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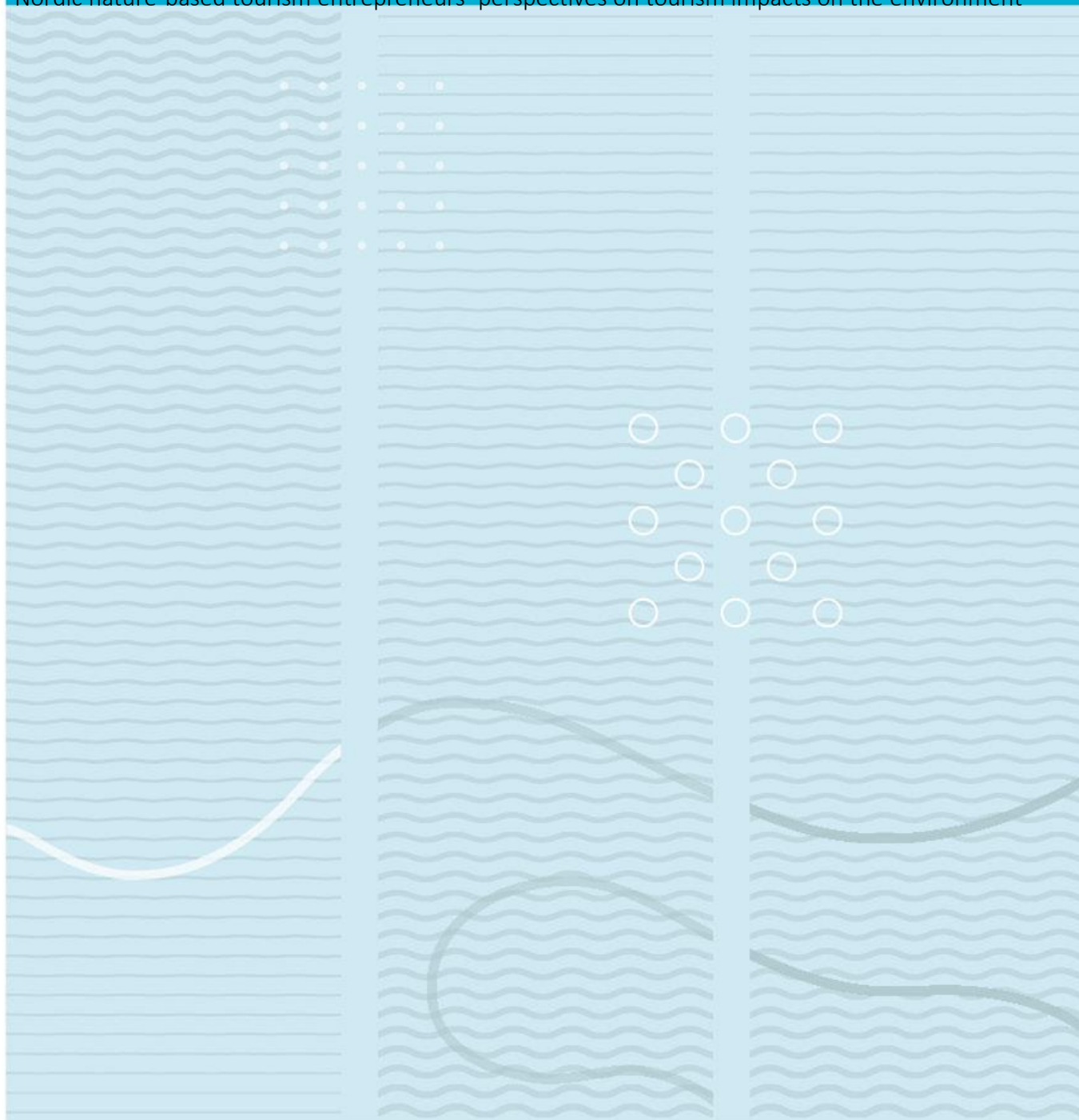
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Plane ticket to nature:

Nordic nature-based tourism entrepreneurs' perspectives on tourism impacts on the environment



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Abstract

Nature-based tourism (NBT) in the Nordic countries is a growing field of tourism, dependent on both nature and arriving tourists. Other unique features of Nordic NBT are the right to roam in nature, the tradition of friluftsliv, micro and small NBT companies led by lifestyle entrepreneurship, and the emphasis on seasonal variation. My study took place in 2022, two years after the covid-19 pandemic, which set the world into a global lockdown. The inquiries for more sustainable tourism practices were already a crucial topic before the pandemic, but the lockdown time also challenged the tourism industry to review its premises. This critique considers the paradoxes when sustainable tourism policies still primarily focus on growth and leave, for instance, the industry's high carbon footprint out of the development plans. The paradox raised my interest in investigating how Nordic NBT entrepreneurs perceive the tourism impacts on the environment. The paper built on a qualitative case study and investigated three entrepreneurs, two from Finland and one from Norway, who run their businesses in a unique pro-environmental strategy. All entrepreneurs were highly aware of the environmental causes of NBT and described a dissonance between environmental attitudes and actions. The existing gap was explained in beliefs re-establishing the consonance and altered pro-environmental behavior and local actions. The study results, insights into the conflicting values and practices created new knowledge and understanding about the Nordic NBT and human-nature relationship, how the industry entrepreneurs perceive the environmental issues, and balance between the environmental matters and profitable business management. The study findings describe the complexity of sustainable tourism and reveal unique local, sustainable tourism practices. The study creates a new opening to the discussion of the human-nature relationship in the context of NBT and a starting point for further critical investigations of sustainable tourism.

Keywords: Nature-based tourism, Environmentally sustainable tourism, Cognitive dissonance theory, Case study

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Foreword

My thesis writing occurred during the winter and spring of 2022 when the covid-19 pandemic started to show easing off. With its lockdowns and uncertainties, the pandemic forced the world to slow down and view modern society's speed and unsustainable values. During the pandemic, I was privileged to study in the Master of friluftsliv program. We, students, were invited to study with the leading Nordic friluftsliv researchers and teachers from The Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences in Stockholm, University of South-Eastern Norway, and Holar University College Iceland. I started the program to learn about Nordic outdoor recreation and the exciting things you can do in nature. Little did I know what the studies of friluftsliv would bring to my life! Learning, reflecting, and experiencing the ethos of friluftsliv changed my perception of nature dramatically; especially, the modern anthropogenic way of seeing nature challenged my relationship with nature. Together with a personal rising eco-anxiety, these findings led me to research the theme further in nature-based tourism and environmental issues. The two-year study journey impacted my core values, which I attempt to evolve and follow further in my daily life choices. I see that the tradition of friluftsliv has essential philosophical grounds that our modern society needs desperately. I hope my thesis inspires new critical thinking for the readers and interest in studying similar themes around the human-nature relationship and nature-based tourism.

I wish to thank the study participants, the wise NBT entrepreneurs who shared their thoughts and ideas in my research and work as brave pioneers within nature-based tourism. Secondly, I could not be more grateful for the mentorship from my thesis supervisor Jessica Aquino from Holar University College, Iceland. Lastly, I warmly greet all teachers and fellow students who shared the journey with me from 2020-to 2022 in the first Nofri program ever. As the new graduates from the Nofri program, we are not only proud specialists of Nordic friluftsliv but also critical thinkers who can influence and spread the ethos of friluftsliv further!

Helsingborg, Sweden, 12th May 2022

Sonja Ikonen

1 Introduction

This study takes place at the beginning of 2022, when, after two years of severe covid-19 pandemic traveling restrictions, the tourism industry is starting to see some light at the end of the tunnel. The news is long-awaited worldwide, also in the Nordic countries, where the tourism sector grew steadily until the beginning of 2020, attracting visitors to experience the unique nature-based locations in the northern hemisphere. However the same time, in February 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported: "(...) *how the human-induced climate change is causing dangerous and widespread distribution in nature and affecting the lives of billions of people around the world*" (IPCC, 2022). Climate change is a recognized threat to nature-based tourism (NBT) and the entire planet. In addition, sensitive nature destinations suffer from mass tourism, which is also an acknowledged issue in Nordic countries (Øian et al., 2018). Secondly, the tourism industry is responsible for roughly 8 % of the worldwide greenhouse gas emissions, where 49 % is related to travel and mobility (Sustainable Travel, 2021). Tourism researchers Buckley et al. (2015) and Haukeland et al. (2021) name climate change as one of the megatrends, changing and challenging the whole tourism industry. Here, sustainable tourism aims to tackle the problems and develop practices to decrease the negative impacts of tourism. However, researchers note how the tourism industry's carbon footprint is not taken seriously enough when the industry's primary goal is economic growth (Margaryan & Stensland, 2017; Simmons & Becken, 2004). Following the idea, Nordic NBT researchers Fredman and Margaryan (2021) request bold theoretical investigations of the human-nature relationship to reimagine and transform the connection between humans and nature towards sustainability and co-existence.

From these premises, my study is interested in the environmental impacts of tourism and further how the NBT entrepreneurs perceive these issues in the context of their business. Interpreting nature-based tourism, I follow ecotourism researcher Fennell (2015), defining it as any form of tourism that takes place outside and relies on the natural resource base. My particular interest is in the NBT companies, which tourism researchers Stensland et al. (2021, p.144) describe as "commercial actors providing

activities or experiences in nature against payment". As a researcher, I am aware of the complexity of environmental issues. My study investigates the environmental topics on a subjective level, especially how the questions are perceived among the study participants, Nordic NBT entrepreneurs (Appendix 1). In this context, NBT is an exciting field of study; the industry is highly dependent on natural destinations and consuming nature as part of the business. The topic is also current since outdoor recreation has become one of the most trending niches of Nordic tourism (Øian et al. 2018). The environmental problems of tourism are not only an issue from the climate change perspective; the NBT industry sees direct impacts in unpredictable weather and destructed ecosystems that threaten the industry (Øian et al. 2018). Therefore, environmental matters require attention and actions on a global and local level.

When looking into the NBT and the outdoor recreation culture in the Nordic countries, two unique features are essential to define. Firstly, the Nordic outdoor culture is described with the tradition of friluftsliv: various, simple, and meaningful ways to experience and spend time in nature (Fredman et al., 2021; Gelter, 2000; Henderson & Vikander, 2007). Secondly, the everyman's rights allow public right of access to public and privately owned land (Beery, 2013). These cultural features, respecting nature, allowing free entry, and using nature with simple means, create an interesting base to research the commercial NBT tourism in the Nordic countries when "the soft values" are challenged by commercial use and side effects such as environmental issues. A similar paradox is emphasized by Nordic friluftsliv researchers Beery (2013), Gelter (2002), and Gurholt and Haukeland (2019). They point out how especially urbanization and human-centric commercial outdoor recreation alter the original ethos or friluftsliv.

Following the latter ideas, my study is interested in the paradox: how nature-based tourism (NBT) companies are dependent on nature, but at the same time, the industry contributes negatively to environmental issues. The guiding theme of the study is how the study participants follow a unique pro-environmental business strategy in their nature-based tourism business and, therefore, may have special insights and phronesis 'practical wisdom' to share related to the study's themes. Further, the study looks to answer three research questions:

1. How do the Nordic entrepreneurs perceive the environmental consequences of nature-based tourism?
2. Is there an attitude-action gap among entrepreneurs in the NBT contexts?
3. If so, how do the entrepreneurs feel about this attitude-action gap?
 - a. And do they attempt to reduce this gap?

Firstly, the study literature builds the basic knowledge of Nordic NBT and recent research topics in sustainable tourism. Both literature and theoretical background lead the study from formulating the research questions and analyzing the empirical data to results and discussion. The literature findings introduced me to the theory of cognitive dissonance, which creates the theoretical framework for the study. The approach by American social psychologist Leon Festinger (1957) describes human components as beliefs, attitudes, and behavior and how a conflict between them causes dissonance, an uncomfortable tension. Typically humans tend to re-establish a unity between the components by altering beliefs or behavior (Festinger, 1957). The dissonance is also called a gap between attitude and behavior and is a utilized perspective when researching environmental attitudes and actions (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014; see also Langseth & Vyff, 2021; Ostermeyr & Walch, 2019). The tourism sector shares a few openings in researching the attitude-action relations; however, the perspectives of Nordic NBT entrepreneurs' have not been investigated from this specific viewpoint.

