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**The Role of Sustainable Practices in Enhancing
Customer Loyalty: The Case of a Finnish travel
company**

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ABSTRACT:

Within the tourism industry, particularly in places that are highly environment conscious and well regulated, the issue of sustainability has assumed the frontline position in the strategic concerns of the tourism industry. The thesis will analyze the role of sustainable practices principle in customer loyalty in the Finnish tourism context through the Haltia Lake Lodge as a qualitative case study. The study is based on an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm. It is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Theory of Stakeholder to study the perception, experiences and evaluation of sustainability by the key stakeholders of the company.

Semi-structured interviews with customers, employees, and the top management were used to acquire the data. The thematic analysis was conducted to find common patterns and meanings in the sources of data. The evidence demonstrates that sustainability is more of a set of practicality, observable and institutionalized practices, as opposed to a strategic formalism. Sustainable practices seem to increase customer satisfaction and trust, but they are more of a complementary than a driving force behind loyalty. The combination of the factors of experience, including place, atmosphere, quality of service and value fit, results in customer loyalty, and the factor of sustainability contributes to the other factors indirectly.

The research contributes to the body of knowledge on sustainable tourism, with a context-specific result in Finland. It underlines the importance of genuineness, sensitive communication, and involvement of employees in the process of converting sustainability into substantial experiences by customers. The implication on real practice, such as how the concept of sustainability can be integrated by tourism managers in the long-term relationship building strategies is discussed.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable tourism; Customer loyalty; Theory of Planned Behavior; Stakeholder Theory; Eco certification; Finland tourism sector; Sustainability perceptions

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Table 1. Overview of Themes and Data Sources

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Abbreviations**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)****United Nations (UN)****European Union (EU)****National Action Plans (NAPs)****Women International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)****Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)**

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The twenty-first century has already witnessed a significant rise in the levels of awareness about the problems of environmental and social sustainability. With pressure to reduce their environmental impact, invest in social well-being, and respond to climate change, businesses of all kinds need to reduce their environmental impact, invest in social well-being, and respond to climate change (Kirchherr et al., 2023). The SDGs of the United Nations and the European Green Deal are powerful instruments to integrate sustainability in the economy and society at a worldwide scale, and the greening of business models becomes a matter of necessity in Europe through pledges toward carbon neutrality, environmental conservation, and a circular economy (Yumnam et al., 2024).

One of the sectors that is greatly concerned by sustainability-related issues is the travel and tourism industry. Being an activity reliant on natural and cultural resources to a large extent, tourism is peculiarly susceptible to concerns like greenhouse gas emissions caused by transportation, oversupply, waste production, and even depletion of the culture and nature of the area (Baloch, 2022; Strippoli et al., 2024). All these problems indicate that the business models need urgent modification to promote sustainable transport, responsible tourism practices, and sustainable consumption patterns.

In retaliation, sustainability has been identified as the core of competitiveness strategies of the various tourism destinations. This is why Finland has been one of the top sustainable travel destinations (Karhu, 2023) with its untouched natural environments, good environmental governance, and cultural heritage. Finland is a country where the travel and tourism industry has evolved into a more sustainable sector by the use of eco certification programs, low-carbon travel programs, community-based tourism projects, and direct investment in biodiversity conservation (Kokkarinen, 2024). These initiatives help not only to fulfil the priorities of the policy of any country but also internationally

established sustainable tourism frameworks, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals or Global Sustainable Tourism Council criteria, which in turn strengthen the position of Finland as a pioneer in sustainable tourism development (Srensen & Grindsted, 2021).

In the meantime, Finnish tourism enterprises are witnessing the growing needs of the clients as they are more critical, value-conscious, and discriminating. Finns and other Nordic customers have a high level of environmental awareness and prefer ethically fair brands over their global counterparts (Rantsi et al., 2023; Jamil, 2024; Amin, 2024). It is an indicator of a trend that demonstrates that sustainability has the potential to be a key element in defining customer loyalty, which is a vital aspect of long-term competitiveness in an industry that is marked by a high customer acquisition rate and stiff competition (Rane et al., 2023).

Profitability, brand equity, and operational efficiency are closely associated with customer loyalty, which denotes that the traveler will buy again and promote the services of a service provider to others (Rane et al., 2023). In the case of tourism businesses, loyalty may be converted into increased lifetime customer value, repeat business, and good word-of-mouth. Nevertheless, sustainability has not been centered as a differentiator, but its effect on loyalty is not apparent, especially within the unique socio-economic and cultural background of Finland (Osman et al., 2025).

The following questions are important: Can sustainable practices really increase customer loyalty, or are they viewed as minimum standards and low in terms of their impact on repeat behavior? What are the most common sustainability practices that travelers visiting Finland like the most? Moreover, what can demographic factors do to this relationship? These are the questions that drive the present research, which aims to investigate the issue of sustainable practices in improving customer loyalty in the Finnish travel and tourism firm.

1.2 Research Gap

Despite an increased interest in sustainable tourism among academia and policymakers, the current literature appears to have gaps that are important, especially on the behavioral implications of sustainable tourism as it applies in practice. The findings and discussions of most of the previous studies center on two key themes: The environmental impact of tourism (Zhao et al., 2025; Shimul et al., 2024) and the success of specific sustainability programmes, including eco-certifications or carbon offsetting, in specific destinations (Elhoushy et al., 2025; Arbelo et al., 2025).

In the travel and tourism industry research has been conducted on the advantages of eco-labels, waste minimization schemes, and energy efficiency schemes (Hou et al., 2023; Gu, 2024). Consumer awareness and attitudes towards sustainability have been examined by others on the macro level (Lin et al., 2022; Foroudi et al., 2022). Nevertheless, empirical studies on the effect of these sustainability practices on long-term customer loyalty are still scarce, which is becoming a promising field of research among scholars and practitioners (Waris et al., 2021).

The geographical background also has a significant gap because most of the current research have been conducted outside Finland (Tyrväinen al., 2014). The socio-economic characteristics of the Nordic region, including high levels of environmental awareness, digital literacy, and active consumer engagement, may differ significantly from other locations and could shape consumer responses to sustainability in distinct ways (Rantsi et al., 2023). Empirical findings reported in recent Nordic research show a significant association between brand commitment and brand preference for ethically aligned businesses, indicating that Nordic consumers, including Finns, display more substantial commitment and preference for ethically oriented brands compared with global averages (Jamil, 2024; Amin, 2024). However, few empirical studies have examined the extent to which sustainability initiatives implemented by tourism companies in Finland contribute to customer loyalty. This unavailability will restrict the applicability of the foreign research and establish a necessary gap in terms of comprehension of

sustainability-related loyalty among Finnish consumers within the psychology of consumers (Kokkarinen, 2024).

The other dimension that is currently under-discussed is the multidimensionality of sustainable practices. Although recent literature has touched on certain practices (the availability of eco-certifications or carbon-offsetting opportunities), there is rarely an attempt to evaluate the cumulative or synergistic effect of practices on consumer behavior (Wongsaichia et al., 2025). To take another example, a hotel may engage in generating renewable energy, in avoiding food waste, or in operating in local communities, but little is known about how customers assess and decide between such activities and which they rank first, etc. (Demetriou, 2022).

Additionally, demographic differences remain insufficiently studied as potential moderators in the sustainability loyalty relationship. Studies indicate that age, sex, income, education, and the frequency of traveling can greatly affect sustainability preferences (Uçgun and Narci, 2022). Indicatively, younger tourists are more concerned with carbon neutrality, and older travelers with cultural protection or community development (Peixoto de & Macario, 2024; Ijatuyi et al., 2025). These differences should not be overlooked, because by ignoring them, it is challenging to create segmented marketing programs that resonate with sustainability messages with target audiences (Lin et al., 2022).

In order to fill these gaps, this study took a case study, qualitative approach that dwells on the Haltia Lake Lodge is a sustainability-based hotel located next to Nuuksio National Park. The Lodge has placed sustainability as a highlight of its activities and created a reputation in the form of eco-certifications and company awards. The case is suitable and restricted to examine the effects of sustainability on customer loyalty within the Finnish tourism sector because of its size, visibility and its active involvement of sustainable practices. The thesis has accurately and contextually described the relationships of sustainability-loyalty by focusing on this single case and does not intend

to generalize statistically, and therefore, provides insights that may be generalized to other tourism providers in Finland and other locations, as well.

1.3 Problem Statement

The concept of sustainability in the present market that has now become environmentally conscious is no longer a fringe requirement to tourism companies but a strategic requirement. Finland, with a good worldwide reputation in terms of natural beauty, clean technologies, and a transparent government, has made great profits in terms of introducing sustainability in the tourist sector. Such measures can include carbon-neutral travel, community-based tourism, eco-certifications, renewable resources in hospitality services, and so on (Basu, 2024).

Even though these initiatives help to understand how sustainable practices affect customer loyalty, their role is quite unclear (Reppmann et al., 2024). Although sustainability will improve the ethical image of a brand, it cannot be determined how the travelers in Finland remain faithful to sustainability-compliant businesses and how many switch to focus on other factors, such as price or convenience. Moreover, the results of existing studies are controversial as some of them show that sustainability and loyalty are correlated, and others suggest that sustainability is not enough to guarantee the repeated patronage (Viralta et al., 2023; Rane et al., 2023).

This ambiguity is coupled with the reality that most companies engage in sustainability practice without an empirical understanding of its effects, or impacts on customer perception, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty-driven behavior. Because of this, resources can be either underutilized or overutilized, where there exists the overuse of initiatives that are considered less valued by customers or the underutilization of such practices that have the highest potential impact on loyalty. Without Finland-specific empirical data, the tourism company risks pursuing sustainability strategies that are ethically commendable but commercially ineffective.

In this study, sustainability which refers to business practices that balance the environment, social responsibilities and economic viability to ensure that the present needs are met without jeopardizing the capability of the future generation to achieve their needs is used as a potential source of loyalty according to the relationship marketing theory and consumer behavior model (Chiu et al., 2005). Nevertheless, the research also admits that such a relationship needs evidence based on context. In response to this, the study assumes a qualitative single case design in which a tourism business in Finland is constructed with sustainability as its central theme. This case is limited, though, which means that it gives the opportunity to take a closer look at the perception of sustainable practices as well as its expression by various stakeholders. It results in the following problem statement of the study:

How do sustainable hospitality practices influence customer loyalty?

1.4 Research Objectives

The study has the following objectives in order to answer the research questions effectively:

- To examine how customers and stakeholders perceive and experience the sustainability practices within a hospitality context.
- To analyze how these sustainability practices contribute to customer satisfaction and influence loyalty formation.
- To explore how different visitor types and demographic factors (such as age, income, and travel frequency) shape interpretations and valuations of sustainability practices.

In order to accomplish these goals, the research examines qualitative data that was gathered by semi-structured interviews with customers, employees, and management with the help of documentary materials and field observations. The thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) will be used to analyze the results and determine the patterns, meanings and contrasts of the current patterns and meanings between the stakeholder sets. A particular attention is given to the relationships between the perception related to sustainability and satisfaction and the discourse of loyalty and the impact of the demographic and visitor-type differences on these interpretations.

1.5 Research Questions

The research provided the following research questions to investigate the major research problem systematically and uncover the dynamics related to the background:

- How do customers and stakeholders perceive and experience the sustainability practices within a hospitality sector?
- In what ways do this sustainability practices contribute to customers' overall satisfaction and their decision to remain loyal?
- How do different types of visitors (e.g., business travelers versus leisure tourists), as well as demographic factors such as age, income, and travel frequency, shape their understandings and valuations of sustainability in their experiences?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Correlation between sustainability and customer loyalty within tourism sector has received a lot of focus over the last couple of years and individuals have become conscious of environment and social issues. Carbon offsetting schemes, eco-certification, waste minimization schemes, and community involvement schemes are only a few of the many activities involved in sustainable tourism practices (Moreno et al., 2025). This is supposed to mitigate environmental and socio-cultural losses due to tourism and to maximize economic gains of tourism to the local communities and waterbody ecosystems (Nguyen et al., 2024). The example of the Finnish travel company, which is characterized by a high ecological focus on customers and a high level of environmental conditions, offers an appropriate environment in terms of analyzing the relationship between sustainability practices and customer loyalty. Customer loyalty may be determined as the degree of customer involvement with a brand and encouragement of the brand in the long-term (Ebele et al., 2024).

The need to understand the impact of sustainability initiatives on loyalty is vital to travel businesses trying to keep up with consumer values to gain a competitive edge. The body of research that has accumulated implies that sustainability has moved on to become a mainstream necessity among travelers, especially in those rather environmentally minded markets such as Finland. In a survey, it was reported that 78% of international visitors took into consideration sustainability credentials when choosing travel providers, and this jumped to 89% when it came to Nordic travelers (Nagendrakumar et al., 2022). Such a transition reflects trending international shifts in which sustainability has become a major distinguishing factor in highly competitive tourist sectors, albeit in far more diverse ways than we can cover here in this survey of the tourism company in Peru (Zayim, 2024).

The increasing interest in the sphere of sustainability in tourism is because international frameworks (including the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations and the European Green Deal) promote the idea of responsible production and consumption (Martins et al., 2025). One of the countries where the sustainability principles are most appropriately introduced in terms of national policies is Finland, which can be viewed as an environment rich in possibilities to investigate the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives towards the enhancement of customer loyalty. Nevertheless, there are few empirical studies on customer loyalty in the context of sustainable practices; therefore, limited information is available on whether such practices influence customer loyalty within companies (Renfors, 2023). This literature review is intended to synthesize existing studies of sustainable tourism practices, customer loyalty, and the relationship between them, as well as the gaps that are to be filled by this study. To clarify this relationship, the theoretical framework of existing research in this field is examined first.

2.2 Theory of Planned Behavior and Stakeholder Theory as the Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Stakeholder Theory. As stated in the TPB, the behavior of people is modeled by attitudes, personal norms, and control perceptions (Hemsworth et al., 2024). Within the framework of sustainable tourism, the environmental and social responsibility attitudes of customers, informed by normative pressure and a sense of control over the ability to engage in sustainable behaviors, determine intentions of patronization of a business that is responsible for the environment (Zhang et al., 2025). In particular, pro-environmental attitude of travelers will increase their likelihood of patronizing hotels that are eco-certified or carriers with carbon offset programs, and therefore brand-loyal (Elhoushy et al., 2025). There is also the influence of subjective norms, which include peer encouragement or social influence trends, which further enforce such behavior, so that sustainability can be a crucial generator of customer retention (Syed et al., 2024).

