UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

Faculty of Social Sciences and Business Studies

Business School

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WITH MEANS OF DESTINATION LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL FINLAND PROGRAM

Case study for Visit Tampere

Master's thesis, Tourism Marketing and Management
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Abstract

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Abstract
Previous research has suggested that destination leadership and stakeholder cooperation are needed to achieve sustainable destination development. Destination management organizations have a crucial role in the implementation of sustainable tourism practices. Visit Finland is developing the responsibility of Finnish destinations with the Sustainable Travel Finland program.   The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how destination leadership is practiced in Visit Tampere, how they cooperate with destination stakeholders and how they can utilize Visit Finland's program for sustainable destination development in Tampere region. The topic was studied from the destination perspective.   This study was executed as an intensive case study. Data was collected by using semi-structured interviews in Microsoft Teams online meetings and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The interviewees were selected by a purposive sample and six professionals working in Visit Tampere were interviewed.   The findings of this study revealed that the program by Visit Finland program was considered of great importance to improve sustainable destination development in Tampere. Visit Tampere has an important role in getting the stakeholders to take on sustainable practices and start the Sustainable Travel Finland program. Through means of distributed leadership, Visit Tampere should increase the engagement and activity of the destination stakeholders. More research is needed to examine Sustainable Travel Finland program and its effect on sustainable development in other destinations in Finland.

Keywords **sustainable destination development, destination leadership, stakeholder cooperation, Sustainable Travel Finland, Tampere**

Tiivistelmä

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Tiivistelmä
Aikaisemmat tutkimukset ovat osoittaneet, että matkailukohteen johtajuutta ja sidosryhmäyhteistyötä tarvitaan matkailukohteen kestävän kehityksen saavuttamiseksi. Matkailun alueorganisaatioilla on tärkeä rooli kestävän matkailun käytäntöjen toteuttamisessa. Visit Finland kehittää suomalaisten matkailukohteiden vastuullisuutta Sustainable Travel Finland -ohjelmalla.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten matkailukohteen johtajuutta harjoitetaan Visit Tampereella, miten he tekevät yhteistyötä sidosryhmien kanssa ja miten he voivat hyödyntää Visit Finland -ohjelmaa matkailun kestävään kehittämiseen Tampereella. Tutkimuksen painopiste oli matkailukohteen näkökulmassa.

Tämä tutkimus tehtiin intensiivisenä tapaustutkimuksena. Aineisto kerättiin käyttämällä puolistrukturoituja haastatteluja Microsoft Teamsin online-kokouksissa ja analysoitiin laadullisen sisältöanalyysin avulla. Haastateltavat valittiin valikoivalla otoksella ja haastateltavana oli kuusi Visit Tampereella työskentelevää ammattilaista.

Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset paljastivat, että Visit Finlandin ohjelmaa pidettiin erittäin tärkeänä Tampereen kestävän matkailun kehityksen parantamiseksi. Visit Tampereella on tärkeä rooli saada sidosryhmät toimimaan kestävästi ja aloittamaan Sustainable Travel Finland-ohjelma. Jaetun johtajuuden avulla Visit Tampereen tulisi lisätä matkailukohteen sidosryhmien sitoutumista ja aktiivisuutta. Lisätutkimusta tarvitaan Sustainable Travel Finland-ohjelmasta ja sen vaikutuksista kestävään kehitykseen muissa Suomen matkailukohteissa.

| Avainsanat **Matkailukohteen kestävä kehittäminen, matkailukohteen johtaminen, sidosryhmäyhteistyö, Sustainable Travel Finland, Tampere** | | | |

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Tourism has grown at a record pace in recent years, both in Finland and as part of the global economy (Visit Finland, 2020). As the tourism industry is getting increasingly competitive, many tourism destinations now must directly compete with other tourism destinations at regional, national and global scale, making it difficult to gain success (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Pike & Page, 2014; Wang, 2008). Simultaneously, the consequences of climate change are more concretely reflected in our living environment than ever before (FGC & Business Finland, 2018). Changes in circumstances, such as extreme heat, drought, storms and rain, will affect the direction of tourist flows in the future (Becken, 2010). Taking sustainable development into account is therefore ever more important for tourism to continue to grow and remain competitive.

The popularity of Finland as a tourist destination is expected to increase, implying the need to further develop sustainable tourism functions in order to manage, among other things, the negative effects of increasing customer volumes, while reinforcing the positive effects of tourism and the actions taken (Visit Finland, 2020). Destination leadership and stakeholder cooperation can play a substantial role in achieving this success. Strong destination leadership is required to foster cooperation among stakeholders. Therefore, destination marketing and/or management organizations (DMOs) who often act as the promoters and mediators for tourism development in a destination have a huge part. (Komppula, 2016; Hankinson, 2012; Wang, 2008)

Many DMOs have been concerned in recent years about providing a more sustainable tourism development within their destinations as these are unavoidably the places where tourism has an impact (Ali & Frew, 2014; Cismaru, 2015). DMOs play a significant role in putting together the varied interests aimed at creating a sustainable tourism destination, followed by destination leadership (Hristov & Ramkissoon, 2016; Miočić et al., 2016). They have to enhance the general interest and frequently serve as a negotiator among the varied interests of the destination stakeholders (Pechlaner et al., 2012). This will improve mutual trust and understanding. (Ghanem & Elgammal, 2017). It can also motivate stakeholders to assist and enable cooperative initiatives to advance the development of sustainable tourism, in which a balance

can be reached between the environmental, socio-cultural and economic aspects (Ghanem & Elgammal, 2017).

A multitude of thoughts, methodologies and ideologies have been developed to both investigate and illustrate sustainable tourism development (Swarbrooke, 1999). Indicators and monitoring present a few examples of these, but in recent years tourism standards and sustainability certification programs have grown in popularity (Ali & Frew, 2014). Sustainability certificates are a solution for improving performance of the tourism industry, increasing the destination potential and mitigating the negative effects of tourism growth on the environment (Font & Harris, 2004). In particular, specific indicators have been introduced by voluntary standards and sustainability labels which can promote environmental, economic and socio-cultural facet of tourism, with positive impact especially on remote destinations (Gkoumas, 2019).

Visit Finland is developing the responsibility of Finnish tourism companies and destinations with the Sustainable Travel Finland (STF) program. The program trains companies and destinations in responsible business operations and provides a low-threshold development path for them. The businesses and destinations that undergo the Sustainable Travel Finland program and fulfill the given requirements will be granted with the Sustainable Travel Finland label. They will also have rights to an ongoing development framework, have up-to-date knowledge on sustainable tourism development, receive marketing assistance and gain exposure on Visit Finland platforms (Visit Finland, 2020).

1.2 Previous research

The increasing recognition of sustainable development as a method for tourism development has prompted academic interest in the implications on destinations and how these are managed and led in destinations. Sustainability has become a key notion in tourism development study and practice, and sustainable tourism has gained a lot of popularity as a favorable goal for policy and practice in tourism development (Cohen, 2002; Sharpley, 2000).

Understanding the issues facing destination leadership is critical to the success of every tourism destination (Pechlaner et al., 2014). Likewise, a cooperation between stakeholders is in the center of attention in a destination's effective development (Bregoli & Del Chiappa, 2013). In her study, Komppula (2016) found that the willingness of destination stakeholders to cooperate is critical to destination leadership. Her finding is further supported by Pechlaner et al. (2014)

as the foundation of destination leadership, according to them, is to get all destination stakeholders to collaborate on destination development goals. DMOs are considered to have authority and power over others in destination development by destination stakeholders but the large number of stakeholders, each with their own set of interests and perspectives on the destination makes it difficult to plan a consistent destination development (Komppula, 2016; Morgan et al., 2012). However, to succeed, stakeholders are required to cooperate in order to get all of the destination stakeholders to develop a destination (Bregoli & Del Chiappa, 2013).

DMOs today have to sustain the broader destination scheme by setting up, developing and handling relationships between a variety of stakeholders (Morgan et al., 2012). These stakeholder networks and support of the local community have an important factor to be successful in sustainable destination development (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). However, previous studies have found that destination stakeholders vary with regard to the understanding and perspective of sustainability and in the adoption of sustainable tourism values. (Guia, 2018; Ghanem & Elgammal, 2017; Mihalic et al., 2012) Therefore there is still a challenge to find feasible ways of putting the concept of sustainable tourism development into action. (Ali & Frew, 2014)

Several researches have concentrated on DMOs and the role they have in destination cooperation (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Morgan et al., 2012). However, there are different outcomes and conclusions about the tasks of DMOs within a destination and in terms of destination development. For example, the roles of DMOs are found to differ vastly among different regions in Finland (Komppula, 2016; Tuohino & Konu, 2014). Until now, leadership has been primarily reviewed on a destination level (Hristov, 2015). It creates a gap in the literature on destination leadership and highlights the necessity for further research into the role of leadership at the DMO level.

The reviewed Sustainable Travel Finland program and label was published by Visit Finland in 2019, and therefore little study about the impacts of the program and label to sustainable destination development in Finland exist.

1.3 Tampere as a tourism destination

Tampere is the third largest city in Finland and the Nordic countries largest inland center. Tampere is also one of the three most quickly evolving regions in Finland. At the moment, there

are over 230 000 inhabitants in Tampere (as of 2019), and the Tampere Region, which includes Tampere and its neighboring municipalities, has a population of nearly half a million people (City of Tampere, 2020). As a tourism destination, Tampere promotes itself as the world's sauna capital and home to the only Moomin museum in the world. The city is known for its industrial heritage, lake nature, diverse range of events and festivals in art, culture and music, activities and great restaurants (Visit Tampere, 2020).

According to TAK Research Visitory statistics (2020), in 2019 travellers spend a total of 46.4 million euros (199 euros per tourist) in Tampere. Overnight tourists spent 44.8 million euros and day visitors 1.7 million euros. Also, in 2019 the number of overnight stays by tourists set a new record, with Visitory statistics showing overnight stays in Tampere increasing by 3.2 per cent compared to year 2018 with 1.2 million recorded overnight stays, of which 1.0 million were made by domestic travellers and 178 000 were made by foreigners (TAK research, 2020).

Visit Tampere is a regional destination marketing and management organization, which aims to make Tampere region internationally known. Visit Tampere wants to systematically improve the sustainability of their operations and lead the way for tourism operators and companies in the region. (Visit Tampere, 2020) The DMO is currently on a path to applying as a destination for the Sustainable Travel Finland program. Destinations can receive the Sustainable Travel Finland recognition when 51% of the DMO's partner companies are responsibly certified and have passed the STF path. (Visit Finland, 2020) Visit Tampere is supporting their partner companies in the region on the STF path, as well as providing training and seminars on the subject. (Visit Tampere, 2020) The DMO itself is certified with Ekokompassi, which is one of the certifications approved in the Sustainable Travel Finland program. The Sustainable Travel Finland program is considered as one of Visit Finland's key nationwide development and marketing project, so it is also a natural step for the development of sustainable tourism in Tampere region.

1.4 Objectives and research questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate how destination leadership is being understood and practiced in Visit Tampere, the DMO for Tampere region, as well as to know how the Sustainable Travel Finland program is being incorporated in the process of sustainable destination development. Furthermore, this study tries to improve the overall knowledge of the cooperation between the DMO and its partner company network in the Tampere region. The

research problem this thesis aims to answer is "How through means of destination leadership, the DMO can encourage destination stakeholders to join the Sustainable Travel Finland program and thus improve sustainable destination development?" Hence, the research questions of this thesis are:

- How is destination leadership perceived in the DMO?
- How are the destination stakeholders involved in the Sustainable Travel Finland program?
- How do destination managers view the use of the Sustainable Travel Finland program and label as means for sustainable destination development in Tampere region?

1.5 Key concepts

The key concepts of this thesis are conveyed in this chapter. Both the theoretical and empirical parts of this study make use of the key concepts. The key concepts are explained in Table 1.