The plan for the study began when I discovered the three NBT companies sharing strong statements about sustainable NBT on their company websites. Two of these enterprises I found from the Nordic Regenerative Tourism seminar website (Nora, 2022), where the entrepreneurs, Annu Huotari from Hawkhill Resort and Jann Engstad from Lofoten Aktiv, presented their company's sustainable tourism practices. The third company, Adventure by Design, was familiar to me before. Finally, these three NBT entrepreneurs were invited for the research. The first participant, the NBT company: *Hawkhill Resort*, is a Finnish family enterprise offering lodging and NBT services in Vihti, close to a large Nuuksio national park area and Helsinki capital area. The second research participant comes from the Lofoten archipelago, Norway, famous for its nature: varying landscapes of fjords and mountains. *Lofoten Aktiv* offers guided

sea kayaking, mountain biking, northern lights tours, and ski rental in the area. The third company: *Adventure by Design*, was a Finnish NBT company providing adventure tours in Kilpisjärvi, Finland. The company is currently closed and existed between 2012 and 2021.

The study follows the strategy of a case study when the aim is to investigate specific participants, the three NBT entrepreneurs, and their company practices. Further, the research follows the principles of abductive reasoning – to understand and describe the perceptions and best practices further in the chosen theory context, rather than presenting general assumptions (Thomas, 2010). The empirical data is gathered through content analysis of the company websites and semi-structured interviews with the entrepreneurs, creating two valid sources of information to investigate the themes further. The data is first analyzed following pre-defined themes and finally discussed with the theoretical framework answering the research questions. The study aims to reveal challenges and new perspectives on NBT and environmental issues, view the best practices in Nordic NBT, and open further discussions in sustainable tourism.

2 Literature review

The increasing number of studies in NBT and sustainable tourism views the academic interest and signifies the urge to develop new knowledge and understanding of the field. The following chapter investigates the current literature and provides a theoretical overview of the perspectives in the reviewed studies and publications. The literature builds the study's starting point, characterizes the Nordic NBT, and gives justice to the research hypothesis.

2.1 Characteristics of the Nordic nature-based tourism

My study focuses on the Nordic countries, especially Finland, and Norway, where the versatile nature and four seasons attract domestic and international visitors to experience and spend a vacation in the unique nature areas. The interest in NBT arises from the steady growth of the tourism industry. A review by Nordic researchers views the rise of international tourism in all Nordic countries until the covid-19 pandemic 2020-2021 (Øian, H. et al., 2018). The same report by the Nordic Council of Ministers highlights the value of NBT, which is the primary reason for many visitors to travel to Nordic countries (Øian, H. et al., 2018). Besides the commonly acknowledged Nordic values of openness, trust, and sustainability (Fredman et al., 2021), the countries share a legacy of 'friluftsliv' (open-air life) with regional variations. The philosophy of friluftsliv views various, simple, and meaningful ways to experience and spend time in nature (Fredman et al., 2021; Gelter, 2000; Henderson & Vikander 2007). Even though the traditional essence of friluftsliv is challenged by, for instance, urbanization and commercial outdoor recreation (Beery, 2013; Gelter, 2002; Gurholt, & Haukeland, 2019), the concept still has its legacy in the Nordic spirit and relationship with nature (Beery, 2013). Further, public access to nature complies with the outdoor life in the Northern countries, offering rights to roam freely in nature and defining obligations to respect the land (Beery, 2013). The global concern of environmental issues has opened an interest for friluftsliv and environmental connectedness. For instance, Thomas H. Beery (2013), a scholar specializing in environmental education, indicates how the core features of friluftsliv, access to nature, and lifelong regular nature experiences, may be an essential part of more vital connectedness to nature and sustainability. However, a

critical approach here is necessary, keeping in mind the increasing commercial and achievement-based outdoor recreation that challenges the original ethos of friluftsliv (Gurholt & Haukeland, 2019). The Norwegian friluftsliv researchers Gurholt and Haukeland (2019, p.176) argue that “the friluftsliv’s aspects of democracy and welfare contribute to social inequalities and commodification nature, threatening the ecological sustainability”. Therefore, friluftsliv requires a critical review when considering tradition’s position in modern Nordic society.

The study is interested in the NBT, which is a broad umbrella term for any form of tourism that occurs outside and relies on the natural resource base (Fennell, 2015). Further, the companies that operate in the NBT industry Stensland et al. (2014) define as commercial actors that provide activities or experiences against payment. These companies typically offer guided outdoor activities, facilitate hospitality, or operate as activity package firms (Stensland et al., 2021). In addition, many orientations of NBT exist, such as traditional outdoor recreation, wilderness tourism, and the growing commercial sector, adventure tourism (Fredman & Margaryan, 2021; Haukeland et al., 2021). Therefore, an NBT activity can be a solo hike in the national park, a guided trip to view the northern lights, a whale watching tour, or a multi-day ski touring expedition with a guide. Besides the increasing segmentation and specialization of NBT, Mykletun (2018) argues how the core features of friluftsliv still exist in the Nordic NBT. Investigating adventure tourism Mykletun (2018) describes how exploration and reconnection with nature play an essential role also in the more extreme forms of NBT. Further, Gelter (2000) suggests how friluftsliv tradition could be a tool to reconnect with nature and the more-than-human world in modern times.

Besides the forms of outdoor practices, friluftsliv traditions may also influence the motives and practices of NBT entrepreneurs. Margaryan and Stensland (2017) describe how the industry of Nordic NBT is dominated by small and micro-sized businesses led by lifestyle entrepreneurs rooted in the rich local traditions of outdoor recreation. Studies have shown how a motive for running an NBT business is often related to the lifestyle, similar to the ethos of friluftsliv: living according to personal values, feeling good at work, spending time outdoors, instead of growth and economic goals (Lundberg et al.,

2014; Stensland, 2021; Margaryan & Stensland, 2017). Therefore, instead of only pursuing entrepreneurs' personal lifestyle goals, "values-based" firms may commit to ethical goals to create alternative paradigms for development and growth (Tomassini, 2019). Tourism researchers Bressan and Alessandro (2020) investigated micro and small tourism firms and their sustainable-oriented innovations (SOI). The researchers describe how the entrepreneurs' lifestyles had an essential impact on running the business, and the findings indicate how lifestyle supporting sustainability also contributed positively to the SOI business practices. Further, the same study sees the value of knowing more about the relationship between the entrepreneur's lifestyle and how this impacts the business models (Bressan & Alessandro, 2020). How NBT firms operate in close contact with nature in protected and rural areas makes my study perspective interesting when researching the Nordic NBT entrepreneurs and how they may follow values related to nature protection and sustainability while running a business in nature. Significantly, when combining a pro-environmental attitude and business, the diversity of values may create internal and external conflicts. I see investigating these perceptions as a unique way to reveal insights and action models from the NBT industry that may view the complexity of sustainable tourism practices.

The characteristics of Nordic NBT have been investigated actively in Sweden by Peter Fredman and Lusine Margaryan, in Norway by Kirsti Gurholt, Jan Vidar Haukeland, Per Ingvar Haukeland, Stian Stensland, and in Finland by Liisa Tyrväinen and Jarkko Saarinen. The cross-national research cooperation is facilitated by, for instance, the Nordic Council of Ministers and several other associations and projects. When describing the characteristics of Nordic NBT companies, Fredman and Margaryan (2017) explain how the NBT only in Sweden is a highly diverse sector with significant variants. However, on a larger scale, Fredman et al. (2021) believe that the Nordic region has much in common as a tourism region. Therefore, this study aims to describe common features of Nordic NBT firms, keeping in mind the country and region-specific variations.

Location in the rural countryside and varying seasons are characteristics describing several Nordic NBT companies (Fredman & Margaryan, 2014). In other words, the access to nature can be seen as the core of the NBT business as well as the predicted weather conditions, such as a steady snow season or warm summers. Accessing nature areas and the right to roam give a unique feature to the Nordic NBT; all visitors have free and public access to nature but are expected to follow the everyman's rights and duties, which apply to the NBT business practitioners as well. Therefore, the commercial NBT, excluding fishing and hunting, is accessible in national parks in Finland and Norway (Koivumaa et al., 2014; Lovdata.no, 2022). In addition, in Finland, the NBT guides and companies need to sign an annual or a three-year collaboration contract with Metsähallitus, the (Finnish) Forest Administration and pay a small fee when using the infrastructure (Koivumaa et al., 2014). In conclusion, the Nordic nature is free and accessible for the NBT entrepreneurs, whether the occasion is related to commercial business or private leisure. Lastly, the character or seasonality highly impacts the business models of Nordic NBT companies (Fredman et al., 2021); during summer and winter, high tourism seasons attract visitors, while shoulder seasons are quieter business months for the companies. The seasonality, therefore, indicates off-seasons, several months with a fewer amount of arriving visitors. The seasonality also explains why the NBT companies often run other businesses as infrastructure or accommodation on the side of NBT; only the NBT activities rarely are enough to employ the companies year-round in rural areas (Fredman & Margaryan, 2014).

When looking into the economics of the NBT sector besides the seasonal business and multiple business operations, it is essential to note how the Nordic NBT tourism depends on long-distance travelers, domestic urban, or international visitors (Fredman et al., 2012; Haukeland et al., 2021). These tourists commonly arrive at nature destinations by air travel, car, train, or bus. A report by Fredman et al. (2012) views the differences in NBT products that domestic (Swedish) and foreign visitors are willing to pay. The domestic increasing interest in NBT and demand for comfort services as guiding also create business opportunities for the Nordic NBT (Wall-Reinius & Bäck, 2011). However, a study made in Finnish Lapland, in ski resort Levi describes how the NBT services are designed for international visitors; the domestic travelers found the

NBT experiences too expensive or not tailored for them (Jeskanen & Hirvonen, 2021). The study indicates how foreign tourists represent a typical paying customer for the NBT companies in the Levi area in Finland. In my research, I could not find NBT statistics viewing the international and domestic customer statistics from the areas where the study participants and their NBT companies operate. However, the number of hotel nights may indicate the variation; the numbers of international tourists before the covid-19 pandemic in popular NBT areas in the Nordic countries were significant. In the Finnish Lapland, 52% of the hotel nights were booked by international tourists (Lapland.fi, 2021). Enontekiö, the county of Kilpisjärvi, 2019, registered 2019 98,900 bed nights, of which 50% were booked by foreigners (Visitory.io, 2022). In Lapland, the most growing markets in 2019 were the long-haul flight tourists from France, China, and the USA (Lapland.fi, 2022). In Lofoten, 2019, the number of bed nights in hotels, youth hostels, campsites, or similar accommodation was 557,000, of which 56 % were foreign visitors (Sbb.no, 2022). The last numbers from Lofoten do not include, for example, cruise tourists or people camping outside of designated campsites. Sustainable tourism research by Gössling et al. (2016) explains how increasing international visitor numbers is a standard business strategy for many tourism destinations. From this perspective, the researchers highlight the threat to social, economic, and environmental resilience if only basing the tourism goals on tourist arrival growth (Gössling et al., 2016). The years of covid-19 are a recent example of how the pandemic affected the travel and tourism sector, causing a lockdown on global mobility (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). The years hit especially hard on NBT companies, whose business highly depends on visitors arriving from abroad (Haukeland & Fredman, 2021). At the beginning of 2022, the pandemic still challenges the tourism industry. Besides reviving the sector to the level where it used to be, researchers Ioannides and Gyimóthy (2020), Fredman and Haukeland (2021) see the pandemic as an opportunity for regeneration, looking critically into the values and strategies by adopting a more sustainable path for the whole tourism industry.

The following chapter described the characteristics of Nordic NBT and current themes within the field. The Nordic NBT companies are typically small-scale businesses run by lifestyle-led entrepreneurs. The tradition of friluftsliv and the right to roam in nature are

unique features of the outdoor culture in the north. Here, public access to national parks is an essential advantage. Still, at the same time, the seasonality and dependency on the international tourists create challenges for running a profitable business year-round. Therefore, the entrepreneurs' relationship to nature, combining the core values of Nordic friluftsliv and commercial NBT tourism, creates an exciting study starting point when looking into the environmental issues caused by the tourism industry in the following chapter.