Recent applications of the TPB within Nordic tourism also provide noteworthy insights into the role of sustainability in the loyalty decision-making process. The socially worthy normative beliefs are also strong in Finnish travelers, where 65% note the presence of social pressure to make environmentally responsible decisions (Luong, 2023). Despite this, the view of being in control of behavior is also a significant barrier, as most people say they cannot find really viable options in the maze of competing claims and certifications (Gallo et al., 2023). This conflict between interest and ability presents an opportunity and a challenge to tourism providers that would assist them to convert sustainability into a form of interest to loyal practices.

This school of thought is complemented by the Stakeholder Theory because it suggests that, to become successful in the long term, the needs of all aggregate of stakeholders such as customers, employees, and communities, should be fulfilled (Mahajan et al., 2023). In the travel company as well as in general, sustainable practices do not only fulfill the ethical duty, but may also help in enhancing reputation and customer trust which are central to loyalty (Rastogi et al., 2024). Companies that do not fake being sustainable, such as the reduction of the carbon footprint or investments in the local economy, are perceived as more trustworthy, which leads to the increase in customer satisfaction and repeat purchases (Ebele et al., 2024). Conversely, an appearance of sustainability of the company, which is actually a lie, can lead to distrust and unwillingness to invest in the specific company, so the effort of sustainability must be transparent and genuine (Hossain et al., 2025). This kind of theoretical approach forms the basis of the methodological designs that are used in the study of the sustainability-loyalty relationships.

An interpretivist-constructivist paradigm is used to inform this research. In this understanding, reality is considered context-dependent, multiple and socially constructed instead of being unique and objective (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). The interactions between the researcher and the participants lead to knowledge co-

construction, and the meanings that are created are informed by the experiences of the researcher and the experiences of the participants. The qualitative researcher, as Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) point out, does not find an absolute truth but rather understands the way people interpret the world around them and presents those interpretations in a manner that would allow readers to respond to and think about them.

In this paradigm, the researcher recognises that the findings are incomplete, localised and subject to more interpretation by the reader. The study aims at producing thick and contextual description that makes transferability possible as opposed to the aim of generalization in a positivist sense. The philosophical orientation is consistent with the purpose of the study to understand how customers and stakeholders of the Haltia Lake Lodge perceive and experience sustainability practices, and how the perceptions influence their loyalty to the lodge.

2.3 Sustainable Practices in Finnish Tourism

The sustainable tourism practices may be considered under three categories: environmental, social, and economic (Ijatuyi et al., 2025). The use of renewable energy, reduction of wastes, eco-certifications, and carbon-neutral transportation are examples of environmental initiatives. Social sustainability aims at maintaining the culture, associating with the local community, and offering real experiences to the visitors, and economic sustainability aims at decent remuneration, promoting local supply chains, and investing in the region's development (Zhang et al., 2025). All these dimensions form a complete sustainability model that is becoming popular among travellers.

The effectiveness of such practices, as well as the actual effect they have on the environment or the social spheres, also rests on the visibility or perceived authenticity of the given practice. Other types of hospitality initiatives, like recycling centers, eco

labels, and programs with different cultures, are also highly related to the trust, satisfaction, and loyalty amongst customers (Nadeem et al., 2025). Comparatively, backstage projects such as heating systems that conserve energy or wastewater treatment, could have gigantic positive payoffs, but this would be completely invisible to the customer unless the project is marketed effectively. This subtlety of the sense of substantive sustainability vernacular and communicative and open approach is needed in the Finnish tourism industry, as the travelers are also conscious of the environment and the authenticity (Ritalahti & Ali, 2023).

As a way of illustrating how all these practices can be effectively practiced in Finland, the carbon eco-certifications and green marketing, namely, carbon offset programs and community engagement have been discussed in the next section.

2.3.1 Eco-Certifications and Green Marketing

Eco-certification is a core designation of credible sustainability messages to customers. Labels like the Sustainable Travel Finland (STF) label and international certification criteria recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (2025) provide verifiable criteria to guide travelers to identify safe, responsible service providers. Tourism researchers have found that hotels and tourism operators who have visible eco-certifications record a higher rate of bookings and repeat visitation in the venture compared to their uncertified counterparts in the company, as certifications reduce the uncertainty and build trust (GSTC, 2025).

In Finland, the STF program has received international attention, which has led to the brand strength of the country as a sustainable destination. Nonetheless, recognition will only work because of consumer awareness and confidence. Research demonstrates that, although Finnish travelers have substantial sustainability awareness, there are knowledge deficits regarding the requirements of the certification processes (Kokkarinen, 2024). Things like green marketing - publishing clear reports on the savings of energy, biodiversity conservation, or engaging with the local communities are

therefore vital to build the sustainability of the claims and avoid ambiguity. With authentic application methods, the use of eco-certifications and data transparency strategies can contribute to the retention of customers by providing them with assurances that a company cares about their expectations and is genuinely interested in meeting the expectations and fulfilling the values of the travellers and doing so in an authentic and genuine way (Muchenje et al., 2023).

2.3.2 Carbon Offset Programs

Of great significance to travel and tourism is the carbon offset program, which is especially important considering that most emission stems from the transportation sector. This kind of scheme provides the option of buying carbon offsets so that the tourist can offset his/her carbon footprint by investing in activities such as reforestation, renewable power, or protection. Here in Finland, carbon offsetting is already in step with the nationwide aim to be carbon-neutral by 2035, with several airlines, tour companies, and accommodation providers already becoming more involved in offering carbon offsetting opportunities to their customers (Shine, 2023).

The empirical evidence indicates that participating customers tend to have better levels of attachment to the provider due to their perception that they are socially responsible and hold the value (Ebele et al., 2024). Adoption rates, however, differ according to demographics: as young and higher-income travellers are more willing to adopt and pay to contribute to offsets, older and price-sensitive travellers may choose prices and convenience over sustainability. Central to the perceived credibility of offset schemes is also the willingness of travelers to remain loyal when companies become more transparent regarding the actual effects of offset investments on the environment. On the Finnish side, this implies that the offset programs should be accessible and well communicated to enforce the outcomes of loyalty (Peixoto de & Macario, 2024).

2.3.3 Community Engagement

Social sustainability projects, and especially ones that are community-based and involve cultural preservation, are critical to fostering emotional bonds with the consumer. The key opportunities in this direction are the collaboration with local co-producers, local communities, and Sami culture (Turcnicovic et al., 2025). When businesses include community partnerships in their services by, for example, facilitating guided tours, advancing local crafts, or using local food, they are sometimes seen to be more genuine and believable (Cano et al., 2023).

Travelers who are citizens who are the focus of community-based tourism activities show a higher degree of satisfaction and positive intentions to be a repeat customer than those involved in conventional tourism systems (Seyfi et al., 2025). The experiences would appease international visitors who desire authentic experiences and local consumers who place importance on morality and local outreach. Effective outcomes occur when there are respectful and fair collaborations. Examples of cultural misrepresentation or made-up engagement have been found to hurt brand reputation and destroy trust (Rodrigues et al., 2023).

Local communities are becoming more loyal to Finnish tourism providers when they are genuinely collaborating with them, and this aspect can help in assuring the sustainability of any business in the long term by making contributions more evenly spread across the territories. This creates a stabilising loop where the interests of the customers, community welfare, and environmental safety are advocated together (Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023).

2.4 Customer Loyalty Dynamics

The classic approaches to the concept of customer loyalty in the tourism industry usually determine it by indicators such as repeat purchase intention and Net Promoter Scores

(Rane et al., 2023). In the framework of sustainable consumption, however, loyalty is no longer a behavioral measure, but, first of all, a relational and emotional element, based on the correspondence of personal values with the corporate behavior. This richer, subjective aspect is what renders it a phenomenon that is ideally to be explored qualitatively because it involves seeking to know as much as the personal stories and interpretations that the customers create.

Alongside the quality of service and customer satisfaction, the value-added such dimensions as trust, authenticity, and fit correspond to the identity are the powerful determinants of sustainability-based loyalty. Although a precondition is satisfaction, a moral and emotional aspect of sustainability in the equation of loyalty appears (Seyfi et al., 2025). It is in this that qualitative methods are invaluable. The depth of conversation can also enable a researcher to discover how emotional connection is achieved when the environmental stewardship of a company is appealing to the values of a customer, or how a feeling of purpose and connectedness can result in a stronger interdependence than transactional satisfaction on its own.

In addition, trust narratives are the focus of this dynamic. The success in the long term is constructed around the needs of the stakeholders in an authentic way, as suggested by the Stakeholder Theory (Mahajan et al., 2023). Customers will stick longer with a company that they think is devoted to sustainability. The best instrument that can be used to investigate the ways in which these narratives of trust are constructed through verifiable eco-certifications, open communication, and genuine community partnerships, or demolished by the perceptions of greenwashing, is qualitative interviews (Hossain et al., 2025). Trust levels can be measured by the use of surveys; however, only conversation provides insight into the stories and actual events that are behind them.

Lastly, identity alignment practices are the primary motivators of profound devotion. Engaging in cultural immersion or conservation supports a traveler in developing a stronger self-concept of an environmentally or socially responsible person (Chang et al.,

2024). This is a personal and complicated process of positioning oneself and one's values in a brand. Qualitative methods have the unique capability to determine how these experiences are being deciphered by the customers, how sustainability practices are being internalized into their account of personal identity and why it leads to a high level of advocacy-based loyalty that can be difficult to quantify with just scaled survey questions.

2.5 The Finnish Context

The country of Finland can be used as the right place to investigate the interconnection between sustainability and customer loyalty because of its high policy framework, high consumer awareness and well-developed sustainability practices. According to previous literature, the Finnish travel companies are active in their efforts to apply measures like eco-labels, carbon-neutral transport, and community-based tourism backed by the national Sustainable Travel Finland programme (STF) (Renfors, 2023). Such efforts have helped to build the reputation of Finland as a responsible tourism destination and boost the trust of international visitors in service providers which operate in the Finnish market.

However, empirical evidence reveals a dilemma on the Finnish consumer behavior. In surveys, over two-thirds of the domestic travellers indicated that they would prefer the sustainable choice, but fewer cited their willingness to pay an extra price to get such travel services (Syed et al., 2024). This intention-action gap makes it clear why the possible identification of which sustainability practices have the best resonance with the customers and their impacts on customer loyalty should be identified. A comparative analysis also indicates that the tendency of Finnish consumers to put a significant degree of trust in the institutional structures may reinforce the credibility of sustainability initiatives (Rantsi et al., 2023), although the strength of sustainability initiatives as social norms may diminish their ability to serve as a differentiation factor.

There is another dimension of complexity within demographic differences. Studies show that young and richer Finnish customers are highly likely to penalize businesses that are not sustainable by their standards, whereas their older or price-conscious counterparts will attach more importance to convenience and affordability (Ucgun & Narcin, 2022). Travel frequency is also likely to undermine the association between these variables, as the frequent travelers are better aware of the negative impact of tourism on the environment and have a connection to environmentally friendly operators (Peixoto de & Macario, 2024).

In total, the Finnish environment has potential tendencies and challenges. Overall, sustainability initiatives positively influence the brand image and consumer confidence, and the impact is not even among consumer groups regarding loyalty. It is also important to take into account the existence of such nuances when a business intends to use sustainability as the source of long-term competitiveness in the tourism market in Finland.

Demographic Factors: Age, Income, and Travel Frequency

Demographic characteristics are of decisive influence in terms of how travelers react to the concepts of sustainability. Age proves to be highly predictable with the younger generations (Millennials and Generation Z) more likely to demonstrate their loyalty towards rewarding sustainability-related practices than older customers. Using the case of Ucgun and Narcin (2022), they concluded that five-sevenths of the under-35 age group and only slightly more of the over-50 age group of hospitality preferred environmentally approved hotels. This age gap implies that younger tourists are likely to make sustainability one of their major expectations, and older tourists are likely to be interested in convenience and affordability.

Loyalty responses are also dependent on the level of income. Travelers with higher income will be willing to pay any extra charges that might be added to eco-certified or carbon-neutral services, and those with lower income will be ready to renounce such

services even if they value the sustainability idea (Peixoto de & Macario, 2024). Such a financial aspect partially predetermines the discrepancy reported between a favorable attitude toward sustainability and the corresponding actual purchasing behavior of the Finnish tourists (Kokkarinen, 2024).

Sustainability loyalty relationship is influenced by travel frequency as well. Another factor that will make frequent travelers spend more on the same provider is a high level of knowledge about the environmental and social consequences of tourism, which helps to make them more responsible and eager to help such customers remain loyal to more serious providers (Ijatuyi et al., 2025). On the other hand, the tourists may be less stressed about the cost and accessibility aspects, thus subordinating the sustainability factor in influencing their loyalty to the particular destination.

The fourth one is the significance of segmentation strategies in the Finnish travel market, which these demographic variations can describe. Rather than considering sustainability a macro driver behind loyalty, it may be that rather than blanket communications and service product offerings, subtle changes to communications and service offerings can be made to better address different groups such as cost-effective sustainability messages and service packages to price-conscious segments and more premium eco-tourism marketing to younger, high-income travelers.

2.6 Emerging Trends

Even though the majority of sustainability and loyalty studies on the tourism industry have focused on eco certifications, carbon offsetting, and communities involvement, the recent literature has increasingly attributed new technologies as a potential instrument to promote transparency and trust. Such technologies may be blockchain-based traceability, digital carbon calculator, and high-tech monitoring tools (Baydeniz, 2024). These innovations are yet to reach their infancy stage of embracement in Finland, and they have not been analysed in-depth considering their correlation to loyalty. This

research follows empirically-grounded practices which already exist in the Finnish tourism sector. Nevertheless, consideration of new technological tools provide a more insightful view on the dynamic aspect of sustainable tourism.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The methodology of a study is the structure that supports the whole research project. Methodological decisions assist the researcher in converting abstract philosophical suppositions into definite inquiry plans. This is specifically crucial in qualitative research, the definition of which does not presuppose any statistical control, but means coherence, reflexivity, and credibility (Khan et al., 2023). This study is interested in the issue of the sustainability of practices in contributing to customer loyalty in the Finnish tourism industry, especially in Haltia Lake Lodge. As argued in the chapters above, Finland is a nation that is at the forefront in terms of sustainable tourism and there is lack of empirical information on the impact that sustainability strategies have on visitor perception and visitor loyalty in the long-term. Since Haltia Lake Lodge is a tourism company that is based on sustainability and it is located in the vicinity of Nuuksio National Park, it provides a limited area where these dynamics can be studied in-depth.

