well as to generate accurate citations within the text. During the interviews for the qualitative research, the Windows audio recorder is used to record the participants and Microsoft Word to transcribe the audio document. Furthermore, the language platform “Deepl” has been used for finding synonyms or for ensuring correct translations of the interviews. The transcription is compared to the audio document and adjusted to that accordingly, to stay truthful to the original outcome of the

interviews. Other AI tools are not used during the work, to ensure the research is free of plagiarism and false information.

As the Thesis involves human participants, the research follows the ethical guidelines established by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2024), which provides principles for responsible conduct and ethical review in human sciences. These guidelines emphasize the protection of participants´ dignity, rights and privacy, as well as the importance of informed consent (TENK, 2024). Overall, the TENK framework ensures that the research is carried out in a transparent, responsible and ethically sustainable manner (TENK, 2024). Furthermore, the most recent academic writing guidelines from the University of Lapland were followed to ensure an academic outcome of the thesis.

This research topic includes positive, but also potentially negative experiences out of the own working life. This leads to the risk that answers from the participants might not be fully truthful, as they might not feel comfortable or safe sharing their honest experiences. Before the interview, the participants are informed about the purpose of the research, confidentiality and their right to withdraw, even afterwards. The participants are also encouraged to clear up any questions or concerns before the interview and add their own thoughts on the topic at the end of the interview. By introducing the personal background of the author, as well as of the study, the participants were able to get a grasp of the idea and intention behind the interview, which helped to get specific answers to the topics. All interviews are recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim and anonymized through pseudonyms.

Participation in the study was completely voluntary, and all participants were happy to contribute to the study to their best abilities. The participants were further advised that if any uncertainties appear after the interview took place, they should connect to the author; This also applied if the participants forgot to mention something during the interview that came to their mind afterwards. Neither of the cases appeared.

4.3 Content analysis

During the interviews, handwritten notes were taken, which focused on descriptive comments, language use and early reflections. These were taken, in order to capture immediate statements or thoughts that stood out in the participants' answers. With the help of the notes, first appearing themes for each interview were identified and grouped; Similar observations and experiences were grouped together. Through this process, both patterns and differences became visible, highlighting shared experiences as well as more individual perspectives. This reflects the process of thematic analysis, where meaning is generated through identifying patterns across the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). After the grouping and identifying of the themes for the interviews, patterns but also differences stood out, which confirm shared experiences but also unique, personal experiences and feelings.

The approach of the study is inductive and exploratory rather than hypotheses-testing, aiming to develop insights from the data itself. Inductive research allows themes to emerge from participants´ accounts and is particularly suitable for exploring under-researched social phenomena (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p. 37). Furthermore, combining semi-structured interviews with document analysis enables the study to link individual narratives to broader institutional contexts. This is a common strategy in qualitative research to understand how personal experiences are embedded in wider social structures (Hall, 2011, p. 12).

Qualitative tourism research does not only collect data but means also to understand how individuals create meaning within tourism spaces. Therefore, this study seeks an insight into how Asian seasonal workers interpret their own roles and navigate emotional and cultural challenges and how they influence the service product in Rovaniemi´s tourism industry. Because tourism research is conducted in dynamic environments involving multiple actors and cultural layers, reflexivity, contextual awareness and ethical engagement are important considerations in tourism fieldwork (Hall, 2011, p. 21). This means that the researcher must remain reflexive and adaptable, while acknowledging their own position and possible influence during the data collection.

Aligning with Braun and Clarke´s reflexive approach to the thematic analysis, this research acknowledges that the researcher plays an active role in the production of knowledge. The identification of codes and themes is not an objective process only, btu influenced by the

researcher´s perspectives, assumptions and interpretive decisions. Therefore, throughout the data analysis, attention was paid to how prior expectations were challenged by the prominence of experiential and lifestyle-related narratives in the data. Furthermore, the cross-cultural nature of the interviews required careful consideration of potential interpretive biases, particularly in relation to language use, cultural norms and differing communicative styles. Reflexivity was maintained by continuously reflecting on how these factors might influence the data collection and analysis. The use of thematic analysis provides a structured, yet flexible framework for analyzing qualitative data, allowing descriptive and interpretive insights. However, as emphasized by Braun & Clarke (2006), themes do not appear from the data but are constructed and named by the researcher though the engagement with the material. This perspective is important in this study, as it highlights that the findings should be understood as interpretations of participants´ meaning-making practices, rather than as direct representations of reality.

For the thematic analysis, Braun & Clarke introduce six phases of thematic analysis, which are familiarization with the data by transcribing and reading the data, as well as generating initial codes in a systematic manner (2006, p. 87). Afterwards, the codes shall be collated into potential themes and gather all relevant data around them which is checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). In line with the reflexive thematic analysis approach developed by Braun & Clarke, coding is understood here as an active and interpretive process, rather than a purely descriptive or mechanical procedure. The analysis began with a process of open, inductive coding, in which all nine interview transcripts were read multiple times to achieve familiarity with the data. During this phase, segments of the text were coded based on their relevance to the research questions, with attention to how participants described their motivations, personal experiences and evaluations of seasonal work.

From the employee interviews, initial codes included “work-life balance”, “experience Nordic life”, experience working culture”, “financial stability”, “financial opportunities”, “better salary”, “international work experience”, “professional growth”, “curiosity about Finnish culture” and “experience living in a different environment”. From the employer interviews codes focused on the characterization of Asian seasonal workers, including “hospitable attitude”, “flexibility”, “hard-working”, “respect” and “attention to detail”. These codes were often connected with evaluative statements, indicating not only the observed behaviors but also expectations of what pictures a “good” employee.

At this stage, the coding remained rather descriptive, aiming to stay close to the participants´ language. Still, even at the early phase, first interpretive decisions were made regarding what was considered relevant and how the segments were categorized. Following the initial coding, the analysis moved toward identifying broader patterns of meaning which groups related codes into preliminary themes. This process involved comparing codes across interviews and examining how different concepts relate to each other.

Among employee accounts, several codes were grouped into a broader theme of experiential motivation, including “curiosity about Finnish culture”, “experience Nordic life” and “experience living in a different environment”. These were separated from instrumental motivations, which included “financial stability”, “better salary”, “financial opportunities” and “professional growth”. At the same time, codes such as “international work experience” and “opportunities to work in world-renowned companies” took an intermediate position, linking experiential and career-oriented motivation. The code “work-life balance” is strongly highlighted, as it connected multiple aspects of participants´ narrative. It was connected mostly both to lifestyle and work conditions, including references to “no hierarchies” and perceived differences in working culture. Therefore, this code was not treated as a standard category, btu as part of a broader theme concerning the reconfiguration of work and life priorities in a seasonal context.

In the employer data, individual codes describing worker characteristics were grouped into a broader theme reflecting the construction of the “ideal seasonal worker”. Attributes such as “flexibility”, “hard-working attitude”, “respect”, “hospitality” and “attention to detail” were invoked across interviews, suggesting a shared evaluative framework. This process illustrates how the coding moved from isolated descriptors toward more abstract, interpretive categories.