2.2 Nature-based tourism and environmental issues

Research interest in climate change within the field of tourism industry arose in the 1960s, but not until the 1990's the topic became a significant study theme among scholars (Sott et al., 2005). A study from 2006 by Finnish NBT researchers Saarinen and Tervo showed how half of the interviewed Finnish NBT entrepreneurs did not believe that climate change exists and would influence the region's tourism industry. Sixteen years later, climate change is an acknowledged threat, a megatrend affecting nature, and the tourism industry (Buckley et al., 2015; Haukeland et al., 2021). Notable is also how the tourism industry is responsible for roughly 8 % of the worldwide greenhouse gas emissions, where 49 % is related to travel and mobility (Sustainable Travel, 2021). Secondly, mass tourism affects sensitive nature areas, and is an acknowledged issue in Nordic countries (Øian, H. et al., 2018). At the same time, Nordic destinations rely on international visitors and market the outdoor opportunities with the following descriptions:

"flora and fauna are like nowhere else on Earth" (Visit Finland, 2022)

"outdoor enthusiast's paradise" (Visit Iceland, 2022)

"natural and stunning playground" (Visit Norway, 2022)

"space for everyone" (Visit Sweden, 2022)

In my study, I am especially interested in the tourism industry contributing a significant amount of carbon emissions: transportation and physical mobility but also touching on the impacts of mass tourism on nature. Often, international tourists arriving from overseas, the visitors need to travel to and within the destination, usually located in

rural areas, sparsely populated natural environments. It is essential to note that transportation is not directly related to NBT activity but a travel input that enables the NBT to run the business and welcome visitors to destinations.

The tourism industry and research community acknowledge environmental impacts, such as increased climate gas emissions, destructive land use, and biodiversity loss, as severe threats not only for NBT but also for the entire planet (Breiby et al., 2021; Haukeland et al., 2021; Simmons & Becken, 2004). Saarinen and Tervo (2006) divide the impacts into *direct*: weather conditions and climate, and *indirect*: changes in flora and fauna. NBT especially encounters these impacts notably when features that the industry is dependent on are at stake (Buckley et al., 2015). Within the NBT, climate change and gas emissions, primarily resulting from physical mobility, are reviewed as one of the most urgent future avenues for research (Haukeland & Fredman, 2021). The urgency of climate change issues also views how it is defined as one of the megatrends, direction that develops and changes the industry, affecting NBT (Haukeland et al., 2021) and the whole global tourism sector (Buckley et al., 2015). However, the discussion of the climate change effects of tourism-related traffic, long-haul flights, and driving follow behind, even though the impact on the environment is significant (Margaryan & Stensland, 2017; Simmons & Becken, 2004). The tourism industry owns a large and increasing carbon footprint, where transport plays a significant role (Sustainable Travel, 2021). Revealing is also how, between 2005 and 2016, transport-related tourism emissions increased by more than 60 % (Sustainable Travel, 2021). Tourism researchers Margaryan and Stensland (2017, p.14) call the absence of air travel in the significant discussions, policies, strategies, and eco-certification schemes "the elephant in the room." Their study emphasizes the conflict in international tourism and how the ground efforts dwarf and lose their meaning when the impacts are compared to the harm done by the air traffic (Margaryan & Stensland, 2017).

In conclusion, the impacts of unpredictable weather and destructed ecosystems are direct and visible challenges for the NBT. Climate change is a defined megatrend affecting the whole tourism industry, but at the same time, the carbon emissions of the tourism industry are not taken seriously enough. Next, the literature investigates the

sustainable development practices within the tourism sector, with which the sector currently aims to tackle its impacts on climate change.

2.3 Sustainable nature-based tourism?

The increasing environmental issues in tourism have brought the demand for sustainable development into the industry policies and management during the last decades (Sharpley, 2020). Sustainable development is an overall concept that meets in all its actions the needs of today without compromising the needs of future generations from environmental, economic, and social aspects (United Nations, 2021). Following the sustainable development goals, sustainable tourism accompanies the three principles in tourism development guidelines and management practices (World Tourism Organization, 2021). Sustainable tourism researchers Stefan Gössling and Michael C. Hall (2006) agree how sustainable tourism can positively contribute to, for instance, biodiversity conservation and community wellbeing on a local level. However, they point out that it is essential to give more notice to the high carbon footprint arising from the travel to and from the destination (Gössling & Hall, 2006). Sustainable tourism strategies and policies are criticized as lacking a global and holistic view and concrete action plans and emphasizing the economic premises (Bogason et al., 2021; Gössling et al., 2016; Margaryan & Stensland, 2017; Shapley, 2020). A Nordic report by sustainable tourism researchers demonstrates the differences between "strong" and "weak" sustainability tourism development strategies; 21% of the subnational tourism development policies in the Nordic countries mentioned the sustainability concerns but provided no further action (Bogason et al., 2021). The survey results describe the dominance of the economic dimensions instead of a holistic approach to combining all three pillars of sustainability into the policies (Bogason et al., 2021). A study by Moeller et al. (2011) investigated the sustainability-profitability trade-off in tourism, highlighting the actions on a local and global level. The researchers conclude that an optimal sustainability strategy would minimize the local and global impacts (Moeller et al., 2011). Tourism researcher Hunter (2002) agrees with the idea and argues that sustainable tourism commonly considers the environmental demands of a local destination; however, consideration should be given to tourism activity's regional and global ecological footprint.

Besides the inadequate sustainable tourism strategies, researchers Margaryan and Stensland (2017) and Sharpley (2020) critique the increasing hype around sustainable tourism when economic growth and competitive advantage are its most sought-after benefits. In 2022 the tourism industry sees the marketing value in sustainability. Nordic researchers Margaryan and Stensland (2017) interpret how commercial sustainability labels and certifications are perceived as tools to reach competitive advantage via improved marketing, influencing consumer decision-making instead of serving the core purpose of sustainability practices. An example of commercial interest in sustainable tourism is *the Sustainable Travel Report 2021* by Booking.com, a leading online booking platform highlighting sustainable tourism as a marketing advantage. The report states that after the covid-19 pandemic, 61 % of the tourists wished to travel more sustainably, and 76 % of travelers would choose accommodation following sustainable practices. Therefore, Booking.com grants increased visibility to the hotel services assigned Booking.com's Travel Sustainable badge, a commercially licensed sustainability certificate (Booking.com). In contrast, English economy researcher Richard Sharpley (2020) challenges the commercialized ethos of sustainable tourism. Sharpley (2020) sees the excessive, unsustainable production and consumption of tourism as a problem and challenges the economic growth model with a shifting focus on sustainable de-growth strategies. By de-growth, Sharpley (2020) presents an ideology where economic expansion is not the primary goal, instead of re-thinking how tourism is produced, managed, and consumed. The idea of de-growth is compelling, challenging the norms of typical tourism development, and could offer new perspectives for discussions about sustainable tourism.

When looking into the academic research field of NBT, the local and practical issues are the most common inquiries in the Nordic NBT studies. Swedish NBT researchers Fredman and Margaryan (2021) analyzed the Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism papers focusing on NBT tourism from 2010 to 2020. Their findings of the environmental research focus indicate how the research interest rises from the implications of climate change, such as how the Nordic climate may become more favorable in the future or how NBT companies may suffer from the shorter winter

seasons. Another research topic they noted is the environmental concern, focusing on tourism preferences (Fredman & Margaryan, 2021). In conclusion, Fredman's and Margaryan's findings view how the NBT research interest rises from adapting to climate change and developing business models from economical instead of environmental premises. Another interesting paper by Finnish tourism researchers Jarkko Saarinen and Kaarina Tervo (2006) studied the perceptions and adaptation strategies of the NBT entrepreneurs to climate change. The results presented altered ways to create winter conditions or create more opportunities for the off-season instead of looking into the causes of climate impacts and ways to develop more sustainable NBT practices (Saarinen & Tervo, 2006). Suitably, Fredman and Margaryan (2021) call for more theoretical research openings that could benefit and create a better understanding of the human-nature relationship within the NBT industry and further develop more holistic, sustainable approaches for the field.

The inquiry for sustainable tourism and dissatisfaction with anthropocentric and profit-centered tourism approaches has developed alternative concepts such as ecotourism, responsible tourism, and regenerative tourism, aiming to approach tourism development from more environmentally and ethically accountable approaches (Fennell, 2015). In addition, various national and international sustainability certificates have been established to audit and evidence sustainable tourism practices (Gössling, 2006), for example, the Travel Sustainable badge by Booking.com. However, the licensed certificates and concepts are not broadly merged in the Nordic NBT. Here, researchers explain the commitment to sustainability and tradition of friluftsliv as predictors and why the Nordic NBT companies may run automatically sustainable tourism practices, instead of adapting various commercial licenses and certificates (Gössling, 2006; Margaryan & Stensland, 2017). A study by Margaryan and Stensland (2017) shows how some NBT companies were not convinced about the effectiveness and benefits of the labels when the companies had already identified their operations as sustainable. Secondly, the companies felt that their actions on a ground level were not enough compared to the harm done by the traffic emissions (Margaryan & Stensland, 2017).

The latter chapter presented a few core ideas of sustainable tourism development, current topics, and criticism of the development principles. In addition, the growing demand and research interest revealed the challenges and paradoxes when environmental themes face the primary growth-based goal of the tourism industry. The presented dissonance within the NBT raised the interest to investigate the theme further. Especially, how the industry actors, NBT entrepreneurs, may perceive the environmental issues caused by their industry and do the entrepreneurs perceive a dissonance in their business practices. The next chapter investigates the theoretical premises of dissonance between values and actions, which builds the theoretical framework for the study.

3 Theoretical framework

The climate crisis calls for sustainability research and transformative environmental practices in NBT and the tourism industry. My study finds the inspiration from the conclusion of Nordic NBT tourism researchers Fredman and Margaryan (2021), who request bold theoretical investigations of the human-nature relationship to reimagine and transform the connection towards sustainability and co-existence. The dilemma between NBT being dependent on nature and aiming to create more sustainable practices while maximizing the growth and contributing negatively to climate change raised the interest in investigating the dissonance further. Several researchers have recently been concerned with similar issues, ties between one's environmental attitude and behavior (see Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014, Langseth & Vyff, 2021, Ostermeyr & Walch, 2019). For example, tourism researchers Emil Juvan and Sara Dolnicar (2014) investigated tourism behavior in Australia and Slovenia; people who actively engage in environmental protection at home still encounter vacation behavior with negative environmental consequences. Similarly, the Nordic surf culture follows similar patterns; in Langseth and Vyff's (2021) study, the Norwegian surfers identified as environmentally conscious outdoor recreationists. At the same time, the surf culture valued conflicting actions such as traveling and exploring exotic destinations (Langseth & Vyff, 2021). The third study, a Master's thesis by Swedish business administration students Lena Ostermeyr and Marina Walch (2019), investigated green consumption in the outdoor apparel industry. One of their conclusions presents how the Swedish consumers generally demonstrate concern for the protection of the environment, but that does not necessarily lead to a consideration of brands' environmental responsibility in their purchase decision (Ostermeyr & Walch, 2019). In all reviewed studies, the environmental attitude existed, but no significant change in the behavior. The researchers called this conflict a gap (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014; Ostermeyr & Walch, 2019) or a dissonance (Langseth & Vyff, 2021), which my study is also interested. Although the tourism sector shares a few openings in researching the attitude-action relations, the perspectives of Nordic NBT entrepreneurs' have not been investigated from this specific viewpoint.

After reviewing the literature, I discovered the theory of **cognitive dissonance** by American social psychologist Leon Festinger (1957). The theory supposes how a conflict between two or more components creates a dissonance, a psychological discomfort. Festinger divides human attitudes and actions into affective, cognitive, and behavioral components. One component may be, for instance, a belief or a value, opinion, knowledge of oneself, behavior, or surroundings (Festinger, 1957). Festinger calls a cognitive consonance when humans strive toward harmony between the components. In contrast, disharmony causes dissonance, an unpleasant mental tension to which a response is to adjust, aligning components with each other (Kassarjian & Cohen, 1965).

Cognitive dissonance is a theory often used when studying people's attitudes and behavior in the climate change context. For instance, Pihkala (2017) explains this with an example. A person who acknowledges how the lifestyle creates a large climate footprint, but at the same time, the person enjoys this quality of life and does not want to give up on that (Pihkala, 2017). The dissonance may become hard to handle in time, and the behavior or attitude models need to be adjusted. However, discord may still exist, significantly if actively modifying one's values and beliefs or experiencing conflicting components in the surroundings (Pihkala, 2017). When researching the experienced cognitive dissonance of vacation behavior of environmental active tourists, Juvan and Dolnica (2014) found a wide range of beliefs when coping with cognitive dissonance. Besides the theory of cognitive dissonance, their findings were postulated by the value-belief-norm theory of environmentalism, social comparison theory, theory of planned behavior, and attribution theory. Their results and the explanations for the vacation behavior included, for instance, denial of the consequences or responsibility and downward comparisons (Juvan and Dolnica, 2014).