The methodological issue is how to make an inquiry that is powerful enough to answer the important questions but in a manner that does not contradict the interpretive orientation of the researcher. This is not a study that seeks to measure the impacts of sustainability in quantitative measures, but rather research that seeks to paint a clear, contextualized image of the way sustainability practices are experienced and perceived by different stakeholders in the Lodge. An approach based on the interpretivist tradition is thus followed. The following sections will elaborate the philosophical paradigm of the research followed by how we have chosen a qualitative case study design, why we have chosen Haltia Lake Lodge as the research case and lastly outline the general research approach and strategy.

3.2 Research Paradigm

No research can be done outside larger ontological and epistemological commitments, either implicitly or explicitly. Ontology is the nature of reality, and epistemology is the nature of knowledge and how to attain it (Ignacio & Paras, 2024). They are both based on a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm in this study. Constructivism is ontological and assumes that reality is not monolithic but complex and constructed by people as a result of their social interactions and lived experiences (Burns et al., 2022). Interpretivism is an epistemological approach that is based on the notion that knowledge is constructed in dialogue, interaction, and interpretation, instead of being an unavoidable truth to be unearthed (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

Such a paradigm aligns with the researcher's orientation and the research questions. The corresponding purpose is to comprehend how customers, employees, and managers of Haltia Lake Lodge construct meaning out of sustainability practices, and how the practices influence their understanding of loyalty. These phenomena cannot be meaningfully represented by a survey per se because they are subjective meanings, values, and emotions which occur in particular situations. Validity, reliability, and generalizability considerations would be the focus of a positivist paradigm (Dedat & Rodrigues, 2025), but the concepts are redefined in this research. The criterion is transferability, rather than generalizability, which implies that the readers receive enough detail about the context, thus allowing them to assess whether the findings can be applicable to other environments or not (Drisko, 2024). Rather than being objective, it focuses on reflexivity and recognition of the role that the researcher will play in the interpretation of the data.

In the constructivist perspective, knowledge is created in a collaborative way. Visitors' and staff's stories are not the facts but the situated ones in the context of the interview, their relation to the researcher, and larger cultural discourses on sustainability and tourism as well. Just like that, the researcher carries her personal background, values, and perspectives in the interpretative process. Such subjectivity should not be regarded

as a weakness but as an asset since it initiates the interpretive levels that will always structure any knowledge production (Soulard & Russell, 2025).

The other implication of this paradigm is that there is a denial of a particular truth. Rather, the study assumes that there are different and even opposing opinions on the definition of sustainability and the relationship between sustainability and loyalty. To illustrate, a business traveller may place more emphasis on sustainability than a leisure tourist, and employees may consider sustainability as an instrument of marketing and an obligation. The methodology should be sensitive to all these divergent views and one that is able to maintain them in tension without diminishing them into one story. This is one of the reasons why a qualitative case study was adopted as a result of this epistemological openness (Hall et al., 2022).

3.3 Research Design

With a philosophical orientation in place, the second thing is to find an outline that fits the design. The study design is the qualitative case study, which is especially appropriate in studies related to the investigation of complicated social phenomena in the real-life setting (Lim, 2024). A case study will enable the researcher to concentrate intensely on one limited system in search of shedding light on how things happen in that environment, and not try to decontextualize variables.

The method of case study is challenged in the research society, and various researchers have highlighted various intentions and processes. Yin (2003) places case study research in a more positivist tradition of the focus on design quality, validity, and logic of replication. Merriam (1998) & Stake (1995), in turn, support interpretivist methods, the importance of the researcher as a meaning interpreter, and the necessity of thick and descriptive descriptions. The approaches to the study are based more on the interpretive approaches to research by Stake and Merriam, as they belong to the constructivist

paradigm, yet the methodological rigor that is offered by Yin (2014) is also considered, particularly, careful sectioning of a case and using multiple sources of information.

A case study may be either single or multiple. Yin (2014) identifies the single-case holistic and embedded studies, and multiple-case studies where cross-case comparison can be conducted. Due to the nature of this study and the recommendation of the supervisor, the single-case design is chosen. The unit of analysis is the Haltia Lake Lodge, and the unit within it is the managers, staff, visitors, and documentary materials. This enables within-case richness and cross-perspective triangulation.

Stake (1995) goes on to differentiate between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. An intrinsic case study concentrates on a case itself, and an instrumental case study concentrates on a case as a prism through which one realizes the larger problems. This is where Haltia Lake Lodge can play a vital role: although the Lodge in question is a unique case, the lessons learned in its study will be applied to the global discourse of sustainable tourism in Finland and the rest of the country. It is not to generalize statistically based on this case, but to create in-depth knowledge that can be incorporated by the reader and the practitioners into the context of their situations.

Various boundaries are applied to the case. On the spatial front, it is confined to a single organization, Haltia Lake Lodge. It is also temporal in that it is limited within the period of research in the year 2025, because practices and perceptions might change over time. In terms of themes, it is limited by the concern with sustainability practices and customer loyalty, although not attempting to learn everything about the operations of the Lodge. These boundaries also render the research manageable, but in-depth enough to answer the research questions.

3.4 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

A very important component of methodological rigor, which is utilized in the qualitative research, is reflexivity, since the researcher is actively involved in the process of creating knowledge. This study acknowledges that the researcher and his or her background as well as experiences will inevitably affect the research process including the research questions, data collection and interpretation of the findings.

This study is motivated by the fact that the researcher has a great interest in sustainability and responsible tourism both as an academic and as a person. The selection of the research topic and case organization was informed by this interest because Haltia Lake Lodge is a setting where sustainability is integrated into daily business and is not seen as a marketing instrument at the forefront of business.

The researcher came to the study with constructive orientation towards sustainability as a way of looking at the study as a necessary and a positive direction towards the tourism industry. At the same time, the researcher was aware that such an orientation could influence the perception of the stories of the participants, particularly, by bringing out the positive sustainability behaviours, or reduced the critical perceptions. In order to deal with this, the issue of conscious attempts to be attentive to the contradicting opinions and to approach sustainability, not as an assumed driver of value, but as an empirical phenomenon to be explored. The reflexive position was especially crucial in the analysis of the data collected by the interviews, as the interviewees revealed their ambivalence regarding sustainability or explained their choice as a secondary motivation.

The role of the positionality of the researcher who was not part of the organization also impacted the research process. Although it decreased the access to insider information about some of the operations of the company, this role contributed to the distance between an analyst and the organization and minimized the possibility of bias. Reflexive notes were kept by keeping a record in data collection and analysis to record assumptions, emotional reactions, and developing interpretations. Such notes were re-

read in the process of analysis in order to critically evaluate the ways in which the researcher might have been biased in making coding choices and theme formulation.

Potential bias was dealt with by several strategies that also improved the credibility. At the start, the data on various groups of stakeholders, such as customers, employees, and top management, was gathered, which is why it was possible to compare the points of view. Second, the transcripts of the interviews were read and analyzed in iterative steps, and constant comparison was utilized to make sure that the themes were based on the description of the participants and not the expectations of the researcher. Lastly, support of interpretive understanding was provided using contextual materials and observations without outweighing the interview-based findings.

This study also tried to improve transparency and credibility by being explicit on positionality and by practicing reflexivity. Instead of trying to pursue objectivity in a positivist manner, the study adopted reflexivity as a virtue that enabled a more subtle and contextually based process of interpreting sustainability and customer loyalty.

3.5 Case Selection: Haltia Lake Lodge

Haltia Lake Lodge is a small nature-oriented boutique hotel in Espoo, Finland bordering Nuuksio National Park and is about 35 kilometres south of Helsinki. The Lodge was launched in 2021 and is currently a nature experience and hospitality enterprise that is eco-oriented. The center is made up of about 20 boutique hotel rooms and five luxury glamping tents that offer visitors a nature-based accommodation experience. In addition to accommodation services, the Lodge has also a new restaurant outside which provides bistro-style meals, sauna, meeting and retreat rooms, and guided outdoor programs such as hiking, canoeing, and nature adventures. The business has a small workforce consisting of a few permanent employees assisted by seasonal workers during high tourism seasons (Haltia Lake Lodge, 2025; Visit Finland, 2025).

This research has been made with the permission of the company to use the name of the Lodge and its founder, Teemu Tuomarla. This will make sure that the reporting of interviews and organization practices upholds ethical issues and transparency on the origin of information.

The case study was specifically selected as Haltia Lake Lodge since the site is located along the Nuuksio National Park making it a sustainability-based tourism enterprise. It involves visible environmental activities, which include conservation of energy, minimization of waste and encouragement of low impact visitor practices. The sustainability principles are applied in different processes, such as using recycled materials, locally grown food, and green tourism experiences. The Lodge has also received the certifications and industry awards like the Green Key certification, which further makes it a worthy case study in regard to sustainable tourism in Finland (Haltia Lake Lodge, 2025).

Haltia Lake Lodge is an appropriate case study that can be researched on how sustainability practices are connected to customer loyalty in the actual tourism setting. The lodge, which is located in the natural surroundings of Nuuksio National Park, has developed its brand identity based on eco-friendliness and nature-based experiences. Being a fairly small but apparent participant in the Finnish tourism industry, it provides a limited environment where sustainability policies can be explored in detail. The interpretivist approach, which involves use of interpretations and experiences rather than the creation of statistical generalization to analyze the research, formed the basis of this research. It can be therefore concluded that, the case allows the generation of rich and transferable insights that can be touched on how sustainability is practiced and experienced in a tourism organization.

The other positive aspect of the lodge is the diversified customers. The international leisure tourists visiting Haltia Lake Lodge would like to experience the nature and the business groups visiting the company would be visiting with an intention to hold

corporate retreats and meetings (Haltia Lake Lodge, 2025). This diversity provides an opportunity to observe the perceptions of sustainability practices by different categories of visitors. An example would be business traveller who may be more concerned with the convenience and efficiency in services, but the leisure traveller can project the feeling of sustainability onto authenticity and environmental responsibility. The fact that these views are observed in the same case enhances the analytical aspect of the results analysis (Li et al., 2023).

In addition, the Haltia Lake Lodge possesses a nice story. The organizational leadership has on numerous occasions established a definition of sustainability as one of the organizational values and one of the major elements of the competitive positioning. The vision of the CEO and his leadership decisions contribute to creating the identity of the lodge as an environmentally friendly tourism company. Such descriptions may play a very important part in the process of enhancing the ability to establish a deeper comprehension of how sustainability is made, delivered and integrated into the business operations, thereby increasing the methodological coherence of the study (Reppmann et al., 2024).

Lastly, the case itself is further justified since it is easily accessible. The researcher could get in touch with the management and staff members, interview visitors and gather documentary and observational data. The nature of operation of the lodge is not very large, yet diversified, which gives a perfect environment to conduct qualitative research. It gives the researcher the opportunity to gain in-depth information but also provides the researcher with the opportunity to triangulate the various sources of evidence, and in the process, makes the study more profound and credible.

3.6 Research Approach and Strategy

The study is inductive qualitative research with the purpose of examining the perceptions and experience of sustainability practices in an institutional context of

tourism. The research is not based on the predetermined hypotheses, but the open-ended research questions guide the research to understand the interpretation of sustainability related initiatives based on various stakeholders and how such interpretations can be correlated with customer loyalty. Inductive approach permits the pattern and theme to emerge out of empirical information, and the study is in a position to capture the lived experiences and the views of the participants.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical knowledge on the Theory of Planned Behavior and Stakeholder Theory that contributes to the analytical orientation of the study. These frameworks are conceptually sensitive in the interpretation of the findings as well as enabling empirical findings to be derived based on the data itself. By so doing, theory acts as a guiding prism as opposed to a strict set of guidelines what the data must conform to.

The study was an iterative investigation that is typical of qualitative inquiry. Concurrent data collection and preliminary analysis were performed, where the early interviews could inform the further data collection. As an example, during initial interviews when there were differences in the perceptions of sustainability practices by the visitors, subsequent interviews further probed into them. This feedback between gathering data and the emergent interpretation in itself reflects the constructivist concept of qualitative research as a dynamic dialogue between the researcher, subjects and empirical data (Dahal et al., 2024).

3.7 Data Collection Methods

3.7.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the major data collection method in this study. Fifteen interviews were organized in this time period (August 2025-February 2026), including

seven customers, Cust1-Cust7, seven employees, EE1-EE7, and one senior managerial representative, CEO. The customer participants were diverse in age and travel history, and had previous experience of staying at the Haltia Lake Lodge, and the employees worked in different capacities in the organization. The CEO interview offered strategic-level information about sustainability practice as well as organization-situated sustainability positioning.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method as they/because they are the most appropriate in the case of conducting qualitative case study research because they provide a balance between structure and flexibility, the researcher can also investigate the predetermined topics, but also allows participants to present their point of view in their own words (Chand, 2025). The interview guide topics were selected based on general themes such as the perception of sustainability, experience in Haltia Lake Lodge, and the perception of how sustainability practices influence customer loyalty. Simultaneously, the interview format was conversational, which allowed unexpected themes and meanings to be generated through the narration of the participants.

The respondents used in the interview were the representatives of various stakeholders involved in the case. Some of the key informants were the founder of the Lodge, Teemu Tuomarla, and the employees who are directly involved in sustainability-related operations, who gave valuable insights regarding the strategic and operational levels. The consumer side had a customer view of the sustainability which was delivered by customers, the local and the international visitors who arrived in the country either on leisure or business missions. The interviews were all taped with consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim and anonymized such that no information could be exposed.

3.7.2 Document and Media Materials

Besides the interviews, organizational documents and media materials that were publicly available were consulted to come up with a contextual comprehension of the

case organization. The resources were the web site of the lodge, marketing communications, sustainability records, certification records, media coverage and online reviews on various sites like TripAdvisor and Google. These records are useful in qualitative case study study since they involve the way organizations formally and informally develop and express their identity and values (Iftikhar and Sergeeva, 2024).

Other than interviews, documentary and media materials were not coded and analyzed as primary empirical data. They were instead applied to aid in familiarizing themselves to the context of the case, to guide the formulation of interview questions, and to enhance the researcher's insights into the manner in which sustainability is reported by the organization to external parties. Video resources and speeches of the founder were also examined to offer the contextual background, but they were not considered the primary empirical sources.

3.7.3 Observations and Field Notes

Non-participant observation was utilized as another form of data collection to help in filling the contextual knowledge of sustainability practices within Haltia Lake Lodge. Notes made on the apparent sustainability related practices in the physical environment of the lodge such as the recycling plants, sustainability related messages on customer facing displays, and day-to-day routines of the employees. These observations helped gain a glimpse into the nature of the organizational behavior that might not be well-represented by interviews alone (Chand, 2025).