The development of themes was not linear but involved several revisions and reconsiderations. Initially, the analysis was guided by an expectation that economic motivations would dominate employee narratives, particularly given the temporary nature of seasonal work in Rovaniemi. As the coding progressed, it turned out that experiential and lifestyle-oriented motivations played a more important role than anticipated in the beginning. The shift in perspective proves how themes in qualitative analysis are not simply discovered but actively constructed though engagement with the data. Some codes were initially treated as secondary (“Nordic life”, “curiosity about Finnish culture”), gained analytical importance as their recurrence and

narrative significance surfaced more. At the same time, employer descriptions of workers were initially coded as straightforward evaluations of performance. Over time, these descriptions were reinterpreted as part of broader discursive construction of worker identity, highlighting how methodological sensitivity to language can deepen the analysis.

Aligning with the reflexive approach by Braun & Clarke, the researcher´s role in shaping the analysis was continuously considered (2006, p. 80). The selection of codes, the grouping into themes and the interpretation of meaning were all influenced by the researcher´s subjective perspectives, assumptions and academic background. As a researcher studying in a cross-cultural context, particular attention was paid to potential interpretative biases, especially in relation to how participants articulated experience in a second language or within different cultural frameworks. Concepts as “respects” or “hierarchy” may carry different meaning within the culture, depending on the context which requires a careful interpretation. Furthermore, the researcher had a personal connection to most of the participants, which may have influenced the view on concepts as “better salary”, or “curiosity about Finnish culture”, as the author is part of the Finnish culture. These tendencies were not treated as distortions, but as part of the meaning making practices that the analysis seeks to understand.

Out of the codes and the themes, as well as the supporting research questions, the following main themes were created: Motivations of working in Rovaniemi, cultural differences in working life, duration of the stay, the role of staffing agencies, contribution to the tourism and hospitality industry. In the following chapter, these are going to be analyzed on a deeper level, evaluating the personal experiences of the participants and setting them into context with each other.

5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the findings of the empirical analysis, structured around the main themes identified through the qualitative data. Drawing on the interview material, the analysis explores key dimensions such as motivations and duration of stay, cultural differences in working life, recruitment processes and the role of Asian seasonal workers within the tourism industry in Rovaniemi, Lapland. In addition, perspectives from both, employees and employers, are contrasted to highlight convergences and divergences in how these are constructed. The chapter

combines descriptive presentation with interpretive analysis, focusing on how participants make sense of their experiences within the broader context of tourism in Rovaniemi and labor migration.

5.1 Motivations of working in Rovaniemi

To better understand the factors influencing migration decisions, the second interview question focused on the motivations of seasonally employed workers to engage in the tourism industry in Rovaniemi. Exploring these motivations provides insight into how workers evaluate their employment beyond purely economic terms. Within the responses, financial consideration emerged as a key theme, within Audrey, Liz and Georgina explicitly referring to financial stability and better salary as important motivating factors.

> *"I come here to look for better work-life balance, like no disturbance outside working hours (...) I also come here hoping for more fairness treatment, no hierarchy (...) and like a little bit better salary." [Audrey, employee]*

> *"(...) the obvious reason is better financial opportunities. (...) more of the chance to gain international work experience. (...) I kind of saw it as an opportunity to maybe grow professionally. (...) I was kind of curious about the Finnish culture and I just want to experience living in a very different environment." [Georgina, employee]*

> *"(...) it´s a financial stability gain, valuable experience, opportunity in working for world-renowned companies (...) also the allure of magical Arctic winter, featuring northern lights and the unique festive atmosphere of Santa Claus Village." [Liz, employee]*

Out of all the participants, only Liz mentioned traits which are specific for Rovaniemi, such as the "magical Arctic winter", "northern lights" and the "unique festive atmosphere of Santa Claus Village". Still, next to the financial motivations, they mention also key words such as "work-life balance", "work experience", "Finnish culture" and "experience living in a very different environment". The same goes for Finja, who is working for the first time in the hospitality industry, wanting to "experience the Nordic life" and the "working life".

"(...) I never worked in this industry before, so I want to give it a try. (...) I want to really experience (...) I want to know how exactly the working culture here. (...) and experience the Nordic life here" [Finja, employee]

Caro and Eddie on the other hand, did not have a motivation for working specifically in Rovaniemi´s hospitality industry, but came here for political reasons, or because seasonal work seemed to be the easiest way.

"(...) in the beginning, I didn´t apply for a seasonal job. (...) I saw this job post in the job board website and I applied for it. (...) It´s easier, faster to apply the working permit if it´s six months." [Caro, employee]

"At that time, because of Trump, he had the policy of tariffs. So, every industry (...) because of Trump, it´s a mess. (...) So there´s not really a motivation, but I just need to survive for my future life." [Eddie, employee]

The answers of the employee participants show that a central theme for them is the construction of seasonal work as an experiential and lifestyle-oriented project; The participants positioned their employment as a means of accessing in a desired environment, even if for different reasons. It shows that for the participants seasonal work is constructed not merely as labor, but as form of experiential consumption and self-development.

From a different perspective, the employers opened up their interview, why they are employing workers from Asian countries. Dave and Bertha state that they are not specifically targeting the Asian countries, but that the workers from the region overall are nice to work with and that there is currently an increased supply in workforce.

"It´s not like we´re targeting Filipinos, but usually they´re very nice people to work with." [Dave, employer]

"Well, obviously there´s interest from there. They´re interested in coming here now. (...) maybe has been one of the factors – but then, what really motivates them to hire is the worker´s attitude toward work." [Bertha, employer]

Carl on the other hand as representative for a recruitment and staffing agency opens up on specifically targeting the Philippines to hire seasonal work force to the Rovaniemi and Lapland region.

"The Philippines is by far our largest source country in Asia (...) we are among the key players in brining labor from the Philippines." [Carl, employer]

The reasoning behind that is the labor mismatch in Finland; Even though the tourism numbers are rising and with it the demand for work force in the region as well. Further, Finnish workers do not seem to be keen to seasonal work, as they are seeking for permanent employment, instead of seasonal, short-term contracts.

"Tourist numbers are growing and growing, and of course, as a result, the need for skilled, professional, and smart workforce is growing as well. (...) the assumption is that Finns would be employed (...) but unfortunately, that´s not the case. The domestic workforce is no longer enough. (...) So, the fact is, we´ll have to bring in more and more of that workforce" [Carl, employer]

"The challenge is to recruit a large number of employees quickly. (...) In our case, we´ve been quite successful in hiring local employees right here in Rovaniemi, but the challenge with this seasonal work is that locals want permanent jobs. (...) But the locals, since they live here and have homes and such, they´re not really keen on doing seasonal work." [Bertha, employer]

All of the employers value the hard-working nature and the eagerness of the Asian workers. Keywords like "hard working" and "positive attitude", or related keywords are mentioned in all answers.

"(...) they are very hard workers and they do (...) the job (...) on point (...) and they follow the rules very well and they collaborate to the establishment. (...) always willing to work and very flexible on things. (...) we always could find somebody that was eager to work and be happy about it." [Dave, employer]

Asians and Filipinos are always smiling and cheerful; they bring that positive spirit to the workplace too. They always come to work laughing, maybe singing. [Carl, employer]

They´re quick and adapt well to the work environment (...) they´re highly motivated to work. (...) They pay attention, smile, are courteous (...) so they have this kind of service culture. [Bertha, employer]

Also, the workers' humbleness and respect for the employer was implied and described as appreciated trait by all of the employers.