Recently, the theory of cognitive dissonance is also used in explaining the increasing phenomena of **climate anxiety**. Climate anxiety or eco-anxiety is an awareness or attitude of climate crisis causing emotions such as confusion and anxiety (Hickman 2020; Pihkala 2017). Hickman (2020) argues that eco-anxiety is an emotional response to the facts and experience of climate change and combines the cognitive knowledge of how humans are causing the crisis and fail to reduce it effectively. Finding ways to cope

with the climate change issues, Pihkala (2017) suggests in-depth discussions, understanding of human values, and discovery of connections to pro-environmental behavior. Therefore, Pihkala's (2017) idea works as a guiding thought in my study, aiming to understand and discuss how the dissonance may be perceived among Nordic NBT entrepreneurs.

4 Building the research

The following chapter presents the research strategy of the study. The idea for the thesis was born when finding interesting NBT companies for further research. The study structure relies on investigating the three NBT companies and their entrepreneurs, and it follows the strategy of a case study. The data was collected using two methods: firstly, conducting a content analysis on the company websites and secondly via semi-structured interviews. Further, this chapter defines the philosophical and theoretical premises of the study, presents the data collection process, and discusses the ethical and reliability considerations of qualitative research.

4.1 Research questions

Construing relevant research questions is a core expertise for a successful study. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) describe how strong research questions are developed in the dialogue with the empirical data, studying the literature, choosing, and getting to know the selected cases. The supposition that the preferred NBT entrepreneurs have exciting thoughts about environmental issues aroused interest in examining the topic further. Secondly, the reviewed NBT literature presents compelling study themes such as critical perspectives on environmental actions within NBT. Here, especially the research by Juvan and Dolnicar (2014) investigating the attitude-behavior gap in sustainable tourism inspired me for further investigation. Therefore, I am following similar research questions as Juvan and Donicar's (2014) research:

Research questions:

1. How do the Nordic entrepreneurs perceive the environmental consequences of nature-based tourism?
2. Is there an attitude-action gap among entrepreneurs in the NBT contexts?
3. If so, how do the entrepreneurs feel about this attitude-action gap?
 - a. And do they attempt to reduce this gap?

4.2 Research strategy

The philosophical viewpoints build the basis of well-informed research; what is knowledge, and the relationship between people, society, and the world in general (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). As my study is concerned with subjective and shared meanings, the research follows the approach of **interpretivism**. Accordingly, the reality is *subjective*, constructed as an individual output of a specific time and context (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). A socially constructed, subjective worldview applies both: to the case study participants and the researcher. For the researcher, understanding research processes requires a sufficient appreciation and a definition of the cases (Berg & Lune, 2017) and an attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants past one's own bias and subjectivity (Sutton & Austin, 2015). As a researcher and a Master's student of Nordic friluftsliv, I am aware of my presumptions about NBT and sustainable tourism (see forewords). Therefore, these defaults were acknowledged and excluded by building the pre-knowledge through reviewed literature and basing the analysis and results on empirical and theoretical findings. However, my interest in the study theme can also be seen as a strength for the study. I was motivated to learn more about the study themes, think critically and conduct the research as well as possible.

Interest in a specific group: Nordic NBT entrepreneurs' perceptions and actions to environmental issues caused by the tourism industry created an inquiry to understand the cases further. Tourism research has long traditions from quantitative studies, but the qualitative interest has risen during the last decades due to the demand for understanding its social and cultural implications (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). In NBT research, theoretically oriented studies are a valuable source for further interpretation, transforming fundamentally human-nature relationships towards sustainability (Fredman & Margaryan, 2021). Following the latter idea, my qualitative study aimed to describe the perceptions of Nordic NBT entrepreneurs within the chosen research frame, their perspectives, and the processes that underpin the knowledge and practices. Besides a personal interest in the study phenomenon, a qualitative study strategy involves several subjective decisions and interpretations by the researcher (Lune & Berg, 2017). The research strategy presented in this chapter supports the study's objectivity when conducting a reliable and replicated research

foundation. However, when evaluating the objectivity of a single qualitative study, Lune and Berg (2017) state how individual research is rarely accepted without further investigation and questions. Therefore, I will later evaluate my study and suggest further research ideas in the discussion chapter.

From the basis of qualitative research, and the interest in a specific case group, the study followed a **case study research strategy**. A case study as a strategy aims to create an in-depth description and understanding of a particular setting (Berg & Lune, 2017; Eriksson & Koistinen, 2014; Yin, 2009). Therefore, my research seeks to create a comprehensive, unique description and a new opening when studying the environmental attitudes and actions in the context of NBT. The case study concept is preferred; when studying empirical inquiries “*how and why*” in a social, real-life context, where the investigator has little control (Yin, 2009). As my study aims to understand *how* the chosen entrepreneurs see environmental issues and *how* they may feel about the dissonance between conflicting values and actions, the case study was logical for my research strategy. The premise of a case study is a compelling, distinctive case and research questions, which further define the nature and design of the study (Yin, 2009). In this study, the three chosen NBT companies and their entrepreneurs created the case study contexts to investigate the study hypothesis further. Investigating multiple cases with various methods offers a compelling way to conduct a case study (Berg & Lune, 2017). My study follows the idea of an **extensive case study**; through three cases, the defined theoretical framework is tested and reviewed, creating new insights and openings to the research theme (Eriksson & Koistinen, 2014; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Using multiple cases is criticized, leaving the descriptions of each case weak (Eriksson & Koistinen, 2014). However, I see that the specific study interest and questions contribute to a well-framed approach and, therefore, the approach can study the themes in-depth within the cases. Secondly, accompanying an **embedded case study design**, my research investigates the cases and chosen subparts: website content and interviews first separately, then comparing and concluding the results (Scholz & Tietje, 2002). Besides providing detailed information about individual cases, and offering opportunities for unique knowledge, Queirós et al. (2017) explain how the case study researcher needs to be aware of the limitations of a case study. These case

study limitations include the difficulty in establishing cause-effect connections, weak results for generalization, and ethical issues, especially related to confidentiality (Queirós et al., 2017). In my research, I see that acknowledging the subjective nature of information, the role of a researcher, and following a competent and transparent research strategy support the validity and reliability of the study. Further, in the following chapters, I specify the role of the theory (chapter 4.3) and ethical considerations when conducting the case study confidentially toward the participants (chapter 4.4).

4.3 Role of the theory

Studying in-depth social models and their meanings is one of the core purposes of qualitative research. Description and interpreting in social scientific research require an active role from the researcher when examining different patterns in the social world (Berg & Lune, 2017). Instead of laws and universal certainties, the social patterns are tendencies with individual variations that may operate with a regular model: *theory*, when carefully examined (Berg & Lune, 2017). A unified theory works to explain empirical findings and an approach and framework for the study design. The theoretical concepts are tools for the researcher to create distance and objectify the empirical data, which are essential for the validity and generalizability of the research (Berg & Lune, 2017; Eriksson & Koistinen, 2014; Yin, 2009). However, a qualitative case study as a study strategy does not seek statistical generalization due to the inconsistent character of human behavior (Berg & Lune, 2017). Instead, the dialogue between the empirical findings and theory aims to document and view a specific phenomenon and facilitate a better understanding of social reality, opening doors for scientific discoveries (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Shaughnessy et al., 2008). In conclusion, my study follows the principles of **abductive reasoning** – to understand and describe the perceptions and best practices further in the chosen theory context, rather than basing the reasoning on the generalization of theories as induction or deduction (Thomas, 2010).

Reading the current research, especially the mentioned paradoxes between NBT and environmental issues, raised my interest in studying the attitude-action models in the theoretical context of cognitive dissonance (see chapter 3). The concept implies a compelling approach when investigating environmental issues and the possible conflicts between human attitude and action models. Here, the theory builds the study strategy, defines the approach, and is an essential tool when examining the hypothesis and conducting a reliable study. As a result, the following pre-defined themes lead the study's data collection and thematic analysis.

Table 1 Pre-defined themes

Pre-defined themes for the interviews and analysis
1) Theme: Environmental attitudes
-aiming to describe what nature means to the interviewee and the level of environmental consciousness
2) Theme: Nature-based tourism and environmental issues
-aiming to describe how the interviewee perceives the connection between nature-based tourism and environmental impacts
3) Theme: The pro-environmental actions
-aiming to describe the environmental actions the interviewees pursue in their business

4.4 Methods and data analysis

Gathering and analyzing empirical data is an engaging way to investigate the social world. Using multiple methods may create a fuller and more profound examination of the case (Berg & Lune, 2017). In my study, first, I chose to describe the website text findings using a qualitative content analysis within the selected themes (Table 1). The website content analysis formed the *secondary data*, a preunderstanding of the companies and their environmental perceptions, which was helpful in the interview planning and contributed valid information for the further analysis of the study. Secondly, *the primary data source*, semi-structured interviews, revealed and described the participants' perceptions when the pre-assumption was that the chosen entrepreneurs shared some level of environmental consciousness and pro-environmental action models. The nature of the semi-structured interview was built

upon a conversational and informal dialogue that followed a preprepared outline of themes (Table 1) and interview questions (Appendix 3). Therefore, as an interviewer, I had the freedom to examine in-depth insights covering still all interview topics. The discussions followed generic pre-planned questions but were supplemented with further questions to allow the participants to speak freely and specify their answers. The chosen three NBT entrepreneurs were first contacted via email, presenting the study approach, premises for the interview, and data management. When semi-structured interviews are seen as informative, probing additional rich information, the technique's limitations are the non-generalizability and time-consumption (Queirós et al., 2017). The interview is always a unique situation, which can not be repeated similarly. Also, the transcription and analysis of semi-structured interview data required special attention and time to analyze it. I also noticed how the limited interview time, 60-minutes, needed me to facilitate the talk a few times to cover each topic and not lose the talk's focus.

Assessing ethical issues in a qualitative research process is essential; the efforts strengthen the transparency and reliability and build trust between the researcher and participants (Eriksson & Koistinen, 2014). The interview invitation letter (Appendix 2) included a consent form: consent to participate in an interview and information used so that the entrepreneur and their company can be recognized. I also briefly explained the topics in the invitation email and offered to answer any questions the participants had. Since the study investigated best practices of the NBT companies and generic perceptions, non-anonymity was justified. Later, the interviewees agreed on how essential they saw sharing their insights and the value of the research when opening the discussion of the NBT and environmental issues. The semi-structured interviews (Appendix 3) were conducted via Teams call because all participants were located in various areas in the Nordic countries. The discussions took 40-60 minutes and were recorded. Even virtually, I see that the interviews succeeded well. Distance sessions can be lacking when creating a personal relationship, safe and comfortable space. However, due to the covid-19 pandemic years, all participants were familiar with online meetings and modern connection tools. Therefore, the distance meetings created an appropriate space for the interviews. After the transcription, I sent the transcribed data to the

interviewees to proofread. The interviewees were encouraged to add and clarify any interview data by proofreading. Due to the time limitations, the interviews took only place once. Even though the interviews gave answers to the research questions and created good discussions around the themes, I see that the second round of interviews could have offered more detailed insights and a chance for follow-up questions.

I started the data analysis from the content analysis on the websites approximately two weeks before the interviews. Reading the website content familiarized me with the NBT companies and helped me prepare for the interviews. Using the pre-defined themes (Table 1) worked as a tool for organizing and describing the data. After acquiring the data, the analysis was a circular combination of reading, coding, sorting, and revising the data into themes and possible subthemes (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2017). Following the embedded case study strategy, the empirical data of each subunit was first analyzed separately, leading to cross-case analysis, comparing, and searching for similarities and differences across cases in contrast to theory (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Yin, 2002). After the analysis, I observed the use of the methods suitable for my research when studying the chosen specific cases. I purposely decided to use the content analysis as a source of descriptive data, offering pre-knowledge of the companies. With more in-depth analysis, the content analysis could offer possibilities for profound insights. Still, since the interviews presented the primary source of information, I chose to focus primarily on the results of the interview discussions. The pre-defined themes helped me emphasize the study topics; this was helpful in both the interviews and analysis and for me as a researcher, leaving my own bias and assumptions in the background. The following chapters 5-6 present the results of the content analysis and the interviews, which will be discussed in chapter 7 and concluded in the final chapter.