The visit to the site, along with the following notes were made as field notes, providing information on observations that relied on physical environment, activities, and interactions in the context of sustainability and customer experience. Similarly to document materials, the observational data were not coded systematically and presented as the part and parcel of the empirical results. Rather, they helped the researcher to interpret the case through his or her understanding and make informed reflections when the researcher was analyzing the data.

3.7.4 Secondary Sources

Finally, the primary interview data were complemented by the secondary ones, i.e., news articles, sustainability awards announcements, and reports publicly accessible about Haltia Lake Lodge. These sources helped to contextualize the case to some bigger national and even global context of sustainable tourism. They were contextual and descriptive, and were utilized to provide background information but not a real basis of the empirical examination.

3.8 Sampling Strategy

Qualitative research uses sampling based on relevancy as opposed to statistical representativeness (Patton, 2015). This study uses purposive sampling, where the participants were chosen according to their capacity to offer valuable contributions to the connection between sustainability and customer loyalty. In the single-case design, purposive sampling is used to guarantee diversity in the points of view without creating conflict with the boundaries of the case.

In the case of interviews, there were three types of participants who were of priority. To begin with, the management and employees who had a direct contribution to the sustainability practices design and implementation of the sustainability practices. Their views played a crucial role in comprehending sustainability intentions and the organizational framework of sustainability. Second, the visitors were the focus of the research questions on loyalty. Diversity among the visitors were sought to be captured, such as domestic and international travelers, business and leisure tourists, repeat and first-time customers.

The participants were recruited with the assistance of Haltia Lake Lodge management. The visitor participants were contacted in the field, where information sheets were available, so as to clarify why participation is voluntary. The expected sample size was

10-15 interviews, but the final figures was determined on the principle of data saturation because further interviews provided no new information (Haltia Lake Lodge, 2025).

In the case of documents, sampling was included, gathering all publicly available material that the Lodge produced throughout the research period, and any other past-related documents, such as award submissions or media reporting. The sampling of online reviews was done purposely to ensure a balance is obtained in terms of positive, negative, and neutral responses. The observational sampling was time-based and included various site visits on various days and times to achieve variation in the activity of customers. It is a purposive but adaptive methodology that gives the sample the diversity of the case and makes it possible to triangulate data types.

3.9 Data Analysis

The analysis of the qualitative case study in the given study consisted of a gradual transformation of unstructured qualitative data into anticipated results through a systematic and flexible process of interpretation. They helped to steer the analysis under the influence of the thematic analysis brought about by the interpretive traditions of Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995). Thematic analysis was deemed suitable for this constructivist inquiry because it focused on meaning-making and enabled themes to come inductively out of the data as opposed to being predetermined (Christou, 2022).

The analysis was done using an iterative process of familiarization, coding, development, and interpretation of the themes. The researcher went back and forth between data, emergent insights, and appropriate theory throughout the process, which enabled analysis to be built up over time as opposed to being linear.

3.9.1 Interview Data Analysis

The main empirical research of this thesis was based on semi-structured interviews. Interpretation of interview transcripts started with reading and rereading the transcripts to ensure familiarization and to have a general picture of the views of the participants. At this stage, preliminary impressions and repetitive thoughts regarding the sustainability practices, authenticity, and consumer loyalty were recorded.

After familiarization, preliminary coding was performed through the identification of meaningful units of text and assigning descriptive codes that reflected the content of what the participants were saying. To explain, the interview transcripts talking of having trust in eco-certifications or doubting about sustainability statements were coded under names like credibility of sustainability practices. The coding was done in an iterative process, and new codes were identified as more interviews were coded.

Categorical aggregation was used in the next stage to classify related codes into broader categories (Stake, 1995). This was done through continuous comparison in the sense that new data blocks were constantly made in comparison with the known codes and classifications to narrow the boundaries of themes. In this way, some of the upper-level themes, including authenticity versus greenwashing, ethical alignment and loyalty, and differences in stakeholder perceptions, were created. These were the themes that were used to build the empirical findings in Chapter 4.

3.9.2 Document and Media Analysis

Document-based and media-based content within the organization, such as the content on the websites, marketing communications, documents related to sustainability, and media coverage that was publicly available, were studied to enhance contextual interpretation of the case organization. These publications were read simultaneously with the interview data to make the researcher acquainted with the way the concept of

sustainability was officially conveyed and reflected by Haltia Lake Lodge (Iftikhar and Sergeeva, 2024).

Nonetheless, document and media materials were not coded and themed systematically. Instead, they were used to inform the creation of interview questions, enhance the contextual awareness and assist in interpreting interview results. Document and media materials, in this way, were not primary data of analysis; they were background data supplied to support the interpretive framework of the researcher.

3.9.3 Observational Data Analysis

The analysis of observational data will rely on qualitative methods, analyzing how the variables and factors affect the research hypothesis. Data was analyzed using qualitative analysis techniques, which examined the influence of the variables and factors on the research hypothesis (Morgan, 1998).

During the familiarization stage of the analysis, non-participant observations and field notes were examined with the help of interview transcripts. Observational data could give contextual data on seen sustainability practices, including recycling setups, sustainability messages in customer areas, and how employees act in their daily activities, which may be complementary to or opposing to interview accounts (Chand, 2025).

Just like document materials, observational data were not coded and analyzed as an independent empirical finding. They were instead utilized as aids to contextual interpretation and reflexive insight of the case, so that the researcher could put the interview responses into their physical and organizational context in the Lodge.

3.9.4 Triangulation Across Data Sources

In this study, triangulation was applied at the level of interpretation rather than through the concurrent analysis of multiple empirical data sources. Interview findings were

examined in relation to contextual information derived from document analysis and observations. This approach allowed the researcher to assess the consistency, divergence, and emphasis across different forms of evidence (Lim, 2024).

As an example, where interviewees in the interview highlighted practical ways of sustainability instead of official certification, it was interpreted by what they observed in-site and how sustainability was being conveyed in organizational publications. By doing so, the triangulation increased the credibility of the analysis by placing the findings of interviews in the framework of a larger context, and preserving the coherence of the methodology as the systematic analysis was restricted to the data of the interviews.

3.9.5 Interpretation and Theoretical Integration

The analytic themes that were obtained empirically in the last stage of analysis were presented in Chapter 2. As a way of exploring the impact of sustainability practices on attitudes, perceived norms, and intentions regarding customer loyalty, the Theory of Planned Behavior was applied. The Stakeholder Theory was used in the explanation of divergent views of customers, employees, and management on sustainability roles and responsibilities.

The qualitative data were organized and managed using NVivo software to increase the transparency and give the audit trail of the coding process. The software helped in storing, organizing, and retrieving the data in an organized manner and yet the interpretation was done by the researcher. In a qualitative study, software is not an analyzing agent, it is merely a technical support tool. The analytical process was therefore aimed at the creation of deep and contextually oriented explanations of the data as opposed to stripping the material of all but technical coding processes.

3.10 Ensuring Trustworthiness

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are the aspects that create trustworthiness in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). In this research, there are a number of approaches towards meeting each of these requirements.

Triangulation of the data sources, interviews, documents, observations, and secondary materials is used to increase credibility. The credibility is further enhanced by the long-term interaction with the case site and the constant exposure to the information.

The issue of transferability is addressed through the provision of thick description. By offering an extensive contextual background of Haltia Lake Lodge, its sustainability practices, and the Finnish tourism environment, the study enables readers to assess the relevance of the findings within their own contexts. The aim is not statistical generalization, but rather the provision of insights that may be applicable to similar cases.

Dependability refers to the consistency of findings (Khan et al., 2023; Lim, 2024). This was done by making sure that there is an audit trail that is kept, which will document the choices of the research, coding schemes, and analytic memos. Some external checks on the process could also be provided through peer debriefing with academic colleagues.

Confirmability is associated with the degree to which findings are influenced by the participants' biases other than the researcher's bias (Baldwin et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2023). This will be upheld by reflexive journaling, whereby the researcher notes her assumptions, reactions, and decisions as she goes through the process. These notes will show the interpretative prism and will help to break unquestionable prejudices. In these ways, the study aimed to fulfil rigour criteria that are appropriate in constructivist qualitative research.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Research integrity is an important aspect of the ethical behavior of an individual, particularly in qualitative research, where the most important factor is the contact with the research subjects. The study was ethically approved with the assistance of the research ethics committee of the university of Vaasa before data collection.

Informed consent was given to all the participants. The nature of the research, which is voluntary and in which a person can choose to withdraw at any time and not face any punishment, was described in information sheets. Before the interviews, consent forms were signed, and the participants were reminded about their rights at the start of each session. In the case of visitors approached on-site, an extra measure was then be to make sure the consent was not forced but authentic.

The anonymization of transcripts and the elimination of the identifiers was ensuring confidentiality. Reporting was done in pseudonyms, and the audio files was stored in secure storage with limited access. The observations were done in the open or semi-open spaces, and the consent of the Lodge management was taken in advance. An attempt was made to avoid disrupting the operations and encroaching on the privacy of the guests.

The same applies to the reporting of findings in terms of ethical sensitivity. Because sustainability practices are included in the Lodge's public image, the findings, which reveal tensions or criticisms, were made in a responsible manner, both in terms of honesty and without causing disrespect to the participants. The concept of reflexivity was involved once again because the researcher was taking into account the possible effects of her interpretations on the individuals and organizations under discussion.

3.12 Limitations of the Methodology

Every methodological choice entails some tradeoffs, and it is thus significant to realize the shortcomings of the study. The first constraint is associated with the application of a single case design. Albeit this methodology gives the opportunity to explore the research setting in depth, it does not permit the generalization of the results of this research over a set of different organizations. The findings will, therefore, not be statistically inferred to the broader Finnish tourism sector. Rather, the thesis focuses on transferability by offering a rich description of the case in a detailed and contextual way. This kind of contextual depth gives a reader an opportunity to determine whether the insights created as a result of this study can be applied to other tourism contexts having similar characteristics.

The second weakness is that there is a risk of self-selection bias in the participants. Visitors willing to be interviewed might have a firm opinion regarding sustainability, and it can be positive or negative. An attempt was made to reduce this bias through purposive sampling of various types of visitors and complementing this with unsolicited online reviews.

The third limitation is that of the influence of the observer. The fact that the researcher is present when they are observing the staff or visitors can influence the behavior in a subtle way. To reduce this, observations were done in a discrete fashion and prolonged contact may help the participants to get used to the presence of the researcher.

Finally, interpretive nature of the analysis suggests that the findings are likely to be affected by the thoughts of the researcher. It is not a weakness but is more an epistemological position which is congruent to constructivism. To make interpretations believable and trustworthy, reflexivity, triangulation and transparency were employed.

4 Empirical Findings and Results

4.1 Introduction

The chapter gives empirical findings of the qualitative study, mainly through semi-structured interviews with the customer, staff, and the Chief Executive Officer of Haltia Lake Lodge. Fifteen interviews, including seven customer interviews, seven employee interviews, and one CEO interview, were conducted on which the empirical analysis was based. Besides the data collected during the interview, the contextual interpretation, as well as analysis of the interview findings, were supported by the use of organisational reports, the media, and observations.

The objective of the chapter is to provide the findings based on how it emerged out of the empirical material, what general patterns, shared meanings, and dominant views there might be in sustainability practices, and the way it is thought to influence customer loyalty. As per the principles of qualitative research, the results are described in this chapter without the involvement of any theoretical interpretation or protracted discussion, which will be covered in the next chapter.

The thematic analysis of the interview data was supported with the help of NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The software helped to code, organize, and classify the material into themes according to semantic similarities between the interview transcripts. The method used in the analysis was inductive, as the themes were produced based on the data and not pre-determined. The quotations of the selected participants are presented to demonstrate each theme, and anonymity is guaranteed with the help of labelling participants as Cust1- Cust7, EE1- EE7, and CEO.

4.2 Thematic Analysis

4.2.1 Development of Themes

The NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used to conduct the thematic analysis, and the theme was inductive. The transcripts of all interviews were subjected to open coding, where the responses of the participants were examined on a case-by-case basis. The first codes were created directly based on the data and referred to the repetitive concepts regarding the sustainability practices, customer experiences, and loyalty perceptions. The codes were reviewed, compared, and then integrated in an iterative process, which resulted in the development of general conceptual categories.

By comparing and refining several times, higher-order themes were formed that constituted dominating trends within groups of participants. Although the semi-structured interviews were the main source of empirical data on the development of the themes, the organizational documents, media materials, and observational notes have been checked with the survey information to facilitate the contextual insight. The last category of themes reflects hegemonic connotations common among participants and can be obtained in Table 1.

4.2.2 Overview of Themes and Data Sources

Table 1. Overview of Themes and Data Sources

Theme Code	Theme Title	Interviews	Documents & Media	Observations
T1	Perceptions of Sustainability Practices	✓	✓	✓
T2	Visibility and Everyday Experience of Sustainability	✓	✗	✓
T3	Authenticity and Trust in Sustainability Claims	✓	✓	✓

T4	Sustainability as a Secondary Decision Factor	✓	✗	✗
T5	Relationship Between Sustainability and Customer Loyalty	✓	✓	✓
T6	Employee Role in Implementing Sustainability	✓	✗	✓
T7	Place, Nature, and Environmental Integration	✓	✓	✓

4.3 Themes

4.3.1 Theme 1: Perceptions of Sustainability Practices

This theme examines meanings of sustainability to the various stakeholders and how they perceive sustainability in the Haltia Lake Lodge. In interviews, sustainability was always discussed as a practical and action-oriented notion, and not as an abstract or technical theoretical concept. Sustainability as defined by participants referred mostly to the apparent, daily activities like minimization of wastes, reduction of resource usage, and wastage of irrelevant materials. This implies that sustainability is perceived in experience, and it is practiced in the daily activity instead of being articulated in terms of structure or institutional discourse. This interpretation is depicted in a customer perspective. As Cust4 explained: “Sustainability to me would imply consuming as little as you require such as not taking extra packaging or not buying what is not necessary”. This quote represents a utilitarian and action-oriented conceptualization of sustainability, in which the meaning is made out of what is seen instead of what is defined.

On the same note, Cust2 focused on the intuitive aspect of such practices as he pointed out: “It is only common sense to be conscious of the way you use things to prevent wastage”. According to these accounts, customers experience sustainability as an apparent and normative practice, as opposed to a professional or an imposition concept. Internalization of environmental responsible practices can also be seen through the framing of sustainability as common sense which will make them conform to the daily

decision making. This operational definition of sustainability is also supported by the views of employees. An example of this is EE3 where sustainability was defined as part of daily working practice: “This goes on to say, that we simply do things simply, not take excess, and always think about nature in our day to day activities”. This is to point out that the employees do not view sustainability as an added burden, but as part of organizational behavior.