Concept	Definition
Tourism destination	Buhalis (2000) defined a tourism destination as "a defined geographical region which is understood by its visitors as a unique entity, with a political and legislative framework for tourism marketing and planning". In addition of tourism destination being seen as a specific geographical area, a tourism destination can be regarded as an open and adaptable system with a lot of interactivity between different stakeholders such as businesses, residents of the destination, local authorities and tourists (Jovicic, 2017; Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011).
Sustainable tourism development	The United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization (2005) defined sustainable tourism as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and

environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities." Sustainable tourism must create and maintain tourist satisfaction and assure memorable experiences for tourists, while raising their awareness of issues related to sustainable development and advocating for practical measures to promote sustainable tourism. (UN, 2015) To ensure active involvement and consensus building, all relevant stakeholders must be informed, and leadership is required for long-term sustainable tourism development. (CPD & UNEP, 2007)

Destination leadership

Destination leadership can be seen as being "about motivating, encouraging and inspiring individual actors by setting long-term values and directions" (Pechlaner et al., 2014, p. 3). Destination leadership includes planning and development of the destination but is also about influencing the relationship between destination leaders and stakeholders. (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014)

Destination stakeholder cooperation

In the context of a destination, the DMO, tourism businesses and entrepreneurs are examples of stakeholders. (Strobl & Peters, 2013) Destination stakeholder cooperation requires the involvement of all stakeholders for the benefit of the destination, which means that the stakeholders influence each other mutually. Different stakeholders may have different interests, but they can collaborate when it comes to responding to challenges and taking the lead on various initiatives. (Komppula, 2016; Beritelli & Bieger, 2014)

Destination Marketing and/or Management Organization (DMO)	Destination marketing and/or management organizations (DMOs) assume the destination's important functions, such as developing strategy, planning, destination development and marketing (Pechlaner et al., 2012). The purpose of DMOs is to improve the destination attractiveness, market the destination to possible visitors and provide revenue to the community (Blain et al., 2005). Nations, states, and cities are the most common sources of funding for DMOs (World Tourism Organization, 2019).
Sustainable Travel Finland program and label	Sustainable Travel Finland is a sustainable development program created by Visit Finland. The program is aimed for Finnish tourism businesses and destinations, who want to adopt sustainable practices. The program is low-threshold and free of charge. Businesses and destinations that undergo the Sustainable Travel Finland program and fulfill the requirements are rewarded with a Sustainable Travel Finland label. (Visit Finland, 2020)

Table 1. Key concepts of the study

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis will specifically examine destination leadership from the DMO aspect, DMO's cooperation with its destination stakeholder network and how the DMO can utilize Visit Finland's Sustainable Travel Finland program for sustainable destination development and encourage businesses to join the program in Tampere region. This thesis has its focus on the DMO (Visit Tampere) and its personnel's perspective. Figure 1 illustrates the positioning of this study.

DMO
Visit Tampere

DESTINATION STAKEHOLDERS
Visit Tampere Partners
Neigbouring municipalities

VISIT FINLAND
National tourism
organization
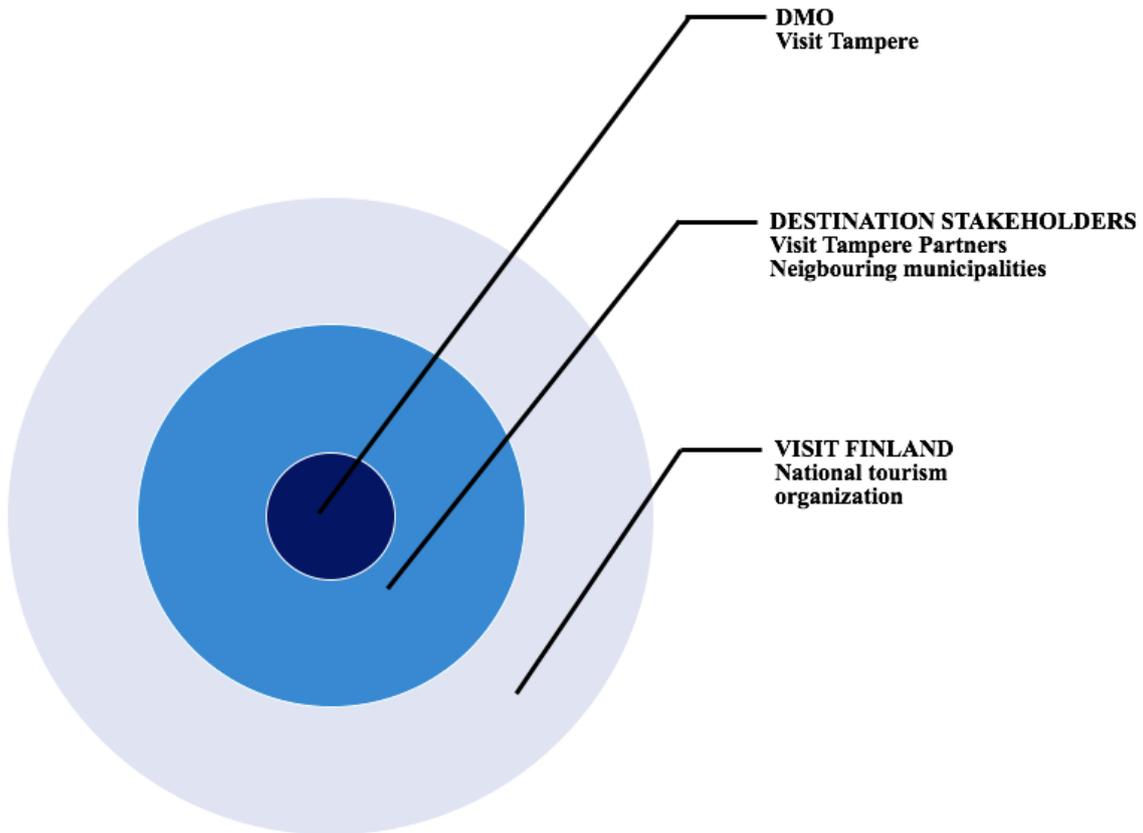
Figure 1. Positioning of the study

The thesis starts by describing the current state of sustainable destination development in Finland, how DMO's through means of destination leadership have tackled the issue and what tools have been established to aid sustainable destination development. Previous research, objectives and research questions, Tampere as a tourism destination and key concepts of the study are discussed in the first chapter. The second chapter provides a review of the literature, tackling destination leadership, stakeholder cooperation and sustainable destination development. The chapter also provides managerial insights to sustainable destination development in Tampere region and the Sustainable Travel Finland program. The framework of the study is presented in the end of the chapter. The third chapter presents the research methodology and includes research approach, methods of data collection and analysis. In the fourth chapter, the findings from the research are presented under four themes: aspects of destination leadership in Tampere region, destination stakeholders and cooperation in the destination, sustainable destination development in Tampere region and Sustainable Travel Finland program and utilization of the label in the destination. Lastly, chapter five discusses the

findings and presents theoretical and managerial contributions. Evaluation of the study and suggestions for future research are made.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the different aspects of sustainable destination development are discussed. This chapter also studies the influence of DMO in relation to destination stakeholders and how destination leadership can manifest in a destination. In addition, the managerial aspects of sustainable destination development in Tampere region are discussed and the Sustainable Travel Finland program is presented. In the end of this chapter, the framework of the study is explained.

2.1 Defining tourism destination and DMO's role in a destination

In tourism research, the concept of tourism destination has many different definitions. A tourism destination can be defined as a place which is visited by tourists (Lemmetyinen, 2010). Bornhorst et al. (2010) define tourism destination as ''a geographical region, political jurisdiction, or major attraction, which seeks to provide visitors with a range of satisfying to memorable visitation experiences." Baggio and Cooper (2010) on the other hand define destination as a community of linked institutions or stakeholders of whom performance is critical for the destination system to operate. There are two primary roles for a tourism destination and many significant assisting roles. It has to strive to better the social and economic welfare of those people living in the area. Also, in order to be categorized as a tourism destination, this improvement of citizens well-being must be provided by providing a variety of tourism activities and experiences (Bornhorst et al., 2010).

Nowadays competition between tourism destinations continues to escalate. Destinations need to able to effectively handle all aspects of the tourism system to maintain an advantage over competitors. Many destinations have introduced a destination management and/or marketing organization (DMO) to provide the leadership of tourism relates issues in the destination. (Bornhorst et al., 2010) In recent years DMOs have become leading organizations with a broader mandate including functions related to leadership and governance, tourism policy, strategic planning, stakeholder cooperation and relationship building. (UNWTO, 2019; Borzyszkowski & Marczak, 2011) The DMO is there to work towards improving the wellbeing of destination citizens, helping to make certain that tourists have a positive and unforgettable experience and while doing so, ensuring that successful destination management and stewardship are given. (Bornhorst et al., 2010) If a destination wants to be sustainable and

competitive, it must have an effective and dedicated DMO as the leader (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003).

2.2 Destination leadership

DMOs are often seen as the leader and advocate of tourism interests for other sectors and within the community (Nomm et al., 2020). Northouse (2012) defined leadership as "a process whereby an individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal". The capacity and power to influence or alter other people's beliefs, views, actions and attitudes is known as leadership (Ganta & Manukonda, 2014). Destination leadership can be viewed as the outcome of an interrelational leadership type between businesses and actors that together influence each other. It is about "motivating, encouraging and inspiring human actors by setting long-term values and directions" (Pechlaner et al., 2014). Leadership refers to the basic circumstances that exist in tourism destination groups made up of various actors with diverse tastes, as well as the ability to respond consistently to obstacles and give rise to the numerous amount of initiatives that are related to operators and organizations. (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014). Leadership is critical for shaping and guiding decision-making policies and the destination's strategic actions. (Corte et al., 2014) Beritelli and Bieger (2014) claim destination leadership should not be understood as leadership of significant establishment as it is integrated in the overall setting of the destination. It focuses on the community as a whole, consisting of all the various stakeholders, who sets the goals for all in the destination to strive towards them. (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014) They further say that leadership is linked to individuals and their authority and power has to be analyzed on destination level (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014; Komppula, 2016).

Effective destination leadership necessitates the ability to foster deep collaboration among all stakeholders in the destination (Hankinson, 2012). In Europe, almost all destinations portray a community type of some sort, where no institution or business can have the authority to control others (Komppula, 2016; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). According to Dwyer and Kim (2003), the DMO will sometimes provide the necessary leadership to provide general direction for the tourism development in the destination. DMOs depend heavily on stakeholder relationships and interactions, and they must also foster strong interactions among them. As a result, DMOs' primary duties are related to leadership rather than management. This emphasizes the intertwined nature of leadership and power, with both having the ability to control other people.

(Stilling Blichfeldt et al., 2014) A leadership approach taken by the DMO can also favour stakeholders' commitment and participation in tourism activities. (Corte et al., 2014) The DMO, according to Bornhorst et al. (2010) and Hankinson (2012), should be in command of destination leadership.

According to Volgger and Pechlaner (2014), DMOs are powerful and have a lot of authority when it comes to destination management and leadership. The authors state that networking skills, presenting clear proof of execution, financing and operating competence are the vital factors that affect the DMOs triumph (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). Destination leadership plays a distinct role in the management of destinations by linking destination managers with the community and broader interest groups, while assisting in the identification of common goals and interests of all parties involved. With leadership, DMOs can allow all members to have a chance to shape the strategic direction of a destination (Hristov & Zehrer, 2015). To better serve its purpose and achieve greater success, local networks, as well as their tradition, must be respected and destination leadership should be personalized to each destination. (Kozak et al., 2014) Leadership should stem from the destination and a mutual objective of bringing all the operators together should be the success of the destination (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014). A study conducted by Komppula and Alegria (2019) suggests that successful cooperation and leadership are important for a destination's success. The results support the view of Beritelli and Bieger (2014), who suggest that individuals, not necessarily organizations, are attributed to leadership in a destination.