5 Results of the content analysis

Following the abductive reasoning approach and the three predefined themes (Table 1), this chapter views the findings of the website content analysis. The themes work as codes when reading and note-taking, categorizing fragmented material into a clear information set (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2017). I also describe the essence of each topic within a case and later how it is embedded between cases. The findings will be used later in the discussion and conclusion chapters.

5.1 Presenting the case study NBT companies

Company websites are marketing and communication tools for companies to present their image and brand identity, who they are, what they do, and what values they may share. The content on the website represents the company and delivers the company messages forward equally to the clients all around the world, partners, and shareholders. (Cornier, 1999 as cited in Owoyele, 2017.) It is important to note that all three companies operate in their local language: Norwegian or Finnish, but also present the company and its services in English on their websites. The analysis investigates primarily the English written content, which often is targeted at international visitors. The only exception is Adventure by Design, whose latest updated were done to the Finnish website. I conducted the content analysis on the websites 1-2 weeks before the interviews, which was helpful for the interview preparations and getting to know the companies.

5.1.1 Case study 1: Hawkhill Resort, Finland

The first participant, the NBT company: *Hawkhill Resort*, is a Finnish family enterprise offering lodging and NBT services in Vihti, close to a large Nuuksio national park area. Hawkhill locates only a 50-minute drive from Helsinki city center and the capital city area, a district accommodating approximately one million people. Therefore the Nuuksio national park is an accessible and popular area for local and international tourists. Even though the Hawkhill Resort locates close to the capital area, there is no direct public transportation to the Hawkhill cottage village.

The first headline of Hawkhill Resorts' English website welcomes the visitors to "a perfect cottage holiday in Finland." The text highlights local entrepreneurship: "Hawkhill is a family company in the third generation" (Hawkhill Resort, 2022). Besides the accommodation, the company offers services and access to locations described as "Finnish experiences": a private sauna, beach, and hikes to the surrounding Nuuksio National Park. The website highlights the local nature with images of a Finnish forest, wooden cabins, and nature areas without any people. The name "Hawkhill" stands for the local hill where the company locates. The hill, trees, and water also inspire the logo design (Hawkhill Resort, 2022).

Hawkhill Resort presents environmental matters under a separate webpage, "*Environment and sustainability*." They also view a short chapter on the first page stating: "We take the environment into account in every decision we make, which is one of our core values" (Hawkhill, 2022). The company emphasizes being a family company in the third generation in the area, which was the playground for the owners: three siblings. Therefore, they want to make sure that Finnish nature and the planet stays clean also in the future.

Climate change and CO₂ emissions are broad environmental themes that Hawkhill Resort features on its website. They present several actions to minimize their footprint and "use the company as a tool to fight climate change and environmental challenges" (Hawkhill Resort, 2022). The forerunning local actions include, for instance, land restoration acting as a carbon sink and supporting biodiversity, using fossil-free energy electricity in heating and logistics, minimizing water consumption, recycling, and following a circular economy as much as possible. Hawkhill Resort openly argues that they focus on near visitor markets: Europeans, in their marketing and aim to minimize flight emissions of arriving guests. The company describes how they measure and aim to reduce its carbon footprint; Hawkhill Resort is already a carbon-neutral company and seeks to become a carbon-negative enterprise in the future. The stated actions indicate how the company sees climate change and CO₂ emissions as negative environmental issues and attempts to contribute negatively to those (Hawkhill Resort, 2022). Notable is how Hawkhill highlights continuous education and development in their

environmental work, learning new concepts, measuring, and aiming for a smaller footprint. Besides passing on the message to their visitors, Hawkhill Resort aims to operate with business partners who share similar values and are committed to sustainable practises. Finally, the website displays four sustainable tourism certificates that the company currently holds.

5.1.2 Case study 2: Lofoten Aktiv, Norway

The second participant is an NBT company, *Lofoten Aktiv*, from Norway. Based in the Lofoten archipelago, the company offers guided sea kayaking and mountain hiking, northern lights tours, and ski rental in the area. Lofoten archipelago is a popular tourism destination in the north of Norway. The site is far from bigger cities and accessible by plane, bus, private cars, and ferry connections.

On the website, Lofoten Aktiv welcomes the visitor with headlines: "great experiences all year round" and "sea kayak in the archipelago, a unique experience" (Lofoten Aktiv, 2022). Name of the company emphasizes the area, Lofoten, and the logo and website images feature the archipelago: mountains, sea, and kayakers, some with people and some without people. Right after the website banner, the site presents an eco-certificate "Norsk Økoturisme" with a logo and an external link to the site governing the license. Besides the certificate, Lofoten Aktiv does not mention environmental themes on its home page. However, later under the "about us" site, they broadly describe their company mission and environmental strategy, highlighting the knowledge of nature and weather when operating in the Lofoten area. The last page presents the company founder, Jann Engstad, a local entrepreneur, and his 40-year background in the area as a kayaking guide. The text continues and describes how essential it is to show respect to the use of vulnerable Lofoten nature. The site highlights the knowledge of nature, the company's work with ecotourism, and the geography and history of the area.

Related to direct impacts on nature and the environment, Lofoten Aktiv highlights the unnecessary noise on their guided trips and notes how motorized vehicles, snowmobiles, and helicopters, are illegal in specific areas. Another notable topic on the

Lofoten Aktiv website is the "leave no trace" philosophy. According to the company, cleanness does not mean only litter-free nature but also living and working in nature without leaving tangible traces. The company puts these actions into practice by leading by example, educating, and guiding the guests to follow the best practices in nature. Lofoten Aktiv has made ecotourism present in Norway since the beginning of the millennium, which they highlight on the website. The entrepreneur Jann Engstad has been involved in the WWF project, linking tourism and conservation in the arctic areas, and participated in the IIB The Northern Periphery Programme meeting in Iceland.

5.1.3 Case study 3: Adventure by Design, Finland

The third company, *Adventure by Design*, is a Finnish NBT company providing adventure tours in Kilpisjärvi, Finland. Kilpisjärvi is a remote and popular tourism area among Finnish, Norwegians, and foreign visitors. Accessing Kilpisjärvi requires a plane, bus, or private car transfer. Adventure by Design company is closed for now and operated from 2012-to 2021. The company and its' two owners were familiar to me, and I appreciated their fore-running environmental inputs. Therefore, I selected the company as one of the case participants. Because the company does not operate actively at the current moment, the company entrepreneur Elina Hutton gave me access to their archived website content.

Adventure by Design worked as a custom adventure tour operator and arranged NBT activities such as northern lights tours, day and multi-day hiking, and ski tours in arctic regions in Finland and northern Norway. On their Finnish homepage, they highlight the "man-powered expeditions" in the vulnerable nature with a professional guide and present themselves: "We share the love of nature and desire to make today's visitors and future generations enjoy it the same way" (Adventure by Design, 2022). The company's promise on the website is to offer a safe experience with a guide with local knowledge and expertise to show nature's calming and empowering side. Adventure by Design describes their expeditions: tailored, small group sizes, executed with "a nature and biodiversity first" attitude. The company follows Visit Finland's Sustainable Travel Finland principles and outlines how sustainable NBT for them means sustainable use of nature and protection of biodiversity. They also emphasize the importance of all three

concepts of sustainable tourism: economics, environment, and social aspects. For example, they mention the importance of guaranteeing fair salaries for their guides and working in the area with respect to the local tribes, such as the Sami.

5.1.4 Summary of the content analysis

Nature has an essential presence when looking into the website content of three NBT companies. Besides only presenting the NBT services, for example, guided hikes, kayak tours, or ski expeditions, the online content highlights the local nature, company owners' relationship to it, and how the company considers the environmental themes in their NBT business. The core services that the case study participants provide are all man-powered, slow adventures in local nature, and all companies work in protected nature areas as in the national parks or the Lofoten archipelago. The NBT service descriptions included depictions of nature, responsible, local, and safe guiding instead of focusing only on the outdoor activity and technical skills. Interesting would be to compare the depictions of how nature is described among NBT companies, who arrange so-called "fast adventures," snow-mobile tours, paragliding, or RIB boat tours.

The analysis investigated how the NBT companies presented the environmental issues on their websites. Texts and messages highlighted several topics, such as issues around everyman's rights, cleanness, motorized vehicles, noise, and CO2 emissions, but in a solution-oriented form. For example, "our company is used as a tool to fight climate change and environmental challenges" or "we focus on quality over quantity" (Hawkhill Resort, 2022). Instead of defining the environmental issues more specifically, the messages offered arguments and solutions on how the company responds to and acts on them. For example, noise can be seen as an environmental issue caused by NBT when stating: "activities are carried out to avoid any unnecessary noise" (Lofoten Aktiv, 2022). However, the investigated websites rarely presented arguments about why, for example, noise is bad for the environment and what is causing it in the area. Perhaps, detailed facts could confirm the pro-environmental actions and offer more knowledge for the website's readers.

A common feature that all NBT companies highlighted on their websites was "leading by example", following company values in the actions done in nature. For example, the companies take visitors out to nature with a local educated guide, whose role is to tell and teach about nature, instead of only leading the group. Choosing to go out to nature with a local guide was also promoted as a sustainable travel action when spending time in nature responsibly — for example, following everyman's right and supporting the local economy when paying a local company and guide for the services. Lastly, all companies represented how they followed eco certificates or sustainable tourism program guidelines in their NBT business. In addition to the labels, the websites displayed concrete arguments, actions, or plans instead of only presenting a commercial eco-label logo.

All three NBT companies expressed environmental concerns on their websites but in a solution-based form. The actions emphasized the local impacts: following everyman's rights, cleanness, and peace in nature. Lofoten Aktiv's NBT is based on ecotourism, and the website highlights these ground rules of their business. In addition, Hawkhill Resort, as a company also providing lodging services, described extensively its mission to reduce its CO2 footprint and contribute positive actions towards climate change and biodiversity. Adventure by Design also highlighted the experience of learning in nature with a local professional guide. The pro-environmental attitude existed, and actions were presented on all three company websites. However, conflicting issues, for instance, tourism footprint at a global level, were not highly emphasized. Hawkhill Resort was the only company describing the marketing efforts and how they do not market their services outside of Europe, which indicates the acknowledgment of tourism's high carbon footprint. In conclusion, the website content highlighted the local impacts and sustainable actions in a solution-based tone. Therefore, the interviews will be valuable information when asking further questions and discussing the possible conflicting environmental issues within NBT.

6 Results of the interviews

The following chapter presents the results of three semi-structured interviews (Appendix 3). The discussions were conducted via Teams call, and as an interviewer, I saw that the interviews also succeeded using digital devices. Next, the results are analyzed according to the pre-defined themes (Table 1) and later concluded in the discussion and conclusion chapters.

6.1 Environmental attitudes

The interview discussions conclude the website findings and emphasize how all three entrepreneurs share a strong connection to nature and environmental issues on a personal and company level. With roots in the Nordic countries, the participant reflected on nature with similar values as the tradition of friluftsliv shares:

“I have lived here around nature nearly all my life and for me it is very important place, to recharge my batteries. And if you're stressed or anything like that, it always helps to go walking in the forest.”

A.Huotari, Hawkhill Resort (personal communication, March 14, 2022)

“Nature is where all the life comes from. Without that there is nothing. That's what it means to me.” E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

From the company perspective, the meaning of nature was described: “as a place to take people to” or “where the companies operate.” The interviewees described NBT as: showing nature, guiding people, teaching and telling how to be in nature, or having fun. Personal values also complied with the company values:

“Due nature has an important part in my life, I want to share it to other people and everything we do here. We think with the attitude “nature first” in our company.” A.Huotari, Hawkhill Resort (personal communication, March 14, 2022)

All entrepreneurs agreed on being environmentally conscious, both on an attitude and action level. The interviews revealed how all of them were active participants in local environmental discussions and actions. In addition, environmental knowledge was described as a constant learning and development process. Jann Engstad explained how, during his over 40-years in the NBT tourism, he had given up arranging whale watching tours after understanding its environmental impacts. Jann and his company are pioneers in ecotourism in Norway, developing NBT practices towards ecotourism before the concept was certified in Norway. Jann Engstad also highlighted the human-nature relationship: “we are here to take care of it to ensure that our grandchildren always will have a place to go” (J. Engstad, personal communication, March 16, 2022).