On the same note EE5 pointed out the fact that these practices were understated: “Reducing waste does not only form a portion of our job, we do not turn it into a performance”. These lessons prove the manifestations of sustainability in the organizational culture and practiced in habitual form instead of formalized or actively advocated programs. The lack of performative communication implies that there is a planned escape of over-signaling sustainability. This meaning is further institutionalized at the level of management.

The CEO defined sustainability not as a specific strategy initiative but as a core value that guides the work of the lodge: “It is not that this lodge has a separate strategy, but the way it functions daily, including how this lodge was built, is what makes it sustainable”. The lens reveals that sustainability is developed within the organization structure, to boost fidelity between the organizational values and practices. The alignment facilitates the formation of authenticity perceptions since sustainability is experienced as natural rather than being forced.

Triangulation of these findings with the documentary and observational data supports them. The literature on organizations was predominantly about the simplicity, minimalism and nature practices and was not written in any technical terms or blatant promotionalism. Still on the same note, the lodge setting was found to have very little use of unnecessary facilities and seemingly saving on resources as well, which further reinforces the inclusion of sustainability in the everyday work.

A combination of these outcomes suggests that sustainability in Haltia Lake Lodge is founded on the premise of practice, experience, and consistency amid the stakeholder groups. The fact that there is an overlap of customer, employee and managerial points of view is an indication that there is a shared view of sustainability as an internalized and normalized attribute of the service environment. This not only helps in perceived authenticity, but also to reduce the degree of explicit communication necessary since sustainability can be seen not to be convinced.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Visibility and Everyday Experience of Sustainability

This theme focuses on how sustainability is visible and lived by the customers through the daily activities at Haltia Lake Lodge. Findings suggest that sustainability is not conveyed using formal messages but it is incorporated into everyday service experience and physical design features where guests can see and analyze practices in their own way. Small, physical details in the area of food services, accommodation, and resource utilization were mentioned by participants often, implying a possibility that visibility is mediated by small, consistent indicators.

Food related practices were especially mentioned by the customers as one of the most important locations at which sustainability can be observed. In illustration, Cust1 has brought out the significance of the small menu in reducing waste by stating, that Free few menu items are good because it will help to avoid food wastage. This view suggests the view of sustainability as an efficiency in operation as opposed to limitation. The small menu has not been considered a negative issue, instead it was considered a deliberate design decision and was in line with environmental responsibility. On the same note, self-service aspects were found to be mechanisms that promote mindful consumption. You cook your own eggs, you see, and this makes you make you think otherwise you should waste food. This quote shows how a person can feel sustainability by taking part, that is, customers will become active participants in conserving resources instead of passive consumers of services.

Customer observations were also based on minimalism and resource consciousness. Cust4 also said that the general atmosphere was strictly regulated, that nothing appeared to be excessive here, that they will only advance you what you actually require. This brings out the realization of how just the fact that there is no excess is a visible manifestation of sustainability. Instead of using the explicit method of communication, the lodge expresses its environmental principles by being restraint and designed. These practices make sustainability an experience to be lived whereby the guests derive meaning based on what is there and what is not there.

The views of employees also explain the ways of constructing this visibility. EE3 described that:

“Sustainability was conveyed indirectly via practice, as opposed to teaching, and behaviors are not imposed but modelled”.

This is in line with the observation that EE2 claimed that, “The guests are not forced but are rather developed to behave in a sustainable manner”. These revelations imply that employees have a facilitative role in influencing the behavior of the guests such that sustainable behavior develops automatically. In the same vein, the EE6 observed that, “The Sustainability was observed in the organization but not in the explanation, which goes to affirm the notion that visibility is attained through consistency in action and not in direct communication”.

These interpretations can be observed. The lodge was designed to emphasize simplicity, reuse and functional design in the physical environment, that is, self-service arrangements, minimal packaging, and reusable materials were used. All these combinations lead to the fact that sustainability is not a program or initiative but a part and parcel of the stay experience.

Altogether, the results prove that the visibility in this situation is unobtrusive but efficient. The concept of sustainability is embodied in daily encounters, design of space, and or behavior patterns, which ensures that the customers are aware and participate in the

practices of environmental concern without requiring to be told. This supports the fact that experiential exposure can be an effective process in the formation of sustainability perceptions.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Authenticity and Reliability on Sustainability Claims

This theme is exploring the consideration of authenticity and credibility of sustainability practices by the customers in Haltia Lake Lodge. The most relevant result is that trust is built mostly by consistency of what is being observed and what is being communicated, and not necessarily due to formal claims or certifications. The participants often compared their experiences at the lodge with the bigger hotels where sustainability efforts were even seen as being over-the-top or sometimes as being fake.

As an example, Cust1 was rather critical of the practices of the industry at large, declaring, "It is somehow greener in bigger hotels and here it is more authentic". This comparison brings out the fact that authenticity is not measured independently but in comparison to the previous experiences whereby in other contexts, over-communication has induced doubt. Conversely, the simplicity strategy of the Haltia Lake Lodge resort increases perceived credibility because it gives the guests the opportunity to make personal decisions through observation.

Equally, Cust2 said that, "Operational consistency was essential in trust creation since I observed, Sustainability was a fact as it was not a poster on the walls but of how the place operated|. This assertion demonstrates that the notion of authenticity is strongly associated with embodied practice, in which sustainability is proved by daily operations, and not by symbolic representation. The lack of too much promotion message minimizes the perceived greenwashing risk and builds trust.

The institutional and cultural environment at large also affected trust. Other respondents associated the viability of sustainability rhetoric with the regulatory context in Finland that can suggest that a rigid set of norms and standards in society reduce the

likelihood of fraudulent activities. Authenticity in this regard is not only an organizational attribute but also contextually justified by the institutional trust and has an effect on how customers understand the sustainability cues.

These findings are further upheld by documentary and observational evidence. The organizational communications were seen as being suppressed and congruent with real practices and the physical environment was not overtly sustainability branded. Such coherence of communication, practice and context leads to high sense of authenticity, in which the sustainability is realized as credible, implicit and trustworthy.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Sustainability as a Secondary Decision Factor for Customers

This is a theme that examines the relative significance of sustainability in customer decision making. The results of the findings are consistent: although sustainability is rated positively, it is more of a supporting or backup factor, not a decisive one. With the location, comfort, and quality of services being practical factors, the customers are driven by their sustainability, which will only improve their decision-making process.

This trend is well expressed in response of the participants. According to Cust1, “Ten percent is a factor of sustainability, but not the first priority”. This is to indicate that sustainability is a valued concept in the decision-making process, but does not put fundamental functional expectations on the backburner. Likewise, Cust2 told, “It is a nice bonus, but I did not come to this place specifically due to sustainability”. In this case, sustainability is applied as a value added and serves to support satisfaction in the aftermath of satisfaction of the major needs.

These understandings imply that sustainability is a conditional force, that is, its significance is determined by the presence of other satisfactory properties. Customers will hardly sacrifice important elements of service to sustainability itself. Rather,

sustainability leads to the general analysis of the experience in the case where the baseline expectations are met.

Another significant difference between attitudinal support and behavioral decision making is also found in the findings. Even though participants had strong positive attitudes towards sustainability, these attitudes did not always lead to decisive action. This is a further statement that the concept of sustainability, as significant as it is, is still embedded into a larger pattern of conflicting priorities. Therefore, it does not play a decisive role in its decision making.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Relationship Between Sustainability Practices and Customer Loyalty

The relationship between the sustainability practices and customer loyalty, especially repeat visits, recommendations, and emotional attachment, is mentioned directly in this theme. The results show that sustainability is an indirect cause of loyalty which mainly increases the overall satisfaction and the emotional experience, but not a direct cause. Customers often associated sustainability with a better and more significant experience. Indicatively, Cust1 said, “The concept that the decisions are made on the basis of sustainability is what makes the experience better”. This alludes to the fact that sustainability promotes perceived quality through harmonizing the service environment with customer values. Likewise, Cust4 observed that “Sustainability adds to the overall impression of the place and makes it all the more attractive to visit”. This shows how sustainability is important in developing the emotional responses, which are essential in creating loyalty.

Nevertheless, respondents repeatedly pointed out that sustainability is not a sufficient reason to make sure the visit is repeated. Cust3 clarified, “The place of location, the tranquil atmosphere, and the excellent food quality determined loyalty and sustainability encouraged the same”. This implies that loyalty is multi-dimensional and sustainability is a strengthening factor, but not the cause of loyalty. The other respondent

also made similar statements and mentioned that, "I would suggest this place, but not only due to sustainability, the latter again proves that it plays the indirect role".

Another view of this relationship can be seen through the employee and managerial views. According to the statement of the CEO, "Sustainability helps in maintaining long-term relations with the guests, yet it collaborates with the comfort, service quality, and place". This is indicative of an organizational conception of loyalty as a unanimous result of a number of variables. It was also noted by the employees that returning customers seldom give the idea of sustainability as the primary source of their allegiance. As EE4 described, "Guests come back since they feel good when they are here, and sustainability is also a part of that good". This assertion reveals sustainability as embedded and implicit in the entire experience.

These are in line with findings of documentary and observational evidence. The concept of sustainability is placed as a part of a greater value-sell approach, and not the primary marketing tool. Repeat guest observations also imply the familiarity with the sustainable practices adds comfort and ease to subsequent visits, which strengthens positive associations in the long run.

In general, the results show that sustainability leads to customer loyalty due to emotional involvement, value congruence, and sense enhancement, but not to behavioral motivation. The significance of this indirect relationship is that sustainability should be part of the overall service experience to sustain customer relationships in the long-run.

4.3.6 Theme 6: Employee Role in Implementing Sustainability Practices

The theme considers the key position of employees in the operationalization of sustainability practices in the Haltia Lake Lodge. The results show that sustainability is not viewed by the staff as a supplementary task but as an inseparable part of daily work routines that implies a high level of internalization of values in the organization. The

employees always claimed that sustainability was part and parcel of their job, and it was part of their daily activities like handling of food, cleaning, and management of resources.

As an example, EE1 stressed the normalized character of these practices saying, “We do not feel that it is extra work, it is just the way we work”. This message emphasizes the fact that sustainability has become a part of day-to-day activity and thus there is less sense of difficulty or compulsion. The same thing was regarding the scope of these practices, EE5 reported, “Everything is done sustainably, such as food handling, and cleaning”. This implies that sustainability is not a narrow set of initiatives but is implemented in totality in operation processes.

In addition to the operations practice, employees are another key factor that affects the behavior of their guests by way of informal social modeling. Instead of imposing regulations, employees mentor guests through leading by example on sustainable behavior. As EE2 assured them, “We do not sell our guests rules but by example”. This implies that the message of sustainability is conveyed in a behavioral manner where guests have a chance to learn by seeing and not teaching. In line with this, EE6 observed that “Sustainability practices are usually practiced by guests due to the fact that they have the chance to observe the actions of staff members”, which explains how employee behavior influences how guests will be engaged.

The enablers that were identified in the maintenance of these practices are training and organizational culture. Employees claimed that there was a commonality in values of sustainability and these helped in a consistent application. EE3 claimed that “Pursuit of sustainability was intuitive to everyone who works here as he or she knows how and why implying that the awareness and alignment is highly internalized in the workforce”. On the same note, EE7 placed a more stress on the cultural aspect where it observed that, “Sustainability was more of a culture than a set of instructions”. This indicates a change of the formal training to value-based integration where the concept of sustainability is a socializing culture as opposed to an assignment.

These insights are corroborated by observational evidence which illustrates human application of sustainable practices in day-to-day operation and in dealing with employees and guests. The staffs seemed confident and independent to execute sustainability without having to use formal enforcement mechanisms. Comprehensively, the report demonstrates that employees are driving forces of sustainability, who not only reflect organizational values into actions, but also impact on the customer behavior on a daily basis.

4.3.7 Theme 7: Place, Nature, and Environmental Integration

The theme is the way the physical environment and natural surroundings of Haltia Lake Lodge affect the vision of sustainability and help to create the comprehensive customer experience. The results suggest that, in addition to organizational practices, sustainability can be viewed in the context of space and environment, which is profoundly affecting its meaning, strengthening and boosting the concept.

The customers often referred to the natural environment as the core of their view of sustainability. Indicatively, Cust1 said, "It was like being in the forest and this made sustainability natural here". According to this statement, sustainability practices seem to be intuitive and context-specific, which is why the environment itself justifies them. In the same tone, Cust4 told, "The place encourages respect towards nature, which implies that the environment has been proactive in creating attitudes towards the environment, and pro-environmental behaviour".

The natural environment was also associated by the participants with emotional and experience results, including calm, mindfulness, and a lack of connection with urban life. As Cust2 cites, "The setting helps in slowing down the pace of thinking and Cust3 notes, the setting is not like the ones in hotels, as it is a part of nature". These considerations show that the experience of sustainability is not only here as some practices but also as

a sensory and emotional experience, which can be achieved through being in the environment.

Environmental integration was termed as a deliberate design approach, as far as the organization is concerned. The CEO stressed this compatibility by saying that, “The concept was to make something that suits nature and not to dominate it. This shows a conscious attempt to align built environment with the natural environment strengthening the authenticity of sustainability practices”. This opinion was further substantiated by employees who stressed on the impact of environment on the behavior of the guests. As an example, EE5 mentioned, “When guests visit us, they will behave differently instinctively because of the environment”, and EE2 said, “The nature does half the work in the aspect of sustainability”. These observations show that the environment acts as a behavioral catalyst, which promotes sustainable behavior without necessarily intervening.

These findings are in agreement with documentary and observational evidence. Organizational messages were always focused on the closeness to the nature as the main element of the identity of the lodge, and the observations proved the combination of the architectural elements, materials, and landscape. Even the physical environment is an expression of the principles of sustainability, which contributes to creating the impression that sustainability is an inherent part of not only the way of operations but also the location.

Altogether, the results prove that environmental context is an important factor that contributes to sustainability perceptions and experiences. The combination of place, nature, and design defines the experience of sustainability in a holistic approach, when the physical environment increases the behavioral activity as well as the emotional experience.

5 Analysis and Discussion

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis and discussion of the empirical findings presented in Chapter 5. Whereas the last chapter was devoted to the description of the themes which could be identified based on the information obtained during the interview, the current chapter is aimed at the interpretation of the findings, and placing them into the context of the larger academic discussion of the issues of sustainable tourism, customer loyalty, and stakeholder engagement (Khuadthong et al., 2025). The three research questions guides the discussion which is informed by the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 2, which includes the Theory of Planned Behavior and Stakeholder Theory.

