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Collaboration as means for sustainable tourism destination – A case study of Hardanger

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This thesis marks the final completion of my two years master program in Service Leadership in International Business, at the University of Stavanger. The two years has given me a great insight into working in the service industry, and I am hoping that this master thesis will be helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of the importance of collaboration.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate collaboration's role towards sustainable development at a tourist destination. To help identifying this, three research questions were identified, and the Hardanger region in the western part of Norway was used as a case.

As a start to finding answer to the project's purpose, literature was found and critically reviewed. This literature consisted of the three main topics: Importance of tourism, sustainable tourism and collaboration. To further answer the aim of the project, a qualitative research through a semi-structured interview was found to be the best approach. The questions were focused on the same three topics as were found important through the literature review. The interviews were transcribed and further analyzed through a thematic- and context analysis, using an open mind. The saturation level was then reached after conducting 12 interviews, with a great variation of informants, connected to all parts of the region.

The findings of the research indicate to a great extent that the importance of tourism in the Hardanger region is high, and that the destination will not be able to survive without it. However, the development of the tourism industry today involves several factors and trends that are found challenging to the tourism actors in the region. One can see that actors are trying to collaborate but that the lack of resources and competence, and the fear of losing value to others is creating challenges to stay on track in the future development. Furthermore, sustainability is becoming more and more important in today's tourism development, but tourism actors are still not completely seeing the value of it in the Hardanger region. The majority of the informants find tourism development important. On the other hand, there are several possibilities for improvements in the Hardanger region.

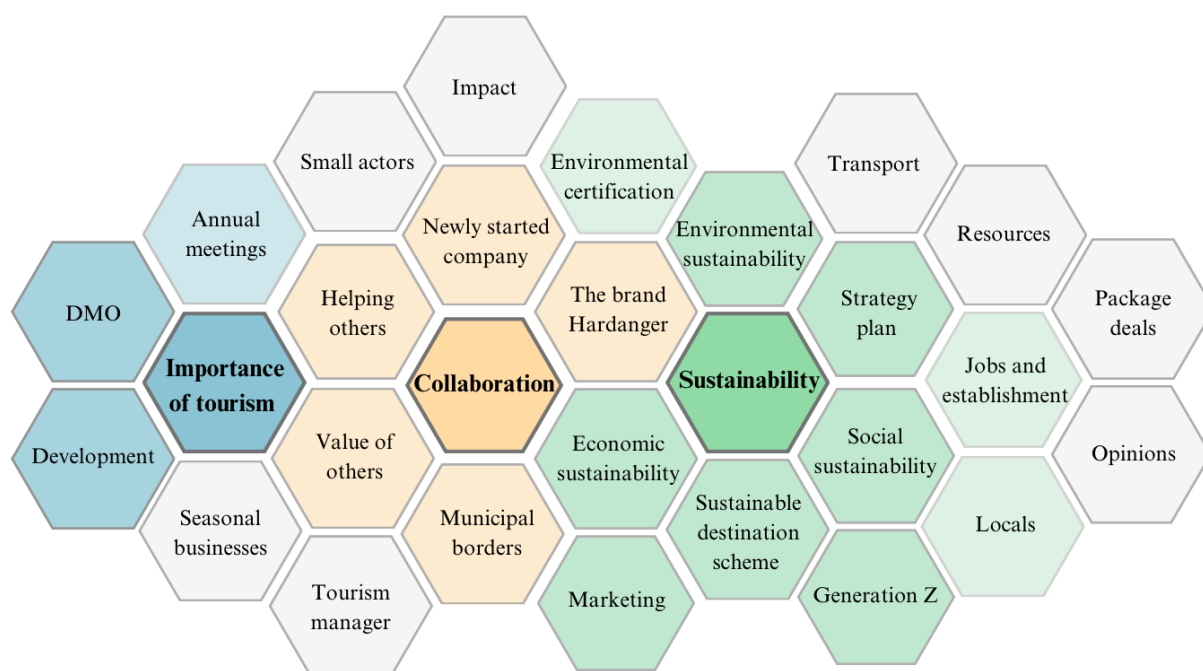
Keywords: Tourism importance, tourism destination, collaboration, sustainability

Model abstract

Throughout the analysis of the findings, with background in the interview guide, three main categories were identified; Importance of tourism, collaboration and sustainability. Furthermore, a thematic- and context analysis identified several sub-categories. In figure 3, both main- and sub-categories are presented. Even though the sub-categories are to a higher extent connected to one of the main categories, they are all connected to each other.

Figure 3

Main categories and sub-categories



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Introduction

Tourism is of high importance in Norway, and impacts both traditional- and non-traditional tourism businesses (Visit Norway, 2022). Statistics shows that in 2019, 182.000 people were employed within the travel and tourism industry, which equals 7 out of 100 Norwegians (Innovation Norway, 2021a). The travel barometer, carried out by Innovation Norway, state that spectacular nature experiences and magnificent scenery, such as beautiful fjords and mountains, are the most well-known attractions in Norway (Innovation Norway, 2022). Furthermore, there is an increasing interest in unique experiences and local culinary experiences. Western Norway, where the Hardanger-region also is located, is full of unique experiences (Visit Norway, n.d.-c). Spectacular waterfalls, mountains, wild glaciers, fjords, and iconic mountain formations, such as Trolltunga and Preikestolen, are located here. Western Norway is therefore a great place for several experiences, such as hiking, skiing, kayaking, museums, traditions, and local specialties.

According to The Norwegian Hospitality Association, Norway experienced an increase in number of tourists visiting before the pandemic (NHO Reiseliv, n.d.-b). The growth in the consumption is showing an increase of 62% from 2009 till 2019, and was contributing to 4.2% of Norway's GDP in 2019 (Innovation Norway, 2021a). This shows a growing importance, and that tourism now is contributing more to the Norwegian economy.

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit Norway in March 2020, and the whole world shut down, the tourism industry was hit hard and had to face dramatic consequences (Jakobsen et al., 2021). Western Norway, a region with many foreign tourists, experienced a total decrease of 21% in the value creation throughout the pandemic.

Even though the pandemic led to a decrease, there are now signs showing that the number of tourists visiting are increasing again (Innovation Norway, 2021a). Research show that the tourism industry globally will increase by 3-4% till 2030, but surveys also gives an

indication of a decline in the interest of Norway as a destination of travel (Innovation Norway, 2022; Jakobsen et al., 2021). On the other hand, Norway will have a competitive advantage due to the increasing interest in nature-based experiences.

However, even though the number of tourists is increasing, one is facing an uncertain future due to climate challenges and the green shift (Jakobsen et al., 2021). The focus on sustainability has now become a growing phenomenon, and can be seen as crucial when it comes to the long-term competitiveness in the tourism industry (NHO Reiseliv, n.d.-a; Visit Norway, n.d.-b). Research show that more people are aware of the climate changes and sustainability, especially the new generation Z, and more than 60 percent choose to travel greener (Innovation Norway, 2022; Prayag et al., 2022; Seyfi et al., 2023).

Background

This master thesis contributes to research within an area where research show lacking information and few previous studies (Dragomir et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2019). Sustainability and collaboration are themes of high interest in today's society, and that there is a need for more research within these fields. Previous research show that there is a need for more research about whether there is a positive connection between collaborations and sustainable development. The importance of trust and everyone feeling included is high, and further research on how to achieve good collaborations is needed. Furthermore, previous studies also state that there is a lack of research and a need of more information in several countries. This master thesis is therefore a good contribution of knowledge within the field, with focus on a region in Norway.

Hardanger is a region with an increasing number of visitors (Skogseth, 2022). Furthermore, Team Hardanger and The Hardanger Council states that Hardanger has the desire of becoming a sustainable destination, and that Hardanger is supposed to be a region with a high degree of collaboration and trust (Hardangerrådet iks, 2022, n.d.). As the

collaboration today seems sub-optimal and lacking, and that the region itself gives the impression that there is a need for both focus on collaboration and sustainability, the Hardanger region is found relevant and interesting for the aim of this master thesis.

Purpose and research questions

This master thesis aims to investigate collaboration as means for sustainable tourism destination. The following research questions will help identify the case: 1) What is the importance and need to maintain tourism in the region? 2) What is the situation on collaboration and sustainability today? 3) What strategies and mindsets can be implemented in the region, that can influence the collaboration and sustainability?

Structure and build-up

This master thesis is presented through five chapters, where this *first chapter* is an introduction to the project. The destination that has been used as a case in this project, Hardanger, is also presented in this part. The *second chapter* is the literature review, presenting the academic literature that was found relevant to the aim and the research questions, such as tourist destination, sustainable tourism, and collaboration. After the theory has been presented, the *third chapter* contains a deeper understanding of the methodological approaches used for data collection, the segmentation of informants, data analysis, challenges and limitations. An evaluation of the quality of the project and ethical considerations of the project are also presented here. The *fourth chapter* presents the findings that have been found through the semi structured interviews. The findings are also interpreted and discussed together with the secondary literature. The thesis is ended with *chapter five*, where a conclusion of how the findings and discussion answers the aim and research questions is being presented.