"I have been working with Filipinos for some time already and they have always been so respectful and (...) polite in a way (...) that I don´t see in other kitchen workers." [Dave, employer]

"They´re kind of humble, (...) they don´t grovel." [Bertha, employer]

"(...) things like reliability, respect for the employer, humility toward the employer and precision, punctuality and then of course a shared sense of community -a very positive attitude." [Carl, employer]

Except Carl, who´s company is actively recruiting workers from the Philippines, the employers of seasonal workers do not target workers from the Asian region. They appreciate the overall work attitude that the employees bring with them, which includes respect and their positive attitude towards work; this positive attitude also reflects on the work environment and workplace overall, which is well appreciated.

5.2 Cultural differences in working life

When comparing the Asian and the Finnish hospitality and service culture is differing through key dimensions, such as customer relations, communication styles, hierarchy and work-life balance. A central pattern here concerns the construction of customer relations and hospitality norms. Participants repeatedly describe Asian work contexts as guided by the principle that "the customer is always tight", emphasizing emotional labor, flexibility and personal engagement; Treating customers "like a god" or "fixing" situations, even if not being at fault.

"(...) in Vietnam, we would try to make customers as happy as possible. (...) even though some cases not our fault, we will try to fix it for customers." [Audrey, employee]

"So the hospitality in Asia in general, I think we are still more like the guest is right all the time." [Caro, employee]

"(...) in Taiwan, (...) you regard customers as the most important person. Even if the customer is wrong, You should tell Yourself the customer is always right." [Eddie, employee]

"In Taiwan or in Asia, (...) I would say they will treat customers like the god." [Finja, employee]

In contrast to that, Finnish working life is constructed as rule-based and regulated, where interactions are rather guided by policies than personal discretion. Audrey´s "everything is according to policies and rules" or Caro´s emphasis on "no gray area" highlight how the participants perceive the Finnish culture as structured and bounded.

> *"And in Finland, everything is according to policies and rules." [Audrey, employee]*

> *"(...) the first impression from my supervisor [in Finland] (...) is the sentence like the guest is not always right (...). It´s just like follow the rule (...) there is no like gray area." [Caro, employee]*

> *"But in this company (...) the manager told me, whenever we are right, we should say we are right. The customer is not always correct." [Eddie, employee]*

At the same time, these differences are not evaluated uniformly. Audrey expresses her discomfort, feeling like "working like a robot" or engaging in "fake interactions".

> *"At first, in the beginning, I would say that I´m very enthusiastic and I would like display my true emotion. (...) now I just (...) say sorry all the time, like automatically like a robot. (...). I feel so stressed after every working shifts, because sometimes I also have to kind of lie to customers. (...) So fake." [Audrey, employee]*

Another dimension concerns communication style and emotional expressions; employees construct the Asian hospitality as "warm", "personal" and "expressive".

> *"So in Philippines, service style is highly personal and warm. Hospitality is very relationship oriented. Communication is expressive and friendly." [Liz, employee]*

> *"Well, in Philippines, the hospitality is more service-oriented and it´s more personal and warm in communication." [Georgina, employee]*

Meanwhile, Finnish communication is described as "professional", "efficient" and also "minimal". These distinctions are not only descriptive, but function to establish broader cultural categories.

> *"While in Finland, it is professional and efficient. Hospitality here is polite but not overly expressive. Communication tend to be minimal and small talks." [Liz, employee]*

> *"But in Finland, it´s more of professional and more reserved." [Georgina, employee]*

Hierarchy and workplace relations form another area of contrast within the interviews. Liz and Georgina describe Asian work environments as hierarchical and characterized by limited access to management.

> *"(...) I thought it´s the same thing as in Philippines (...) being stuck again with bossy managers and higher ups." [Liz, employee]*

> *"And in Philippines, there´s always hierarchy. (...) you don´t really get to approach managers as freely as I can do it here." [Georgina, employee]*

Liz describes the Finnish managers as being "accessible" and "hands-on", as well as Georgina, who appreciates the ability to approach supervisors freely. This illustrates how equality is constructed as a defining feature of Finnish working life.

> *"(...) but I´m surprised they have flat hierarchy and equality. Managers tends to be more accessible. They always mingle with employees like me, very hands-on to the employee. All employees treated as equal." [Liz, employee]*

Work-life balance and labor conditions emerge as a central theme in the construction of cultural differences in the working environment. Participants describe their long working hours in their home countries, overtime expectations and limited personal time. Eddie references to twelve-hour workdays and Georgina opens up on overtime as a marker of appreciation; it highlights the normalization of the labor intensity in one context but problematized in another.

> *"(...) in Philippines (...) the working hours are longer and You feel like You are more appreciated if You work long, if You work on Your day off, if You work overtime. (...) because it´s very service oriented, the overtime can be a common practice." [Georgina, employee]*

> *"(...) if I work in Taiwan, I need to work like twelve hours a day (...)." [Eddie, employee]*

Contrasting to this, Finland is portrayed as enabling personal time, hobbies and social life, reinforcing an image of balanced and fair labor practices and companies that care about their workers´ wellbeing.

> *"So, I felt that here it´s more balanced. (...) Finland has a strong respect for work-life balance and I would say the labor practices here are fair. (...) since it´s very professional, the working hours are regulated (...)." [Georgina, employee]*

"But here at least I can go somewhere else to find our friends or do my hobbies." [Eddie, employee]

"Companies here value the life of the employees." [Liz, employee]

From the employer perspective, the same patterns can be observed within the answers. Also, for employers, service orientation and customer relations play a central role when comparing the cultures. Asian workers are described to have exceptionally high service standards, characterized by "extreme politeness", "precision", and a willingness to "go above and beyond" for customers. Bertha notes that these workers "set the bar really high", while Carl emphasizes their "strong service-mindedness".

"They really emphasize extreme politeness and precision, and they set the bar really high for those things in their service. (...) When it comes to customer service or treating guests, their standards are very high." [Bertha, employer]

Then, of course there´s the service-mindedness (...) they want to do everything they can for the employer. That´s their mindset, and of course it shows in their customer service – they really want to go above and beyond for the customer." [Carl, employer]

"They [Asian workers] were extremely polite and well, hard workers as well." [Dave, employer]

Finnish workers are positioned as "less customer service-oriented" or more "laid-back", suggesting a relative lack of emphasis on customer satisfaction. This strongly contrasts Asian workers as embodying an intensified form of hospitality, while Finnish workers are associated with a more moderate or restrained approach

"Finns are naturally a bit more laid-back and more open." [Bertha, employer]

"Finns are maybe a bit of the other extreme (...). They aren´t so customer service-oriented, so there are good and bad sides to that from an Asian perspective." [Carl, employer]

Still, Bertha makes sure to point out that even though these differences exist, both, Finnish and international service workers are on the same level of quality served to the guests.

"(...) our international employees (...) they´re friendly and considerate, just like a true Finnish customer service representative would be." [Bertha, employer]

The second recurring characterization relates to the communication style and interpersonal behavior. Employers describe Asian workers as “friendly”, “cheerful” and “positive” contributing to a “good vibe” in the workplace. On the other hand, Bertha also characterizes them as more “reserved” and “proper”, especially with their co-workers. This indicates that this behavior is not only culturally interpreted, but also situationally.