Local knowledge, experience, and curiosity for lifelong learning describe all entrepreneurs. The owners of Hawkhill Resort and Lofoten Aktiv highlighted their long roots of entrepreneurship in the area. Therefore, the local nature and its features were important and respected, and the entrepreneurs took action in the local community actions. Elina Hutton from Adventure by Design, who works currently as a university lecturer at the Arctic University of Norway, acknowledges that her academic background gives her knowledge and understanding of environmental issues. To the question, if the entrepreneurs saw themselves as environmentally conscious people, answers described the actions taken: recycling, low consumption, a vegetarian diet, using a bus, and basic small things in everyday life. On the other hand, feeling guilt and “not doing enough” was a described feeling. Here, especially the guilt about flying for leisure purposes or driving a diesel car raised a dissonance in their daily life choices:

“I'm all the time thinking that cannot travel anywhere, which would be nice after two years to go somewhere. See sun and travel somewhere from here, but then you think these concerns. That it has changed in my mind, so I feel I bad about my travel.” A.Huotari, Hawkhill Resort (personal communication, March 14, 2022)

"I feel extreme pain because I drive a diesel car. So, I have the total guilt of having to drive a diesel car because that's what I must do now." E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

6.2 Nature-based tourism and environmental issues

The discussion related to NBT and environmental issues raised several thoughts, concerns, and ideas. All entrepreneurs acknowledged the severe impacts of tourism on climate change and the environment. The arguments considered the whole tourism industry on a bigger scale instead of only focusing on NBT.

"I know that it's bad for nature, travelling without having a work related or a different related thing, but just traveling for pleasure .. It's not good for nature." J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

"Our tourism industry can't be sustainable, but nor can any industry. But one single company can be as much as they can, so I think that's the important thing that we must focus on." E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

NBT AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

When looking into the environmental impacts of NBT, the carrying capacity of nature concerned all interviewees. The entrepreneurs all worked in national park areas or archipelagos and agreed on the effects of "having too many people everywhere." They described problems caused: by ignorance, city people, social media, and visitors who do not follow the right to roam etiquette or national park rules.

"I'm quite concerned about the city people of Norway, Sweden and Finland. Who are raised thinking that we are nature people? And think that they are good at it. They have lost contact with nature, what they are wanting to experience is no longer environmentally friendly." J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

"I understand that many places are so crowded, but when if I think about animals and birds and those who are living in National Park, then I would think that they need some areas where there are not so many people around. So why do people have to be able to go everywhere?" A.Huotari, Hawkhill Resort (personal communication, March 14, 2022)

"Instagram is a nature killer on the high level. It's really one of those things that is the biggest danger to the natural landscape that we have because people just want to brag about themselves." J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

Entrepreneurs saw that with skilled NBT guides, who follow responsible practices, the visits would not harm nature. However, differences between local NBT companies were highlighted, which indicates how the entrepreneurs saw the environmental issues arising from their industry:

"The guides who do hiking and ski trips have a lot of focus on environmental issues. But then if you talk about side companies as in snowmobile trips and stuff, they think completely different about the level of commitment to the sustainability because snowmobiles just aren't sustainable in any ways." E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

"Well, it's quite a different what I do and what some of the other companies do. I am not doing RIB boat cruises, fishing and sightseeing trips or whale safaris. I see that the consumption of emissions for these trips is so high!" J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

The interviewees followed actively, for instance, the local communal land use planning, or were active spokespeople in environmental issues in their communities. All participants described how leading by example was necessary, and influencing the customers and local companies, partners, and travel agencies were seen as essential. Jann Engstad from Lofoten Aktiv described himself as a local environmentalist who follows up on what the local companies are doing. He gets involved if he notices false marketing, greenwashing, or a company and their guests doing harm to nature.

“Lots of people hate me and lots of people love me because of this. I care about my lovers and not about the others.” J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

The economy first attitude was raised as a concern among the participants. Annu Huotari from Hawkhill Resort saw that their company could be bigger and more profitable. However, growing the company would mean that the areas “would not stay the same”, increase consumption, and peace and nature would be disturbed. In addition, working with local companies sharing similar values was an important action for Hawkhill Resort. Value-based decision making was also the reason why Adventure by Design rejected a collaboration since the tour operator did not consider environmental issues on their expeditions:

“An American tour operator organized a three-day trip visiting Tromsø, Kiiruna, Kilpisjärvi, and Narvik. Great! So, we participated on that trip once thinking that we do it this way once and maybe we can help them to see those not really good idea to fly customers from America to do this three-day trip. But because they didn't want to change it, then we didn't continue working with them.” E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

Climate change was a concern mentioned in most discussions. In general, the consumption, whether it was caused by leisure travel or consumption of materials or natural resources, highlighted climate change. Transportation and short-term stays were mentioned as specific issues in NBT, causing CO2 emissions and further increasing climate change. The participants especially noted the international travel footprint since all NBT companies work mainly with foreign visitors:

"If you come from America or from Australia or New Zealand, they will have to stay here for three weeks to make the footprint low enough that it's acceptable." J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

"If we would get all cottages full of people who would travel from Asia - nothing helps! Nothing we do is enough to compensate those emissions of those flights are so huge and many of those people who are coming here. They come here for very short time that is also a problem." A.Huotari, Hawkhill Resort (personal communication, March 14, 2022)

Also, changes in seasons and weather raised concern and were visible impacts of climate change, affecting NBT. Elina from Adventure by Design especially noticed this due to the company operating in the arctic area. The winter seasons with snow and minus temperatures were an essential part of their NBT:

"On winter, the snow was often too soft, or we got too little snow, or too late or early. Sometimes you planned a ski expedition in March, and it was raining - that's not normal. So, it was visible quite often." E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

Further, the concern of climate change included the changes in the environment, for example, nature and biodiversity:

"I am concern with everything to do with the climate change and what is happening to nature, how we are losing some species." A.Huotari, Hawkhill Resort (personal communication, March 14, 2022)

"Also, summers were sometimes warmer than normally but that's not really a problem for anybody. It's quite nice to have warmer than normal summers for tourism. But then of course it's not good for the nature." E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Further, the study investigated whether the entrepreneurs experienced dissonance between their environmental attitudes and actions when working in the NBT. As noted, all study participants acknowledge environmental impacts caused by NBT. When asked the feelings around the conflicting attitudes and actions, Elina from Adventure by Design answered:

"How would I say .. I feel very schizophrenic. Especially cause now I'm even teaching new people (students) who come into the industry. For instance, carbon footprint of flying, iglu accommodation, and camping in places where you're not actually ready to go, are really bad examples of tourism. I am trying to be optimistic, but if that is just that I am closing my eyes from the reality."

However, when asked how the interviewees felt about the dissonance, the answers commonly referred to the tourism industry or personal lifestyle choices, as presented in the previous paragraph. The following indicates how environmental issues are causing conflicts between attitudes and actions on multiple levels of life. Therefore the answers referred to the overall experiences and perceptions, not only conflicts related to NBT. Besides describing the feelings around the experienced dissonance, the responses revealed beliefs explaining the conflicting issues. As noted in the theory chapter, humans tend to avoid dissonance and strive for harmony between the components, which can be done by adjusting, for example, the beliefs (Festinger, 1957). The adjustments can be seen natural human behavior; the entrepreneurs work in the NBT, and if facing a conflict, they need to adjust their attitudes or actions to deal with the situation and continue working in the NBT. Juvan and Dolnica (2014) see these explanations as attempts to re-establish cognitive consonance and cope with the conflicting components. The beliefs of NBT entrepreneurs followed the findings of Juvan and Dolnica's (2014, p.86) "six groups of beliefs," from which four similar groups of beliefs were identified.

IT'S NOT THAT BAD (DENIAL OF CONSEQUENCES)

The first discovered belief bases on value-belief-norm of environmentalism theory. This Juwan and Dolnica (2014) describe as **denial of consequences**. The belief is based on protecting the core values, for example, running an NBT company by denying the negative effects.

"It's quite a different what I do and what some of the other companies do." J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

Another belief in the group **that it's not that bad** highlighted the positive side of tourism and how the environmental issues would be balanced out. The statement highlights the good sides of tourism over the negative and how these outcomes may patch the caused environmental issues.

"Tourism is also a way to get people to nature, maybe it balances out in the end" E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

Even though all the entrepreneurs acknowledged the environmental impacts of the NBT industry, the presented comments describe the denial of consequences on some level. This may indicate how the tourism industry, in general, contributes negatively to the environment. Still, on an NBT company level, the entrepreneurs can impact on a concrete level and follow their values when acting in the NBT sector.

IT COULD BE WORSE (DOWNWARD COMPARISON)

The second group of beliefs follows the theory of downward comparison and Festinger's (1957) social comparison theory. The idea bases on how seeking out something worse makes people feel better about their beliefs and behavior (Juwan & Dolnica, 2014). In my findings, the tourism industry, where the participants worked, was **compared to other "worse" industries** or other NBT companies as in the previous chapter. The beliefs made justice to the tourism industry when it was not seen as the only field causing environmental issues:

"I'm concerned but I wonder what we are going to say about battery and plastic production. Those are the biggest challenges to our life, then CO2 emissions." J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

"If you compare for example the footprint of flying just for travel and tourism it's smaller than our clothing industry, but nobody is talking about stopping clothing industry either, even though that is polluting a lot more and using a lot more resources than tourism so." E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

I WOULD LIKE TO, BUT .. (DENIAL OF CONTROL)

"As long as we are curious as human beings, the more people will like to travel. It's not that its unstoppable. You get more information that you can consume, so you choose what you want to hear and what you don't want to hear." J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

The following interview argument describes an interpretation of the global world and human nature, which are out of one's control. As Juvan and Dolnica (2014) explain, postulating the planned behavior theory by Izeć Ajzen (1985), **the feeling of being out of control affects actions**. Admitting that something is out of one's control justifies the behavior and is an attempt to re-establish the consonance. Here, Juvan and Dolnica (2014) describe how the nature of this belief differs from the previously presented since the environmental impacts are an acknowledged issue, but the behavior contrasts with it. Out of control signifies how something is unavoidable to prevent in one's behavior.

ACTUALLY, I AM DOING MORE GOOD THAN BAD (COMPENSATION THROUGH BENEFITS)

"I could do more, but I think me, and our company are already doing quite a lot." A.Huotari, Hawkhill Resort (personal communication, March 14, 2022)

The last discovered belief bases also on acknowledging NBT's environmental issues. Here, the belief of caused environmental impacts is aligned **with upgraded attitudes** that harmonize the belief with the actions. The comment below emphasizes the importance of ensuring that your own company acts according to and works with a pro-environmental approach:

"Tourism can never be ecofriendly. I work in tourism and accept this. Then I make sure that when people are here, they have a change to be more nature friendly than anybody else. My excuse for working with tourism is that I can make sure that nobody leaves us without being told how to do things better." J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

The descriptions of beliefs had similarities with Juvan and Dolnica's (2014) findings and viewed the insights into how the NBT entrepreneurs perceived the dissonance between their attitude and action models. It is good to note that the comments were individual arguments along with the discussions and can not be generalized as common opinions of the participants. More precise interview questions and focusing on this specific theme could offer more thorough information on the perceptions. However, the revealed beliefs exemplified the complexity of environmental issues, attitudes, and behavior. Similar to Juvan and Dolnica (2014), my study findings also indicate how the modification or addition of beliefs can be used as a mechanism to cope with cognitive dissonance. As presented previously, the analysis identified four belief groups of six. However, my interviews did not include the two groups of beliefs: denying one's responsibility or seeing NBT as an exception, which Juvan and Dolnica (2014) discovered in their study. In other words, the NBT entrepreneurs acknowledged their responsibility and saw NBT as an industry causing environmental harm but explained the actions by referring to the four different groups of beliefs. This may indicate how the gap between NBT entrepreneurs' attitudes and actions exists but is acknowledged and how the participants work actively to find environmentally friendly strategies to continue their work within NBT.

6.3 Environmental actions

The interview discussions revealed evidence of changed behavior in participants' personal lifestyle choices and NBT business operations when becoming aware of the environmental impacts of tourism and experiencing a conflict between the attitude and action. Festinger (1957) and Juvan and Dolnica (2014) explain this modified behavior by coping with dissonance and altering actions in the view of climate change.