Hardanger

The Hardanger region consists of the four municipalities; Ullensvang, Kvam, Ulvik, and Eidfjord – all with big contrasts to each other and several highlights in each municipality (Hardangerfjord, n.d.-d). The region is known for the spectacular nature, magnificent waterfalls, mountains and one of Norway's biggest glaciers, Folgefonna. Along with this, fruit trees, cider and juice has become a big part of the Hardanger-region. Here, one can find Norway's largest orchard, Norway's outdoor capital, the second longest fjord in Norway, Hardangerfjorden, and the spectacular rock formation, Trolltunga.

Being a region that is highly built on traditions, Hardanger is still focusing on the same things as previous generations, such as local food and drinks, tourism and creating experiences that will be seen as extraordinary and unique for their visitors (Hardangerfjord, n.d.-d). Norwegian Scenic Routes (n.d.) has also marked four different routes within the region to be scenic routes, where one will get to experience the nature and culture on close hold.

Along with several places to get traditional and local food and drinks, Hardanger offers almost 100 different accommodation options, such as traditional hotels, camping, apartments, mountain lodges, and spectacular tree-top cabins (Hardangerfjord, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). Furthermore, the attractions and activities offered in the region are many, and there are options for all seasons, interests, ages, and preferences – even if one wants to do things alone, in a group, or with a guide (Hardangerfjord, n.d.-a). Hikes, skiing, cider cruise, RIB safari, cider farms, and museums, are just a few of the options in the region. One thing that can be seen as unique and spectacular in the Hardanger region, is that it is possible to go swimming in the fjord and go skiing – all in the same day (Hardangerfjord, n.d.-d).

Literature review

This chapter presents literature that was found relevant for the aim and research questions of this master thesis. The literature review is split into three different main categories. *Tourism destination* involves a presentation of different types of travel patterns, the importance of destination development, and destination marketing and branding. *Collaboration* presents the importance of collaboration at tourist destinations, both connected to the residents and other actors at the destination. The last category, *sustainable tourism* gives an insight to the definitions of sustainability and sustainable tourism, before presenting the tourism's role in the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, it gives an insight to the importance of collaboration in sustainable development, the Sustainable Destination Scheme. Lastly, and lastly Generation Z's attitude towards boycotting.

Tourism

Travelling has been part of peoples' lives for hundreds of years, and people today spend more and more time of their life traveling (Jacobsen & Viken, 2014; Kamfjord, 2015). Tourism can be defined as all the time people spend outside of their home and workplace that includes at least one overnight stay. Tourism is a social phenomenon that is experiencing an increasing attention in the way it impacts political, industrial, people and the society. Even though people are travelling, they tend to do many of the same things as they would do at home. This will be a combination of eating, sleeping, having fun and doing activities, while meeting other people. A great combination of several factors, all within the core industries of tourism.

Tourism involves tourists moving geographically depending on the reason for their travel (Kamfjord, 2015). There are four different types of travel patterns; Business stay, lay-still-stay, base stay, and round trip. *Business stays* are based on people travelling to a specific business and using the business' services. *Round trips* involve tourist travelling around in a

bigger area, wanting to experience as much as possible. These trips are also typically set before the tourists start their travel and are in many cases planned around profiled areas. The round trips are also in a high degree depending on the preferred transport of the tourist. *Lay-still-stays* involves both resort-stays and destination-stays. A resort stay is characterized as travelling to a company that includes all factors needed for the tourists' travels. A destination-stay is characterized as traveling to a destination where the total of all businesses at the destination lays the base for the stay.

Destination development

Kamfjord (2015) defines a tourist destination as a geographic area where actors within the core industries accommodation, catering, transport, and attractions, work together through collaborations to create a holistic experience for its visitors. To ensure that travelers want to travel to a destination, destinations will have to offer a product that meets the travelers' requirements, needs, and interests. Furthermore, a destination can be defined as geographical, economic and social unit that consist of various services, organizations and activities (Ness et al., 2014). The impression created by composition of attractions, services and other infrastructures, are often what makes a destination become a hotspot for tourism (Miocic et al., 2016).

Successful destination development involves a systematically work to take care of and develop a destination in a holistic way (Innovasjon Norge, n.d.; Kamfjord, 2015). It is of high importance to recognize and to keep both the tourists and the locals wishes and needs in mind, along with the businesses at the destination. One will have to focus on the possibilities and assumptions of the destination, while at the same time having sustainable perspectives in mind throughout the development. Destination development is a complex process and is dependent on several actors at the region working together and seeing the possibilities of

holistic development, at the same time as one will have to face several problems that will have to be solved along the process.

Destination development involves two basic aspects; create value and utilization of resources by specializing and creating relations between the different tourism actors, and focusing on achieving gains through integration and collaborations between tourism actors (Ness et al., 2014). These aspects are also found critically important within destination management and destination marketing, which are also important aspects within destination development.

Destination marketing

In connection to destination development, destination marketing can be seen as a critical aspect due to the importance of promoting the destination through collaborative marketing (Ness et al., 2014). Instead of focusing on each individual actor's product or service, destination marketing focuses on promoting the products and services of a destination as a whole (Cooper, 2016; Kamfjord, 2015). Through destination marketing it is important to meet the needs of the customers, while at the same time taking care of the destination's own goals, visions and objectives. Kamfjord (2015) highlights that destination marketing involves product marketing, by giving information and doing sales. Digital media, such as home pages and social media will also play an important role. Furthermore, a factor that is found of high importance through destination marketing is the role of hosting, which includes giving information at the destination and creating package deals.

It is found important to analyze factors and trends that are having an impact on the destination, so that one will more easily be able to plan and set strategies for future development (Cooper, 2016; Kamfjord, 2015; Sotiriadis, 2021). Research on competitors and finding its position in a market full of several big brands is found to be an important part of destination marketing, to maintain its position in the market and stay competitive. One will

have to build the brand of the destination and communicate it as a whole. Furthermore, it is found of high importance to find the suitable segment, target them, and find their preferred characteristics. Destination marketing is a systematic year-round activity and process, where planning, research, implementation, control and evaluation is playing an important role in the way of becoming unique. Furthermore, at destinations where tourism is important, destination marketing is found to be a critical factor regarding the growth and sustainability (Miočić et al., 2016).

Even though destination marketing is often found at a private and regional level, destination marketing is often found expensive, and is therefore also found important to the national tourism organizations (NTO) (Cooper, 2016). Furthermore, the NTO is functioning as a superior actor to market all destinations under a common 'umbrella'. Innovation Norway is building the brand of Norway and is therefore focusing on promoting Norway as a tourist destination as a whole, at the same time as they are to increase value and the economic growth. This is all done through partnerships and collaborations among actors that are connected to the tourism industry. However, as destination marketing is also found at a more local or regional level, the destinations themselves are responsible to market their own destination (Cooper, 2016; Morrison, 2013). Destination marketing is found to be connected to destination management, and it is then often seen as one of the destination management organizations' (DMO) jobs.

Destination branding. Destination branding is about marketing the image you want the destination to be perceived as, and differentiating it from other destinations (Morrison, 2013). The destination will have to build on something unique that the tourists can associate to the destination. Kamfjord (2015) stated that a critical factor is found to be the importance of offering an attractive destination, and further highlighted the importance of building the destination's brand through social media. The destination management organization (DMO) is

often found to be the one to go in front in the process of developing a destination's brand (Zouganeli et al., 2012).

Even though the DMO will be leading the process, the destination brand should reflect and be the result of good collaboration at a destination (Cooper, 2016). To succeed with destination branding, actors at the destination will have to collaborate, instead of only highlight one's own brand. If bigger actors choose to only highlight their own brand, and not the brand of the destination at all, it will potentially create great damages for the smaller actors, and also the destination brand overall. By working together and coordinating different actors' services, activities and interests, one will be able to create a product of higher quality and connect it to the destinations brand and image, leading to sustainable long-term competitiveness (Miocic et al., 2016).

The destination's brand should reflect the destination's attitude towards sustainability, and show the uniqueness of the destination (Zouganeli et al., 2012). The brand should further reflect that tourists' expectations towards sustainability has been taken into consideration, to increase the chances of giving the visitors positive experiences, positive word-of-mouth, and also to increase brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is to a great extent impacted by the tourists' satisfaction and the quality of the service they are getting from the destinations, and how satisfied they are with their visit (Zhang et al., 2014).

Destination management

Destination management is about managing the destination as a whole, focusing both on tourist experiences and the consequences it has to the destination (Cooper, 2016; Tritto & Fun, 2019). One will have to combine social-, biological-, psychological-, and physical carrying capacity. To succeed with destination management, one will have to effectively strengthen and encourage to collaborations between the different actors at the destination. This will then lead to a strengthen competitiveness, quality, and increase the sustainability of

the destination. The destination management is often based on businesses, organizations, and actors relevant to the tourism industry at the destination, and the destination management organization (DMO) is often the one in charge.

Tourism leadership is often based on distributed leadership, as the management is shared among several actors at a destination (Pechlaner et al., 2014). This leadership style is dependent on collaboration to function. However, even though one is working through an organization or having a shared management, it is often found relevant to have a person functioning somehow as a leader, e.g., a tourism responsible. A leader can get things done faster, function as a coordinator, and get others to understand better (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). A leader should motivate, encourage, inspire, and also influence towards achieving shared goals and value (Pechlaner et al., 2014).