> *“(…) they´re so cheerful and always in a positive mood at work, it rubs off on the work community and creates that positive vibe for everyone else there too.” [Carl, employer]*

> *“And then with international employees, since they´re in a completely foreign country (…) they act more properly and a bit more reserved and (…) friendlier to a certain extent.” [Bertha, employer]*

Regarding work ethic, flexibility and initiative, Asian workers are framed as “hard-working”, “flexible” and “eager to work”, especially in situations requiring adaptability, such as covering shifts or responding to staff shortages. Dave´s account on always finding someone “very eager to work” highlights flexibility as a valued trait.

> *“Always willing to work and very flexible on things. So, when we had those people sick or something like this, we always could find somebody that was very eager to work and be happy about it.” [Dave, employer]*

By contrast, Finnish workers are described as “less flexible”.

> *“Finnishes are a bit different. (…) They are just a bit less flexible.” [Dave, employer]*

However, this contrast reveals a more complex evaluative dynamic; While Asian workers are praised for their diligence and willingness to follow rules, they are also described as less likely to take independent initiative. Dave describes how they would “check” with supervisors rather than making decisions themselves. In this case, Finnish people would take the initiative and solve the problem autonomously.

> *“(…) they follow the rules very well and they collaborate to the establishment. Something goes wrong, they would still come to You to check, but they didn´t (…) decided for themselves something (…). Finnish people do it they would solve the issue and then they talk to me after.” [Dave, employer]*

Hierarchy and workplace relations further contribute to these constructions. Asian workers are described as “respectful”, reinforcing an image of structured and hierarchical workplace behavior.

> *“(…) they were very polite, more polite than like even necessary, respectful in general.” [Dave, employer]*

Across the employees, training and integration are constructed as partially address but unevenly developed aspects of their work experience. The training is framed though what is lacking, desired, or informally acquired, highlighting the gaps between institutional needs. A central pattern is the Finnish language training. While the participants recognize language skills as crucial for long-term integration, they simultaneously emphasize the limited provision of such training by employers. Audrey notes that learning Finnish is important but not supported by tourism companies, positioning the language learning as individual responsibility. Also, Finja desires to learn “basic sentences”, reflecting a practical need for everyday communication.

> *“I think, of course, learning Finnish is important. But the tourism company they´re not going to offer any training with that. (…) If You want to stay here long term, then probably learn Finnish would benefit You more.” [Audrey, employee]*

> *”I think they´re lacking for some language training (…) since we all know that Finnish language is one of the hardest to learn.” [Liz, employee]*

> *“I would like to learn some like basic work or like basic sentence so that it´s more convenient.” [Finja, employee]*

Next to language training, the employees also highlight the need for structures cultural and institutional orientation. Caro suggests that companies could offer courses on Finnish culture, which indicates that training is not only about functional skills, but also about fostering mutual understanding and improving workplace integration, but also integration into the Finnish society. Georgina goes further and calls for clearer guidance on Finnish labor rights, pointing to a gap in employee´s knowledge of formal workplace structures and protections. These accounts construct training as means of reducing uncertainty and enabling more confident participation in the work environment.

> *“The company could offer something like this [language or Finnish culture course], (…) the worker would engaged more and then the better understanding from and better fitting the different countries.” [Caro, employee]*

"Support from my employer that I´ve got is like cultural adaptation coaching. They offer this one to help us integrate in Finnish society." [Liz, employee]

"I think it would be more helpful for us foreign workers to have like a structural integration on things like Finnish labor rights." [Georgina, employee]

In contrast to the employee point of view, employers construct training primarily as a matter of structured orientation and organizational efficiency, rather than as an ongoing process of integration. The interviews indicate that training is largely framed in terms of predefined informational systems, particularly online orientation programs that introduces the ongoing employees to Finnish working life, company practices and the local context. A central feature is the emphasis on comprehensiveness and standardization. Carl, for example describes "extensive and comprehensive online material" that employees complete prior to arrival; These materials cover aspects such as Finnish culture, climate, and basic language elements. Similarly, Dave highlights also the provision of training related to workplace system, policies and cultural norms.

"So, then they go through this really extensive and comprehensive online material, which, of course, covers the rules of Finnish working life and Finnish culture. They start by learning about the Finnish climate, Finnish words (...)." [Carl, employer]

"(...) we do teach people you know how to use [program], (...) we have the Finnish culture, we have policies that we share with everybody." [Dave, employer]

"We currently have an internal online orientation system where we explain about Rovaniemi." [Bertha, employer]

At the same time, Bertha´s statement that learning Finnish is "not really part of our plans" positions language training as outside the scope of organizational support; This suggests a prioritization of immediate functionality over long-term integration.

"Well, we could do more of this (...). Learning Finnish isn´t really part of our plans right now – I mean we can´t really start teaching them Finnish during the program, so it´s not exactly our top priority at the moment." [Bertha, employer]

These accounts illustrate how employers frame training through a discourse of organizational provision and practicality, emphasizing what is already offered while delimiting what is considered feasible. In contrast to employee narratives, which highlight gaps and unmet needs, employer perspectives present training as largely sufficient within the context of short-term

employment. This contrast underlines how training is constructed differently depending on positionality, revealing not only differing expectations, but also differing definitions of what "integration" entails.

5.3 Mobility, temporality and staying decisions

The interview material shows that employees construct their duration of stay in Finland as a flexible, evolving and conditional process, rather than as a fixed or predetermined decision. Across the data, intentions to stay, return, or leave are framed through a combination of personal evaluation, future aspirations and ongoing workplace experiences; This highlights the temporal uncertainty that characterizes seasonal and migrant work. A central pattern here is the conditional nature of long-term plans; Participants link their duration of stay to specific criteria, such as working conditions, career opportunities and personal well-being. Caro for example emphasizes that continued stay depends on a "healthy working environment". Audrey intends to stay in Finland, but not within the same company, using mobility between employers as a strategy for improving working conditions.

> *"(...) so far, I didn´t plan to stay or to leave (...). As long as it´s a healthy working environment, the salary is paying the bill, and there is future potential. (...) So that is the reason why I am also staying and continuing coming back." [Caro, employee]*

> *"I´m planning to stay here at least maybe one or two years more, but not in the same company. (...) I was looking for like better treatment in the company, but apparently, I don´t get that (...). So, I hope that for the next company." [Audrey, employee]*

Differing to that Eddie links his engagement with Finland to specific goals, framing his engagement as short- to medium term.

> *"(...) I´m planning to stay here for at least two years to four years. (...) my final goal is to get a residence permit in Finland so I can travel around Europe." [Eddie, employee]*

Contrasting to this, Georgina articulates a long-term or even permanent orientation. She describes how her seasonal work transitioned into a stable employment, supported by factors such as a permanent contract, job stability and fair compensation. In her narrative, the shift from uncertainty to security is reflected.

"Well, I have already been here for eight years. (...) my decision to stay is mainly influenced by job stability, fair compensation and professional growth opportunities. Because now that I get the permanent contract, I feel like I have a long-term security compared to the uncertainty I experienced before every season." [Georgina, employee]

Liz is emphasizing the role of affective attachment and place-based experience. The description of "falling in love" with northern Finland demonstrates how emotional engagement with the environment can influence intentions to return. Here, the duration of the stay is not purely determined by work-related factors, but also by the experiential and symbolic value attributed to the location.

"(...) I want to return in the future (...). I was indeed amazed by the beauty of the northern Finland. One thing is for sure that I will definitely go back here in a season that I want. So I fell in love with this place. (...) Work is great as well." [Liz, employee]

At the same time, Finja maintains an open, undecided stance, who is uncertain about returning and is considering different career paths.