The chapter follows an interpretivist constructivist approach as it acknowledges that the concepts of sustainability and loyalty are not a priori or globalized concept, but rather created in the context of personal experiences, social norms, and context. In this viewpoint, customer loyalty is not only the repetitive behavior, but a relational and value-based phenomenon, in which trust, emotional fulfillment and recognition of personal values with organizational practices are involved. Sustainability, in its turn, is defined as an experience, where meaning can be created by means of engaging in services, environments and organizational cultures but not by defining it or making a policy statement.

The chapter is dedicated to the interpretation of findings connected with the research questions. In particular, it will look at the perceptions and experience of customers and other stakeholders on sustainability practices at Haltia Lake Lodge and the ways the practices affect customer satisfaction and loyalty. The analysis combines both empirical understanding and the literature to clarify trends in the data collected and to point to how the results validate, elaborate, or add complexity to previous studies.

5.1 RQ1: Perceptions and Experiences of Sustainability Practices

The first research question was based on the perceptions and experiences of the customers and other stakeholders in the Haltia Lake Lodge with respect to the sustainability practices. These results reveal that sustainability is more of a lived and experienced phenomenon and not a formalized or technical concept. Sustainability was hardly mentioned by the participants through certifications, policy frameworks or institutional standards. Instead, their explanations were founded on the practices that were evident in the day-to-day business such as waste reduction, resourcefulness, and daily running business with environmentally-sensitive practices. This means that sustainability is internalized by communicating directly with the service environment rather than conceptualization.

This empirical finding is in line with earlier studies which have suggested that tourists are likely to understand sustainability based on physical and observable processes as opposed to institutional accounts (Moreno et al., 2025; Nadeem et al., 2025). But the current results are broader in this view because they show that this experiential sustainability is not only increasing awareness, but also significantly influencing the evaluative judgement and behavioural orientation. In the context of the Theory of Planned Behavior, the given observations can be viewed as an impact on the attitudinal aspect of the behavioral intention. Good attitude towards sustainability practices seems to promote positive attitudes towards the lodge since the guests view the practices as genuine, easy and in tandem with what they expect to see in a nature-based destination.

In addition, the less imposing nature of sustainability implementation also helps to create subjective norms. The lodge does not tell the guests to act in a way that is environmentally responsible, instead it creates a social setting where the behavior that is sustainable is normalized. The employees are also important to this process as they model their daily routine in environmental responsible ways. This is in line with the social influence concept in TPB whereby an individual stands to embrace more behaviors that are either seen to be socially acceptable or expected. This indicates that informal social

processes are used to strengthen sustainability at Haltia Lake Lodge, and not formal communication strategies, which confirms the previous studies that the concept of social modeling is useful in hospitality settings (Ritalahti and Ali, 2023).

Moreover, the results also offer an insight into the creation of behavioral intentions, which is the third key element of TPB. Although the concept of sustainability was not noted as a major determinant of decision-making, it had an influence on decisions that were based on revisit behavior and recommendation. Visitors that said that sustainability practices were genuine and smoothly incorporated into service experience reported being more satisfied and emotionally attached to the lodge. It shows that sustainability affects behavioral intention in an indirect fashion, with positive attitudes and social reinforcement contributing to the overall experience quality, which in its turn contributes to the outcomes of loyalty.

Communication also supports this interpretation. However, sustainability in the lodge is established using small and subtle cues and not direct promotional messages. The participants were inclined to contrast this approach with their experience in bigger hotels where the sustainability statements were seen as being dramatic or fake. The difference suggests that there are general problems with greenwashing, which could be characterized by overstating environmental responsibility and lack of substantial action (Hossain et al., 2025). Compared to it, the subtle communication approach of Haltia Lake Lodge seems to result in the perceived credibility to increase as the guests are guided by their eyes, and not by convincing messages. This enhances attitudinal trust and less skepticism in terms of TPB and this helps in bolstering a more favorable behavioral judgment.

The findings can also be taken using the Stakeholder Theory, especially regarding the alignment of value between internal and external stakeholders. Employees explained sustainability as a part of their day-to-day duties, but not something that is imposed upon them. This internalisation of sustainability values will help in the stabilisation of

service delivery, which is, in turn identified by customers as authenticity. Mahajan et al. (2023) argue that this alignment is essential to attain sustainable organizational results and ensure that the expectations of stakeholders are met in the framework of coherent and integrated practices. The present study confirms this stance by demonstrating that employee actions are a significant way in which sustainability is communicated and established.

Finally, the bigger Finnish context also makes a significant contribution towards sustainability perceptions. The institutional trust is also established to reduce skepticism on the sustainability claims because the respondents were inclined to associate the activities of the lodge with the national regulations of environmental policies and cultural beliefs. This finding is validated by the existing literature that institutional system credibility enhances the credibility of the sustainability related initiatives (Rantsi et al., 2023). Analytically, this means that sustainability practices performance is not completely determined by the organizational behavior but is moderated by situational elements such as cultural norms and regulations.

Comprehensively, the results show that sustainability in the Haltia Lake Lodge is an embedded socially reinforced and contextually facilitated phenomenon. Sustainability practices assist in setting up a holistic customer experience by controlling the attitudes, subjective norms and indirectly controlling intentions of the behavior. This integrated understanding provides a more polished and modified application of the Theory of Planned Behavior in sustainable tourism in which experiential and contextual aspects have been discovered to play a great role in forming pro-environmental perceptions and responses.

5.2 RQ2: Sustainability, Customer Satisfaction & Loyalty

The second research question was to research on the level of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty as a result of sustainability practices at Haltia Lake Lodge. The results

show that sustainability is not a major customer choice factor or repeat visit factor. Rather, it is a complementary and reinforcing factor that improves the total experience of the service. Although people always indicated their positive attitude towards sustainability, they never mentioned sustainability as a crucial factor in choosing the lodge or their intention to visit again. Instead, loyalty was a complex combination of factors, such as the quality of the service provided, natural environment, the ambience, and personal traveling reasons. Sustainability, hence, assumed a significant, but subsidiary role in a larger measure.

This observation is consistent with the current body of research on sustainable consumption, namely, the intention action gap, where it is generally reported that pro environmental beliefs are not necessarily followed by actual behavior (Syed et al., 2024). The same can be said in the hospitality research with the sustainability being mostly valued but hardly being put above the functional features like comfort and convenience. Indicatively, Rane et al. (2023) established that sustainability is a positive element in customer perceptions and a less impactful element in behavioral loyalty. Similarly, Seyfi et al. (2025) postulate that sustainability is an enriching experience-making factor as opposed to being a major decision making factor. Renfors (2023) adds more to the point by stating that in nature-based tourism settings, the environmental practices are commonly perceived as normal instead of special, thus less powerful in terms of their differentiating power. The current research confirms these arguments but adds to them by showing the way sustainability works inconspicuously in the experiential and emotional aspects of the service experience.

Although sustainability plays a secondary role, it also helped customers to have satisfaction via the value congruence mechanism. When perceived congruence between their own values and practices of the lodge, participants said they felt more positive about their experience. The observation is in line with that of Chang et al. (2024), who emphasize the role of alignment of values in the establishment of emotional attachment and brand affinity. The sustainability activities like minimizing waste and using resources

efficiently in the context of Haltia Lake Lodge were viewed as genuine manifestations of their environmental accountability, which added the perceived meaningfulness of the stay. Consequently, sustainability empowered the emotional and symbolic elements of satisfaction as opposed to substituting conventional service quality determinants.

The results also contribute to the claim that sustainability can be more successful with the combination of being a complementary feature, not as an independent value offer. According to Ebele et al. (2024), the element of sustainability will improve customer experience once it aids instead of replacing the core service components. This was reflected in the current research, in which the participants stressed that sustainability provided additional substance and meaning to their experience and cannot be used to fill the gaps in comfort and service provision. Therefore, sustainability served as an augmenting factor that enhanced the quality perception.

Applying to the Theory of Planned Behavior, it is possible to explain these dynamics in terms of interaction of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The relationships towards sustainability were positive and supported by more extensive social expectations that encourage the environmental friendly manner of conduct, especially in the context of the Finnish culture (Hemsworth et al., 2024). But the perceived behavioral control came in as a restraining effect where practical behavior like cost, convenience and traveling purpose affected the actual behavioral outcome. This is the reason why positive attitudes failed to translate to sustainability motivated loyalty hence demonstrating the continuation of the intention action gap in the given context.

The views of the employees also help to justify this interpretation, as they indicate that returning customers hardly ever mentioned sustainability as the stated purpose of their loyalty. Rather, loyalty had to do with the general ambiance, the emotional warmth, and the complete experience that the lodge offered. Sustainability was explained as an aspect of the background that helped to build a feeling of trust and well-being without being made a conscious foreground. This implies that sustainability-based loyalty is

relational and indirect, built into the wider experiential framework as opposed to cognitive appraisal itself.

In terms of Stakeholder Theory, loyalty is achieved, via sustainability, via building trust and along term relational value. In line with Rastogi et al. (2024), trust is created when organizations show consistency between stakeholder values in regard to credible and consistent practices. The Haltia Lake Lodge did not work on promoting sustainability through its marketing campaign, but rather, it injected sustainability in its day-to-day operations and this made it appear more natural. This authenticity, in its turn, brought about trust and the encouragement to visit again and the positive word of mouth. The perceived responsibility and ethical behavior of the lodge towards the customers were more likely to make them develop a stronger perception of the brand.

Notably, the results also include the contextual variations that render this study unique in comparison with the earlier ones. Institutional trust and good environmental norms in the Finnish context can lead to the decrease in skepticism towards sustainability claims, thus enabling the subtle practices to work. This is contrary to other backgrounds where clear communication should be made in a bid to achieve credibility. Therefore, the thesis adds to the literature that exists on the fact that the context is a determinant in defining the relationship between sustainability, satisfaction and loyalty.

To conclude, sustainability at Haltia Lake Lodge impacts on customer satisfaction and loyalty in an indirect and multidimensional way. Instead of being a key driver, it contributes to the increase in emotional engagement, value congruence and trust establishment. These findings can be seen as a hint at the idea of sustainability as a phenomenon in the hospitality sector, as it demonstrates that it does not contribute to the initiation of action-related decisions but rather facilitates the experience-based and relationship-based dimensions of customer loyalty.

5.3 RQ3: Visitor Types and Demographic Influences on Sustainability Perceptions

The third research question has examined how different types and demographic variables like age, income, travel purpose as well as frequency of travels influence the sustainability perceptions and impact customer experiences at Haltia Lake Lodge. Although this study cannot be statistically generalized due to its qualitative character, the results show that the same tendencies exist that would be of substantial value in understanding the interpretation of sustainability among the various groups of visitors. These differences imply that sustainability is not understood in a similar manner and it is fragmented by personal situations, interests, and socio-cultural standings.

Another one of the identified key differentiating variables in the data is the purpose of travel, especially the difference between business and leisure visitors. Leisure travelers were seen to show more inclination towards involvement in sustainability as part of an overall and feeling-based experience. To these participants, the natural surroundings of the lodge were greatly interwoven with sustainability which added to the sense of relaxation, authenticity and escapism to the urban environment. Instead of being considered as a specific operational characteristic, sustainability increased the perceived quality and content of the overall experience. This observation confirms the argument by Hou et al. (2023), who believe the leisure tourists are more dependent on experiential and value-based criteria in their evaluation of tourism services. Sustainability in this sense is a kind of amplification of experience, which enhances emotional involvement and strengthens the symbolic meaning of nature-based tourism.

Conversely, business travelers were more instrumental and goal-oriented and sustainability was second to functional qualities of efficiency, access, and reliability. Even though sustainability was perceived in a positive light, it was not part of their consideration in the service experience. The difference can be attributed to the difference in the motivational structure. Business travelling is normally time-limited,

organisational pressure, and set objectives, which restrict how far experiential or ethical factors can impact decision-making. The observation can be compared to Foroudi et al. (2022), who observe that business travelers are interested in utilitarian benefits, and sustainability is an auxiliary and not a determining factor. Therefore, the demographic difference in the intent to travel affects sustainability perception by affecting the relative worth of emotional and functional criteria of evaluation.

Age also became a significant determinant of sustainability perceptions especially when it comes to orientation to value and style of life. Younger participants had higher acceptance of minimalistic service models and self-managed sustainability practices, whereby they viewed them as an end that makes sense and is consistent with their environmental values. To this group, sustainability was not something that was added as the bonus to the experience of a high-quality tourism but rather the anticipated part of the high-quality tourism experience. This is in line with the generational research, which indicates that younger consumers will consider sustainability part of who they are and how they consume products (Rantsi et al., 2023; Kokkarinen, 2024). Theoretically, this may be explained by value based attitudinal formation where sustainability helps to increase self-identity and, as such, positive assessments and emotional investment.

Although the older participants were generally in support of sustainability, they gave more emphasis on comfort, clarity, and reliability of services. Sustainability was valued when it did not disrupt the prior expectation of the services implying that there was a more conditional acceptance. The difference indicates the differences in risk perception and the formation of a habit between different age groups. The older consumers might be more dependent on the norms of the services and they might consider that a break on the norms will lead to the quality decrease. As a result, less easily accepted may be sustainability practices which need behavioral change or lack of convenience. This observation is in line with previous research showing that older tourists are more concerned with comfort and predictability as opposed to ethical considerations when making trade-offs (Ucgun and Narcin, 2022).

The level of income also impacted the process of assessing sustainability especially regarding perceived trade-offs. Individuals having greater disposable income were more willing to accept any potential cost that may be incurred due to sustainability in terms of higher prices or fewer service choices. To these people sustainability was internalized in the bigger lifestyle beliefs as well as the consumption habits. Conversely, those respondents who had narrower financial means echoed this opinion by conditional approval that sustainability should not pose a big challenge to their costs. This is how economic capacity is utilized in the development of perceived behavioral control in accordance with the Theory of Planned Behavior. Financial constraints may restrain the attitude to sustainability through behavior even in the presence of positive attitudes towards sustainability. This result is consistent with the findings by Peixoto de and Macario (2024), who point to economic accessibility as a crucial factor of sustainable consumption.

The frequency of travels also influenced the perceptions of sustainability. The number of travelers was also observed to be more conscious about the environment and more willing to recognize and appreciate responsible behaviors. Sustainability to this group was linked to professionalism, moral accountability and long-term effects on the environment. Having been subjected to various tourism contexts on multiple occasions, they might be able to critically and comparatively evaluate sustainability practices. This result is in line with Ijatuyi et al. (2025), who also relate the travel experience to the rise in pro-environmental awareness and behavioral sensitivity.