Where the tourism represents a factor of high importance and is having a significant influence on the economy, a Ministry of Tourism is common (Cooper, 2016). In Norway, there are no Ministry of Tourism and travelling. Instead, tourism is being part of Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries (Regjeringen, 2021). Funded by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, Innovation Norway functions as the national tourism organization (NTO) in Norway (OECD, 2018). They have created the national tourism strategy, containing a large focus on sustainability (Innovation Norway, 2021b).

Destination Management Organization (DMO). DMOs are to be found at different levels, such as country, state, region, and city (Morrison, 2013). The role of the DMO is to lead the destination management, and is to a great extent connected to strategic leadership, marketing, development, and coordination, all with the background of reaching the destination's shared goals (Cooper, 2016; Morrison, 2013; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). A destination's success can to some extent be linked to the success of the DMO. The DMO is found to be important both connected to the control and coordination of development at the

destination and is further found important in the role of giving information to tourism actors, visitors and other important actors. Giving information is critical both online and at a destination, both before, during, and after a stay.

The DMO should give advice and support to local businesses, and facilitate and provide collaborations, partnerships and networks (Cooper, 2016; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). DMOs are found to be important in developing common goals, plans and strategies that will strengthen the collaborations' potential at the destination, and further the competitiveness and sustainable development (Fyall et al., 2012; Graci, 2013; Miocic et al., 2016). An essential part will be to gather the tourism actors, to make common goals and to create a framework to help with joint action. It is found to be a critical factor that the DMOs are motivating and pushing towards more focus on sustainability by incorporating guidelines, and further creating something unique to get the actors to see the shared value of collaborations.

Collaboration

Collaboration is often seen as a strategic factor when challenges regarding destination management and marketing are occurring, and is found to be a critical factor regarding the development and success of a tourist destination (Fyall et al., 2012; Miocic et al., 2016; Ness et al., 2014). To best succeed as a tourism destination, one will have to start thinking of the destination as a whole, and a collaborative advantage, rather than each individual actor thinking of the competitive advantage against each other. However, collaboration can be seen as a competitive advantage for the destination as a whole, in competition with other destinations (Farsari, 2018; Perkins et al., 2020). Collaboration is found to be a critical factor at destinations facing challenges regarding the economy, and also in helping destinations in a market where the competition is high (Morrison, 2013). Collaboration through networks is seen as key to handle the development that is happening these days, due to no actors being big

enough to be able to handle the arising demands of the future tourism by themselves (Ford et al., 2011; Hooley et al., 2020).

For businesses to survive, collaboration and business relationships are necessary (Ford et al., 2011). Either indirect or direct, all actors will somehow be connected and depend on each other. When interaction between actors at the destination goes over time, networks will be created, which will include both collaboration and competition. For networks to function and have a positive impact on all involved actors, both in present time and in the future, it is important to communicate and for actors to work towards a joint goal (Ford et al., 2011; Miodic et al., 2016). To achieve this, a manager is found to be important.

At destinations, there will always be imbalances of power among the different actors (Fyall et al., 2012). However, to succeed with collaborations, actors will have to gain trust and have a mutual engagement, along with being open in sharing knowledge and resources. This includes the scarce resources, as it will in the end lead to value for both them and other actors. Research shows that through collaborations, actors are able to see beneficial outcomes from other actors' resources, strengths and knowledge (Ford et al., 2011; Mintzberg et al., 2009; Tritto & Fun, 2019). Even though there naturally will be some internal competition, and that actors often want success for their own business, one will be able to learn from other's knowledge and share one's own knowledge with others, both on a long- and short-term.

Although many studies point to the benefits of collaboration, there are also challenges connected to it (Farsari, 2018; Perkins et al., 2020). This might include difficulties on how to allocate the resources, differences in actors' contributions, and lack of trust, communication, structure and leadership. Furthermore, the varying size of the actors might be seen as a challenge, along with differentiated effort and power imbalance. However, if things are to be changed, the biggest actors will have to be challenged.

Residents

A tourism destination can be seen as a complex network, involving several actors offering their own products and services (Zhang et al., 2022). However, to achieve success in both destination- and sustainable development, one will have to work together, also with the residents at the destination. It is found of high importance to include the residents to make sure that they are engaged in the development, and that they are having a positive attitude to the fact that the tourism is developing (Chiappa et al., 2019). When residents are having a positive attitude, it will have a great impact on the tourists' experiences, as they will feel positively welcome, which again will increase the possibility of them visiting at a later occasion and spreading positive word-of-mouth. It is therefore important to make sure that the residents feel like they are belonging to the destination (Zhang et al., 2022). Residents are to a great extent the ones that have to live with the impacts of tourism at their destination, both negatively and positively. Along with being hosts for tourism, residents contribute to tourism development by helping in solving occurring problems, while at the same time contributing to value creation.

Package deals

As customers today are interested in value through more unique experiences, collaborations are found to be essential, e.g., through creating package deals (Hooley et al., 2020; Morrison, 2013). Networks between actors at the destination will help in linking single actors' products together, to create a package that will be seen as an overall product for the destination (Ness et al., 2014). Package deals are contributing to a greater number of visitors, and should be possible to sell at the destination, online, and also through tour operators (Farsari, 2018). Packaging within tourism involves combining two or more different services and making a package that is purchasable for tourists as a single-price offering (Hooley et al., 2020; Morrison, 2013). At many destinations, the packaging is done by the tourism actors

themselves. However, the DMO is also found to be an important part of this process, as they can both help with creating the packages and in the sales process. Furthermore, it is found relevant that the DMOs should be involved by encouraging the actors at the destination to make packages, while at the same time offer incentives, both financial and non-financial. A destination's DMO is also often connected to developing packages that shows off local attractions through a set itinerary.

Sustainable tourism

Brundtland (1987, p. 15) defined sustainable development as “*meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs*”.

Previous years, sustainability has been seen as a factor only a few actors used as a tool to highlight their own excellence (Graci, 2013; Guo et al., 2019; Kamfjord, 2015). However, sustainable development has gradually been accepted by the society due to its value creation, and one is starting to realize that one will have to keep sustainable solutions in mind to stay on track to cope with the long-term competition, viability and development. Tourism is a rapidly growing industry, and the focus on sustainability represents a more and more important part of the work in the development of tourism (Miocic et al., 2016). Tourism industry can be seen as part of the problem to sustainability, due to the high degree of CO₂ emissions (Kamfjord, 2015). On the other hand, tourism industry will have to face the consequences, but will at the same time be part of the solutions.

There is an arising concern connected to tourism's contribution to sustainable development, and sustainable tourism has therefore become a factor of high interest amongst many actors connected to the tourism industry (Hall, 2019). The World Tourism Organization (n.d.-a) defines sustainable tourism development as “*tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities*”. Hall (2011) defined sustainable

tourism as a paradox, where tourism at one side represents a success among tourism actors, while at the other side one will have to face several environmental-, economic- and social impacts due to tourism development.

On the other hand, Gössling et. al. (2012) highlighted the fact that tourism today is becoming less and less sustainable, considering the rapid growth. Tourism can lead to a significant impact on the environment, the satisfaction of the locals, and also their economy (Tudorache et al., 2017). Tourism actors are showing limited progress towards the use and implementation of environmentally friendly solutions (Gössling et al., 2012). The industry tends to show a higher interest in only the economic aspect of sustainability, like increasing their profitability, instead of also focusing on social- and environmental impacts.

Several tourism destinations are depending on income from tourists, and at the same time have to face several challenges regarding the tourism (Graci, 2013). Although destinations have positive financial outcome from tourism, it is important to consider that they have to cope with challenges related to social-, economic- and environmental impacts. Due to tourism development, one might have to face huge financial sanctions, might have to give up on personal habitats or buildings, infrastructure will be worn out and in need of upgrading, and nature might be degraded. Furthermore, pollution through air and noise, both at land and sea, is found to be a great challenge.

In many cases, tourism destinations have not come far enough in the process of being able to offer sustainable alternatives for their visitors (Prayag et al., 2022). On the other hand, some are having good sustainable alternatives, but they are not being good enough in marketing their alternatives or guiding their visitors in this direction. It can therefore be seen that several destinations are having a great potential for improvements in sustainable alternatives, and how to engage their visitors on thinking on the environmental and sustainable issues.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Tourism has a great potential of contributing in sustainable solutions and in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (The World Tourism Organization, n.d.-b). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) consist of 17 goals (figure 1) and 169 targets that lays the base for the common goal of eradicating poverty, fighting inequality and stop the climate changes within 2030 (Hall, 2019; The World Tourism Organization, n.d.-b). Tourism sector is found important to all 17 goals, but are specifically mentioned in goals 8, 12 and 14. Furthermore it can be discussed that it is of high importance to goal 17 as well, due to collaboration's role in sustainable tourism development.

Figure 1

Sustainable Development Goals



Figure 1. “Sustainable Development Goals”, n.d., by United Nations.

(<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/>).