"I´m not decided yet if I want to return, I want to come back next season or not, but for me considering about like a career path, I think maybe doing something more challenging." [Finja, employee]

The employer interviews construct rehiring as a desirable but constrained practice, which is shaped by organizational and external structural limitations. Across the material, employers consistently emphasize the value of retaining seasonal workers, framing rehiring as beneficial in terms of continuity, efficiency and workforce stability. A central pattern here is the preference for re-employing familiar and proven workers. Employers highlight that workers who have previously performed well and are willing to return are welcome to do so. Dave states that they "try to keep the same people", illustrating how rehiring is linked to positive past performance and mutual satisfaction. Similarly, Bertha describes efforts to actively encourage return migration, including the use of financial incentives such as a bonus for the contract renewal. These practices construct rehiring as part of a strategic approach to workforce management, aimed at reducing uncertainty and maintaining service quality.

"Well there are definitely a lot of good things about it, so we´d like them [seasonal workers] to come back and we´re trying to make that happen. (...) we do have a kind of

bonus for coming back. So if You come back, You get a bonus if You renew Your contract." [Bertha, employer]

"(...) we usually try to hire the same. If people are happy and they have been doing a good job and they want to come back, we hire them. (...) we try to keep the same people." [Dave, employer]

On the other hand, next to the efforts to attract workers to return, Carl points to institutional and bureaucratic constraints, especially in relation to work permits and international recruitment regulations. Carl´s reference to the Finnish Immigration Service and the regulatory frameworks in countries such as the Philippines highlights how rehiring is not solely an organizational decision, but is shaped also by complex transnational systems. These constrain also highlight the element of unpredictability, limiting employers´ ability to retain experiences workers even when there is mutual interest.

"Of course, it would always be best if the same people would be re-hired, but unfortunately that´s not always possible, and one unfortunate and significant challenge is the Finnish Immigration Service. The Finnish Immigration Service poses challenges in certain areas – specifically, work permit matters. (...) and on top of that in Asia, for example in the Philippines, the laws and bureaucracy of the Philippine government dictate a lot of how it´s possible to recruit people there." [Carl, employer]

These accounts demonstrate how employers construct rehiring through a dual discourse of intent and limitation. On one hand, they emphasize their willingness and efforts to retain workers. On the other hand, they attribute challenges to external factors beyond their control.

5.4 The role of staffing and recruitment agencies

In the material, employees construct recruitment pathways as diverse and uneven, with staffing and recruitment agencies playing more a selective role than a universal one in accessing seasonal work in Finland. The participants highlight two main trajectories: direct application processes and agency-mediated recruitment, each associated with different forms of support and experience. A dominant pattern I the data are direct recruitment channels, such as company websites or online job platforms. The participants describe applying independently by responding to job advertisements or submitting applications directly to employers. Recruitment

here is framed as relatively straightforward and self-managed, with minimal institutional mediation.

> *"(...) I applied directly through their website because they opened their job advertisements there." [Audrey, employee]*

> *"(...) I just found it on job website (...). So they post this job on the job board (...)." [Caro, employee]*

> *"I actually did not go through any recruitment process. (...) I didn´t go through a staff agency also. (...) So we were directly hired." [Georgina, employee]*

> *"(...) I saw this recruitment news, recruitment notice (...). So I just sent my resume and I just picked up whatever position." [Eddie, employee]*

> *"So I found this job on a Taiwanese job website. (...) My manager just contacted me directly (...). So no agencies between these recruitment." [Finja, employee]*

Agency-mediated recruitment on the other side is constructed as a more structured and guided process, especially in cases involving international mobility. Liz, who engaged with recruitment agencies, emphasized the comprehensive support provided, including interview preparation, job matching and assistance with administrative procedures such as visas, travel arrangements and documentation. Similarly, Caro experiences being referred to an agency, illustrating how recruitment can occur through informal networks combined with institutional mediation.

> *"There´s an agency in the Philippines that´s looking for (...) a specific candidate (...). So luckily, I´m the one they´re looking for. (...) recruitment agency helps me with all the process smoothly. They (...) helps me go through things like interview preparations (...) all the paper works, (...) the whole process like visa, plane tickets, immigration things, or some bureaucratic paper works." [Liz, employee]*

> *"I happened to (...) run into someone who offered me [staffing company]. (...) So, he referred his (...) agent of this staffing company, (...) she did an interview and then matching me to [company] receptionist." [Caro, employee]*

In contrast to the employee accounts, where recruitment agencies are described as optional or situational support structures, employers construct these intermediaries as strategically valuable actors within a complex recruitment system. The interviews highlight how staffing agencies are integrated into organizational practices as a means of managing scales and complexity in

international hiring. A central theme in the employer narrative is the role of agencies in filtering and pre-selecting candidates. Bertha emphasizes the "staggering number of applicants" for seasonal positions, describing recruitment as a resource-intensive process that exceeds internal capacities. Here, agencies are valued for their ability to do the initial screening, verification of qualifications and presentation of a curated pool of candidates. Also, Dave highlights that applicants who pass agency selection are already perceived as "probably good" indicating a level of delegated trust in the agency´s evaluative role.

> *"But when a recruitment firm handles it themselves, they´re focused specifically on that work. (...) They filter the applicants, check all the references and do that initial screening there so that they aim to provide us with the best candidates." [Bertha, employer]*

> *"If Your work with [staffing agency] and [staffing agency], it´s a bit faster and easier. So they just facilitate and also they have a bigger pool of people and they do the pre-screening before (...) we know if somebody is applying and they pass it through their first selection they gotta be probably good." [Dave, employer]*

Beyond the candidate selection, employers also construct agencies as essential in navigating bureaucratic and administrative requirements, including work permits, taxation, insurance and migration procedures. These tasks are framed as highly specialized and continuously evolving, positioning agencies as holders of expert knowledge.

> *"(...) then there´s all this bureaucracy on top of that. Like work permits, tax issues, insurance and all the migration stuff (...). I´d say that they´re constantly training in this specialized skill set, well, the value of what we get from them is definitely significant." [Bertha, employer]*

At the same time, the employers do not present agencies as indispensable in all cases. Bertha and Dave note that international recruitment can also be conducted internally, suggesting that agencies function more as facilitators rather than sole gatekeepers.

> *"Well, they facilitate the employment of international people. (...) we hire people by ourself that are international." [Dave, employer]*

> *"We have an HR department. Like, a dedicated department or person (...) who can handle this kind of global recruitment. (...) When we post seasonal positions, we get an absolutely staggering number of applicants; Even from Asian countries, going through them is a challenge." [Bertha, employer]*

The agency involvement in the overall recruitment procedures is associated with speed, ease and access to a broader candidate pool, reinforcing their role as enhancers of recruitment efficiency. Still, the employee, as well as the employer's point of view proves, that employment is not dependent on solely on recruitment or staffing agencies, but can go through direct processes as well.

5.5 Contribution to the tourism and hospitality industry

The interview material shows that employees construct the contribution of Asian seasonal workers as multifaceted, encompassing labor, service quality, and broader economic and cultural dimensions. A central theme concerns the emphasis on service orientation and work ethic. Employees repeatedly describe Asian workers as "hard-working", "flexible" and "friendly", positioning these qualities as key contributions to enhancing customer experiences. Audrey links flexibility and friendliness directly to tourist satisfaction, while Georgina highlights a strong commitment to "excellent customer service". Caro links these attributes not only to the customers' satisfaction, but also to the appreciation of the employer.