"I'm not doing whale safari trips which I was doing before, which was my winter work and the biggest joy of my life. But I stopped that when I realized that the consumption of emissions for the trips were so high. I knew that already, but that was way much more than I could accept in our tourism business." J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

Running business value-based did not mean only altering business operations for the sake of being a more sustainable company but connecting the values naturally in all actions:

"We think that sustainability is not a choice. It is a necessity. It is something everybody must do, for example, recycle, avoid disposable cups – this should be normal! It shouldn't be something that "oh our company is recycling". A. Huotari, Hawkhill Resort (personal communication, March 14, 2022)

As noted in the content analyses, the company websites described the environmental issues and actions with a solution-based model. The statements indicate that environmental issues are acknowledged, and the companies aim to work according to these beliefs. Most of the actions are taken on a local level, admitting how the environmental issues caused by the tourism industry are severe issues on a global scale but challenging to influence for one actor. The local actions may therefore help to cope with the dissonance:

“No industry can be sustainable, but one company can be, this is where we should focus on” E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

The tourism industry's carbon footprint was defined as a severe environmental concern among all participants. In this, the local level actions were taken, for instance, controlling the company's consumption or aiming to become carbon neutral at the local level actions. Traveling-related carbon footprint raised reflections since all NBT companies work with international tourists. Two companies, Hawkhill Resort and Lofoten Aktiv did not do marketing for tourists outside of Europe and saw this as a way to act against the climate change:

“We have not been doing any marketing to get visitors outside Europe, so we always try to concentrate to people who are already here nearby and who can get here easier, not like needing 10-hour flight before you get here.” A.Huotari, Hawkhill Resort (personal communication, March 14, 2022)

Flying customers from Asia, Australia, or America, were the majority customer groups of Adventure by Design, as for many other Nordic NBT tourism companies before the covid-19 pandemic. The issue was discussed as follows:

“We were feeling bad about it. We did discuss it sometimes, but never thought that we would just focus on central Europeans. We always thought that it would balance out in the end.” E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

In conclusion, the footprint of long-haul visitors was an environmental issue that all entrepreneurs acknowledged in the interviews. Two companies followed altered marketing actions, and they saw this as one tool impacting the CO₂ emissions of their NBT company. However, not marketing to oversea visitors does not mean that the customers would not include the long-haul flight travelers; the travelers can still find the company and book services without seeing company's marketing campaigns. Besides targeted marketing, the entrepreneurs had developed services encouraging

visitors to stay longer in the area and use less fossil-fueled transportation on-site. In addition, the entrepreneurs controlled the carbon footprint and consumption of the business at some level. Together with minimizing the carbon footprint, educating the visitors about the environmental themes was seen as an essential action, what individual NBT companies could do and contribute positively to environmental issues. Foreign visitors who might have never seen arctic nature could see and hear for the first time how vulnerable nature is and how climate change is visible in the area.

“Our Singaporean customers had never seen nature which they needed to protect in the global scale. So that can also be a good thing. That people can connect with the nature and especially with the Arctic where the climate change is so visible compared to many other places. Maybe it's also good and maybe that can balance the carbon print of flying..” E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

As outdoor guiding was at the core of all NBT businesses, the philosophy and principles of guiding were an essential factor in companies’ environmental work. The entrepreneurs highlighted the local knowledge and education of their guides. Guiding outdoors was not only about teaching the activity; their role was to lead by example, show and tell the visitors about nature, and how to spend time there responsibly. Hawkhill Resort and Lofoten Aktiv engaged their customers also to the conservation work:

“Any campsite we are using must look better when we leave it. The area we are using should not have any proof that we have been there except from the flat grass from our tent and where we walked. So very often we collect plastic and put them into one place and pick up later.” J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

“This year we are trying to get rid of lupines, invasive species as much as possible. I have asked from Nature Center if we would like to do together some kind of campaign. So, the visitors would get something small and local produced like a can of honey as a reward of picking up

these plants.” A.Huotari, Hawkhill Resort (personal communication, March 14, 2022)

All entrepreneurs mentioned the impacts of social media and how it has changed nature and outdoor culture. For instance, the number of pictures and videos was not controllable. Accidents happened due to photographing, and places became accessible and visible to millions of people due to geotagging. Lofoten Aktiv’s intake on the issue was to educate their visitors about the social media issues and suggest not to geotag the locations. Many of their guests were not aware of the problems caused by the social media:

“Social media and geotagging are nature killers. So, when we go on trips, I tell people that I would prefer that you don't tag our tours because on our tours, we are quite a lot of the time on our own doing trips that nobody else is doing. People instantly understand this, however, most of them have never thought about this.” J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

Leading by example was seen as an important principle with the customers and with partners and local authorities. For example, working with local, responsibly operating companies was mentioned as essential. As noted in previous chapters, the entrepreneurs saw themselves as pioneers or local environmentalists in their areas, leading by example:

“I think that the more we do, and more we tell what we do, will challenge the companies around us.” A.Huotari, Hawkhill Resort (personal communication, March 14, 2022)

6.4 Future thoughts on the Nordic nature-based tourism

At the end of each interview, the participants were given the opportunity to supplement the interview discussions or add ideas that they saw as essential to the study theme. All interviewees shared their thoughts about the future of NBT and the current issues they were concerned about. This chapter presents these thoughts as a subtheme arising from the thematic interview.

All participants called for more control and legislation for the NBT industry. As Jann Engstad from Lofoten Aktiv describes: "(...) I've said now for 25 years that tourism is the last wild west of Norway, because there are no rules. Even my work as a trained outdoor guide is not recognized". The NBT entrepreneurs saw that regulations would improve the working conditions of guides and safeness:

"We just can't have an industry that is not regulated. Anyone can become a guide and take customers wherever" E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

"I told them (younger guides) what we're doing, and we must know the safety rules because it (safety) is an important part of guiding. One of them asked: how do you learn this? Well, you learn this when you become a trained guide." J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

Concern about the nature, especially the high usage of famous national parks, raised comments challenging the right to roam law, which is a public law allowing private people and guides to visit the areas without specific control or fees:

"There's no control over National Parks, which have gone totally wild. There's too much people, who don't apply the rules. We have foreign and Finnish companies coming in, who don't care about the rules. So we need more control both Finland and Norway: where can you go, what can you do .. both in organized activities, but also with individual tourists. The nature is not going to handle that all, wherever they want

to camp and use the nature as a toilet.” E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

As solutions for the national park issues, the NBT entrepreneurs suggested areal fees, paid parking lots, and more national park infrastructure such as staircases, toilets, and built paths to protect the vulnerable areas.

“During high seasons we could do as in Yellowstone. You must prebook that you have that space to go to.” J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

However, the national park fee was also questioned and suggested whether the areas could be accessible for the local people and whether national parks could charge small fees to other visitors. The following comment views the conflict between the local users of nature and commercial tourism:

“People are saying it is impossible that you start charging of visiting in National Park. I don't know why not. Maybe not charge those who are living here.. at least people from abroad, why wouldn't they have pay? Why do they have the same everyman rights as we have? If they would be charged, then Metsähallitus, would get more money to maintain the roads, practice science for example.” A.Huotari, Hawkhill Resort (personal communication, March 14, 2022)

Also, targeted marketing was mentioned as a tool to control the tourist crowds and protect especially the most crowded nature areas. The suggestion of focusing the tourism on designated nature areas and leaving the rest of the land for non-commercial use was presented as follows:

“Building paths and steps and advertise those routes. And make sure that these areas are protected so that they won't be worn out. And then let's not talk about the other places.” J. Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv (personal communication, March 16, 2022)

Interesting in all presented comments is how the NBT companies themselves suggest that their business should be more controlled. The entrepreneurs seemed to be willing to pay for the usage of nature, which would be a cost for their company but a way to maintain and protect nature. They saw that the NBT should adapt to conserve nature, not vice versa. Finally, the participants shared a few thoughts about the human-nature relationship. The NBT entrepreneurs saw both concerns and hope about how modern people and tourism situate with the environment. Access to nature was seen as educating the next generation skills to be in nature and respect it. Therefore, the free and easy access to nature in everyday life was seen as essential to support a more sustainable future:

*"I see it's also important that people go to nature and people have found nature again! This way this special relationship with nature will continue to the new generations." A.Huotari, Hawkhill Resort
(personal communication, March 14, 2022)*

Finally, the growing tourism in nature raised worries for the future, but at the same time, change in peoples' values and behavior was seen possible:

"I used to think that we have no hope that tourism is going to destroy all these fragile places up here because all I could see was the tourism in Lapland and the tourism that is done in the centers in Norway. But now that I have been teaching in the university have changed my fate for the future of tourism. The generation who are now around 20, they look at things completely differently. They look at me with the face of "you got to be kidding" when I tell them what the tourism has been doing. And I do believe that they will be smarter than we were.

Maybe all these world issues that we're having now are going to help open our eyes. Maybe that is already changing behavior? So, I am trying to be optimistic and see the bright sides, but I don't know if that's just closing my eyes from the reality." E.Hutton, Adventure by Design (personal communication, March 18, 2022)

7 Discussion

In conclusion, the environmental work in the three case study NBT companies was seen as a constant development and value-based act of adjusting and inventing new business models and operations. A strength of the study was the three unique participants, companies and entrepreneurs, and the successful interview discussions with them. The interviewees shared unique insights and described their pioneer thoughts and actions when working in the NBT. The NBT entrepreneurs acknowledged the environmental issues of tourism and altered their business operations to decrease the impacts.

Integrating one's pro-environmental philosophy, passion, values, and ethics into a business model is described as a sustainably rooted approach to sustainable-oriented innovation (Klewitz & Hansen, 2014). Here, the researchers see how the approach contributes to business success and the broader society in the form of the common good and potential outcomes for change at the industry level (Klewitz & Hansen, 2014). My study followed similar findings to Klewitz and Hansen (2014); how one company's environmental work may contribute to the community and region. The entrepreneurs were active spokespeople in their areas or occupations; they saw the local actions as concrete impacts, which the companies were able to influence. As the high carbon footprint of tourism, global impacts were known issues reacted in various ways. The entrepreneurs highlighted the importance of pioneer work, leading by example, and including the environmental actions at all levels of the NBT. The results also supported Bressan and Pedrini's (2020) findings on how tourism entrepreneurs' sustainable lifestyle choices positively contribute to sustainable-oriented innovations.

The NBT company website findings and interviews with the entrepreneurs emphasized how all three participants share a solid connection to nature and environmental issues on a personal and company level. Working in the close association of national parks or nature reserves, they acknowledged the severe impacts of tourism on climate change and the environment. However, the arguments considered often the whole tourism industry instead of only focusing on NBT. The troubles discussed included nature's carrying capacity, CO₂ emissions, climate change, and its impacts on nature.

The first environmental concern, the number of people and the human traces left behind impacting nature, was a problem raised by all three entrepreneurs. However, the participants saw visiting nature with local professional guides as an outdoor activity that would not harm nature. All three NBT companies provided man-powered outdoor activities like hiking, ski touring, or kayaking in small groups. The activities also go together well with the culture of friluftsliv, where simple and slow dwelling in nature is at the core, instead of commercial and sports technology-based experiences. Therefore, other NBT companies and their environmental actions got critiqued. For example, companies who use motorized vehicles and guide big groups. Or do not follow the national park rules or everyman's rights and base their NBT business on short-term foreign visitors. The second topic, CO2 emissions and climate change, raised concern and had directly affected running an NBT business via changing weather and visible impacts on nature. The participants noted especially the travel footprint of international tourists since all NBT companies worked mainly with foreign visitors. Global emissions were an issue that was a more difficult impact directly; however, on a local level, the entrepreneurs believed that one company could make a difference. Therefore, the study participants saw the environmental work necessary and participated actively in local environmental discussions and actions. They described environmental work as a constant process of learning and acting.

Secondly, the study investigated whether the NBT entrepreneurs experienced dissonance between their environmental attitude and action models. The participants generally expressed existing tension between their attitudes towards the environment and the impacts of the tourism industry. The websites displayed company actions and values primarily; how the enterprise follows sustainable tourism practices. The texts did not mention the conflicting issues directly, but the presented business actions aimed to decrease the environmental impacts. However, the interviews described the contradictory values and acts on three levels: personal lifestyle choices, NBT, and the tourism industry, which views multiple levels of environmental attention. The discussions brought up beliefs used to cope with the existing dissonance. The analysis followed cognitive dissonance's theoretical framework, especially Juvan's and Dolnica's (2014) research approach. My study identified four groups of beliefs similar to Juvan

and Donica's findings. As noted in the results chapter, the comments were individual arguments along with the discussions and can not be generalized as common opinions of the participants but still as good examples of conflicting issues. The first discovered belief viewed the denial of consequences, the negative impacts of NBT, and this way, protecting the core values or actions of working in the NBT industry. The second belief compared the effects to something worse; for example, other industries and emissions justified the actions when the NBT was not seen as the only one causing environmental issues. Thirdly, the arguments conveyed the global world and human nature and the feeling of not being able to control these actions. The last finding considered beliefs, where the upgraded thought, "I am doing more good than bad," harmonized the dissonance between the beliefs with the actions. The study of Juvan and Donica (2014) offered an inspiring viewpoint to describe the cognitive dissonance in my study context, which I could have used even more thoroughly. Like, Juvan and Dolnica, I see how these insights of beliefs and explanations contribute to our understanding of the paradoxes of sustainable tourism and the challenges of minimizing the negative environmental impacts. Even more depth focus on a similar theoretical framing could have offered a more thorough understanding of how the tourism entrepreneurs may perceive the cognitive dissonance in their work.