Travel & Tourism sector is contributing a lot to the global gross domestic product (GDP), and is found among the top export earners on a global level (The World Tourism Organization, n.d.-b; World Travel & Tourism Council, n.d.). Before the pandemic, the GDP was accounting 10.4%. In 2022 it accounted 7.6% and is still arising. Tourism is also one of the biggest providers of jobs and are worldwide currently providing one in ten jobs.

Tourism often consists of small businesses and entrepreneurs, and is shown to be contributing to lowering the national poverty by creating several jobs and foster the economic growth (The World Tourism Organization, n.d.-b). Diversification will contribute to the strengthening of social values, and by offering decent work opportunities, tourism will contribute positively to the SDGs. An important factor for the tourism industry to become more sustainable, is that they need to become more sustainable in their production and consumption. To get a result within all three dimensions of sustainability, one will have to focus on factors like creating jobs, biodiversity, waste handling, local communities, and the use of water and energy. Tourism is also at a high degree impacting the coastal and maritime zones, and tourism should therefore focus more on sustainable solutions regarding marine resources. Littering has become a huge problem, along with pollution and greenhouse gases, all impacting the life and acidifying the sea. To achieve the SDGs, tourism is found to have an important role, and collaborations and partnerships are essential (Graci, 2013; Hall, 2019).

Collaboration for sustainable development

As no actors possibly can handle the SDGs and the sustainable development alone, collaboration is found to be a critical factor in the work of sustainable development at tourist destinations (Bjärstig, 2017; Graci, 2013; Hall, 2019). Even though powerful actors within the tourism industry will have a greater impact on enabling sustainable alternatives, collaborations and partnerships is found of high importance to engage actors and tackle

challenges and problems that are occurring. Collaborations can also be used as a tool to handle stakeholder conflicts, and to increase the quality of decisions and the resources.

Collaborating with sustainable development will contribute in reducing uncertainty, as there will be a shared risk (Chauhan et al., 2022). With the SDGs as a guideline, actors will share knowledge and benefits, and reach for a common goal that will create value for the destination as a whole. It is further found relevant that the DMOs contribute in creating networks between actors at the tourism destination, to ensure sustainable development, which again will lead to competitive development (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

When working with sustainable development, the importance of policy framework and guidelines is found important (Guo et al., 2019). However, it has shown to be difficult for companies and countries to capture and report the impacts tourism is having on the aspects of sustainability, and management is found of high importance to tackle and solve complex problems (Bjärstig, 2017; Hall, 2019). Furthermore, sustainable tourism development should be treated as a holistic concept, balancing economic-, social- and environmental dimensions, even though many find social- and economic impacts to be more accessible. One of the mistakes that often is being done, is that there is a greater focus on two of the dimensions, and that the last dimension is being forgotten. Even though actors have tried to become more sustainable for several years, it turns out to be difficult due to the lack of collaboration and partnerships (Graci, 2013). Several municipalities find collaborations to be a pain, something that can be seen as a challenge regarding both destination- and sustainable development (Bjärstig, 2017). On the other hand, collaboration is a critical factor if one is to aim at sustainable development, and especially in the work of gaining the Sustainable destination scheme, where collaboration is a requirement (Innovasjon Norge, 2023; Visit Norway, n.d.-e).

Cultural landscapes, local societies, magnificent nature, cultural traditions and heritage are all part of the tourism's vulnerable resources (Hall, 2019; Visit Norway, n.d.-d). If the

tourism is not managed correctly, it will have a negative impact on several vulnerable resources, such as the planet and people. However, many of the resources are highly renewable if they are used correctly. The national tourism strategy states that sustainability now is seen as a concrete goal and a value basis for the development of the tourism in Norway. To make the process easier and more systematic for the tourism industry, the Sustainable Development Scheme has been developed by Innovation Norway.

Sustainable Destination Scheme

If one wants to travel to destinations with a high focus on sustainability in Norway, one can look for destinations labelled by the National Sustainable Destination Scheme (Innovasjon Norge, 2023; Visit Norway, n.d.-d, n.d.-e). This label is a voluntary tool that will guide tourist destinations into the right direction in their sustainability work, both by offering guidelines and certification. Destinations that are labelled by the Sustainable Destination Scheme show that they are having a high focus on prioritizing sustainability, ethics, and social- and environmental responsibilities. The label is targeted at destination companies and other actors that are relevant for the tourism industry, within a specific geographical area, and can be seen as a positive tool to use in the future marketing, giving the destination a competitive advantage. Destinations working on their sustainability challenges, will be focusing on both the destination as a whole and in details.

Innovation Norway has created ten principles for sustainable tourism, and the Sustainable Destination Scheme has its point of departure in these principles (Visit Norway, n.d.-e). The principles are based on the three dimensions of sustainability. *Conservation of nature, culture and the environment* involve presenting, while at the same time taking care of the local history, culture and traditions. One will have to show a high degree of respect towards nature and the wildlife, and make sure that the degradation is lowered. Furthermore, the destination will have to focus on the climate challenges, both regarding pollution and

being aware of their use of scarce resources. *Strengthening of social values* involves making sure that the lives of the locals are being considered, while at the same time ensuring that there is no degradation of the common goods at the destination. Furthermore, it is important to have the locals feeling included in the development of tourism, and to offer jobs of high quality within the tourism industry. The activities and experiences offered to the tourists should be of high quality, and everyone must be included. The last dimension, *economic sustainability* is about the value creation at the destination, and making sure that the destination stays competitive at a long-term perspective.

Getting the label. The process of getting the label is a period of two years, and collaboration is of high importance in this process (Visit Norway, n.d.-e). However, before getting started with the process, one has to go through a strict list of checkpoints together with Innovation Norway to ensure that the destination meets the requirements of what it takes to be qualified for the Sustainable Destination scheme, and also to get the economic support needed for the process (Visit Norway, n.d.-a). This includes that the geographical area for the destination must be defined. Along with a destination company working on behalf of tourism companies in the area, there must be a system for how the destination finances their joint tasks. As collaboration is an important part of the process, it is also important to involve the municipalities and to have a tourism strategy plan that includes information about the destination's goal of sustainability.

Once the project has begun, measures are implemented. An action plan is then created to ensure that the work of sustainable development meets the required standards (Visit Norway, n.d.-a, n.d.-e). Collaboration and involvement from local actors, destination companies, and the municipality, are of high importance and a critical factor for gaining success towards reaching a common goal. The action plan will after some time be revised, and the destination will be getting points and a score on their achievements, leading to a

possible qualification for the Sustainable Destination Scheme and an awarding of the mark. Furthermore, destinations that have been labelled by the Sustainable Destination Scheme have to be re-marked every 3rd year, to ensure that the destination is still working with sustainability. This includes documentation of their work, analyses, regular measurements and a control visit at the destination. The achievements will be raised over time, to ensure destinations' long-term commitment to sustainability.

The label shows that the destination is contributing to the United Nations' sustainability goals and is the only labelling for the Nordic regions' tourism destinations (Innovasjon Norge, 2023; Innovation Norway, 2023). The label is of high value for both tourism businesses and destinations, giving them a competitive advantage by being marketed as a sustainable destination that are following strict guidelines to ensure less environmental footprints, and that local communities and cultural heritage are being preserved. This label is to a great extent something that Generation Z is looking for when they decide on where to travel (Brand et al., 2022; Seyfi et al., 2023).

Generation Z

Generation Z (Gen Z) is the generation born after the middle of the 1990s until early 2010s (European Travel Commission, 2020; Nieżurawska et al., 2023). Gen Z is the future of the travel and tourism industry, they travel a lot, and are the ones that will shape and give value to destinations in the future. Even though this segment seems challenging, it has emerged into becoming the largest customer group, with a high influence on the future.

Gen Z is differentiating a lot from other generations due to more than 80% of them being part of a segment that is more focused on the environment, or mixed-environmental, and are highly aware of the environmental footprints and that their practices should be sustainable (Prayag et al., 2022). For Gen Z to have a good experience when travelling, the

environmental aspects has shown to be of high importance, and sustainability has therefore become an important part of their decision-making process (Seyfi et al., 2023).

Generation Z has never experienced a time without the internet, and the use of mobile devices and social media is a second nature to this generation (European Travel Commission, 2020; Seyfi et al., 2023). When spending more time on social media one is also being more exposed to information about e.g., global- and ideological crisis (Brand et al., 2022; Seyfi et al., 2023). As the younger generation is the future, they are often being targeted by this kind of marketing, and therefore become more concerned about the global warming and environmental degradations and feel pressured of taking responsibility for saving the future.

Boycotting. Gen Z is known for boycotting, which often also originates in their use of social media (Seyfi et al., 2023). This means that they are rewarding businesses based on their behaviors towards sustainability and environmental issues, by purchasing the products and services of these selected businesses. They are making choices based on their self-identity and self-perception, and do not want to waste resources that will impact future generations in a negative manner. Boycotting will therefore influence actors to become engaged in sustainable and ethical practices, at the same time as Gen Zers influence others through word-of-mouth. When doing a purchase, Gen Zers tend to care about sustainability and are often looking for different sustainability labels (Brand et al., 2022; Seyfi et al., 2023). They are willing to pay a higher price for ethical alternatives, also within tourism.