> *"(...) the advantage would be that since we are very hard working, (...) we are very friendly and we try to be as flexible as we can to the customers. So, I would say that it might improve the hospitality and tourism here in the future" [Audrey, employee]*
>
> *"We always want the excellent customer service." [Georgina, employee]*
>
> *"Asian worker is always very welcome as working flexible, not just towards the guests, but also flexible with the hours. (...) it´s very intense long working hours I can see that there will be more and more Asian people coming to work." [Caro, employee]*

At the same time, participants emphasize their role in addressing structural labor demands, particularly during peak tourist seasons. Liz and Georgina describe Asian seasonal workers as filling labor shortages and maintaining service quality under conditions of high demand.

> *"We fill temporary job shortage. We maintain service quality by delivering exceptional work. (...) Seasonal workers like me benefits local economy, increases income within the community." [Liz, employee]*

"I think it´s a very crucial role in the industry, especially during the peak season, when the labor demand is very high. Many Asian workers are experienced in hospitality and we bring all this strong service orientation (...)." [Georgina, employee]

Another important dimension is the role of Asian workers in supporting the internationalization of tourism. Several participants highlight the growing number of Asian tourists and the corresponding need for multilingual and culturally aware staff. In this sense, workers construct themselves as cultural intermediaries, bridging gaps between tourists and the local context.

"(...) some part of the Asian they don´t speak English quite good (...) people tend to want to speak in their own language." [Caro, employee]

"(...) the tourism market in Lapland is also growing on the Asian part, so having a multilingual and culturally aware staff, it strengthens the customer service experience." [Georgina, employee]

"(...) there´s a lot of Chinese-speaking or Asian people coming to Rovaniemi as the tourists. (...) So I think being as Asian (...) helps the future development of Rovaniemi, because there´s more and more people coming." [Eddie, employee]

"I think there´s getting more and more Asian tourists in the past few years, so I think apart from language, I think sharing our experience here is quite important. (...) And probably by this way, it can help to attract more and more tourist who want to visit Finland in the future." [Finja, employee]

From the employer perspective, the contribution of Asian seasonal workers is primarily constructed in terms of labor market necessity, service enhancement and strategic alignment with changing tourism flows. Unlike employee narratives, which emphasize personal attributes and experiential contributions, employers frame these workers within broader organizational and industry-level needs. A central theme here concerns the role of Asian workers in responding to the internationalization of tourism demand. Employers highlight the growing number of Asian tourists visiting Lapland and emphasize the importance of providing services in customers´ native languages. As Bertha notes, the ability to offer service in tourists´ own is "a very important factor", positioning Asian workers as valuable not only in labor, but as linguistic and cultural resources.

"And since our clientele also comes from there – meaning Asian countries have also become a major destination for tourism in Lapland (...) they can receive service in their own language is a very important factor." [Bertha, employer]

At the same time, employers construct Asian seasonal workers as part of a broader solution to labor shortages, specifically in sectors such as kitchen work. Dave´s account of relying on Filipino workers reflects how certain groups become associated with reliability and competence, based on prior experience.

"(...) kitchen staff is very limited like the people You can hire are is very small amount of people (...). Filipinos we could rely on, I knew how they worked and I know they work well (...). In the kitchen they can be really good for us (...) for sure can be really good in other positions as well (...)." [Dave, employer]

However, Bertha emphasizes that the importance of Asian workers is not framed as inherently cultural, but rather as situational and demand driven. Her statement that it is "not crucial" for workers to be specifically Asian suggests that their significance is tied to availability and suitability rather than essentialized identity.

"It´s not crucial whether they have to be specifically Asian, (...) we need them and maybe there are more Asians coming from there now." [Berhta, employer]

Furthermore, the increasing presence of Asian workers is constructed as having a positive systemic impact on the local labor market. Carl´s observation that this workforce is "growing year by year" and will benefit both employers and employees positions as stabilizing and expanding force within the tourism economy of Rovaniemi.

"The Asian workforce is growing year by year and this will certainly have a positive impact on the employer and employee markets in Rovaniemi." [Carl, employer]

While earlier themes construct seasonal work in Lapland as offering opportunities for experience, mobility and professional development, the interview material simultaneously reveals a contrasting narrative. Employees articulate structural inequalities and vulnerabilities associated with their position as international workers. These accounts highlight tensions between perceived opportunity and experienced limitation, particularly in relation to labor conditions, access to information and career progression. A central point of contrast emerges around the idea of being valued versus being exploited. On one hand, Asian workers are frequently constructed (by themselves and others) as "hard-working", a trait that is often framed

positively in the context of employability. On the other hand, Audrey´s account suggests that these same attributes may lead to overexploitation, as workers feel compelled to accept all requests and are offered minimal compensation.

> *"They kind of take advantage of Asian seasonal workers because we are known for hard working. So whenever they call, we will say yes, always." [Audrey, employee]*

Another important contrast concerns knowledge and information asymmetries. Finja highlights how gaps in understanding of Finnish labor laws may be used to attract workers who are not fully aware of their rights, while Audrey similarly notes a lack of knowledge regarding industry-standard wages. These narratives construct international workers as operating within an informational disadvantage, which can limit their ability to negotiate conditions or recognize unfair practices.

> *"And we don´t know the average salary of the industry, so we just accept the bare minimum." [Audrey, employee]*

> *"(...) because I think some people, they´re just using information gap to attract people working here, and they don´t know exactly what is the things going on here, or maybe they´re not familiar with like a working law here. So they just work here, they don´t even know their right is being abused." [Finja, employee]*

> *"I hope that maybe the Asian or international companies that come to Finland for work, they should maybe follow the Finnish laws (...) and then give better working environment for the workers." [Audrey, employee]*

Career opportunities and workplace integration also emerge as areas of tension. Caro and Georgina describe barriers related to social networks, language and belonging, indicating that foreign workers may face restricted access to advancement despite having relevant qualifications. The importance of informal connections ("knowing somebody") is constructed as an advantage for local workers; this reinforces inequalities in access to employment opportunities. Georgina characterizes herself as "a visitor" and describes how limited integration can shape perceptions of long-term belonging and professional recognition.

> *"(...) Finnish people has a huge advantage (..) if You know somebody it´s easier for You to get for the job (...). Without the connection it will take way longer or less opportunity, less options for You. So for the foreigner it would even more difficult (...). So I feel like the career opportunity is limited for sure for the international worker." [Caro, employee]*

"I´m struggling my work my way up in the company as an Asian who doesn´t speak the language but has the credentials (...). I´m just like a visitor here." [Georgina, employee]

Moreover, the concern of trust and structural stability withing employment relationships is raised. Caro is questioning This long-term contracts and mutual trust points to a perceived lack of security, suggesting that employment conditions may not always align with expectations of fairness and transparency.

"Is there any concern for the employee offer a proper work contract for a long term? (...) I don´t find there´s a mutual trust between employers and employees. (...) I find there´s a structure wrong." [Caro, employee]

This contrasts with earlier narratives that emphasized stability and regulated labor practices, revealing a more complex and uneven reality. These contrasting accounts demonstrate how employees construct their experiences through tension-filled narratives, where positive and negative aspects coexist and are negotiated.