Notably, these demographic differences should be viewed in the context of the Finnish society at large, which greatly influences the sustainability perceptions. The country is defined as having a high degree of institutional trust and environmental regulation, as well as ingrained cultural norms concerning nature and sustainability. Consequently, sustainability activities at Haltia Lake Lodge were usually viewed to be typical and normal, but not extraordinary. This contextual aspect augments mistrust and maximizes the

trustworthiness of the minor sustainability actions because customers will tend to presume authenticity in a high-trust setting (Rantsi et al., 2023). As a result, the operation of demographic differences does not occur in a vacuum but it is influenced by cultural context in the way sustainability is perceived and appreciated.

The results hence indicate that demographic conditions drive sustainability perceptions operating in three important mechanisms, namely, disparities in motivational priorities, disparities in value orientation, and resource and context constraints. The purpose of travel will be the difference between an emotional and a functional approach to sustainability, the age will determine the level of value match and willingness to change behaviour, and lastly, the income will decide on whether sustainability preferences can be acted upon. All these are further mediated by the socio-cultural environment of Finland, where sustainability is normalized and less direct communication is required.

In short, sustainability cannot be implemented as a consistent perception or loyalty driver among the groups of visitors. Rather, its power depends on the demographic attributes and context. This points to the significance of doing differentiated and context-sensitive theorizing of sustainability in tourism instead of generalized assumptions and adopting a more detailed way of looking at how various segments of visitors perceive and react to sustainability practices.

5.4 Integrated Interpretation Through Theoretical Frameworks

This research was justified by the fact that the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Stakeholder Theory were taken into account and developed an elaborate model of customer loyalty with regard to the sustainability issue. The personal theoretical frameworks were playing another explanatory role as well and when they were integrated, they could provide a multi-level explanation of the empirical trends observed.

The Theory of Planned Behavior also came in handy in the explanation of why positive disposition towards sustainability did not always result in loyalty behavior. The results of

the interviews indicated that the customers were more inclined to have a positive orientation towards sustainability and subjective norms that support the environmentally responsible behaviour in particular with respect to the Finnish culture. But it was found that perceived behavioral control was a limiting factor. Practical constraints as price sensitivity, accessibility, and service expectations were more likely to be cited by customers as having a role in their decision to visit the company again and again. The same interpretation was also proved by the documentary evidence as sustainability was one of the elements of a set of experiential factors in the organization, but not a key element of customer choice.

This interpretation was further supported by observational data, as it revealed that sustainability practices were merged into the guest experience instead of being emphasized as points of decision-making. The lack of clear sustainability messages or calls to action implied that, though attitudes had a positive influence on sustainable practices, no active reduction of practical obstacles associated with repeat visits was made. Such congruence in interviews, documents, and observations can be viewed as an intention-action gap in the former studies (Syed et al., 2024). TPB was thus providing a systematic prism whereby the perceived behavioral control dominance over attitudes and norms in predicting loyalty-related behavior may be appropriated.

The Stakeholder Theory was added to this individual level of explanation to provide a broader context of customer behavior in an organizational and relational context. The findings of the interviews revealed that sustainability practices at Haltia Lake Lodge were credible because they seemed to strike a balance among the expectations of the various stakeholders, such as the customers, employees, and the natural environment around the hotel. Sustainability was presented by employees as a part of daily life, and not propagated as a marketing tactic, which was supported by observation statistics on the uniformity of statements and the consistency of operational practice.

This interpretation was further supported in the analysis of documents that showed hard and objective sustainability messages in organizational documents. The concept of sustainability was brought forth as a component of the operations and not as a marketing statement, which minimized the perceptions of greenwashing and increased trust. Such consistency of the stakeholder expectations is consistent with Mahajan et al. (2023), who mention that balancing the stakeholder interests in a clear and consistent manner is the basis of the long-term process of creating stakeholder values. This overlap of the interview, documents, and observation is a pointer that Haltia Lake Lodge has been able to establish this type of coherence, which has resulted in impressions of authenticity and credibility.

The TPB and the Stakeholder Theory combination enabled the stratified meaning of the sustainability-based loyalty. TPB suggests the influence of individual motivations, attitudes, and perceived constraints on behavioral intentions, whereas the Stakeholder Theory elucidated the effects of organizational credibility and trust on the contextual factors under which the behavioral intentions were shaped. All of these frameworks contribute to the explanation of the fact that sustainability in this situation served not as a leading force but as a reinforcing one of the motivating factors of loyalty. Sustainability boosted satisfaction, trust, and value alignment, but loyalty was realized as a result of the joint impact of the experiential, contextual, and organizational factors.

5.5 Contribution to Sustainable Tourism Literature

This research contributes greatly to the body of research on sustainable tourism since it offers detailed qualitative data on the perception, experience, and interpretation of sustainability in one of the nature-based hospitality contexts. Although previous studies have mostly used quantitative approaches to explore the sustainability customer behaviour relationship, this thesis shows that sustainability is not necessarily perceived as a formal or strategic concept but rather as an embodied and experiential phenomenon. It is concluded that sustainability affects customer satisfaction and

customer loyalty indirectly but significantly through emotional engagement, value congruence and perceived authenticity, but not directly in behavior motivation. By so doing, the research will further expand the existing body of empirical evidence by developing the relation and affective aspects of sustainability, a phenomenon that has been neglected in survey-based research (Hossain et al., 2025; Muchenje et al., 2023).

Theoretically, the study will facilitate the development of the Theory of Planned Behavior and Stakeholder Theory as used in sustainable tourism. In particular, the results narrow the scope of the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior by pointing to the fact that sustainability is not directly related to behavioral intention but has an indirect effect on the latter through a mediation process of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. This aids and broadens the idea of the intention-action gap by showing how it manifests in subtle ways in a hospitality environment. Moreover, the research is relevant to the Stakeholder Theory as it presents the significance of value fit and internal uniformity between business practices and expectations of the stakeholders. The aspect of employees as the instrument of sustainability underlines the ways organizational values are worked out and conveyed by the behavioral means instead of the formal messages. Combined, these revelations give a more detailed and situation-specific theoretical understanding of the role of sustainability in customer perceptions and loyalty.

With regard to contribution to methodology, this article points out the applicability of qualitative research designs in that they are able to bring out the complexity of the perception of sustainability in tourism. Semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis help the study to determine those context-specific dynamics, which are difficult to measure with quantitative tools. Particularly, the thesis demonstrates the approach of uncovering the experiential, emotional, and symbolic aspects of sustainability using narratives compared to structured measurement surveys. The methodological approach will permit examining the idea of sustainability as envisioned by various categories of visitors to a greater degree, eliminating the constraints of the previous literature that

would prefer to regard sustainability perceptions as homogenous and standardized constructs. In this connection, the study proposes the use of qualitative methodology in sustainability research in the future to overcome and broaden the current quantitative research paradigms.

Finally, the study makes a significant contribution to the context, as it puts its findings into the Finnish tourism context, where the institutional trust is high, where environmental norms are strong, and where cultures are closely attached to nature. The results indicate that sustainability does not have to be undertaken explicitly in high-trust scenarios in order to be believable. Rather, subtle and integrated practices are adequate to create authenticity and trust amongst the customers. This observation contradicts the popular notion that more visibility and communication are needed where effective sustainability positioning is concerned. Moreover, this thesis recognizes the incorporation of the natural environment as one of the mediators in the development of sustainability perceptions and demonstrates that place-based context is one of the factors that promote the higher perceived authenticity and experiential value of sustainability practices (Stokowski, 2002; Williams & Vaske, 2003). The focus on the interplay between the demographic variability and the contextual conditions, the study can be said to add to the more refined and geographically attentive knowledge of sustainable tourism, in that it is no longer seen as a generalized notion, but as a context-specific interpretation.

5.6 Practical Implications for Sustainable Tourism Management

The findings of this study have several implications for tourism managers who would like to use sustainability as a value proposition. First, sustainability activities should be internalized in the day-to-day activities, rather than displayed as part of marketing. The malevolent and sustained practices seem to be more applicable in the creation of trust and loyalty than the visible, yet inconsequential programs.

Second, communication strategies must be used in terms of authenticity and coherence as opposed to volume. Excessive focus on the case of sustainability may create a suspicion, especially in markets where individuals are greenwashing conscious. Harmless but transparent communication that enables the guests to see sustainability at work could be more efficient towards the establishment of trust.

Thirdly, the segmentation plans must consider the differences in demographics and the type of visitors. The content and design of the service offered to various audiences can be modified according to the requirements of the specific audience groups, e.g., focusing more on experiential and environmental values among leisure travelers and ensuring that the service is efficient and convenient to the business-motivated guests. The acknowledgment of sustainability as a growing yet not prevailing driving force can assist organizations to possess sensible anticipations and provide balanced propositions.

This chapter has discussed and analyzed the empirical findings according to the literature available, the theoretical framework, and the research questions that informed the research study. The review revealed that sustainability practices in Haltia Lake Lodge were seen as being authentic, experience-based, and integrated in day-to-day activities. Although the sustainability positively affected customer satisfaction and loyalty, it was indirect and affected by demographic and contextual factors and practical forces. The chapter combines empirical data with the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Theory of Stakeholder to give a subtle explanation of sustainability-based loyalty in the Finnish tourism industry. The results emphasize authenticity, trust, and sensitivity of context in the design and assessment of sustainability initiatives that bring both theoretical and practical knowledge of sustainable tourism.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the key findings of this chapter, implications of the study findings (both practical and theoretical), weaknesses of the study findings have been identified, and recommendations for what the study could have done have been made. The overall aim of the study was to determine the perceptions and experiences of the customers and other stakeholders about the sustainability practices in the Haltia Lake Lodge and the impacts of the perceptions on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the Finnish tourism industry. The research, which is informed by the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Stakeholder Theory, and is guided by an interpretivist qualitative approach, assists in developing an in-depth view of sustainability as a lived and context-based phenomenon, rather than a strategic or marketing concept.

In the semi-structured interviews of the customers, the employees, and the managers of the lodge, the study attempts to go beyond the superficial evaluation of the sustainability in order to look at the way the meaning, trust, and authenticity are created out of the daily experiences. The last chapter is a reflection of how the research objectives were achieved, a summary of the main discoveries made by the study, and the applicability of the contribution made by the study to the academic and practical world.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

Results of this research show that sustainability at the Haltia Lake Lodge is mostly enshrined within the whole guest experience instead of a differentiated or even a highly advertised feature. Sustainability practices were always viewed as authentic, subtle, and in harmony with the locality of the lodge, which is near a national park. The participants did not pay much attention to a particular initiative (waste reduction, energy-saving, etc)

as the primary cause of satisfaction; they focused on the general mood of environmental friendliness and good relations with nature.

The attitude of the employees and management towards sustainability as a guiding philosophy and practice in the day-to-day activities and decision-making also supported this image. The inner consistency was used to establish the outer credibility, minimize suspicions, and generate trust among the guests. The results also show that authenticity and consistency in the behaviors of various stakeholders are more important factors that determine positive perceptions than the amount or the exposure of sustainability communications.

The analysis established sustainability to be a reinforcing rather than dominating factor in terms of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Although sustainability per se was hardly mentioned as the main factor to visit or go back to the lodge, it enhanced emotional attachment, trust, and moral alignment. These factors contributed to great satisfaction and likelihood of returning and positive word-of-mouth, especially with the environmentally-aware and frequent fliers.

It was also determined that there were enormous differences in the type of visitors and their demographics. Sustainability was of more concern to leisure travelers and younger players, as well as higher-income guests, and repeat customers were more concerned with sustainability and would apply it in their loyalty programs. On the other hand, business travelers and those business travelers who are more price conscious were conditional in their favor of sustainability in terms of efficiency, comfort, and affordability. These findings refer to the situational and disintegrated sustainability-based loyalty in tourism.

6.3 Contribution to Research Objectives and Questions

The research was able to answer all three research questions. To begin with, it provided rich qualitative data on customer and stakeholder perception and experience of the sustainability practices in Haltia Lake Lodge. These perceptions were perceived not just through certain initiatives but by the sense of conformity of place, practice, and organizational values. When it was constructed and designed simultaneously, sustainability was savored as authentic.

Second, the research established that sustainability has an indirect impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty via trust, emotional closeness, and value alignment. The results do not prove the naive idea of sustainability being one of the direct causes of loyalty; on the contrary, they emphasize its significance as one of the enhancements of the overall experience of service.

Third, the results of the study help to comprehend how visitor type and demographic factors influence the sustainability perceptions and valuations. The study contributes to the existing discussion by illustrating the age, income, frequency, and purpose of visit differences, and by confirming that segmentation is an important aspect of the research and practice of sustainable tourism. Together, these lessons help form a vision of sustainability as a relational and experiential process and provide empirical undertones to the theoretical analysis of the literature on sustainable tourism.

6.4 Practical Implications for Tourism Management

The research has a number of practical implications for tourism managers and policy makers, particularly those of high trust or sensitive areas, as was the case in Finland. Among the implications, the necessity to implement sustainability in the day-to-day operations rather than an abstract marketing attribute can be mentioned. Apparently,

organic, infused practices, which guests can view, prove to be more efficient in terms of trust and loyalty development, as opposed to irrelevant programs, which can be blatant.

The other implication relates to the communication strategies. The research indicates that low-key and open communication can be more effective than greenwashing marketing when consumers are not convinced by the sustainability marketing. The emotional appeal and credibility can be enhanced, allowing the guests to get to know about the sustainability, not by telling them about it, but by experiencing it. The emotional appeal and credibility can be enhanced, allowing the guests to get to know about the sustainability, not by telling them about it, but by experiencing it.

The outcomes also prove the significance of particular segmentation policies. The providers of tourism must understand that sustainability does not have the same meaning to all visitors. Experience-based and nature-based sustainability descriptions can impact leisure travelers more, whereas efficiency and reliability are likely to be critical to business travelers. To increase the satisfaction of different segments, operational effectiveness should not be undermined for the benefit of customizing sustainability messages and service design to different segments.

The study highlights how institutional frameworks and certifications can help in enhancing trust in policymakers and destination managers. It, however, suggests that certification will not suffice unless there is frequent implementation and alignment among the stakeholders. Helping small and medium-sized tourism enterprises in practicing sustainability, as opposed to popularizing labels, can provide a more significant contribution (Mfarrej et al., 2025).