However, it shows that even though the Gen Zers are having attitudes that are strongly oriented towards environmental and sustainability issues, it has become a big challenge that they do not manage to show the same attitude and engagement in practice when arriving at a destination (Prayag et al., 2022; Seyfi et al., 2023). The older generations are not necessarily having the same view and are not thinking as much about these issues, but on the other hand, they are demonstrating a more sustainable behavior and practice when visiting a destination.

Method

The method that has been used in this project is based on the aim and research questions of this master thesis (Johannessen et al., 2020). In this chapter, the research design, data collection, informant sampling and interview process will be described. Furthermore, the challenges and limitations connected to the data collection is presented. The quality of the study will be presented through evaluating the reliability and validity. The last part of this chapter is about ethical considerations and information that had to be approved before starting the data collection.

Research- design and method

The method that has been the most used within research of sustainable tourism, and that was found the most accurate for answering the aim of this thesis, is qualitative research (Guo et al., 2019). As the goal of this master thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of collaboration leading to sustainable development at a tourist destination, qualitative research has been considered to be the best approach.

Qualitative research design was found suitable for this exploratory project, to gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of the social phenomenon of collaboration and sustainable development, and is seen as the best research method on themes where there has been little previous research (Johannessen et al., 2020; Neuman, 2014; Thagaard, 2018). Furthermore, a qualitative research method focuses on a smaller group of units, giving a closer interaction with the informants and the possibility of gaining a better understanding of their personal thoughts and reflections of the situation.

A case study focuses specifically on a case that usually is time and place dependent (Johannessen et al., 2020; Thagaard, 2018). This project, that is being carried out within a short period of time and at a specific geographical area, the Hardanger region, can therefore be characterized as a single case study, with multiple units of analysis. Throughout a case

design, a qualitative approach is often carried out, such as interviews, which also were found to be the best approach on how to collect as much content-rich, varied, and extensive information possible to answer the aim and research questions of this thesis. Data is also often collected from several units, which is much of the reason why this project is based on information from 12 interviews.

As this project is a case study, it is found of high relevance to have a literature review as a base (Brunt et al., 2017; Yin, 1993). The literature review helps determine the choice of case and helps strengthening the outcome of the project and support the generalization. However, even though a case study contributes to a detailed and in-depth research on a case, and opens for transferring knowledge to other cases, a negative side of case studies is that it is not always possible to generalize the findings to a wider context.

Data collection

This master thesis is contributing to knowledge by analyzing primary data that has been collected through interviews in the Hardanger region. Primary data means that the data has been generated by me, the researcher of this project (Neuman, 2014). However, the information collected will be discussed in relation to previous studies and literature, which will be based on secondary data.

Based on the time limit of this project, in-depth interviews were found to be the most accurate way of collecting data. Interviews are the most used method within qualitative research and functions like a conversation that is having some kind of structure and purpose (Johannessen et al., 2020). Conducting interviews were found relevant for the thesis due to the possibility of acquiring as much content rich information possible in a relatively short time. Furthermore, interviews open for more freely answers of informants' own experiences and perceptions, and you get a lot more information, than for example by doing a questionnaire.

However, it is important to keep in mind that there can be some things that might become a disadvantage if you are not aware of it and plan well in advance (Brunt et al., 2017). Interviews might be a time consuming method, both before, during, and after the interviews. When you carry out a project alone, and then also the interviews, it will be very helpful to make audio recordings of the interviews. Both because of the challenges connected to taking notes and talk to the informant at the same time, but also the fact that audio recordings will contribute to a better basis for writing and citations. However, audio recordings fall under the General Data Protection Regulation, and involves personal data, consent, and report obligations (Sikt, n.d.-a). The process of getting the project approved by Sikt, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research is estimated to take from 0 to 30 days. Also, the time spent both during and after the interviews can be time consuming. Interviews are often estimated to last longer than 30 minutes, and after finishing the interviews one will also have to transcribe the interviews. It is therefore important to plan in advance, so that you have enough time for all different parts of your project.

After a tentative time-schedule was set, to make sure that all possible time-thieves were taken into considerations, the interviews were designed. To collect most optimal data for the phenomenon in question, the interviews were designed to be semi-structured (Johannessen et al., 2020; Thagaard, 2018). A semi-structured interview was created with an interview guide as a starting point. However, due to implementing interviews from both more concrete tourism actors and also some actors that might be more superior to several tourism companies, I found it relevant to create two interview guides. As several units were part of the project, and that the purpose was to compare and discuss all answers and aspects, it was found important to have interview guides that secured the informants of getting mostly the same questions, but also to make sure that the questions fit to the different informants. This included questions representing the most central themes of the project, with sub-questions that

covers more specific themes. However, this way of implementing an interview is open for asking follow-up questions where it was found interesting to get more information or the interview went into different directions. By using semi-structured interviews, I was left with a unique set of information to use further on in analysis and discussions.

Designing an interview guide. The aim of the project, “*Collaboration as mean for a sustainable tourism destination – A case study of Hardanger,*” and the belonging research questions was setting the base for developing questions for the interviews. Even though a theoretical frame and a literature review was set before developing the questions, it was still found of high importance to make questions that were understandable for all informants and to avoid leading questions (Johannessen et al., 2020; Thagaard, 2018). This was done by avoiding too complicated words, not to have too long questions, and by asking questions that made them think themselves. It was also found of high importance to keep in mind that the interviews were supposed to be a comfortable session for the informants, and questions were therefore designed to encourage the informants of giving as much concrete, supplementary information possible, through own narratives, thoughts and reflections.

The questions were pre-made as a guidance, but due to the interview being semi-structural, the questions were reformulated during the interview to adapt to the situation and conversation (Johannessen et al., 2020; Thagaard, 2018). It was found important to make the questions flexible, so that it was possible to ask them at different times during the interview. This opened for a possibility of asking follow-up questions where it was found reasonable to get some more details. The set frame for the interview guide was therefore based on some main theme, with underlying sub-questions, as shown in Table 1. Even though this project is based on two different interview guides, they are both more or less based on the same frame.

Table 1*Interview guide – framework*

Steps	Description	Topics	Example
Step 1. Introduction	Loose talk to get more confident about the process. Introducing myself, and explain more about the project.	Presenting the theme, confidentialization, information letter and consent form.	“Before we start, do you have any questions?” “Is it ok for you that we record the interview?”
Step 2 Main themes	Questions containing the main themes of the project.	Importance of tourism, sustainability, collaboration.	“When you hear the word sustainability, what do you think?” “Do you have any collaborations with other actors in the region?”
Step 3 Sub-questions	Questions that are connected to the main themes, but more in detail.	Sustainable tourism schemes, challenges, possibilities.	“What do you see as the biggest challenges with sustainability and collaboration?”
Step 4 Summing up	Summarizing what we have talked about and making sure that everything has been understood correctly.	Clarifications, extra questions, future process, thank you.	“Have I understood you correctly...” Is there something we haven’t talked about that you would like to add?”

Before getting on with the data collection process, the information letter and interview guides had to be approved by Sikt, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. Both the information letter and interview guides, as shown in Appendix 1, 3

and 5, were made and used in Norwegian throughout this project. However, for clarity in this project, it has been decided to also translate them into English, shown in Appendix 2, 4 and 6.

Informants

Through this project, 12 interviews have been conducted. Based on prior research on the region, the literature review, and previous knowledge, the informants were purposively sampled from all actors that somehow is connected to the tourism industry in the Hardanger region (Neuman, 2014). To ensure that the level of confidentiality is at a high level, and to make sure that all informants are held confidential, no names of the actors or businesses will be mentioned in the thesis. All informants will therefore be referred to as Informant A, B, C, D, and so forth.

When finding informants for this thesis, it was found relevant to carry out a strategic selection (Johannessen et al., 2020). This was in order to find the most relevant informants within the field, that could possibly give the most detailed and relevant information for answering the aim and research questions of this project. As the aim of this master thesis is to look at collaboration as a mean for sustainable tourist destination in the region of Hardanger, it was found relevant to speak to several actors working within the tourism industry at the destination, involving all core industries within traveling and tourism. Furthermore, it was considered to be of high importance to include both small and big actors that are connected to different parts of the tourism industry the region. The reason of this was to collect most possible information from different angles, that covered different perspectives. Furthermore, it was found important to conduct interviews in all municipalities that is being part of the Hardanger region.

To kindly contact potential informants that were found relevant and interesting to the project, I designed an e-mail containing an introduction to why I was contacting them, and an introduction to myself and the project. Being aware that it could be challenging of getting in

touch with the informants and that recruitment often is a time-consuming process, snowball sampling was further used to reach the saturation level (Johannessen et al., 2020; Neuman, 2014). This allowed other informants to come with suggestions on who to recruit further on in the project. To get the best and most detailed information, I saw a relevance of talking to meaningful people with the most knowledge within the business. Knowing that it often is difficult to get in touch with leaders or others in higher positions, I was open to talk to anyone to reach the saturation level, as long as they had knowledge about the subject in question.