6. DISCUSSION

This study was set to examine how Asian seasonal workers contribute to the operational capacity and service experience of the tourism industry in Rovaniemi, Lapland. By bringing the empirical findings into dialogue with the existing literature on migration and tourism labor and cross-cultural service work, the research aimed to move beyond a purely descriptive account of seasonal employment and instead provide a better understanding of how these workers shape the tourism system. Based on the analysis, the research aim can be considered achieved. The findings demonstrate that Asian seasonal workers contribute in multifaceted and structurally embedded ways, extending beyond the role of supplementary workforce. Instead, their contribution operates across operational, experiential and strategic dimensions, aligning with broader debates on the complexity and significance of human resources in tourism (Baum, 2007, p. 1385).

With regard to the primary research question, how Asian seasonal workers contribute to the operational capacity and service experience of the tourism industry, the study shows that their role is central to maintaining business continuity, particularly during the peak winter seasons characterized by high demand and labor shortages. This supports the existing research which

highlights the reliance on migrant workers to address labor shortages and ensure business continuity (Larja & Peltonen, 2023). In the case of Rovaniemi, where tourism has experienced rapid tourism growth in recent years (Business Rovaniemi, 2024), the reliance on international labor becomes not only beneficial, but also necessary to sustain service provision. Asian workers fill critical gaps, especially in sectors with limited local labor supply, such as hospitality and kitchen work, thereby enabling businesses to function effectively during intensive periods.

At the same time, the study demonstrates that their contribution extends to the quality of the service experience. Employees construct their role through characteristics such as flexibility, friendliness and strong service orientation, while employers similarly highlight their politeness, attentiveness and willingness to "go above and beyond". These findings resonate with the concept of emotional labor in hospitality, where workers actively manage emotions to meet organizational expectations and create positive customer experiences (Hochschild, 2012, p. 7). The data further reflects the argument by Baum that "skills" in hospitality are socially constructed, as qualities such as politeness and service-mindedness are culturally framed and valued differently across contexts (2008, p. 78). In this context, Asian seasonal workers contribute not only through physical labor, but through the production of a particular type of customer-oriented interaction, which enhances the overall tourism experience.

In addition, the findings highlight the importance of cultural mediation. As the number of Asian tourists visiting Lapland continues to grow (Visit Finland, n.d.-a), Asian seasonal workers play a key role in bridging linguistic gaps between visitors and Finnish service providers. Workers´ linguistic and cultural competencies position them as cultural intermediaries, facilitating communication and improving service accessibility. This supports arguments by Yu et al. (2004, p. 85) and Feldman & Skinner (2018, p. 6), who describe tourism workers as bridging gaps between destinations and visitors. In this sense, the workers´ contribution extends beyond labor supply to shaping the international competitiveness of the destination.

The supporting research questions further deepen this understanding. First, regarding motivations and duration of stay, the findings of the research indicate that Asian seasonal workers are motivated by a combination of experiential, economic and professional factors. While financial benefits and better salaries remain important, also the desire to experience Nordic life, achieve work-life balance, and gain international experience are included. This reflects Lee´s migration theory, where mobility decisions are shaped by a combination of push

and pull factors, including both economic opportunities and lifestyle aspirations (1966, p. 50). The findings also suggest that seasonal work in Lapland is often constructed as a form of lifestyle migration, rather than purely economic migration. However, the duration of stay is not fixed but conditional, depending on factors such as working conditions, career prospects, and personal well-being.

Second, concerning the role of recruitment and staffing agencies, the study shows that these actors function as key intermediaries within the migration process. From the employee perspective, agencies provide practical support, particularly in navigating bureaucratic processes such as visas, contracts and travel arrangements. From the employer perspective, they function as efficient tools for candidate selection and risk reduction. This dual role can be understood through the concept of migration infrastructure, which emphasizes how mobility is facilitated by networks of actors, institutions and practices (Bastide & Yeoh, 2025, p. 3). Recruitment and staffing agencies are acting as intermediaries in this system, connecting supply and demand while shaping access to opportunities. Similarly, the OECD highlights the importance of fair recruitment practices in ensuring equitable labor mobility (2025, p. 112). However, the findings also point to potential inequalities within these systems, particularly regarding information asymmetries and dependence on intermediaries. This reflects broader concerns in the literature about the power dynamics of recruitment processes, where access to information and institutional support can significantly influence workers' experiences (Robinson, 2013, p. 96).

However, the findings also highlight structural limitations: While workers are drawn by opportunities for personal and professional growth, they simultaneously encounter challenges related to working conditions, information gaps and limited career progression. These findings resonate with research on precarity in tourism employment, where migrant workers often occupy vulnerable positions despite their essential role (Zigo et al., 2017, p. 155). This, while Rovaniemi is constructed as a place of opportunity, this is accompanied by uncertainty and inequality in long-term prospects.

Despite these contributions, the study is subject to several limitations. First, the relatively small sample size, particularly on the employer side, limits the extent to which findings can be generalized across the tourism industry in Lapland. However, this limitation is consistent with the qualitative research design, which prioritizes depth and contextual understanding over

statistical representativeness (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p. 37). The inclusion of both employee and employer perspectives was a deliberate strategy to enhance analytical depth and allow for comparison between different viewpoints.

Further, the reliance on self-reported interview data introduces a degree of subjectivity, as participants construct and interpret their experiences in specific ways. However, qualitative research acknowledges the interpretative nature of data and the active role of the researcher in the analytical process (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80). The identification of recurring themes across interviews strengthens the credibility of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82), while the combination of interviews with document analysis allows for a more contextualized interpretation of individual accounts (Hall, 2011, p. 12).

While the empirical findings highlight differences in communication styles, service approaches and workplace expectations, the patterns can be further understood through the lens of cross-cultural theory. In particular, the Lewis model provides a useful analytical lens from interpreting the interactions between Asian seasonal workers and Finnish workplaces. As discussed previously, Finland can be characterized as a linear-active culture, emphasizing task orientation, direct communication and structured work practices (Cross Culture, n.d.-a), while many Asian contexts align more closely with reactive cultural patterns, which prioritize harmony, indirect communication and attentive listening (Cross Culture, n.d.-b).

Applying this framework to the findings, the difference described by participants, such as the contrast between rule-based service in Finland and more flexible customer-oriented approaches in Asian contexts, can be interpreted as manifestations of these broader cultural patterns. For example, employees´ emphasis on adaptability, emotional engagement and going “above and beyond” reflects a reactive orientation toward service, while employers´ descriptions of Finnish practices as structured and policy-driven align with linear-active characteristics. These differences help explain both the added value that Asian workers bring to service interactions and the tensions and misunderstandings that arise in workplace communication.

Furthermore, the findings related to hierarchy and workplace relationships can also be interpreted through this framework. Participants´ descriptions of flatter hierarchies and greater accessibility to managers in Finland contrast with more hierarchical norms in some Asian contexts. This aligns with Lewis´ argument that cultural differences in authority and

communication influence workplace dynamics and expectations (Lewis, 2018, p. 105). Such differences may lead to challenges, for instance when workers hesitate to question authority or when direct feedback is perceived as overly blunt.