6.5 Theoretical Contributions

The research will add to the body of theory, in the sense of enhancing a more developed insight into the impact of sustainability on customer behavior, especially in tourism

settings, by expanding the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Although TPB conventionally presupposes the positive attitudes, the favorable subjective norms, and the adequate perceived behavioral control to create behavioral intentions and consequent behavior, the results of this study could indicate a more complicated and indirect association. In particular, sustainability was identified to condition customer loyalty not directly as a determinant of behavioral intention but mediating through satisfaction, emotional engagement, and alignment of values. Though the participants gave positive views on sustainability and worked in a social environment that supported pro-environmental norms, the actual decisions on loyalty were limited by practical aspects like cost and convenience, and the purpose of traveling. This improves TPB as it shows that post-consumption evaluations (as opposed to pre-purchase decision making) in a hospitality context are supported by sustainability-related attitudes, thus providing an explanation of the intention-action gap persistence in sustainable tourism (Syed et al., 2024).

Moreover, the research expands on TPB and indicates the importance of the contextual and experiential variables that are not explicitly stressed in the original framework. The results also suggest that the influence of sustainability rises as soon as it is incorporated into a valuable and engaging service experience, which implies that the behavioral intention is not necessarily the effect of rational consideration but can also be influenced by affective and situational variables. This contribution is especially applicable to tourism research, in which consumption is inherently context-dependent experiential. The study offers a more context-sensitive version of TPB by showing that sustainability works via indirect and psychological and emotional channels, which are more representative of actual consumer behavior in service settings.

The work is useful in the context of the Stakeholder Theory because it offers a multi-layered and differentiated perspective of the interpretation and application of the concept of sustainability via stakeholder groups. What the findings reveal is that the perception of sustainability among the stakeholders does not seem to be the same.

Sustainability is mainly viewed by customers as an experience-based and value attribution that increases authenticity and emotional gratification. Conversely, sustainability is seen by the employees as a business practice that is integrated into the normal business activities and service delivery. Sustainability, on the other hand, is regarded by management as a strategic positioning tool, which assists in brand credibility and competitiveness in the long run. This distinction forms the Stakeholder Theory since it proves that the value generated together by the stakeholders is the creation of independent but mutually related stakeholder knowledge and not the result of a single organizational conversation (Mahajan et al., 2023).

Moreover, the thesis is devoted to the Stakeholder Theory explaining the significance of congruency and coordination of these stakeholder attitudes. The results indicate that trust and perceived authenticity are achieved when sustainability practices are logically communicated on organizational levels, and this starts with strategic intent and continues to employee behaviour and customer experience. To this extent, sustainability-based loyalty does not just happen to be the by-product of organizational claims, but this is the product of a congruency in what organizations say, what employees do, and what the customers experience. This leads to the significance of behavioral signaling and everyday practices in the development of stakeholder trust, thereby expanding the theory of stakeholder engagement to a more practice-oriented theory.

Finally, the research integrates both TPB and Stakeholder Theory to give a multi-level theory, which will be used to fill in the gap between the individual and organizational levels. Through the findings, it is evident that neither of the two frameworks can be entirely used to comprehend sustainability-based loyalty. Rather, personal-level attitudes and intentions are molded in a larger organizational and contextual surrounding that is typified by trust, authenticity, and alignment of stakeholders. The combined view develops theory because it shows the interaction of psychological processes and organizational dynamics that contribute to sustainable consumption behavior. In this way, the study offers a wider and more contextually concerned

framework in comprehending sustainability in tourism, which adds to the current body of interdisciplinary practices in research on sustainability in tourism.

6.6 Limitations of the Study

This study has a number of limitations that can be mentioned despite its contributions. Firstly, the study is a qualitative single-case study and therefore its findings are contextual and cannot be statistically extended to other tourism settings. Although in qualitative research there is no need to generalize, the peculiarities of Haltia Lake Lodge and its Nordic location have the potential to shape the perceptions of sustainability in a different way than in other cultural or geographical locations.

Second, the empirical research was carried out on a rather small sample, including the customers, the employees, and one representative of senior managers. The sample was rich and in-depth, but might not be representative of the diversity of views among the larger customer base or other stakeholder groups that can be related to this lodge.

Third, despite the research process involving the review of several data sources, the analysis of the sources was not conducted to the same extent. The main data of analysis were semi-structured interviews, and the supporting information, as contextual interpretation, was provided by organizational documents, media materials, and observations, without any systematic analysis. Consequently, the triangulation was mainly used at the interpretive level, which could restrict the level of cross-validation of findings within data types.

Fourth, the research was based mostly on self-reported perceptions and experiences, and this can be affected by social desirability bias. It can be especially applied to the Finnish context, where sustainability is highly appreciated and has social sanction. Documents and observations helped to create the context, but they were not enough to remove this possible bias.

Lastly, the results capture the perceptions of the stakeholders at a particular time. The sustainability practices and customer attitudes are dynamic and can change according to the larger social, economic, or environmental changes. The longitudinal data is missing, and this restricts the capacity to estimate the manner in which the perceptions and loyalty intentions based on sustainability evolve over time.

6.7 Suggestions for Future Research

Resting on the findings of the presented study and restrictions identified, one can suggest some future research directions. Firstly, it would be beneficial to conduct comparative case studies with a number of tourism destinations in Finland or other Nordic countries concerning the impact of the contextual factors on the sustainability-oriented customer loyalty. The role of sustainability in customer decision making may be reflected through a comparative study in the rural, urban, and resort-based tourism setting where the background of the environment, the scale of organizational size, and market positioning determine the role of sustainability in customer decision making.

Second, prospective research might increase the range of data, as it may engage more in-depth studies of organizational communication texts, i.e., social media texts, digital storytelling, and video content produced by founders or organizations. The systematic analysis of those materials would allow the researchers to explore the formation, sharing, and perception of sustainability discourses in a long-term perspective and the effects of digital transparency on customer trust and loyalty.

Third, longitudinal research designs would prove beneficial in trying to come up with the transformation of the sustainability perceptions and loyalty relations. The longitudinal analysis of media of organizational communication, customer reaction, and sustainability practice may be relevant in shaping trust and loyalty, or the accumulation

of sustainability practice, or the intensification of the external forces, including climate policy alteration or economic instability.

Furthermore, the mixed methods, which combine the qualitative information with quantitative scales of satisfaction, loyalty, and behavioral intention, can be used in future studies. These designs would help researchers to test the transferability of qualitative findings, as they are context-sensitive and stakeholder views. Lastly, the new aspects of sustainable tourism, such as digital tools of transparency, carbon monitors, and community-based sustainability projects, and how those affect customer trust and loyalty, may be examined in the future (Li et al., 2023). Developments on these subjects would contribute towards the realization of a more moving picture and forward-looking sustainability on the tourism front.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Master's Programme in International Business

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Thesis title: The Role of Sustainable Practices in Enhancing Customer Loyalty in the Finnish Travel Industry

Researcher: Ramsha Munir, Master's in International Business, University of Vaasa

Email: _____

You are invited to take part in a face-to-face interview for a Master's thesis about how sustainable practices in the Finnish travel industry, particularly at Haltia Lake Lodge, influence customer loyalty. Your participation is voluntary.

By participating, you understand that:

- The interview will take about ___ minutes and may be audio-recorded.
- Your decision to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Haltia Lake Lodge or its services.
- Only the researcher (and, if necessary, the academic supervisor) will have access to the data.
- Your name and identifying details will not appear in the thesis; your responses will be anonymised.
- Data will be used only for this thesis and related academic purposes and deleted after thesis completion (no later than __ / __ / 20__).

CONSENT

- I have read and understood the information above.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without consequences.
- I agree that the interview may be audio-recorded.
- I understand that my data will be anonymised and used only for academic purposes related to this thesis.

Participant's name (block letters): _____

Participant's signature: _____ Date: ___ / ___ / 20__

Researcher's signature (Ramsha Munir): _____ Date: ___ / ___

/ 20__

Join Us on Our Sustainability Journey!

We're partnering with a master's student from the University of Vaasa's Business School to explore how sustainable practices influence guest satisfaction and loyalty at Haltia Lake Lodge, located beside the beautiful Nuuksio National Park.

We would greatly appreciate your input in a short face-face interview.

- ◆ Your thoughts can help shape a more sustainable future for Haltia Lake Lodge!



Ramsha Munir
student of Master of
International Business



UNIVERSITY
OF VAASA

Thank you for your valuable time!

Appendix 2. Interview Guides

CEO Interview Guide

This interview explores the role of sustainable practices at Haltia Lake Lodge and how they may influence customer loyalty within the Finnish travel industry. Questions are semi-structured; follow-up questions may be asked as needed.

A. Role and Strategy

1. Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities at Haltia Lake Lodge, and how sustainability fits into your overall business strategy?
2. What does “sustainability” mean at Haltia Lake Lodge (your key pillars), and what are your top priorities?

B. Sustainable Practices (Decisions and Trade-offs)

3. Which sustainable practices are most important for the lodge today, and why were these chosen?
4. How do you balance sustainability with customer comfort and quality expectations (e.g., convenience vs environmental impact)?
5. What kinds of sustainability investments have been made, and how do you evaluate return on investment (financial and non-financial)?

C. Execution, Governance, and Partners

6. How do you set sustainability goals and measure progress (e.g., KPIs, targets, reporting)?
7. How do you involve employees in sustainability (training, guidelines, incentives, culture) and ensure consistency across teams?
8. How do you manage sustainability across the supply chain (e.g., local sourcing, partners, materials, waste management)?

D. Customer Experience and Communication

9. How do you communicate sustainability actions to customers before, during, and after their stay?
10. How do you ensure credibility and avoid “greenwashing” (e.g., transparency, standards, certifications, evidence)?

E. Sustainability and Customer Loyalty (Core Theme)

11. From your perspective (and any data you track), how does sustainability influence customer loyalty (repeat visits, recommendations, reviews, satisfaction)?

12. Which customer segments seem most influenced by sustainability, and how does that shape marketing, targeting, or service design?

F. Challenges and Future Plans

13. What are the biggest barriers to implementing sustainable practices (e.g., cost, infrastructure, staff time, guest expectations)?

14. If you could change one thing to improve sustainability and loyalty outcomes, what would it be?

15. Looking ahead 2–3 years, what sustainability initiatives are you planning, and what impact do you expect on customer loyalty?

Optional Follow-up Probes

- Can you share a real example where a guest mentioned sustainability as a reason to return or recommend?
- Have you ever changed or removed a sustainability initiative because it negatively affected the guest experience or operations?
- Do you think sustainability supports premium pricing here? Why or why not?
- What do you most want guests to remember about Haltia Lake Lodge’s sustainability approach?

Employee Interview Guide

This interview aims to explore employees’ views on sustainable practices at Haltia Lake

Lodge and how these may influence customer experiences and loyalty. Questions are semi-

structured; follow-up questions may be asked when needed.

A. Background / Warm-up

1. Can you tell me about your role at Haltia Lake Lodge and how long you have worked here?

2. What kind of contact do you usually have with customers in your daily work?

B. Sustainable practices in the lodge

3. From your perspective, what are the main sustainable practices used at Haltia Lake Lodge?

4. How do these practices appear in your daily tasks? Can you give a few concrete examples?

5. Have you received any training or information about the lodge's sustainability goals or policies? If yes, what kind?

C. Employee views & involvement

6. How important is sustainability to you personally in your work?

7. Do you feel you can influence or suggest new sustainable ideas in the lodge?

8. Can you describe any situation where you or your team improved something to make it more sustainable?

D. Customer reactions and experience

9. How aware do you think customers are of the lodge's sustainable practices?

10. Have customers ever commented on your sustainability actions (for example recycling, local food, nature activities)? What do they usually say?

11. Do you think sustainability affects how customers experience their stay here? In what ways?

E. Link to customer loyalty

12. In your opinion, can sustainable practices encourage customers to come back or recommend Haltia Lake Lodge to others? Why or why not?

13. Have you noticed any examples where customers mentioned sustainability as a reason for choosing or returning to the lodge?

14. What aspects of your sustainability work do you think matter most for building long-term relationships with customers?

F. Challenges & improvements

15. What are the main challenges in practising sustainability in your daily work here?

16. Is there anything that could be improved to make it easier for staff to act sustainably?

17. Are there any sustainable practices you would like to see introduced in the future?

G. Closing

18. Is there anything else you would like to add about sustainability and customer loyalty at Haltia Lake Lodge?

Customer Interview Guide

Opening

1. Could you briefly describe your travel habits how often you travel, and what kinds of destinations or accommodations you usually prefer?

2. What factors usually influence your decision when choosing where to stay?

Section 1: Perceptions and Experiences of Sustainability Practices

(Linked to RQ1 & Objective 1)

1. When you think about sustainable travel, what does it personally mean to you?

2. What kinds of sustainable practices have you noticed in Finland overall? Which ones stood out as most memorable or unique?

3. Thinking about your visit to Haltia Lake Lodge (HLL):

- Which of Haltia Lake Lodge's sustainability practices felt most memorable or unique compared to other places you've stayed?
- Did any sustainability aspects at HLL surprise you, either positively or negatively?
- How do Haltia Lake Lodge's practices compare with other destinations you've visited in terms of sustainability?
- Did you feel that HLL's sustainability values were visible and authentic throughout your stay (e.g., in operations, staff behavior, or communication)?
- In your opinion, is HLL perceived as a leader in sustainability or more as "one among many" sustainable destinations?

Section 2: Sustainability and Customer Loyalty

(Linked to RQ2 & Objective 2)

1. How did HLL's sustainability approach affect your overall satisfaction with your stay?
2. Would these sustainability practices influence your decision to return to HLL or recommend it to others? Why or why not?
3. How important is sustainability to you when deciding whether to revisit a destination like HLL?
4. How do you evaluate whether a destination's sustainability claims are trustworthy and authentic?
5. If HLL's sustainability efforts required slightly higher prices or less convenience, how would that affect your decision to stay again?
6. Would you specifically recommend HLL to others because of its sustainability values? If yes, which practices would you highlight?

Section 3: Traveler Background and Influence

(Linked to RQ3 & Objective 3)

1. How do you think your own background (e.g., age, income, education, or travel frequency) shapes the way you value sustainability when traveling?
2. Do you think different types of travelers (such as families, couples, or solo travelers) view sustainability differently when choosing accommodation?
3. Would you personally be willing to pay more for sustainable services like those offered by HLL? Why or why not?

Section 4: Wrap-Up

1. Based on your experience, what could Haltia Lake Lodge do to further improve or communicate its sustainability practices?
2. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with sustainable travel or specifically with Haltia Lake Lodge?