Due to a low number of answers to the e-mails, and the fact that after a week I had only made an appointment for a couple of interviews, the e-mails were followed up by a phone call, which turned out to be a much more productive method and led to appointments for several more interviews. I continued the process with sending an e-mail and following up with a phone call to reach a higher level of saturation, and continued this process until I reached a satisfying saturation point of data collection for this project. This project were following a non-linear research process, making it possible to move both back and sideways before moving forward (Neuman, 2014). Furthermore, the snowball method was also used, due to other informants giving with several good suggestions on who to contact further, and again helping to reach the best possible saturation level.

What characterizes the final sample is that most informants are working in higher positions, and they are all people with knowledge that has been found relevant for the aim and research questions of the project. The sample consists of 7 female and 5 male informants. Due to the confidentiality and personal privacy, the names of the businesses are anonymized, and they are categorized as superior- and tourism actors, as shown in Table 2. The sample consists of 5 superior actors and 7 tourism actors. However, their common denominator is that they are all working within the core industries of tourism industry in the Hardanger region. There

are informants representing each municipality in the region of Hardanger; Ullensvang, Kvam, Eidfjord, and Ulvik.

Table 2

Profile of informants

Informant	Gender	Actor
A	Female	Superior actor
B	Female	Tourism actor
C	Male	Tourism actor
D	Male	Superior actor
E	Male	Tourism actor
F	Female	Superior actor
G	Female	Tourism actor
H	Male	Tourism actor
I	Female	Superior actor
J	Female	Tourism actor
K	Female	Tourism actor
L	Male	Superior actor

Interview process

It is found of high importance to be aware of the possibility of the informants feeling uncomfortable in the interview setting and by being close to the researcher, which again can affect the behavior, ways of talking, and willingness to give information (Johannessen et al., 2020; Thagaard, 2018). With this in mind, it was found important to facilitate a safer and

relaxed interview situation to make sure that the informants felt safe in sharing their knowledge, thoughts and reflections. To achieve this, I decided to start the whole session with a calm chat to get to know each other a bit and feel more confident about the situation. This was all done before the recording was started, and the informants were again asked if they accepted to go through with the recordings. When arriving at the place of the interviews, it was made sure to contact the informant directly to avoid any non-participants becoming aware of the interview.

Before implementing the interviews, all informants were given information about the project, confidentiality, their rights, and what it involved for them to participate in the project. This was done by sending them an information letter, which also contained a consent form, shown in Appendix 1 and 2. All informants were encouraged to carefully read it thoroughly before the interview. However, due to the importance of everyone reading it, extra copies were brought to the interviews. All informants were then asked to sign the consent form, either through e-mail in advance, or when meeting for the interview. By signing the consent form, the informants also agreed to audio recordings. The interviews were then recorded on an approved device. Furthermore, I had also made the decision about not making notes during the interview. This was done to give all my attention and focus to the informants.

In order to facilitate the best alternatives for the informants, they were all given the opportunity of scheduling a time that suited them best. Preferably within three weeks, which was the time I had scheduled for data collection. However, when adapting to the informants, it turned out difficult to schedule all interviews within the same three weeks. I was therefore flexible, and conducted the interviews spread over four weeks. The locations were also adapted according to the informants' preferences. Most of the informants wanted to do the interview at their respective workplace, but some wanted to meet in their home or at cafés. Even though it was said to be preferable to conduct the interviews face-to-face, it turned out

difficult for some. As a telephone interview is having most of the same strengths, I decided to use this to reach a satisfactory saturation level (Neuman, 2014). 5 out of 12 interviews were therefore carried out as telephone interviews.

To adapt to the informants and to make it more comfortable for them, it was decided to do all interviews in Norwegian. As all informants were Norwegians, this was found more reasonable and comfortable for them. Conducting the interviews in Norwegian also contributes to avoiding the informants struggling in translating to English, as they might lose their point when having to talk in a language that they might not be very comfortable with.

The length of the interviews varied from 16 minutes to 1 hour and 40 minutes, as the amount of information given from the informants were very varied. All interview situations were experienced as relaxing, and it was perceived that the informants became more engaged and were willing to give more information when the interview was more like a conversation and not an overly formal interview. They were given the opportunity of speaking freely, but I came up with some questions and topics based on the interview guide. When relevant themes, that was not part of the interview guide, emerged during an interview these were passed on as questions to the next informants as well. Furthermore, even though the informants were talking more freely, it was important to show interest by nodding and giving conforming words (Johannessen et al., 2020).

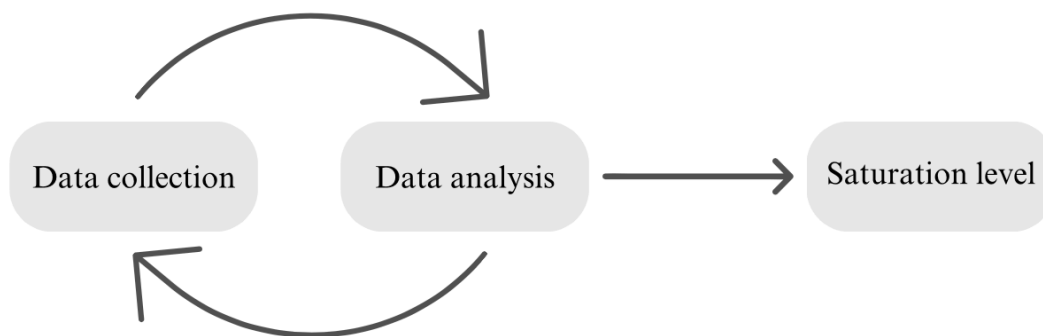
Saturation level

In the end of the data collection, I had conducted 12 interviews with informants that are all relevant for the aim and research questions of this thesis, “*Collaboration as means for sustainable tourism destination – A case study of Hardanger*”. The satisfying level of saturation was reached after collecting enough information to answer the aim of the thesis, and when interviews had been conducted among informants from both small and big businesses, in all municipalities in the region.

The process to reach the saturation level consisted of going back and forth between data collection and data analysis, as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2

Reaching saturation level



When an interview had been conducted, the process of transcribing and getting an overview of the findings was started immediately. This was done to get an overview on the need of further information and made the decision about the need for more interviews easier. Originally it was estimated that around 10 interviews would be conducted. However, when the planned numbers approached, there was still new information coming in during the interviews, and a decision was made that more interviews were needed, to ensure that important information was not missed. After going back and forth between the data collection and data analysis several times, the interviews started to contain the same information as previous interviews. A couple more interviews were therefore carried out to ensure that there was still the same information, and that there was no need to conduct more. After conducting 12 interviews, there was no new information, and a satisfactory level of saturation was achieved.

Data analysis

After conducting the 12 interviews and I felt that I had reached the saturation point, the interviews were all transcribed. Transcribing involves getting the oral audio file to a written file (Thagaard, 2018). This way, one will be able to use quotations and to better analyze the information. When deciding to record the interviews and later on transcribe them, instead of taking notes during the interview, it opened the possibility of doing some reflections and analysis at the same time one is transcribing. The audio files were listened to carefully, and all interviews were written thoroughly down word by word. At the same time as transcribing, the personal information was anonymized.

Furthermore, as the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, the interviews were translated in the process of transcribing. To ensure that no points were lost, and that no uncertainty about the reliability of the project should arise, it was found of high importance to translate the interviews carefully. This was done by listening to the recordings several times and double checking that the information had been translated correctly. Once it was ensured that all translations were correct, the files were stored in encrypted folders, and separated from the audio files, in order to maintain Sikt's guidelines.

Coding

To analyze the interviews, a thematic- and context analysis was evaluated to be the best approach for the aim of this thesis, as it gives an in-depth understanding of the topics in the transcripts and also an insight in the variation between them (Thagaard, 2018). After transcribing all interviews, the transcripts were firstly read through to get a first impression of the informants' thoughts, reflections and opinions. However, to make sure that no key points were lost in the process, the transcripts were read several times to get the best overview possible.

Furthermore, it was decided to highlight all key findings that were found relevant in each transcript. As this is an exploratory study, it was found of high importance to have an open mind in the process, even though the literature review and aim of the thesis somehow had an impact on some of the themes worth looking for. An open mind is important to become aware of information that could contribute to new information within the subject in question or beyond.

Later on, a context-based analysis was done, and all highlighted key findings were coded to identify different themes. The first part of the coding was done by setting an initial code to each of the highlighted findings, a code that summarized what they were all about. Furthermore, the codes of the different interviews were compared to see if there were any similarities among the codes. The initial codes were then secondly coded, with a greater focus on creating structure and developing categories among the codes that were common for the various interviews. As an interview guide with set categories was set in advance, and laid the base for the interview, it was also found naturally that these became the main categories in the coding. However, as it was found of high relevance to identify as much detailed information possible, several sub-categories were also identified. Even though the literature review that was done in advance gave an indication on some themes to look for, the process was done with an open mind.

However, due to the fact that the interviews contained a big amount of information, and that therefore some information fell outside of the topic of the project, it was seen necessary to double check that all categories were found relevant to the aim of the project. This process helped in reducing data that was not found necessary, without losing data that was found important to the project. However, it was important to keep an open mind during the process and be open to other themes than what the literature had laid as a base in the

beginning. The findings from all 12 interviews were then presented in categories and further discussed in connection with the theory presented in the literature review.