Bringing all of these elements together, the study shows that Asian seasonal workers contribute to the tourism industry in Rovaniemi in three keyways: Operationally, experientially and strategically. They contribute operationally, by filling critical labor shortages and enabling businesses to function during the peak winter season. Further, they contribute experientially, by enhancing the service quality through strong service orientation, emotional labor and cultural mediation. Lastly, they contribute strategically, by supporting the internationalization and competitiveness of the destination. At the same time, these contributions are shaped by motivations, mobility patterns and recruitment structures, as well as by broader inequalities within the labor market. While workers are attracted by economic and experiential opportunities, their long-term engagement depends on working conditions, integration and career prospects. Recruitment agencies facilitate access but also structure the terms under which mobility occurs. Overall, the findings confirm that Asian seasonal workers are not only a supplementary workforce, but a central component on the tourism system in Lapland. Their contribution extends beyond labor supply to shaping the social and cultural dynamics of the industry. At the same time, the findings support broader arguments in the literature that cultural diversity in hospitality work represents both an asset and a source of complexity (Baum et al., 2007, p. 233). In this sense, cross-cultural mediation becomes a key mechanism through which these differences are negotiated in practice, enabling both improved service quality and more effective collaboration.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has explored the role of Asian seasonal workers in the tourism industry in Rovaniemi, Lapland with a focus on how their contribution is constructed and understood by employers and employees themselves. Using a qualitative, reflexive thematic analysis approach, the research has moved beyond a purely descriptive account to examine how meanings around work, mobility and cultural difference are actively produced through interview narratives.

The findings show that Asian seasonal workers play a central role in sustaining the operational capacity of the tourism sector, particularly addressing labor shortages during peak seasons. At the same time, their contribution extends to the service experience, where attributes such as flexibility, politeness and strong service orientation are constructed as enhancing customer satisfaction. Additionally, the workers function as cultural and linguistic mediators, who support the growing internationalization of tourism in Rovaniemi and Lapland. These multiple dimensions highlight that their role is not limited to labor provision only but is embedded in the social and experiential fabric of tourism.

At the level of individual motivation, the study shows that migration to Lapland is driven by a combination of economic, experiential and professional factors, including the desire for financial stability, international work experience and the opportunity to experience Nordic life. However, the duration of the stay in the region is not fixed, but conditional and negotiated, shaped by working conditions, career opportunities and personal well-being. While some workers envision long-term settlement, others engage in more temporary or circular forms of mobility.

The analysis also highlights the importance of recruitment and staffing agencies as mediating actors in the employment process. These intermediaries facilitate access to jobs and manage administrative complexities, while also shaping the conditions under which workers enter the local labor market. Their role shows how seasonal migration is embedded in broader institutional and organizational structures, rather than being solely the result of individual choice.

Simultaneously, the study identifies tensions between inequalities within this system. While Asian seasonal workers are often valued for their work ethic and service orientation, these same characteristics can contribute to vulnerabilities; these include limited bargaining power, information asymmetries and restricted career advancement. Differences in language, social networks and institutional knowledge further shape unequal experiences within the workplace. These findings point to the coexistence of opportunity and constraint, reflecting the complex realities of seasonal and migrant labor in tourism.

In a nutshell, Asian seasonal workers emerge as a crucial yet unevenly positioned group within the tourism industry in Rovaniemi. Their contributions are vital to the functioning and

development of the sector, yet their experiences are shaped by structural conditions that influence their opportunities and constraints.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

During the approaching process of potential participants for the interviews, first limitations occurred; the majority of companies contacted did not reply to the E-Mail request or declined without reasoning. This could be caused by ethical issues from the company´s side, as the interview discusses the sensitive topic of cultural differences and might give room for assumptions. As Scheytt & Pflüger found in their study, field access in qualitative organizational research is often mediated by gatekeeper, making it a significant challenge for researchers (2024, pp. 9-10)

Throughout the process of interviews, the interviewees were reminded that they were not obligated to answer the questions completely if they felt uncomfortable; This can lead to a gap in the analyzing process. Furthermore, even though the participants were ensured that no sensitive data (personal information, names, company names) is published, it cannot be ensured if the answers by the participants are given truthfully, which can lead to false conclusions at the end of the content analysis.

Methodologically, the study underlines the value of a qualitative approach in capturing the named complexities. By applying a reflexive thematic analysis framework, the research has highlighted how meanings are constructed through comparison, contrast and evaluation. The findings therefore should be understood not as objective representations of reality, but as interpretative accounts shaped by participants perspectives and the researchers analytical engagement with the data.

Future research could further explore the role of policy and institutional frameworks in shaping more equitable and sustainable forms of labor mobility in tourism. Furthermore, a more investigative approach could be used, in order to get deeper insights into the tourism industry in Rovaniemi. Also, it would be interesting to see, how this research could be reflected five years after publication.

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APPENDIX 1: Interview questions

Questions for seasonally employed tourism/hospitality workers in Rovaniemi, Lapland, originating from Asia

Q1 Which part of Asia are You from?

Q2 What motivated You to come to Rovaniemi for seasonal work in tourism?

Q3 How did You find Your job in Rovaniemi?

What role did recruitment or staffing agencies play in this process?

Q4 Before arriving, what expectations did You have about working and living in Lapland?

How are these compare to Your actual experience?

Q5 Can You describe Your current work tasks and how You feel Your role contributes to the daily operations of the tourism business?

Q6 How long do You plan to work in Lapland and what factors influence Your decision to stay for on season or return in the future?

Q7 Have You noticed differences between hospitality practices in Your home country and Finland?

If so, how do these affect Your work?

Q8 How do You experience the emotional or interpersonal demands of working in tourism, especially during busy seasons?

Q9 What kind of support have You received from Your employer or agency in terms of training, language or cultural adaption?

What support do You feel is missing?

Q10 In Your opinion, what role do Asian seasonal workers play in the future development of tourism in Rovaniemi?

Questions for employers in the tourism/hospitality industry in Rovaniemi, Lapland

Q1.1 How would You describe Your labor needs during the winter tourism season and what challenges do You face in recruiting staff locally?

Q2.1 What motivated Your organization to employ seasonal workers from Asian countries?

Which parts of Asia are Your employees from?

Q3.1 In what ways do Asian seasonal workers contribute to the daily operations and service quality of Your business?

Q4.1 What role do recruitment or staffing agencies play in sourcing and managing seasonal workers in Your business?

Q5.1 Have You observed differences between Asian and Finnish hospitality practices in Your workplace?

If so, how are these differences managed?

Q6.1 How do Asian seasonal workers interact with tourists from different cultural backgrounds?

Q7.1 What kind of training or support do You provide to help foreign seasonal workers integrate into Your organization and Finnish work culture?

Q8.1 Do You aim to rehire the same seasonal workers in future seasons, and what factor influence retention or return migration?

Q9.1 How do You see the role of Asian seasonal workers in the future development of Rovaniemi´s tourism industry?

APPENDIX 2: Interview consent form

Dear Participant,

My name is Charlotta Laux. I am Master student at University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland under the supervision of Senior Lecturer Linda Tallberg (linda.tallberg@ulapland.fi, Tel. +358(0)405945629). You are invited to participate in my master thesis study entitled "The impact of Asian seasonal workers in shaping the tourism industry in Rovaniemi, Lapland". The purpose of the study is to determine, in how far Asian seasonal workers contribute to the operational capacity and service industry in Rovaniemi, with a deeper look on motivational factors and intentions during the stay. 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 Program 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,

Charlotta Laux

TourCIM Master student

Email: claux@ulapland.fi

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

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____

Print Name