With destination leadership, Valente et al. (2014) reason that it can be characterized as distributed leadership. Gibb (1954) coined the term "distributed leadership" to describe the complexities of power structures in both formal and informal communities and organizations. (Hristov et al. 2018) Distributed leadership has its foundation on interactions rather than actions (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017). Distributed leadership values the broader possibilities for participation throughout the network in leadership decisions, knowledge distribution, skills and critical development resources. (Hristov & Ramkissoon, 2016) Distributed leadership around the destination network is seen in tourism as a way to improve collaboration and inclusivity. (Hristov et al., 2018)

The research from Kozak et al. (2014) and Pechlaner et al. (2014) are among the first centralized attempts to recognize distributed leadership in research concerning DMOs. Tuohino and Konu (2014) provided evidence that, regardless of being an under-researched issue, in destination

research there is scope for distributed leadership. Hristov and Ramkissoon (2016) conducted a study on destination leadership networks with a focal point on DMOs, which discovered the shift from power relationships in destination decision-making and valiant leadership to collaborative, distributed leadership practiced by a multitude of destination organizations on a DMO level. Distributed leadership appears to be especially prevalent in environments with unclear command, a number of different actors, and structural uncertainty, much like tourism destinations. (Pechlaner et al., 2014) To provide insight into the development resources and facilitate strategic decision-making at destinations, distributed leadership requires cooperation between a multitude of leaders and builds on stakeholder collaboration. (Hristov et al., 2018)

2.3 Stakeholder cooperation in destination

A destination consists of a group of different stakeholders integrated into a social network (Gursoy et al., 2015). In tourism planning, stakeholder involvement is usually characterized by great diversity. Stakeholders in tourism are people or businesses who have an interest in the regional development and may profit from their regions' development in a direct or indirect manner. (Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019) Since within every tourism destination there are different stakeholders providing products and services, it makes them intricate entities to manage. Each stakeholder may be pursuing different things and have varying resources and skills, which results in overall lack of cohesion (Bregoli & Del Chiappa, 2013). The co-existence of various stakeholders is definitely one of the distinctive characteristics of a tourism destination. (Brokaj, 2014)

The sustainable development of tourism is unachievable without stakeholder participation (Conaghan et al., 2015). Multi-stakeholder processes in sustainable tourism provide a diverse range of experience and views that enable tourism stakeholders to make informed decisions, to gain the expertise and improve the learning skills needed to meet economic, socio-cultural, and environmental goals (García-Rosell & Mäkinen, 2013). A core principle of sustainability is to encourage stakeholders' support and get them to participate in the planning and development projects. (Ghanem & Elgammal, 2017) It is important to recognize stakeholders in sustainable destination development and take account the different points of view on the issue. Stakeholders should be active participants and drivers in sustainable tourism initiatives, not passive receivers. (Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019) If the different stakeholders in a tourism destination do not recognize that it is in their own best interests to adapt their business to sustainable development

standards, there will be little impact on the efforts of other stakeholders. Other stakeholders' involvement and active participation in the implementation of sustainable development is unlikely if the public sector is unable to provide effective training and enforce a sustainable development strategy. Local residents will not accept public sector initiatives if they do not understand the short- and long-term advantages that come with policies for sustainable development. Finally, if the needs of visitors and tourists cannot be sufficiently met by sustainable forms of tourism, they can disregard destinations that are attempting to put that type of supply on the market and opt for something else (Jovicic, 2013).

One of the most important aspects of a destination success is effective collaboration between its various stakeholders. (Komppula, 2016) For several stakeholders, the marketing expertise and the coordination of marketing and sales efforts the DMOs offer is a valuable resource (Blain et al., 2005). The DMO as the leading entity in the tourism destination has a significant role in the management of destination networks and the promotion of engagement and participation between the different stakeholders in a destination. (Pechlaner et al., 2012; World Tourism Organization, 2019) In many destinations DMOs become leading organizations with a wider directive. This involves planning, organization and control of many activities within an appropriate governance structure and integrating different stakeholders to operate under mutual goals in a destination (World Tourism Organization, 2019). According to Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider (2019), there are many benefits gained through stakeholder involvement, such as more transparent and better-accepted tourism strategy and results. The inclusion of stakeholders helps to understand the broad set of interests and address regional issues. This interaction between the destination stakeholders can improve or decrease the destination's competitiveness. (Gursoy et al., 2015)

Stakeholder networks which are managed and led by DMOs have been addressed as essential factors in the development of a sustainable destination and DMOs have a critical role in the standardization and coordination of stakeholders working in the destination. (Bregoli & Del Chiappa, 2013; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2013) Destination managers are now expected to incorporate social values into their work, successfully maintaining a balance between business interests and the broader network of destination stakeholders, including those in the host community who do not have any vested interests in tourism (Kozak et al., 2014) If the stakeholders do not have an accepted vision and strategy with destination development, it may result in conflicting development initiatives and disjointed marketing campaigns carried out by

neighbouring municipalities, particularly when there is not a DMO in the region. (Komppula, 2014) In Finland, the responsibility of tourism destination policy making is on the local governments and/or the provincial authorities. (Komppula & Alegria, 2019) There is no systematic structure of institutions in tourism as an industry and the structure of regional and local DMO vary from one region to the next. (Komppula, 2016)

2.4 Sustainable destination development

This chapter discusses the economic, socio-cultural and environmental features of sustainable tourism and how they must be considered when planning sustainable activities. Later sustainability indicators and certifications as means of creating positive destination image and enhancing the sustainable destination development are explained.

2.4.1 Sustainable tourism

As an industry, tourism is based on people. It was made for people, just as it is for tourists, visitors, and locals. Tourism, however, also relies on the existing natural and cultural resources in the destination (Cismaru, 2015). Sustainable tourism has its foundation on the concept of sustainable development and has an intimate relationship with it (Ali & Frew, 2014). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and World Tourism Organization (WTO) (2005) defined sustainable tourism as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities." The implementation of all three aspects of Since sustainability concerns are beyond the reach and obligation of private organizations and companies, sustainability in a destination is especially important for sustainable tourism. (Lee, 2001) Sustainable tourism is not a distinct or exclusive form of tourism; all types of tourism should aim to be more sustainable (Brokaj, 2014). Sustainable tourism must create and maintain tourist satisfaction and ensure memorable experiences for tourists, while raising their awareness of sustainable development issues and promoting practical measures for sustainable tourism (United Nations, 2015).

Successful development of sustainable tourism requires comprehensive and long-term planning, monitoring and actions (FCG & Business Finland, 2018). Good planning guarantees tourism development is in line with greater economic and social development priorities and that adequate frameworks and processes are there to secure the sustainable development of tourism.

(McLoughlin & Hanrahan, 2019). Sustainable tourism values should be integrated into tourism policy and operations (Fodness, 2017).

Environmental sustainability should allow the best possible use of the available environmental resources, which are an important part of tourism development. It preserves the critical ecological mechanisms and helps to preserve the natural heritage and biodiversity (FCG & Business Finland, 2018). The economic sustainability should ensure viable, vital economic activities that offer societal security to all of its stakeholders, including safe working conditions and revenue-providing opportunities. The tourism industry should for example employ local residents instead of people not living in the area (Kauppila et al., 2009). Tourism revenues should also remain within the destination and regional economy as much and long as possible in order for the local community to gain benefit from tourism (FCG & Business Finland, 2018). The need for local people to have influence of their own lives, community, and use of their environment is referred to as socio-cultural sustainability (Kauppila et al., 2009). Tourism should uphold the sociocultural authenticity of the host community, preserve built environment and infrastructure, cultural heritage and traditional values and foster intercultural understanding and tolerance (FCG & Business Finland, 2018). The three aspects of sustainable tourism have been summarized in Figure 2. A destination can be considered sustainable if the environmental, economic and socio-cultural sides of tourism development are aligned (Ali & Frew, 2014).
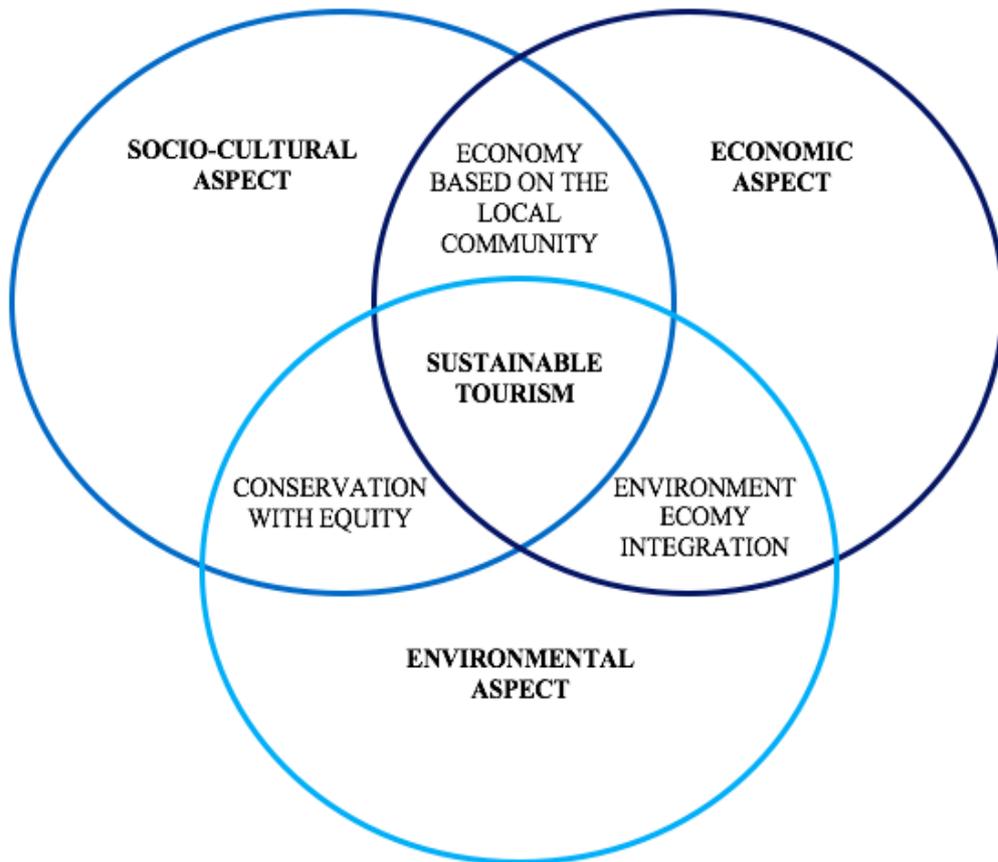
Figure 2. Adapted sustainable tourism model by Hall (1998).

2.4.2 Sustainable tourism indicators and sustainability certification

Sustainable tourism indicators are among the most widely used methods for assessing sustainability in the destination (Blancas et al., 2011). Sustainable tourism indicator systems are defined as "the set of measures that provide the necessary information to better understand the links between the impact of tourism on the cultural and natural setting in which this takes place and on which it is strongly dependent" (WTO, 1996). Sustainable tourism indicator systems, apart from measuring progress, help to define sustainable development goals and suitable management strategies. Sustainability indicators can help policymakers make better choices and to take more effective measures by streamlining, explaining, and collating information available to them while also spreading the ideas, opinions, and principles of various stakeholders (Kristjánsdóttir et al., 2017). Indicators are essential for any destination's collaborative, long-term tourism development (McLoughlin & Hanrahan, 2015).

The construction, development and application of different sustainability certifications or sustainability labels around the world, a number of sustainability indicators have been endorsed.

(Akama et al., 2011). There is a numerous amount of tourism specific indicators to choose from, theoretically speaking, given the complex nature of tourism systems. Policy, the type of sustainability approach taken, measurability, resources, interests of stakeholders, public support, politics and such are all factors that influence the selection of suitable indicators in a tourism destination (Jovicic, 2013). Establishing sustainable tourism indicators is a way for tourism businesses to put sustainability principles into practice (Agyeiwaah et al., 2017).

One way to achieve a more sustainable tourism industry is through the use of sustainability certifications. Sustainability certification refers to the process of adopting environmentally sustainable practices which are accredited by a certification body if they are successful. (Lissner & Mayer, 2020) Sustainability certification emphasizes the social, economic and environmental performance and make sure that certified companies meet the sustainability criteria. (Esparon et al., 2013) Sustainability certificates are established by individual businesses, industry associations, non-profit organizations, and government agencies, and they can range from single regions to global, and from single activity to entire destination. The majority of the sustainability certificate schemes in tourism are either national or regional (Puhakka & Siikamäki, 2012.)

There is a number of different sustainable certification schemes for the tourism industry and these continue to expand and evolve (Buckley, 2012). Schemes of this kind encourage businesses to improve their environmental performance and can complement existing regulations. There is a desire for tourism businesses to make a positive commitment to sustainable growth, and discuss the detrimental social and environmental effects of their activities (Mzembe et al., 2020). Still, not all tourism operators have found suitable programs for their own activities among the existing programs. Some systems and programs also focus only on minimizing environmental impacts (FCG & Business Finland, 2018). Vertinsky and Zhou (2000) explain that certification can present a positive destination image. However, sustainability certification comes at a price. The costs include the costs of adjusting operations to meet certification standards, gathering data, filling out paperwork, and dealing with administrative requirements, as well as the certification program's registration and audit fees. (Buckley, 2020)

A sustainability label is the visual communication tool which demonstrates that a provider has achieved such environmental accreditation. For tourists, on the other hand, such recognitions visualized as labels aid in the search for businesses and destinations that emphasize sustainability (Lissner & Mayer, 2020). However, it has also been noted that sustainability certifications do not have an increasing effect on demand for all tourists. (Karlsson & Dolnicar, 2015) Certification of tourism products is highlighted as a crucial tool for managing sustainable tourism to help decrease the negative environmental and social consequences of tourism (Puhakka & Siikamäki, 2012; Esparon et al., 2013).