Challenges and limitations

During this project, some challenges has occurred. A challenge that occurred early in the project was the definition of the Hardanger region, which also became challenging during the interviews. It occurred that both online sources and informants are having different opinions on the geographical delimitation of the region. Some were clear that Kvinnherad, which takes up a big part of the area along the Hardanger fjord, is also part of the Hardanger region. On the other hand, most of the informants of this project believe that only Ullensvang, Kvam, Eidfjord and Ulvik are part of the region. In this thesis, the Hardanger region has therefore been limited and defined as Ullensvang, Eidfjord, Ulvik and Kvam.

The recruitment process was experienced to be a lot more time consuming than originally planned. E-mails on the business' websites were often very general and not leading to getting in touch with one concrete person. The contact through these e-mails were therefore often time consuming. Another experience was also that information about a call was sent forward to someone else, with a promise about getting back to me, something that in several cases did not happen. Furthermore, I was in touch with some people that suddenly stopped answering the e-mails, and the agreement about an interview was therefore to be seen as cancelled.

As the municipalities vary in size, the number of businesses that are related to tourism and travelling will also be variable. Therefore, another challenge that occurred was experiencing high difficulties to get a sample that included the same number of informants in each municipality. The bigger municipalities have more businesses within the relevant field, and it was therefore easier to find informants that are relevant for the data collection of this project. In the smaller municipalities, I experienced that several of the businesses were

seasonal businesses. They were not open at the time of my data collection, and for that reason not possible to get in touch with. Due to this, it was not possible to reach the same number, and I have therefore conducted some more interviews in the bigger municipalities than in the smaller ones. However, I made sure that I got at least some interviews in all municipalities before being satisfied with the level of saturation.

The places of the interviews were also somehow impacting the interviews. As some interviews were held outside of the informants' respective workplaces, such as in cafés, there were people in the background. This had an impact on the recordings and made it more time-consuming to transcribe those interviews, due to hearing noises in the background of the interview. There was then a need of listening to the audio files several times to make sure that no key information was lost. Some of the interviews also contained some short breaks due to unforeseen interruptions, but due to privacy concerns these will not be further elaborated.

The quality of the research

The quality of a qualitative research is to a great extent dependent on the trustworthiness of the research (Thagaard, 2018). Validity, reliability and generalization are three factors worth looking at when evaluating the trustworthiness and quality of the research.

Reliability and validity

Reliability focuses on how the data of the research were developed, its accuracy, and how the data collection were carried out (Johannessen et al., 2020; Thagaard, 2018). Within reliability, it is found of relevance that other researchers should be able to re do the study at a later occasion, and still get the same results. However, as the way people are analyzing and that the subjectivity throughout the analysis will differ, challenges regarding other researchers' possibility of getting the same results will occur. Within qualitative research, the importance of raising the reliability by carrying out the process in a good way is found critical.

The questions in the interview guide were designed in a way that should make it easier for the informants, both in terms of the content and the order of the questions. To facilitate for the informants, and to make sure that they felt comfortable throughout the whole interview, they were all conducted in Norwegian, and the informants were to a great extent giving the opportunity of speaking freely. This will also contribute to the reliability of the project, due to the fact that the informants then will have an easier time talking about their opinions and thoughts, without important points of view being lost in the translation. On the other hand, the interviews had to be translated while transcribing. A bias was then found to be the risk of losing information, or important points of information, meanings and thoughts being misunderstood in translation. To strengthen the reliability on this point, the interviews were therefore read through several times, translated carefully, and double checked.

Throughout the interviews it was expected that the informants would contribute with a great variation of answers, and the questions were therefore designed in a way that the informants answers were contributing to a shared understanding of the different questions. Even though the answers of the informants varied, the informants' answers were to a great extent contributing to answering the aim and research questions of the project. The interviews had a big difference in time consumption, and varied from 16 minutes to 1 hour and 40 minutes. However, this is not seen as a bias for the quality of the project. Some informants provided short and concise information, while others needed more time to think and come up with their opinion. Since the informants were allowed to speak freely, they were not disturbed while talking, only with confirming words, nodding and showing interest. This was done to get most possible information during the interview. However, follow-up questions were used when things were unclear or if there was a need for more information.

Along with the reliability, looking at the validity is an important part in evaluating the quality of the research. Validity involves whether the project investigates what it is said to

investigate (Johannessen et al., 2020; Thagaard, 2018). In other words, if it responds to the project's aim and research questions, which was found to be the initially wish of what the project is to explore. To strengthen the validity of the research, the questions of the semi-structured interviews were designed based on the literature review, which again was based on the aim and research questions of the project. However, even though an interview guide was set before the interviews, the informants were able to speak freely, giving their own thoughts, opinions and solutions, all contributing to a more explorative research and not answers not only being impacted by the research questions.

The validity was further strengthened by conducting interviews in all municipalities in the region, leading to a wider understanding of the phenomenon in research. However, it was found difficult to conduct the same number of interviews in all municipalities, and there might therefore be some biases connected to this. The reason for this bias may depend on the fact that the size of the municipalities is so variable, and therefore a varying number of relevant actors in each municipality. On the other hand, the project contains an even distribution of large and small actors, which again is contributing to an increased validity of the project.

Generalization

Generalization is about whether the study that has been carried out, also can be transferred to similar phenomenon (Johannessen et al., 2020; Thagaard, 2018). This means that the findings of this project could have been used at other destinations than the Hardanger region. However, even though there is a literature review that helps strengthening and support the outcome of this project, the findings are not possible to generalize. This is due to the fact that all interviews were unique and that the informants were able to speak freely, and other researchers would not have gained the same results if conducting the same project.

Even though this master thesis is not possible to generalize, it is possible to use as inspiration for future research, as it opens for possibilities on researching other dimensions within the field of tourism, collaboration and sustainability.

Ethical considerations

Before starting the data collection through interviews, the project was approved by Sikt, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (Sikt, n.d.-b). This was to ensure that the data collection was handled in a legal manner, and that information was saved, processed and used in legal ways. All personal information that possibly could track the informant's identity was kept encrypted during the process and anonymized in the transcriptions and thesis. Before the interviews, all informants were provided with information letters, informing about the purpose of the project, how their personal information would be handled, the duration of the project, and what their participation would mean to them. The information letter, consent form, and interview guides were all approved by Sikt before the data collection of the project started. These are all shown in in Norwegian in appendix 1, 3, and 5, and in English in appendix 2, 4 and 6.

Findings and discussion

The findings from all 12 interviews will be presented in this chapter. It was found necessary to keep an open mind throughout the analysis. On the other hand, the interview guides contained questions within three different categories; importance of tourism, collaboration and sustainability, and it was found natural that these also then laid the foundation for the analysis. Furthermore, through a thematic- and context analysis, several sub-categories have been identified, as shown in figure 3. As data collection and analysis were carried out in parallel, it was found natural to implement the findings and discussion at the same time. The findings will be discussed in the light of the theory presented in the literature review.

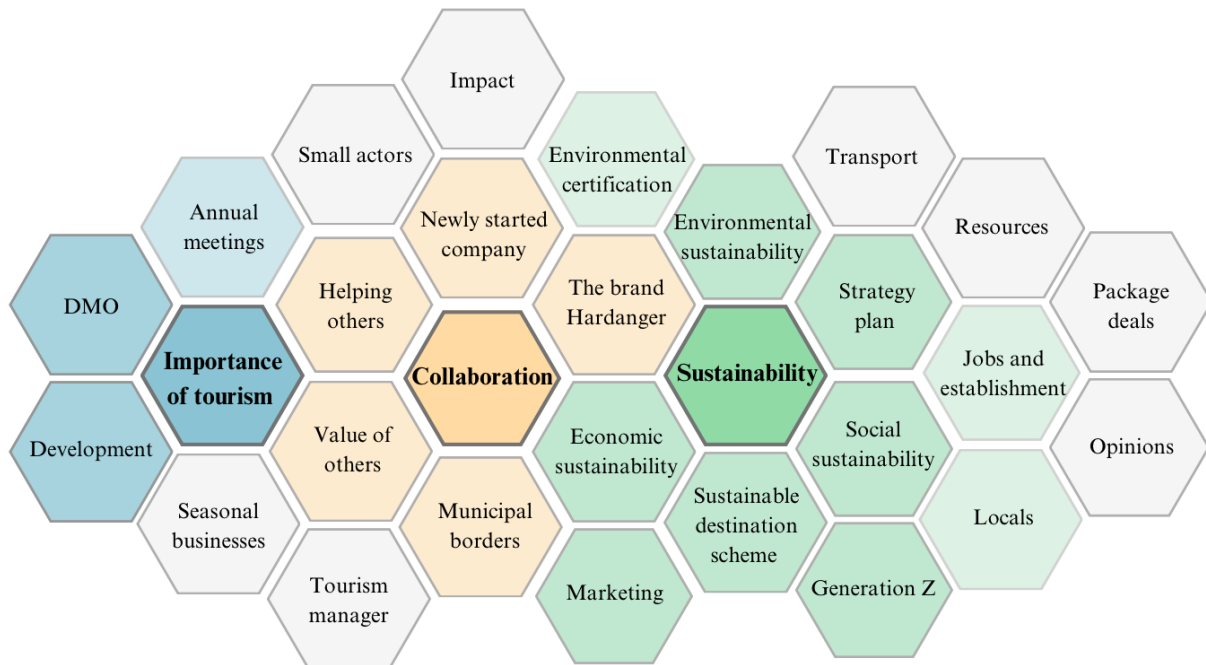
Figure 3*Main categories and sub-categories*

Figure 3 provides an overview of all three main categories and sub-categories that were identified through the 12 interviews. The three main categories; Importance of tourism, collaboration, and sustainability, are all represented by different colors in the figure. The sub-categories are to a greater extent connected to the main category of the same color, even though they all can be seen in connection to each other. The gradation of the colors refers to the importance of the categories. The stronger the color is, the higher importance of the category. However, even though some of the categories are to a higher degree connected to one specific main category, they are all connected to each other. The grey parts of the figure represent some of the more general sub-categories.