Finally, my study investigated the actions and how the NBT companies attempted to reduce and impact the industry's negative impacts. The discussions revealed altered behavior in personal lifestyle choices and NBT business operations. A few of the findings followed the ideology of de-growth (Sharpley, 2020), where the companies re-considered the tourism production, management, and consumption models instead of maximizing the business growth. This also indicates how the cognitive dissonance may have altered the action models. For instance, the NBT company Lofoten Aktiv did not run whale watching tours anymore due to the increased knowledge of the environmental impacts, and the entrepreneur of Hawkhill Resort saw how growing the company size could have an impact to the local environment. Also, Adventure by Design declined to work with a tour operator against their business values. Marketing the services only to Europeans was part of the de-growth strategy when the environmental impacts went beyond attracting overseas travelers. All companies also considered their

local level footprints and consumption and aimed to minimize them. Even though my study's theoretical framework did not include de-growth theory, the findings revealed exciting insights into a similar ideology of de-growth. With more time and resources, it would have been interesting to have this as an added theoretical viewpoint to conduct a deeper analysis. The future suggestions (chapter 6.4) presented similar de-growth ideas, where the participants called for more control and obligations for people using the national park areas. The NBT entrepreneurs saw necessary, for instance, fees for commercial guides in national parks, even though this would be an expense for their business.

The environmental actions followed entrepreneurs' core values and beliefs and were seen as a natural part of running a business, not only reacting when issuing an environmental problem. The entrepreneurs saw the environmental work as constant development and were active participants in the local communes, even if that might cause conflicts between the local actors. Working according to the values was visible also when choosing partners, at the risk of rejecting a good offer or a well-paying customer. Most of the actions were taken on a local level, admitting how the environmental issues on a global scale were a challenge for the tourism industry. On a local level, professional and company value-based guiding and visitor education were seen as crucial environmental actions, besides the pioneering work in the local communities.

The compelling case study participants and the interview results created a valuable source of information and unique descriptions answering the research questions. Due to the limited time and resources, I invited three participants to the interview. Increasing the number of participants and conducting the second round of discussions could have deepened the analysis with a more detailed description. Also, using other methods, such as a quantitative survey to gain a broader collection of data or field research to deepen the observations, could offer exciting insights into the theme. The research questions aimed to cover attitudes, actions, and dissonance topics. The topics revealed many insights, and the study could have offered more in-depth analysis if it only focused on one of the topics. The chosen theory of cognitive dissonance created

an appropriate viewpoint for the research and revealed other compelling perspectives as a de-growth strategy for further investigation. The environmental issues of NBT are a broad theme, and in my study, I focused primarily on the footprint of tourism. However, the interviews with the NBT entrepreneurs highlighted the direct impacts of tourism on nature and criticized, for example, the current Nordic public right to access nature. Overall, the results indicate how NBT in the Nordic countries needs to consider the future carefully from environmental perspectives.

8 Conclusions

My study described the Nordic NBT entrepreneurs' perspectives on tourism's environmental impacts. The chosen three NBT companies represented pro-environmental business strategies and, for this reason, were invited to the study. Based on a qualitative case study analysis, the results conclude that the interviewed participants acknowledged the environmental impacts of their industry. The results viewed existing dissonance between attitudes and actions, which were explained in beliefs re-establishing the consonance, altered pro-environmental behavior, and concrete acts in local communities. The NBT entrepreneurs shared a solid relationship with nature and environmental issues. At the same time, participants' NBT business was based primarily on visiting international tourists, causing a large carbon footprint and visible traces to nature. The company entrepreneurs balanced the dilemma, worked as active environmentalists in their local communities, and created alternative NBT practices to offset the environmental impacts. These insights and concrete actions offered valuable information on Nordic NBT and the environmental issues the industry is facing. The case study participants all described an advanced level of environmental awareness and practice of sustainable tourism. However, the entrepreneurs explained how balancing environmental issues and profitable business requires compromises. Interesting would be to investigate a broader sample of NBT practitioners to see whether similar perceptions may appear. The study is the first to investigate the Nordic NBT and attitude-action gap among business owners. Therefore, the study is an informative opening to understanding the human-nature relationship of an NBT entrepreneur and viewing the anthropocentric premises of perceiving nature.

As a researcher, I was excited to give a voice to these entrepreneurs and the unique practices of running an NBT company. I see that more in-depth and practical knowledge can be revealed by listening and discussing, which may further contribute to more sustainable tourism practices both on a local and global level. For future research, I suggest more openings for critical sustainable NBT topics, challenging the ideology of tourism growth with the de-growth strategies. Also, investigating the innovative tourism practices and hearing out the knowledge of NBT entrepreneurs can contribute valuable information for local and global nature conservation.

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Appendix 1

List of the case study participants

Adventure by Design

Adventure by Design was a Finnish NBT company providing adventure tours in Kilpisjärvi, Finland. The company is closed for now and existed between the years 2012-2021. Adventure by Design and its' the two owners were familiar to me, and I appreciated their fore-running environmental inputs, when running a nature-based tourism company. Located in Kilpisjärvi, in northern Finland, almost at the border of Norway, the company worked as a custom adventure tour operator and arranged nature-based tourism activities such as northern lights tours, day and multi-day hiking, and ski tours in the Käsivarsi wilderness area.

website: www.adventurebydesign.com

site accessed March 2022; site inactive on April 2022

Hawkhill Resort

Hawkhill Resort, is a Finnish family enterprise offering lodging and nature-based tourism services in Vihti, close to a large Nuuksio national park area and Helsinki capital area.

website: www.hawkhill.fi/en/

Lofoten Aktiv

Nature-based tourism company Lofoten Aktiv offers guided sea kayaking and mountain hiking, northern lights tours, and ski rental. The company locates in the Lofoten archipelago, Norway, which is famous for its' nature: varying landscapes of fjords and mountains.

website: www.lofoten-aktiv.no/en/

Appendix 2

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project.

The primary purpose is to study three chosen Nordic nature-based tourism entrepreneurs who run their business with a pro-environmental strategy. The study will be conducted as a qualitative case study, aiming to describe entrepreneurs' environmental attitude and action perspectives and look further at how those may connect and contribute to the field of sustainable nature-based tourism.

In this letter I will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

The project is a master's thesis for the program: Nordic Master in Friluftsliv Studies in the faculty of Humanities, Sports and Educational Science in University of South-Eastern Norway.

The study's interest rises from the inquiry to understand the environmental perceptions, especially related to climate change, of nature-based tourism (NBT) entrepreneurs and how the attitudes of environmental issues may affect their actions in the nature-based tourism business.

The NBT literature presents interesting study themes such as the critical perspective to environmental actions within nature-based tourism. Also, the paradox of how nature-based tourism companies are dependent on nature, but at the same time, the industry contributes negatively to climate change, offers a critical theoretical perspective to the topic.

From this perspective, the insights of NBT entrepreneurs are interesting, how they perceive the environmental issues. The study follows a theoretical framework of cognitive dissonance searching insights from the environmental attitude and action perspectives, and possible dissonance between them. Research strategy builds on the descriptive dialogue between the empirical findings, and theoretical framework. The

study aims to contribute new insights for the environmental discussion, especially in the tourism and nature-based tourism. The collected personal data will be only used in this master's thesis purposes.

Who is responsible for the research project?

University of South-Eastern Norway is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

The three cases (Nordic nature-base companies) were discovered, when the researcher was searching for information about NBT companies, who run their business with an innovative and pro-environmental focus. The three companies were found via google search and are all new contacts to the researcher, so there are no personal connections between the companies and researcher.

Companies are based in Nordic countries, Norway, Sweden, and Finland, and all the companies have been approached similar way, via this email and letter.

What does participation involve for you?

The study follows qualitative case study strategy and is interested in describing nature-based tourism entrepreneurs' environmental perspectives.

Interview and content analysis from the company website

Here I am inviting your participation in an online interview that could last from 30 minutes or up to 1 hour. If this is suitable for you, the interview will be recorded for accuracy.

Because the study is purposefully interviewing Nordic NBT entrepreneurs with a pro-environmental business approach, "best practices" and views, the researcher suggest that the interviewee names, companies with chosen quotes will be identifiable. All participants need to agree on this, otherwise, the data may be presented anonymously.

Afterward, you may request to follow up the interview to go over a summary of the discussion. This is to ensure the accuracy and transparency of the research findings.

Besides the interview, the research includes a brief analysis from the company website. In this, information (texts and quotes) are gathered to build background data about the case studies. Texts and quotes from the website will be used therefore also as part of the research.

Both interview and content analysis are researching the following themes:

Theme 1: Environmental awareness

-aiming to describe what nature means to the interviewee and the level of environmental consciousness

Theme 2: Nature-based tourism and environmental issues

-aiming to describe how the interviewee perceives the connection between nature-based tourism and environmental impacts

Theme 3: The pro-environmental actions

-aiming to describe the environmental actions the interviewees pursue in their business

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – store and use your personal data

The study will use your participant's personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. The personal data is processed confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). The personal data is accessible only for the researcher and her supervisor.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end 13th May 2022. The data will be stored only on researcher's computer and deleted after the research.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:
access the personal data that is being processed about you
request that your personal data is deleted
request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.
Based on an agreement with University of South-Eastern Norway, Data Protection Services has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:
Research supervisor, Jessica Aquino jessica@holar.is Holar University College, Iceland
Our Data Protection Officer: Paal Are Solberg paal.a.solberg@usn.no
Data Protection Services, by email: (personvertjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 53 21 15 00.

Yours sincerely,

Sonja Ikonen

Student and researcher

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project Nordic nature-based tourism entrepreneurs' perspectives on tourism impacts on climate change and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

I give consent:

to participate in an interview ____

for information about me/myself to be published in a way that I and my company can be recognised ____

OR

I wish to participate but so that the data is presented anonymously ____

for my personal data to be stored until the research project is finished ____

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 13th May 2022.

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix 3

Interview Guide Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this interview. The objective of this project is to investigate nature-based tourism entrepreneur's environmental perceptions, especially related to the impacts caused by the tourism industry. I really appreciate you taking the time to share your insights with me.

This interview will be approximately 45 minutes and the questions follow three themes, discussing about environmental awareness, nature-based tourism and environmental issues and possible pro-environmental actions related to the impacts. This interview is voluntary, and you can terminate it at any time for any reason. As noted, your name and company name will be mentioned in the research.

Finally, I would like to ask for permission to record this interview. The recording will be used for data coding and analysis. All data will be deleted after the study is ready in May 13th 2022.

Interview questions

Background questions:

1. Can you introduce yourself shortly?
2. Can you tell me about your nature-based tourism business?

Topic 1. Environmental awareness

1. Could you describe what nature means to you?
2. Do you consider being an environmentally conscious person? If yes, what does this mean to you? Could you give an example?

Topic 2. Nature-based tourism and environmental issues

1. Are you concerned about environmental issues? What especially?

2. Do you see that the industry where you work, nature-based tourism, is causing environmental issues? If so, what specifically? If not, why not?

3. How does that make you feel as an NBT entrepreneur?

Follow up question: How do you see the climate emissions/footprint of the tourism industry?

Topic 3. Pro environmental actions

1. What is your company doing to minimize these impacts, especially the climate emissions?

Follow up: How important do you see these actions? What are the challenges?

2. How do you think you as an NBT entrepreneur can affect environmental issues?

Follow up: Do you think these impacts are enough? What else could be done?

Extra questions (if time left) Future thoughts and open discussion

1. How would you like to see the future of nature-based tourism?

2. Anything else you would like to add or say...

Thank you for your time!