2.5 Sustainable Travel Finland program and label

In 2016, the Finnish government updated the goals of Finland's Arctic policy on the development of the Arctic region and Finland's role in the Arctic by aligning three strategic priorities, which are Arctic know-how, sustainable tourism and infrastructure solutions (FCG & Business Finland, 2018). On the basis of this guideline, Arctic sustainable tourism was also defined as part of the action plan updated in the mid-term review of the Finnish government program. Visit Finland/Business Finland Ltd. was also granted funding for the Arctic Sustainable Tourism Destination project for 2017–2019 as part of the Tourism 4.0 additional allocation (FCG & Business Finland, 2018). The purpose of the program was to develop sustainable operations in Finnish tourism companies and destinations, to market Finland as a sustainable tourism destination, and guide tourists arriving in Finland and foreign tour operators bringing tourists to Finland to act in accordance with sustainable development. The Sustainable Travel Finland (STF) program and the Sustainable Travel Finland label are one of the programmes measures. (Visit Finland, 2020.)

In 2019, Visit Finland launched the Sustainable Travel Finland program, which is intended for tourism businesses and destinations in Finland to help them adopt sustainable practices. With a focal point on every aspect of sustainability (environmental, socio-cultural and economic), STF program provides a complete toolkit for Finnish tourism industry to implement these strategies. The STF programme is designed to meet regional and national development needs and is aligned with globally recognized sustainable tourism initiatives and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To lower the barrier for applying to the STF programme and the development path, Visit Finland Academy developed an educational concept to put the destination and its tourism operators together to begin the process of obtaining the STF label (Visit Finland, 2020).

While the Sustainable Travel Finland label allows a quick way to find a sustainable tourism provider or destination for the international travel trade, it offers a seven-step sustainable tourism development path for the tourism industry in Finland (Visit Finland, 2020). The seven-step program is conducted on an online platform specifically developed for this purpose. An e-learning environment is supported by the platform, accessible only for those accepted to the STF program. In order to get the Sustainable Travel Finland label, destinations have to take the following steps (Visit Finland, 2020):

1. Commitment: formally making a decision to evolve sustainable tourism, agree to the set national sustainability principles and appoint a sustainable tourism coordinator.
2. Increase knowledge: Destination familiarizing with the STF e-guide, arranging and participating in dedicated workshops and making online self-assessment.
3. Destination development plan: creating a plan for sustainable tourism development, including both short-term and long-term goals and an action plan for the destination.
4. Communicating responsibly: transparency in the communication about the actions taken towards sustainability for the general public
5. Getting certified and audited: Receiving a certificate that is audited on a routine basis and promotes sustainable development. If a destination wants to be a Sustainable Travel Finland -destination, 51 percent of tourism businesses (including those with the biggest turnover) in the destination partnership network need to have the STF label.
6. Getting verification and measurement: ensuring sustainable tourism operations have been practiced for at least a year, commitment to the national sustainable tourism indicators.
7. Contract and continuous development: signing a contract with Business Finland / Visit Finland for the use of STF label and committing to the regular renewal of the STF label

The businesses and destinations that undergo the Sustainable Travel Finland program and fulfill the given standards will be awarded with a Sustainable Travel Finland label. They will also be able to access development model which is continuously updated, have up-to-date information on sustainable tourism development, receive marketing assistance and exposure on Visit Finland platforms. (Visit Finland, 2020) In June 2020 it became possible to apply for the STF label. With the help of the Sustainable Travel Finland program, tourism destinations can develop sustainable tourism systematically and bring together all companies in the region with

the Sustainable Travel Finland label which further increases the region's awareness as a sustainable destination (Visit Finland, 2020).

2.6 Sustainable destination development in Tampere

The city of Tampere has a goal to grow sustainably and be carbon neutral by 2030. It has introduced the Sustainable Tampere 2030 program, which is implemented in cooperation with the city's different units, businesses and subsidiaries, as well as other stakeholders. The climate measures have been compiled into the Carbon Neutral Tampere 2030 roadmap. The roadmap contains 236 measures divided into six themes; urban planning, transportation system, construction, energy, consumption and urban nature (City of Tampere, 2020.) On this roadmap, there are few specific allocations made specifically for Visit Tampere, the local DMO for Tampere region, under the theme "consumption". The following allocations are dealing with sustainable business and events;

1. Visit Tampere seeks environmental certification and also helps and guides their partner companies to seek certification (e.g. the Sustainable Travel Finland label).
2. Visit Tampere promotes the organization of responsible events by developing guidelines for organizing events based on the principles of sustainable development. They promote the management of platforms and areas used for events by reforming the principles for renting event areas in line with sustainable development. (City of Tampere, 2020.)

The tourism strategy that Visit Tampere has set out for the years 2020-2025 is called "with sustainable steps" (Visit Tampere, 2019). According to Ritchie and Crouch (2003), tourism strategy is a "set of rules, regulations, guidelines, directives and development objectives that provide a framework within which collective and individual decisions directly affecting the development of tourism and the daily activities within a destination are taken". The tourism strategy for Tampere region was prepared through horizontal co-operation involving personnel, board of directors of the company and the parent company Business Tampere, its partner companies and other stakeholders. The mission of Visit Tampere stated in the tourism strategy is to make Tampere region internationally known and help the local tourism businesses and communities to grow. Their vision is to be Northern Europe's most interesting experience and event city, known for its bravery and sustainable growth. (Visit Tampere, 2019.)

The aim of a tourism strategy is to give excellent tourism experience that are profitable for destination stakeholders while also making sure the destination's environmental, social, and cultural dignity are not jeopardized (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Visit Tampere has set three main objectives for their tourism strategy. These are;

1. Building a competitive tourism ecosystem by utilizing digitalization and data.
2. Bringing more value to the partners marketing and sales by boldly marketing the Tampere region.
3. Gaining sustainable growth and attraction by being an accessible destination and having a favourable operating environment for tourism (Visit Tampere, 2019).

Visit Tampere is committed to operating responsibly and according to the standards of sustainable development (Visit Tampere, 2020). The DMO strives to take account of all their sustainable development activities in all areas. With destination leadership related issues, sustainable development has been noted in the decision-making processes and the management of the DMO is devoted to promoting sustainable development and allocating resources to the work. They also provide training for staff, their partner companies, and congress and event organizers.

Visit Tampere has a vision that, in the future, Tampere will be known as one of the world's most responsible tourism, congress and event cities. Their goal is to raise their ranking among the top 10 cities in the Global Destination Sustainability Index. To achieve this, cooperation with local stakeholders is needed. They encourage their partnership companies to commit to the principles of sustainable development in their operations and communicate about the responsibility achievements of their partners. The DMO is also participating in different destination development projects such as the Sustainable Tourism Hub project for the Särkänniemi area and "Choose more sustainably" program. (Visit Tampere, 2020.)

With Visit Finland's Sustainable Travel Finland program, Visit Tampere is on the path for applying the label as a destination. In order for a destination to receive the Sustainable Travel Finland label, at least 51% of the destination companies (counting in the largest in terms of turnover) need to have a Sustainable Travel Finland label. This rule applies to tourism companies doing international business in the destination. The calculation of the 51% criteria is based on the network of companies defined by the destination. Visit Tampere currently has around 135 partners in their network, out of which around 100 are doing business related to

tourism with international clients. Currently twelve of their partner companies have started the Sustainable Travel Finland path and one company has gotten the STF label. The partners in their network vary from accommodation, restaurants, attractions, events to universities and even municipalities. This indicates that the DMO has still plenty of work to get all companies in the tourism sector to commit for the STF program.

2.7 Framework of the study

The DMO has a major influence when developing a destination and its tourism products and services sustainably. Figure 3 depicts the theoretical framework of the study. The framework combines the central concepts reviewed in the theory section: DMO is central when it comes to destination leadership and sustainable destination development. The destination stakeholders should be active participants in the development and there needs to be cooperation with the DMO. Visit Finland has set the Sustainable Travel Finland program as one of Finland's key nationwide tourism development and marketing project, so it is also a natural step for the development of sustainable tourism in Tampere region. This requires the DMO (Visit Tampere) to identify how they can cooperate with destination stakeholders to encourage them to start the path towards STF label.
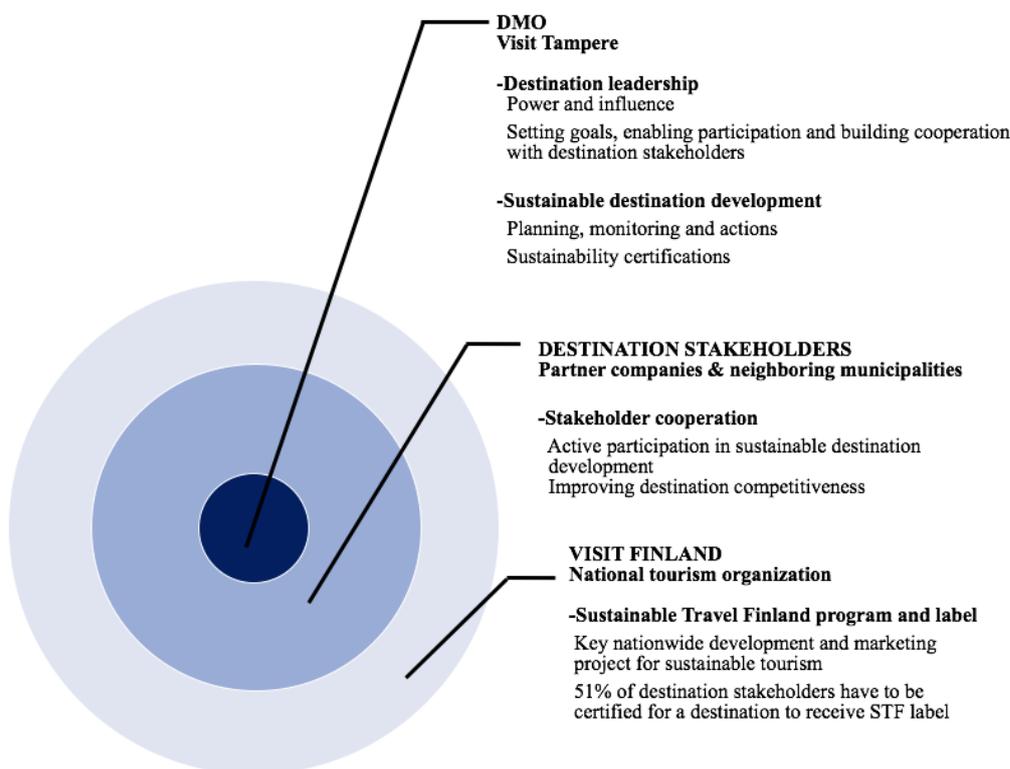

Figure 3. Framework of the study

3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the research approach, methods of data collection and the data analysis of this study are presented. To tackle the subject, the research employs an intensive case study approach, with data gathered through semi-structured theme interviews and findings analyzed through qualitative content analysis. The objective of the thesis is not to have generally applicable data and information but rather to seek insight of how through means of destination leadership and Sustainable Travel Finland Program the DMO can encourage destination stakeholders to contribute into sustainable destination development in Tampere region.

3.1 Research approach

The qualitative research method was chosen for this study. If the research necessitates a thorough knowledge of a particular phenomenon or concept, a qualitative approach is used. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) Qualitative research is often used in social sciences such as business research. An example of how to use a qualitative research method in a business study is to use it to provide a deeper knowledge of topics and issues that are still uncertain in quantitative research. Quantitative research focuses on explanation, hypothesis testing, and statistical analysis, whereas qualitative research approaches are focusing on interpretation and comprehension. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) In several qualitative research approaches, data collection and analysis are responsive to the social and cultural context with the goal of achieving a comprehensive understanding of the issue studied. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016)

In this research, the intensive case study method is used, aiming at understanding destination leadership, stakeholder cooperation and sustainable destination development in the given context, namely Visit Tampere and Tampere region. Intensive case study as a method concentrates on comprehending and investigating the situation inside, from the participants' perspective. The focus is on one or few cases that are studied in their proper contexts holistically and intensively (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). The focus of this case study is the DMO, Visit Tampere, and is specifically interested in the implementation of Sustainable Travel Finland program in their functions related to sustainable development. The goal of intensive case study is to not generate standardized results or knowledge, but to better understand the case and be able to answer the questions "how" and "why". (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) The goal of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of DMO employees.

3.2 Data collection methods

Interviews, surveys, evaluation, and data gathered from various records are the most popular data collection techniques used in qualitative studies. Depending on the issue being studied and the study tools available, these various approaches can be used alternately, in conjunction, or in various combinations (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2017, 113-114). This study was conducted by interviewing the interviewees. In this study, an interview is a one-on-one discussion where the interviewer asks questions aloud and takes notes on the interviewee's answers. (Eskola, 1975) When it comes to qualitative research, there are many advantages to using interviews as a data collection method. The advantage of the interview is, above all, flexibility. The interviewer has the opportunity to repeat the questions if needed, correct misunderstandings, clarify the wording of the expressions and have an interaction and conversation with the interviewee. Order of the questions can also vary depending on the interview and the interviewee. It is also possible to pick interviewees who have experience or knowledge of the subject under the study. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2017)

Semi-structured theme interviews were used to gather information and data. Semi-structured theme interviews proceed on the basis of certain key pre-selected themes and related specific questions. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2017) In this study, the questions were divided to four pre-selected themes; perceptions of destination leadership in Tampere region, stakeholder cooperation in the destination, sustainable destination development and Sustainable Travel Finland programme. In addition, one theme recording the interviewees background was used. The advantage of a semi-structured theme interview is that in the interview, questions can be clarified and deepened based on the answers of the interviewees. Methodologically, the thematic interview emphasizes people's interpretations of things, the meanings they give to things, and how meanings arise in interaction. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2007) This was also the case in this study. In semi-structured theme interviews, the interviewer seeks to find meaningful answers according to the purpose of the research and the problem statement or research task. In principle, the pre-selected themes are based on the research framework, i.e. what is already known about the phenomenon under study. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2017) The six interviews were used as a primary data source in the study, but secondary data sources were also used. For instance, previous studies regarding sustainability conducted by the DMO and information concerning the Sustainable Travel Finland program were looked into to get a better understanding of the case in focus. The interview questions were formed on the basis of theory,

relying on themes connected to destination leadership, destination stakeholders, sustainable destination development and Sustainable Travel Finland program.

Six professionals working in Visit Tampere, the local DMO for Tampere region were interviewed (Table 2). The interviewees were selected by using a purposive sample. In purposive sampling the primary objective is to produce a sample which is indicative of the entire population. (Lavrakas, 2008) The colletion of a purposive sample is usually achieved by using professional expertise of a population to pick a sample of components that represent a non-randomly selected cross-section of the population. Purposive sampling is normally assumed to be more appropriate for a collection of small samples, usually from a restricted geographical area or a limited description of the population, where population assumption is not the primary consideration, due to the subjectivity of this selection process. (Lavrakas, 2008)

In this study, the DMO was first contacted via email to discuss the topic and possibility to conduct the study. One Microsoft Teams online meeting was held before the actual interviews to give the DMO an overview of the study, its aim and purpose and to check whether there were any limitations. After, the contact person from the DMO was asked to provide suitable interviewees from inside the DMO, who would have either responsibility regarding sustainable destination development or leadership in the destination. The DMO suggested six people to be interviewed based on their merit and position in the destination organization. All of the interviewees were working with issues relevant to this study e.g. sustainable destination development, partnership network and destination leadership. The interviewees also had different focus points such as MICE (=meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions), marketing, development projects and knowledge management.

The interviews were carried out as Microsoft Teams online meetings between 18th and 25th of February 2021. All interviews were conducted in Finnish. The interviewees were told of the research's goals, how the data would be used, and by whom at the start of the interview. All interviews were recorded with the interviewees' permission. More detailed information of the interviewees is presented in Table 2. "Interviewee" is represented by the letter "I." It is used in the text to denote each informant's comments.

	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6
Position	Manager	Manager	Director	Manager	Director	Manager
Years in the DMO (over/under five years)	under	under	under	over	under	over
Interview duration (min, sec)	56.10	50.55	46.10	47.59	46.26	68.47

Table 2. Details of the interviewees.

3.3 Data analysis

This study takes an abductive approach. The act of switching from people's everyday descriptions and meanings to categories and ideas is known as abduction. It forms the foundation of an interpretation or definition of the phenomenon being described. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) Since this thesis is not attempting to prove nor establish a new theory, an abductive approach to interpretation and analysis was chosen.

The data gained from the interview was analyzed with the use of qualitative content analysis. The goal of a qualitative content analysis is to give a clear vision of the topic that is under research. Another goal is to generate a rich, comprehensive and insightful interpretation of the contextual meanings of the data. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed to Microsoft Word document. The research analysis was carried out by labeling and identifying patterns in the transcribed interviews, as well as connecting topics and similarities. In this study, the analysis was concerned with finding relevant key terms, paragraphs, phrases and themes from the data. In this way, parts of the data are classified into categories that are coded with specific names. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) The process of data analysis in this study:

1. Transcription of the recorded interviews into Microsoft Word document.
2. Each transcription was read several times.
3. Grouping each interviewees answers question by question
4. Different colors were used to highlight individual words, sentences and phrases that was relevant to the study from the data.
5. Grouping the answers under four themes.

4 FINDINGS

The goal of this research is to learn more from destination leadership, stakeholder cooperation, sustainable destination development and how the Sustainable Travel Finland program is incorporated into the process in Tampere region. The focus of the study was on the DMO's aspect. A total of six interviews were conducted with the personnel from Visit Tampere and analyzed. This chapter presents the findings, and they are divided into four themes: aspects of destination leadership in Tampere region, destination stakeholders and cooperation in the destination, sustainable destination development in Tampere region and Sustainable Travel Finland program and utilization of the label in the destination.

4.1 The concept of destination leadership

The first research question in this thesis was to find out how destination leadership is being perceived in the DMO. The interviewees from Visit Tampere were asked to define and explain the term *"destination leadership"*. The main focus was to think destination leadership specifically in the context of Tampere region.

The aspect of *"building the best possible operating environment for the tourism industry"* (I1) and *"developing the tourism ecosystem, i.e. developing the business of tourism companies, based on business intelligence."* (I5) were mentioned. Also, having a strategy and setting directions for destination development in the region were considered to be the main features of destination leadership. Many interviewees thought that as the DMO they have the responsibility to *"bring the view of how the tourism industry should be developed, so that we remain as a competitive and attractive destination in the future"* (I2). This requires the DMO to *"take the special features of our area into consideration, finding our own niche markets from the world, actively acknowledge tourism trends and guide companies in the direction that their supply matches demand."* (I4). In Tampere, the DMO was seen as being a *"link to the public sector"* (I1), *"subordinate for Visit Finland's actions"* (I4) and *"connector of different actors"* (I2).

With their expertise in the tourism industry, the DMO felt that they can help their partner companies and make the diverse group of destination stakeholders feel included. I6 stated that by *"giving examples, opening up the world and enabling tourism businesses to develop their own operations"* they can motivate and encourage destination stakeholders, but also get them to be more involved and strive towards the common goals such as sustainable tourism. I3 said that it is important to *"have a tourism strategy which concerns the whole tourism industry in*

the area and is operated so that our partners buy what we are selling and accept it". Besides destination leadership, the DMO had the attributes of distributed leadership, where they give possibilities for destination stakeholders to get involved and have a say in the destination development. I3 described how through means of distributed leadership the DMO can improve collaboration and convince their partnership network companies:

> *"Our tourism strategy, which concerns Visit Tampere, the whole area and its tourism industry was done one and a half years ago. Back then we strongly included our stakeholders, i.e. companies and partners to the strategy work. They could tell their own opinions and have an influence, which of course did, and commit to the big lines. This went OK and it has worked."*

4.1.1 Destination leadership in DMO's operations

In Tampere region the DMO has traditionally focused on destination management, but two out of six respondents (2/6), felt that the DMO is currently in a critical stage, moving from destination management towards destination leadership. I6 explained:

> *"We are now at a turning point, i.e. where we are moving from the organization and management of companies issues to bringing information for the tourism companies to utilize, but the management is left for the companies themselves. It is more about creating opportunities instead of us making something concrete."*

The fact that the interviewees from the DMO felt that *"for the past two and a half years, we have taken steps to move in that (destination leadership) direction"* (I1) and *"our activities and the focus of doing things have changed quite much of what it was in the past"* (I6) might have caused confusion among their partnership companies and how they see the DMO functions. I4 talked about the role of Visit Tampere:

> *"Maybe our view of Visit Tampere's role differs from how some of the companies see our role. Our goals and future images are not always in line with those of the companies, but I think we are striving hard to gain leadership. We still partially focus on the micro-level things instead of macro-level. We should boldly focus on the bigger picture, show direction and just rely on the companies that they will join us."*

I3 continued with the aspect of having responsibility as a DMO and how they need to set an example for the destination stakeholders:

> *"We have to be pioneers in a certain way and make those new things. Companies have to trust us and that we really understand what we are doing and why we are doing it. But I have a feeling that it works."*

The majority, four out of six respondents (4/6), replied that they believed the DMO is currently using a destination leadership approach in their operations and daily functions. The interviewees told that destination leadership shows in their operations, for example I1 told that *"we currently have a development team, which has been taking a new approach on utilizing business intelligence and bringing forward the voice of development."* I2 thought that *"...it shows in the way that we currently organize a lot of training, provide and share knowledge and are developing our own functions to the direction that we are able to lead this better."* I6 elaborated that *"we build dashboards so we are able to provide companies with analyzed information so they can develop their business and settle in this changing world."* The same thoughts were shared by I5, who said that the DMO is currently *"running, planning and preparing development projects that aim for that (destination leadership)"*.

The current pandemic has had an effect on the DMOs development in destination leadership, as *"we have a strong focus on international marketing and developing international capacity"* (I5). Due to the fact that international measures are currently on hold, the DMO has had to focus on the domestic market as *"it has risen to an unpredictable value"* (I4). I4 described the situation, which they could have after the pandemic:

> *"After the Coronavirus pandemic, we will see how well we take the destination leadership approach into international tourism activities. Now is also a good opportunity to leave many unnecessary things behind and take new gear when we start the international measures again."*

I5 also acknowledged, that there will be major shifts in their actions after the pandemic:

"We have developed our strategy and during this year it will become more concrete. ... although our international marketing measures are currently not implemented, we have the readiness to start them as soon as possible"

4.1.2 Leadership in the destination

Tampere as a region was considered to be very equal and lacking any strong personalities, that would take the position of a destination leader (Table 3). Many of the interviewees felt that the destination is being developed in cooperation, saying *"we are going forward as Tampere"* (I2). With visible leaders in Tampere region, interviewees thought that *"we do not have a leader in the area"* (I3) and *"Tampere is already such a big destination that it does not personify."* (I1).

Table 3. Recognition of a leader in the destination

	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6
No clear leader in the destination		x	x			x
DMO is the leader	x					
Leader is an individual in the DMO						x
Leader is a company in the partnership network / destination	x	x	x		x	
Leader is an individual in the partnership network / destination	x			x		
Leadership is done in cooperation	x	x		x		x

I2 compared the current situation they have in Tampere region to the past, and how the destination will develop in the future:

"If you think about time 15 years ago and how much bigger and more determined the whole business has become and, on the other hand, how it is changing all the time. Digitalization will be changing the ways we function and how tourism is marketed. Perhaps it also means that the city (Tampere) can promote itself instead of focusing on Finland as a whole (although this is also important), but that we can do our own stuff and rise as a unique destination."

When the interviewees were asked to think whether there could be any individuals or companies in the region taking an active role in destination leadership, many thought that there were many good examples of active companies, but not necessarily leaders. I6 explained the situation:

> *"In my opinion, we have good individual companies that are eagerly involved and doing things in a new way, but I cannot say that anyone could rise as a leader on this perspective of new destination leadership."*

I1 felt that in Tampere region some companies and operators are important *"lodestars"* and they would need more of them. The most often mentioned companies were Särkänniemi amusement park (I1, I2, I3 and I5) and Tampere Hall (I1 and I2). I5 told that *"the way Särkänniemi develops their own operations and the whole region, their course of action, taking advantage of data and promoting sustainability makes it a great example."* I1 continued *"they have done a good and visible job for a long time and are also actively promoting it among the professionals".* Some interviewees also mentioned single companies and individuals (I1, I3, I4, I5 and I6).

I4 pondered, that *"it is good that the leadership comes from the businesses, so that we would get the other companies to see what the value of our measures and development targets is."* I4 added later that as a DMO *"we often have to watch our words when we participate in any discussion, but then these companies can slightly more directly and more freely tell about their opinions and views, also for our favor."*

4.2 Destination stakeholders and cooperation in the destination

4.2.1 Stakeholder cooperation in Tampere Region

Visit Tampere currently has around 135 companies in their partnership network, with around 100 of them doing international business. As in many other destinations, the stakeholders in Tampere region vary a lot in size and the industry presented. The partnership network is a way for the DMO to gather destination stakeholders together and get a hold of them. I1 explained that *"it is good that the partnership network exists, and it is of paramount importance as a tool to even somehow get in contact with the companies".* I3 talked about the situation they currently have in Tampere with the destination stakeholders:

"More than ninety percent of tourism companies are really small. There are two problems with this, i.e. a) that there is not enough financial resources and b) even if there were financial resources, they do not necessarily the mental resources, that is, the entrepreneurs are caught in their own business and in their own daily functions, so there is no time to think about anything far-reaching. The positive thing is that they are really flexible, and their customer service is very personal, which the customers of course like."

The interviewees were asked to ponder how the partnership network is currently working in the destination. I6 explained that *"for the first time ever last year and this year we have had a situation where we have had direct contacts from companies. They have heard from our partnership network and are interested in it"*. I2 thought that the partnership network is currently working *"reasonably well"* and continued *"the feedback that has come from events and other things that we have organized, has made me feel that the partners are quite satisfied."*, I3 felt that *"it works well"* and continued with *"at least among the top three regions here in Finland"*.

Some interviewees felt that there was still *"room for improvement"* (I5) in the DMOs own operations as *"we have noticed that having one package cannot suit everyone"* (I4), *"the partnership network is difficult to utilize optimally"* (I1) and *"... the network should be systematically developed"* (I6). What came to the development needs of the DMOs functions in order to get more out of the partnership network, I6 talked about tailoring their services:

"We should be able to take into account the special features of our businesses. For example, we cannot provide the same partnership model for restaurants and cafés that we offer for our activity and experience providers. It is a thing that has been constantly going in a better direction."

I4 was talking about the need to distinguish the various stakeholders in their partnership network:

"We need to take into account the various profiles, sizes and potential audiences of our companies. We need to think more about our big goal and who (out of the partnership companies) are really at the point that they can help us, and we can help them,

excluding, of course, this Coronavirus situation. Here too, we might have fallen to offer something for everyone instead focusing towards one clear goal."

Many interviewees also recognized that there were some difficulties in getting the partnership network companies to be active in the development of the network. I5 explained that *"we have to get our partners better involved in these development measures, what we are running and also for the various projects. But we need more ideas and thoughts."* I4 was running along the same lines, stating *"we need more activity from the entrepreneurs themselves"*. I1 thought that the lack of activity might be due to the fact that *"some partners handle interaction directly with their contact person and are not otherwise active in these measures."*

4.2.2 Factors affecting the cooperation between the DMO and its partnership network

Personal relations, trust and communication between the DMO and its partnership network companies and individuals were considered to be the most important factor affecting the cooperation in the destination. The emotional connection and bond formed between the DMO and its partners was highlighted as *"in the end all cooperation is built between people and their personal relationships"* (I1). I3 talked about the importance of having a good chemistry with their partnership network companies:

> *"Well, they are here (in Tampere), as in anywhere else in this world, tied to personal relations. The fact that the personal chemistry is working with the companies and their leaders, so that we can easily find common ground is, in a way, a win-win situation. We can do business together and both parties benefit."*

With interaction, I2 told that with the partnership network *"it is important to me that the interaction is genuine and not from top to bottom. The current pandemic makes this difficult, as getting those genuine interactions require personal contact and meetings."* I1 also told, that *"the fact that we have the same faces here in Visit Tampere for a little longer enables this kind of relationships to be built."*

As the partnership network is currently quite extensive, it can be difficult to try and reach all of the partners, if they are not active themselves towards the DMO. I1 explained that there was a lack of communication with most of the companies as *"it feels like approximately twenty or thirty percent of our partners are active towards us, come to our events and want more interaction."* I6 illustrated the current situation:

The fact that there are about 150 companies means that we should, in practice, be in touch every day with a partnership network company or to a human being in order to go through them all during one year. We are a bit clueless of what the companies are doing, so there should be more communication."

I3 spoke about the role of the DMO and how it should be their responsibility to *"get the entrepreneurs to the same table, i.e. host events, seminars or casual get-togethers."* I4 wanted to emphasize the finding of mutual ground and understanding between the DMO and its partners:

"We need to have a mutual understanding, i.e. Visit Tampere understanding the challenges the companies are facing and the companies in turn understanding where we as a DMO are aiming with our measures. ...we can provide guidance and sparring but we cannot be the body that decides, for example, which e-commerce system the company chooses or what kind of products they should be selling."

When the DMO knows their partners they "*know what we can offer to them and identify the pain points, i.e. know what measures should be implemented and what could benefit them"* (I2). I5 talked about finding out what the partnership companies need in order for the DMO to develop the cooperation:

"Likewise, the fact that we will go through our partners' needs, digital capabilities, internationalization rates and in general the challenges of business development will give us a lot of valuable information to develop this network."

4.3 Sustainable destination development in Tampere region

4.3.1 Improving sustainability in the destination

Visit Tampere has set sustainability as one of the main steps in their tourism strategy. The DMO has been taking active measures to improve and develop sustainability in the destination. The three different aspects of sustainable development (environmental, economic and socio-cultural) were considered secondary in the interviews. I1 summarized the different aspects of sustainable development in Tampere region:

"If we think about responsibility in the big picture, we have many things in good shape. Finland as a society is safe, stable, equal and social sustainability is inletted in our society so strongly that it is not such a big problem. With economical sustainability the basic structure is good, but tourism as an industry is challenging because it is highly dependent on seasons. Ecological sustainability is what we are concerned about the most. However, my view is the fact that we have many things already in good condition, we have good water supply, waste management and fewer tourists than many other destinations."

All the interviewees explained that their biggest measures in sustainable destination development were connected to the Sustainable Travel Finland program. The DMO has set a goal to get certified with the STF label as a destination during 2021 and is keeping track of the partnership companies joining the STF program (I2, I3, I4). I3 explained that *"for us, this year's goal is that we will get the STF label as Visit Tampere and it requires that 51% of our partners who are doing international business would be certified with the STF label as well"*. With the STF label, the DMO will get a tool for monitoring the sustainable destination development in Tampere region (I1, I2, I3, I4, I5 and I6). The program also obliges the DMO to make a development plan for sustainable tourism. The indicators for Sustainable Travel Finland programme were not yet available but will be available in spring 2021.

The Sustainable Travel Finland program will increase the sustainable destination development, and at this stage requires the DMO to actively put resources in their partnership network. *"This STF path is now one to which our partner companies are trained and directed",* I4 explained. *"We contact them, organize training and encourage them (companies)"* I3 added. The DMO felt that overall it is essential that they *"help partners to act more responsibly"* (I5). *"The fact that we get all destination stakeholders involved has the biggest meaning and also increases the impact"* I2 continued.

In their own operations, the DMO is focusing on contributing to sustainability with concrete actions:

"In our own functions we have, for example, the Ekokompassi certification and we carefully think about all purchases and not serving meat in our events. Just practicing according to our own values. Sure, our actions are terribly small." (I2)

"We have started the STF path and we also have the Ekokompanssi certification. We have been thinking about our own actions for example at the office. In the future virtual meetings and working remotely will become more common and we will no longer travel for meetings if it is not necessary." (I5)

They have also put resources into the communication of sustainability. This year they are launching a "Choose sustainably"-program on their website. I6 explained more about the program:

"The Choose sustainably -program is modified from Helsinki's Think sustainability-program to us. It is not only related to tourism but offers many companies in various fields to bring out to their sustainable functions. There are an X number of criteria from which the company must meet Y amount and then they get the use of a red heart symbol. We want to boost the communication of everyday sustainability matters."

I2 explained that Choose sustainably-program can act as a first step in sustainability work for example for many small businesses. With these *"marketing benefits and motivators"* (I4) the DMO has introduced for the companies working in Tampere region it hopes to increase the sustainable destination development.

The majority of interviewees said that there were no active monitoring or measuring indicators, programs or tools at the destination at this time. I1 said that the city of Tampere has a carbon neutral Tampere 2030-development program, which can serve as a foundation of sustainable development for the DMO but lacks *"concrete measures and indicators for the tourism industry"*. The carbon footprint calculators and emission measurement of the city of Tampere were also mentioned by I2 and I6. I1 continued that the DMO is involved in 6 aika - Carbon Neutral Tourism development project, which aims at developing a tool for collecting data and counting the carbon footprint of the tourism industry. The DMO is also counting the Global Destination Sustainability index, which is used to benchmark sustainability in destinations around the world (I2).

4.3.2 Responsibility for sustainable destination development in Tampere region

The responsibility for sustainable destination development in Tampere region received diverse answers (Table 4). The interviews revealed that sustainable destination development in Tampere region requires active participation from many parties.

Table 4. Responsibility for sustainable destination development in Tampere region

	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6
DMO	x		x	x	x	x
Entrepreneurs and businesses	x	x	x	x	x	x
The city of Tampere / Tampere region	x	x			x	
Joint responsibility	x	x			x	

All interviewees shared the view that responsibility cannot be the task of one party, but rather everyone in the destination has their own role to play. I1 said that sustainable destination development in Tampere region is a shared responsibility but the responsibility of leading this is the task of Visit Tampere, the city of Tampere and the municipalities. I2 summarized that *"everyone should be responsible as Tampere region alone is committed to really strict climate goals"*. I5 added *"examples are needed from the public actors, such as the fact that Tampere is carbon neutral by 2030 or that we as a destination apply for the STF label"*.

The DMO has a visible role and responsibility to lead the way when it comes to tourism. The role of the DMO in sustainable destination development in Tampere region, based on the interviews, is to *"spread knowledge, competence and tools about sustainability for tourism companies"* (I5)*, "tell why sustainability is necessary and useful for the companies"* (I6) and *"bring information, so that companies are able to make the right kind of product development and bring sustainability to their own operations"* (I4)*.

Few interviewees also mentioned that, the DMO has the power to influence and increase pressure towards the partnership network companies to join the Sustainable Travel Finland program, which many interviewees saw as the biggest action taken towards sustainable destination development in Tampere Region:

"In the big picture, we should with little pressure, push companies that have not yet started the Sustainable Travel Finland program. Visit Finland has already aligned that at some point, companies who do not have the Sustainable Travel Finland label cannot take part in their actions. That should be a good sanction." (I3)

"The fact that we as a destination area have started the Sustainable Travel Finland path is kind of a statement for companies. Meaning, we want the companies to work more responsibly and we need them to join the program as well." (I5)

"At some point, we might have the principle and goal of showcasing only companies who have the STF label." (I6)

The local businesses and entrepreneurs were thought to be *"responsible for their own actions"* (I3) concerning sustainable development. The DMO can share knowledge regarding sustainable tourism and *"insights of tourism market trends"* (I4), but *"in the end, the responsibility relies with the companies. Each company should understand the benefits of sustainable development and its necessity in this situation we have going on in the world."* (I6).

4.3.3 Challenges in sustainable destination development
The interviewees were asked about the challenges in sustainable destination development in Tampere region (Table 5).

Table 5. Biggest challenges in sustainable destination development in Tampere region

	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6
Environmental aspect	x	x	x			
Economic aspect			x	x	x	x
Socio-cultural aspect				x	x	x

Few interviewees thought the biggest challenge was the location of Tampere, i.e. the accessibility to the destination:

"Perhaps the most concrete challenge is the arrival to Tampere, its carbon footprint, how to react to it and how to compensate for it." (I1)

"Our location and the arrival of international tourists is the biggest challenge. When we wrote down the time it took to arrive in Tampere by methods of slow travelling such as a boat or train, it became clear that it is challenging. I believe that we can do things here pretty sustainably once they get here, but how they arrive here is the issue." (I2)

The location was thought to cause the biggest impact on the carbon footprint caused by travelling (I1, I2, I3). Many discussed that they are eagerly waiting for airplanes running on electricity or other more sustainable way of moving around to be introduced in the near future. *"Moving both on airplanes, cars and other ways, must be changed as little polluting as possible"* I3 stated.

Four interviewees raised the issue of economical aspect, with financial situation of the tourism companies significantly weakened by the Coronavirus pandemic:

"At the moment companies do not have any money left in their cashiers. Many of them are ready and willing to make the measures but are slamming the brakes because they need to get certified first and it costs." (I3)

As the DMO has put a lot of expectations in the Sustainable Travel Finland the whole process stops, if their partnership network companies do not get certified. "Getting a certificate requires both time and finances from the companies, and the certification is necessary in order to get the STF label" I5 explained.

The DMO has recognized that among their partnership network they have a lot of operators, which are sustainably certified and do all their operations sustainably, but do not see the value of communicating about their actions. *"For many Finns sustainability and sustainable development is still heavily connected to recycling and environmental responsibility, but they ignore the many aspects (social, economic and ecological) which are currently being highlighted"* I6 explained. The DMO still has difficulties in getting their partnership network companies to put resources in sustainability*:*

"The biggest challenge is still the fact that we have to convince companies that responsibly and sustainably produced tourism products and services are in the future

the ones that go ahead. As a result, the second challenge is that we must first be able to convince the companies, so they are willing to invest money." (I6)

The DMO has also recognized that the partnership companies struggle with the implementation of sustainable practices:

"The challenges are in the know-how and whether the companies are able to develop their own activities or know where to focus on. They do not necessarily know what things they should do first, which is of great importance or what to do next. Even a small company is expected to manage a large number of different things in order to be a responsible, digitized international company." (I5)

I4, I5 and I6 talked about tackling the issues the companies are facing through *"offering concrete help to the companies"* (I5), *"means of communication"* (I4, I6) and *"explaining the advantages gained from sustainable activities"* (I4).

4.4 Sustainable Travel Finland program and utilization of the label in the destination

4.4.1 Reasons for applying to Sustainable Travel Finland program as a destination

Sustainable Travel Finland program is considered as one of Visit Finland's key nationwide development and marketing projects, which has been active since 2019. For destinations, the possibility to apply the STF label came in June 2020. Visit Tampere is currently on the path for applying the label as a destination.

Sustainability and responsible actions were considered to be very important for the tourism development in the region by all interviewees, which had made the decision to apply for the Sustainable Travel Finland program self-evident for the DMO. I5 thought that it was *"a very self-evident decision"* and I1 stated *"it would have been embarrassing not to join"*. The DMO has a desire to "*act more responsibly and promote sustainable actions"* (I5) and when Visit Finland developed and launched their program, it was easy for the DMO to join. I6 explained that "*our basis is that we as a destination want to act sustainably and feel that this is an*

important issue in the tourism industry." The DMO has a vision that the STF programme will be a nationwide marketing and development tool combining all regions in Finland.

The reason for applying as a destination for the STF programme came back to destination leadership and the sense of responsibility the DMO has for the tourism development in the region. I1 stated that *"we cannot preach something that we do not practice".* I3 talked about the role they have as a DMO:

> *"We have to be a role model and lead the way for our partnership network companies. It would feel foolish, if we tried to pressure other companies to be sustainable and acquire different certifications, but we would not have done anything about it."*

In the interviews it came clear that many interviewees felt some sort of pressure for the DMO to join the program, whether it was pressure from Visit Finland as the national tourism organization or from other tourism regions in Finland. I4 thought that the DMO did not have any alternative as *"Visit Finland has stated that Finland wants to be sustainable, we do not have any options or can afford to miss out."* The DMO wants to be active in the international measures, which are usually delegated by Visit Finland. For Tampere to be involved in the international market they *"must be involved in the STF-program and get certified"* (I2). I6 saw the promotion of the program and label be put on a pedestal in the future:

> *"it is evident that at some point only destinations and companies with the STF label can take part in their (Visit Finland) operations."*

With other tourism areas in Finland joining the program and reaching the status of sustainable tourism destination, the DMO definitely felt *"strong peer pressure from other areas"* (I1).

The DMO has been focusing heavily in international markets during the past few years. As they see growing potential in the international markets, the certification gained from Sustainable Travel Finland is seen as *"essential and necessary to have"* (I2). The certification was seen as the only way to *"authenticate for foreign tourists that we do things here sustainably"* (I3) and help the destination to gain *"competitive advantage"* (I6). I1 talked how they can already see a trend in sustainable tourism products and services:

> *"All the signs suggest that after the pandemic, sustainability will be an even more significant factor for tourists and their choice-making process. Hence, sustainability*

needs to be taken seriously and taken into account in our development activities…
Sustainable Travel Finland is a great tool for that."

4.4.2 Partnership network companies' involvement in the Sustainable Travel Finland program

In order for Visit Tampere to receive the Sustainable Travel Finland label as a destination, the DMO needs to be sustainably certified itself but also get 51% of their partnership network companies, which are doing international business to get sustainably certified and complete the STF path. This study wanted to find out the partnership companies are being involved in the STF program.

The DMO relies first and foremost on *"providing information and organizing training focused on the Sustainable Travel Finland programme"* (I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I6). The professionals in the DMO told that they *"actively mention about the program when meeting partners"* (I2), provide material and have been delivering these packages for the municipalities and their representatives in order to *"activate the companies in their own region"* (I5). I6 said the DMO is willing to provide *"hands-on help and advice on Sustainable Travel Finland related things"* if necessary and I1 had even started to offer *"direct face-to-face counseling for anyone interested in jumping to the STF path"*.

It became evident that the biggest issue for the DMO in getting their partnership network companies to join the Sustainable Travel Finland program was the fact that in order to get the STF label, companies have to have a pre-existing sustainability certification. The Sustainable Travel Finland program currently approves around twenty different sustainability certifications in their program. For companies, which do not have a pre-existing certification requires them to invest both time and financial resources. I1 recognized that with *"the current situation with the pandemic and everything, the Sustainable Travel Finland program might not be the first thing the companies want to hop on"*. If the companies do not get sustainably certified, it will stop the process for the destination to apply for the STF label.

The DMO is not currently providing any financial aid for their partnership network companies. *"There has been a discussion on incentives, but there is still none. A good incentive would for example be a discount for a specific certificate such as the Ekokompassi that we have as a DMO."* I2 explained. I4 said there had been discussions of sponsoring the certificate for 10 or

20 businesses or for small businesses, but these initiatives had not been further advanced. I1 told about a development project aimed for the rural tourism companies, their certification process and joining the Sustainable Travel Finland program. It came evident, that financial incentives were tricky to organize for the DMO:

> *"We do not have financial incentives. We have been thinking whether we should be economically involved in supporting the certification process so that they would be cheaper, but it has its own problems. It begins to be supporting businesses and that does not belong to us."* (I3)

> *"We are bound by the fact that we cannot give direct support for companies in cash, that is, we cannot pay for anyone's certificate."* (I6)

4.4.3 Utilization of the Sustainable Travel Finland program and label

The Sustainable Travel Finland program was considered one of the most important ways to add the recognition of sustainable destination development in Tampere region. One aim of the study was to investigate how the DMO sees the use of the Sustainable Travel Finland program and label if the destination gets certified. All interviewees recognized the marketing value they can utilize and gain from the STF label. Especially the label was seen beneficial in international marketing measures:

> *"Sustainable Travel Finland is targeted mainly to international markets. We trust that the connection to Visit Finland's marketing and our marketing measures will strengthen each other. Visit Finland promotes Finland as a sustainable destination and all areas who have the STF label will definitely be highlighted."* (I6)

> *"I find it especially important in international marketing, as it is a clear and easy way to upgrade the image of Finland as a destination. ... in international markets we have to accept that it is Finland first and Tampere second."* (I2)

> *"We can utilize the label when marketing our sustainable tour operator packages, which are popular especially in the German market."* (I4)

With domestic marketing and communication measures, the Sustainable Travel Finland program and label will be shown for example in their website and social media. They already

have the "Choose sustainably" program aimed for domestic travellers, but according to I4, the companies with the STF label will be highlighted in their website and prioritized in influencer marketing measures. I3 stated that the label will become a *"like a new logo for our communications"* and I6 continued *"it will reinforce the whole message of sustainability"*. I1 summarized that by combining the marketing advantage gained from the label with the special features of Tampere is going to be important for the DMO.

With the help of the Sustainable Travel Finland program, the DMO is able to monitor the progress of sustainable destination development. As the destination did not yet have any actual indicators, the program was seen as a *"roadmap and backbone for our long-term work on sustainability. It also forces us to monitor its progress."* (I1) and continued later *"...it is a tool that we have not had so far."* (I1) I5 also acknowledged that the certification brings responsibility for the DMO to keep developing and improving their sustainability measures:

> *"STF is a concrete program with tools to promote sustainability in the region. Certainly, the work does not end with the fact that we will get a certificate, but we will have to continue to develop our own and our partners operations in the region."*

Most of the interviewees highlighted the aspect of having a concrete certificate to show for the destination's sustainable actions:

> *"The fact that this destination receives a certification tells everyone that things are okay from the perspective of sustainability."* (I3)

> *"For locals it is enough that we can tell who are providing sustainable services, but if we want to compete internationally, we have to be certified."* (I2)

> *"Travelers appreciate the fact that we act sustainably and take into account the socio-cultural, economic and environmental factors."* (I5)

The DMO was also waiting for the national cooperation, which the Sustainable Travel Finland program enables. I1 said that *"being part of a bigger entity will benefit the marketing of entire Finnish tourism"* and later added *"although it might not always be active, just having a network where one can bounce ideas and learn from each other is important."*

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Discussion of the findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate how destination leadership is being understood and practiced in Visit Tampere, the DMO for Tampere region, its cooperation with destination stakeholder network and how the DMO can utilize Visit Finland's Sustainable Travel Finland program for sustainable destination development and encourage businesses to join the program in Tampere region. This study was conducted by interviewing six tourism professionals from Visit Tampere, the DMO responsible for tourism development in Tampere region. The six professionals provided insights into four different themes; destination leadership, stakeholder cooperation, sustainable destination development and the Sustainable Travel Finland program. In this chapter the findings are discussed and reflected into previous research.

Three main research questions were used, each with a different perspective on the issue. First, in order to understand how destination leadership is perceived in the DMO, the professionals' understanding of the subject and its appearance in the DMOs operations was studied. The study also tackled the role of a leader in a destination. Second, the meaning and impact of the Sustainable Travel Finland program for the DMO and the sustainable destination development in Tampere region was studied. Third, the aspect of destination stakeholder cooperation and how the DMO is incorporating their partnership network companies to join in the Sustainable Travel Finland program was studied.

In this study, interviewees saw destination leadership above all as a way for the DMO to improve the operating environment of the tourism industry and set the directions for tourism development in Tampere region. The DMO was thought to have an active role in helping their partnership network companies by providing encouragement and opportunities for them to get involved in the destination development. The DMO wanted to maintain a role, where they can coordinate the functions and have the ability to connect all destination stakeholders. In their study, Tuohino and Konu (2014) compared three different Finnish destinations to determine who is in charge of tourism destination development. They discovered evidence that destination leadership is highly dependent in circumstances, and the various roles played by actors in the investigated destinations, as well as the different types of destination leaders reflected this variability in leadership. This thesis was focusing only to one case destination and the results reflect the type of leadership specific to Tampere region.

Visit Tampere is moving strongly towards destination leadership after being mainly focused on destination management. Over the past few years the DMO has actively developed their own operations and included the destination stakeholders into the development process of their new tourism strategy. The reviewed Sustainable Travel Finland program was one of the most crucial projects involving the destination stakeholders. The DMO has recognized that they should be focusing more on giving guidance, training and support instead of managing the issues of the destination stakeholders. Corte et al. (2014) found in their study, that a leadership approach taken by the DMO can also favour stakeholders' commitment and participation in tourism activities. In this study it was also found that the changes the DMO had made in their operations had been confusing some of their partners, but also reinforced their foothold as a leader.

As a destination, Tampere region is led with a united front, rather than having clear leadership from the DMO or individual destination stakeholders. Beritelli and Bieger (2014) suggested that leadership could be linked to individual actors instead of organizations on a destination level. The interviews revealed that DMO could identify many exemplary stakeholders in the destination, but none who would take the role of destination leader. Rather, these stakeholders were thought to set a great example for other operators in the region and support the objectives and goals lined by the DMO. Hristov and Ramkissoon (2016) described, how by means of knowledge distribution, expertise and development resources there can be greater participation, and this can be seen in Tampere region.

The study revealed that in Tampere region the partnership network is of utmost importance to stay in touch with the destination stakeholders. The partnership network was thought to work pretty well, however, the DMO recognized they need to modify the services they provide as every partner requires different things. They also recognized that the biggest obstacle for the cooperation between the DMO and its partnership network is lack of engagement from the entrepreneurs. Komppula (2016) discovered that the ability of destination stakeholders to cooperate is critical for destination leadership. Her findings were supported by Pechlaner et al. (2014), stating that destination leadership is built on bringing together all stakeholders in a destination to work toward common development goals. The biggest factors affecting the cooperation between the DMO and its partner companies in Tampere were trust, communication and personal relations. The DMO had put a lot of resources into getting the destination stakeholders to discuss the important issues and implement sustainable practices.

Visit Tampere has a good understanding of sustainable practices in tourism. They have been actively developing methods to tackle the issue and included the principles of sustainable tourism into their tourism strategy. The interviews did not reveal the concrete actions done from all aspects of sustainable development (environmental, economic and socio-cultural), but the DMO stated they have been mainly focusing on the environmental aspects in their operations. The DMO still lacks clear measurements for managing and monitoring sustainability as the interviews revealed that they do not have unified indicators yet in use. The DMO believes the Sustainable Travel Finland program is going to provide the needed indicators, which aid the monitoring of sustainable development in the destination. The results from the interviews show that in Tampere region, sustainable destination development is highly dependent on having a sustainability certification, particularly since the implementation of the Sustainable Travel Finland program demands 51% of the partnership companies doing international businesses in the destination to be sustainably certified. As stated by Esparon et al. (2013), sustainability certifications emphasize the social, economic and environmental aspects and ensure the business or in this case, a destination has met the sustainability criteria. If the sustainable development of the destination relies to the Sustainable Travel Finland program, the DMO needs to convince the partnership companies of the perceived benefits of the certification.

When it came to responsibility in sustainable destination development, almost all interviewees agreed that the DMO and tourism businesses were the responsible parties. In a destination the size of Tampere, all stakeholders need to take sustainability into account in their daily functions. This supports the findings of Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider (2019), who stated that destination stakeholders, or in this case the partnership network companies should be active participants in the sustainable tourism actions. This study also acknowledged that sustainable destination development requires cooperation between the destination stakeholders and leverage from the municipality.

The destination still has some challenges to overcome when it comes to sustainable destination development. The biggest challenge was connected to the economic aspect, as the cost of attaining sustainability certifications was proven to be a barrier for their partner companies. The interviews revealed that there are still companies in Visit Tampere partnership network, who do not see the value of sustainable tourism operations or do not have the skills and know-how to implement sustainability in their activities. This finding was supported by previous studies done by Ghanem and Elgammal (2017) and Mihalic et al. (2012) which had acknowledged the

fact that destination stakeholders vary in their understanding and implementation of sustainability. The DMO also acknowledged that it is difficult to improve sustainability in the destination, if the destination stakeholders do not participate in the development projects. The finding is propped by Komppula (2014), who claimed that DMOs cannot function efficiently if the destination stakeholders i.e. the companies are unwilling or unable to collaborate, or, as in this study, they are not active towards the DMO.

Sustainability was thought to be central in the destination development of the region and the DMO immediately knew they had to join the Sustainable Travel Finland program. It was seen as the most important action and a way to enhance sustainable destination development in Tampere region. There was also strong lead taken by Visit Finland to prompt all tourism regions in Finland to join in the program. The DMO provides training and consultation for their partnership network in order to get the required number of entrepreneurs in the destination to join the Sustainable Travel Finland program and get the STF label. As the DMO has put a lot of expectations in the Sustainable Travel Finland program and certification, the whole process stops, if their partnership network companies do not get certified. It became clear that the DMO cannot provide financial incentives for the companies but is actively trying to come up with development projects, which could aid the stakeholders in the process.

The reviewed Sustainable Travel Finland program and label was published by Visit Finland in 2019, and therefore little study about the impacts of the program and label to sustainable destination development in Finland exist. The benefits gained from the Sustainable Travel Finland label in Tampere region were mainly connected to marketing and communications, with the label acting as a visual communication tool and enhancing the image of a sustainable destination. Lissner and Mayer (2020) explained that sustainability labels often demonstrate that the provider is sustainably accredited but also helps the customers, or in this case travellers, to help them find destinations that are accentuating sustainability. A study done by Puhakka and Siikamäki (2012) and Esparon et al. (2013) recognized that companies with sustainability certification appear more appealing for visitors thus creating a competitive advantage. By getting the Sustainable Travel Finland label, the DMO will obtain a concrete proof that in Tampere region tourism products and services are generated sustainably. This will in turn help the DMO in their operations aimed for international markets.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

As the influence of the Sustainable Travel Finland program for sustainable destination development in different tourism regions in Finland have not yet been studied before, this thesis provides useful information on the subject. The findings of this study revealed that national sustainability programs, such as Sustainable Travel Finland are considered of great importance to improve sustainable destination development. Visit Finland as the national tourism organization has a big influence on the actions taken by different regions and tourism destinations in Finland. Regional tourism organizations such as Visit Tampere want to be involved in the measures concerning Finnish tourism marketing and Sustainable Travel Finland is one of the key marketing and development projects running at the moment.

A sustainability certification such as the STF label, can help travellers and tour operators to recognize responsible actors, or in this case, a destination and aid in the creation of positive destination image. (Lissner & Mayer, 2020; Vertinsky & Zhou, 2000) For a DMO this is useful information, as this will help them in encouraging the partnership network companies to obtain STF label. Sustainable Travel Finland program also provides guidelines and support for Visit Tampere to monitor and measure sustainability in the destination, which aids putting sustainability principles into practice. (Agyeiwaah et al., 2017)

The DMO's primary function is to provide the collaborative structure that allow the various destination stakeholders to work together to achieve both the single and collective goals. (Fyall et al., 2012) Although DMO is typically understood as enabler of collaboration and engagement, it should also take a more active leadership role to get destination stakeholders involved in the Sustainable Travel Finland program. This study revealed that destination managers and, as in this case, a DMO have authority and influence over the destination stakeholders. Lack of engagement from the partnership network companies to sustainable development initiatives was one of the barriers recognized by the DMO. Individuals make decisions to support initiatives and collaborate based on their own personal experiences, which result in informal, personal connections, knowledge of and trust for other people. (Beritelli et al., 2007) By improving communication with the destination stakeholders and by means of distributed leadership, Visit Tampere can increase activity and engagement between the DMO and the partnership network companies.

5.3 Managerial contributions

As the DMO has taken active measures to improve sustainable destination development, they have to take a more visible role and provide leadership to guide the implementation of sustainable practices in Tampere Region. This applies to the Sustainable Travel Finland program, as it is one of the destinations key measures to increase sustainability and obtain tools for monitoring and measurement. Visit Tampere should put resources into the communication between the DMO and partnership network and actively start to include the Sustainable Travel Finland programme in their functions done together with the partners. It is important that the professionals in Visit Tampere continue to develop the relationship with the entrepreneurs and give them opportunities to influence of destination development.

The tourism professionals in Visit Tampere believe the Sustainable Travel Finland program and label will have a favorable effect on the image of the destination. However, they should acknowledge that based on previous research on sustainability certifications, the fact that a destination has one does not necessarily increase the demand on all tourists. (Karlsson & Dolnicar, 2015) As the perceived benefits gained from the label were mainly connected to marketing and communications, with special attention to international markets, the DMO should also ponder whether there are other tangible efforts which would aid sustainable destination development.

Finally, Visit Tampere has recognized the barrier concerning the cost of sustainability certifications and how it can stop the process of achieving the Sustainable Travel Finland label as a destination. The DMO should actively find ways which could aid the destination stakeholders in obtaining the needed certification. This could include development projects or financial aids from sources outside the DMO. If the issue also concerns other bigger destinations in Finland, the DMO could address it with Visit Finland.

5.4 Critical evaluation of the research

For the critical evaluation of the research, this study is analyzed over credibility, transferability, generalization, dependability and confirmability to make a judgement of the degree of trustworthiness. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) Credibility refers to the researcher's experience with the studied subject and whether the evidence obtained confirms the assertions presented.

The link between the observation and categories should be logical, so that other researchers would be able to make same conclusions drawn from the data and information (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The researcher was familiar with the subject of the study and had personal experience regarding the sustainable destination development in Tampere region. Before the interviews and data collection, the researcher made a thorough search and familiarization with the subject and theories connected to it. The credibility of this study was first and foremost done by describing the findings as clearly as possible with the help of direct quotations and tables. Still, it is possible that other research focusing on the same subject would lead to different findings.

Transferability of the finding means that the researcher has to be able to portray a level of similarity between the study and previous research done by other researchers in order to form connections (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). There has been little study on the effect of the Sustainable Travel Finland program to sustainable destination development. However, the role of a DMO in destination leadership and stakeholder cooperation received similar findings in this research and previous research done by Pechlaner et al. (2014), Corte et al. (2014) and Komppula (2014).

Dependability of the research refers to the writer's responsibility to offer logical, traceable and well documented information for the reader. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) The study proceeds in a logical order, explaining all the steps thoroughly and clearly, with tables, figures and quotations added to improve the trustworthiness of the study. The results of the study are matching to previous studies done on the subject, thus increasing the trustworthiness. With theoretical generalization, this study was a case study focusing only on one single destination, and thus, the findings are not generally applicable.

Confirmability refers to the researcher's responsibility to present the findings and interpret the data neutrally and understandably. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) In order to make it easy for the reader to keep track and understand the findings of this study, they are presented in the same order as the theoretical background. To add conformability of the study, the findings were backed up by direct quotes from the interviewees and tables to clarify certain themes. As the interviews were conducted in Finnish, the author acknowledges that there might be mistakes in the translation of the direct quotations, which might lead to miss interpretation. The

interviewees had the chance to add and correct their comments during the interviews and they had the possibility to check the paper.

This study was conducted during the global Coronavirus pandemic in winter 2021 and as a result, data collection was restricted. The global and local restrictions and recommendations concerning meetings and travelling had already had a huge effect on the tourism industry. All interviews had to be organized online, which probably had an effect on the quality and content of the interviews. Still, the size of the data for this qualitative study was adequate. The interviewees also highlighted how the pandemic had forced the DMO to make changes in their operations, including almost all activities concerning international markets and the Sustainable Travel Finland program. On the other hand, the pandemic had given time for the DMO to develop their own operations from destination management towards destination leadership.

5.5 Suggestions for future research

This study showed that the Sustainable Travel Finland program was held in high value in the destination to enhance sustainable destination development and provide tools for measuring and monitoring sustainability. In addition, the Sustainable Travel Finland label was seen as a helpful tool for marketing and communications. However, little study about the Sustainable Travel Finland program and its effect on destinations in Finland exist as the program is still relatively new. Conducting similar type of study in different destinations (regions or municipalities) in Finland would expand the understanding of the topic.

Sustainable destination development should also be investigated from the perspective of the companies in the partnership network as it would provide insights to the attitudes of the destination stakeholders into sustainable destination development and the Sustainable Travel Finland program. The destination stakeholders would be able to evaluate the performance of the partnership network and give development ideas to the work done by Visit Tampere.

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1. The interviewees background

   1.1. How long have you been employed in this DMO and what is your current position?

   1.2. Describe what kind of work/tasks you are involved with? Have you had any other positions here?

2. Perceptions of Tampere region and destination leadership

   2.1. What is the definition of destination leadership according to the interviewee?

   2.2. Has the DMO taken a destination leadership approach in its functions? If yes, how does it show? If not, what are the main reasons?

   2.3. Is there a leader in the destination/DMO that the interviewee recognizes? If not, is there someone or a company (stakeholder) who should or could step into the role of leader?

3. Stakeholder cooperation in the destination

   3.1. How well do you think the stakeholder cooperation is currently working on the destination?

   3.2. What factors affect cooperation between the DMO and its partner companies in the destination?

4. Sustainable destination development

   4.1. The DMO has set sustainability as one of the main steps in their tourism strategy. Can the interviewee provide concrete examples of improving sustainability in the destination?

   4.2. How is the implementation of sustainable development measured in the destination?

   4.3. Who does the interviewee see is responsible of the sustainable destination development in the Tampere region?

4.4. What are the most difficult challenges in sustainable destination development in Tampere region?

5. Sustainable Travel Finland programme

5.1. Why did the DMO choose to apply to the STF programme as a destination?

5.2. How is the DMO helping its partner companies to get involved in the Sustainable Travel Finland program (for example through incentives/education)?

5.3. How will the DMO utilize the STF label if the destination is certified?

The interviewees were also free to express any thoughts they had about the topics discussed.