Importance of tourism

Early in the interviews, all informants were asked about the importance of tourism in the Hardanger region. Throughout the interviews, it appeared that all 12 informants

believed that tourism is found of high importance. Informants stated that tourism is one of the biggest industries in the region, and is not only important for the tourism industry itself, but also for the surrounding industries. Informant A said *“I think it is very important! We do not have industry enough in a way that Hardanger can survive without tourism. And tourism is ideal because we have so much beautiful nature to offer”*. Which also was a factor that the informants showed pride to, Innovation Norway highlighted that Western Norway, where the Hardanger region is located, is full of unique and spectacular nature experiences (Innovation Norway, 2022; Visit Norway, n.d.-c). Furthermore, informant B stated that *“tourism has been important, it is important, and it will become even more important”*. As referred to in the literature review, tourism industry is a rapidly growing phenomenon, and informant J said that *“tourism is up and coming and is only getting bigger and bigger. They are trying to make Odda the “outdoor capital”, and there is a lot of potential in the region”*. However, informant C stated that *“it is very variable how dependent the different villages are on tourism”*.

Furthermore, informants stated that tourism is found important to the region due to its contribution of creating workplaces and employment. Informant E referred to tourism as *“an industry that creates jobs”*. Likewise, informant I said that tourism is very important to the region, and stated that

Tourism is important in terms of jobs, of course, both seasonally and year-round. But also, a part of the reputation. So, in relation to perhaps moving to the region, right, that maybe it can make it an attractive place to move to, due to the fact that there are jobs or that there is such a positive reputation. (Informant I, 2023)

As referred to in the literature review, 7 out of 10 Norwegians are employed within the travel and tourism industry. Likewise, global statistics show that 1 out of 10 persons

globally are employed within this industry. As several informants stated, this is also the case in the region of Hardanger, and it is seen that the region is highly dependent on the tourism industry to survive, both regarding the economy and for many of the residents to get a job.

Destination development

As highlighted in the literature review, it is found critical for all core industries at a destination to collaborate on creating a holistic experience for the visitors and creating a hotspot for tourism (Kamfjord, 2015; Miocic et al., 2016). For the region to become a destination for tourists, all core industries; accommodation, catering, transport, and attractions, will have to be implemented and collaborate to create value and achieve gains.

In the literature review, it was highlighted that it is important to focus on possibilities and assumptions while developing a destination, but at the same time keep sustainability in mind. Collaborations and seeing the possibility of a holistic development is found important, and informants showed joy at the fact that more and more people want and dare to aim at development and new openings in the region. Informant D stated that it is important to create activities and attractions to get people to the region, which in the literature review also were mentioned as a critical factor for success. One will have to meet the tourists' needs, interests and requirements. Informant E referred to the tourism actors as "*contributors in relation to making the region attractive as a tourist destination*".

Informant B mentioned that "*we shall show the fantastic nature that we have. It deserves that the surrounding services are of just as high quality*". However, informants mentioned that it is important to dare to try and to have stayer-power if one wants to survive in the region. To a high degree, destination development involves creating value and utilizing resources, which is something that is also found important connected to stayer-power and surviving among others (Ness et al., 2014). Informant B further stated that "*it is my goal that we are many becoming really good*", showing the arising interest of good collaborations and

seeing the possibility of a holistic development, which also will be positive regarding the sustainable perspectives of developing a destination. As shown in the literature review, it is important to wish positively for others, and to see that value for others will have value for one's own business as well, when getting together as a holistic destination.

On the other hand, several informants mentioned the need for more year-round attractions, and informant J stated that "*one will have to collaborate about the low season and make it a high season*". Collaboration and working towards a joint goal is important, and informant D stated that

We have been completely dependent on being able to get others to do the same, so that we are not the only actor within winter products. Then the hotels must be open, the restaurants must be open, and then it is important that others also go in the same direction. (Informant D, 2023)

Both informant B and informant K mentioned that it has become even more fun to invite people to come visit them when they are prouder of their home region, and there are so many great things to do and see. Informants point to pride in the arising development and that the region has become as attractive as it has, with several large investments and high competence in several areas. This is giving an indication that the tourism actors are also focusing on the residents, making sure that they are also satisfied and proud of how the region is developing today.

A highly needed strategy plan. As referred to in the literature review, Innovation Norway has created a national tourism strategy, but further also highlighted the importance of regions focusing on developing an own brand. However, throughout the interview, Informant D stated that in the Hardanger region, "*there is a lack of a tourism strategy plan*". Both

informant B and D mentioned that it has been under planning for several years, and shows uncertainty to how far they have come in developing this plan.

However, informants made it clear that there is a great need for a common strategy plan for the tourism in the region, and a common goal to work towards. As previously highlighted, analyzing trends that eventually will impact the destination, will be of importance, and further to implement those into a plan and set strategies for future development (Sotiriadis, 2021). However, informant D stated that *“it is difficult to move in the same direction if you have too little cohesion towards the goal”*.

Furthermore, informants stated that if there had been a common strategy plan, that everyone agreed to follow, the region would have come further within tourism. A common strategy and goals can be seen as a factor contributing to a strengthened collaboration, but also the competitiveness and sustainable development of the destination. When referring to the development of the tourism in Hardanger, informant L stated that

A preliminary project on a regional tourism plan has been made. It has now been decided that we will think about the entire region when we make plans for the development of tourism. It is not possible for each municipality to sit and try to come up with something clever separately, it must be done in a joint project. (Informant L, 2023)

As the literature review further highlighted, it is required to have a joint strategy plan, which also includes information about the destination's goals of sustainability, to be able to achieve Innovation Norway's label for sustainable destinations (Visit Norway, n.d.-a). Informant H stated that the new national tourism strategy, which also spreads beyond the regional level, contains a major focus on sustainable tourism, which is something that should

be important in the regional tourism strategy plan as well. Informant I stated that “*people do have different assumptions and motivations. There will always be big actors, and there will always be small*”, and further mentioned the importance of having a common goal to work towards.

The destination management organization (DMO) is playing an important role in developing a common goal, strategy and plan, and informant L further stated that the development of the tourism industry and a tourism strategy plan rests on the shoulders of the DMO. On the other hand, informant C stated that it will be difficult for DMO to make a common strategy plan for the whole region, when the actors vary so much in size and their dependence on tourism is so variable. Likewise, informant D stated that “*the biggest problems is that the tourism is so gaped*”. Informants show big differences in interests and preferred customer segment. Some want bigger groups and cruise tourists, while others prefer single tourists.

Informants mentioned that mass tourism is not something they want in the region, and that it impacts all dimensions of sustainability; economically, socially and environmentally. Tourism actors want a higher focus on smaller groups of tourists. Informant G and J stated that they would rather have quality tourism than mass tourism. Likewise, informant H stated that one should focus more on smaller groups, because they disappear more and become less visible. Some of the informants, especially informant B and C stated that they are willing to raise their prices, to avoid the bigger groups that push the prices to a lower level, and in that way play on team with the locals. Generation Z is found to be willing to pay a higher price for ethical alternatives, and are known for boycotting and rewarding destinations with a high focus on sustainability.

Throughout the interviews, half of the informants specifically mentioned that the cruise ship tourism is having a negative impact on the region, due to it being characterized as

mass tourism for the small villages. Informants were negative due to them leaving behind a layer of pollution and little money, and that they do not take the locals into account. Informant D stated said “*I do not see cruise ships as necessary for the region to have at all*”. Only informant F mentioned the cruise ship tourism to not be seen as a big problem for the region, but mentions that one will have to set rules for the tourists. Furthermore, informant F highlights the possibility for smaller actors to gain development due to the cruise ship tourism.

The need of a more common segment can therefore be seen as crucial if the destination is to work towards a joint goal and strategy of development. As referred to in the literature review, it is then essential for the DMO to take the lead and gather all tourism actors at the destination, while at the same time help them in the creation of a framework of a common goal and joint action.

Destination management

As also highlighted in the literature review, informant B showed frustration and stated that “*there is nobody nationally that has the responsibility for tourism. There is a Ministry of Industry and a Ministry of Agriculture, but there is no one who has an overall view of tourism*”, and further expressed concern and dissatisfaction about the fact that

Tourism and the tourism industry are seen as industries that everyone can have an opinion about. You do not need to be qualified to be able to say something about tourism development, you only need to have an interest, be part of the municipality or live here. People just jump in and think “yes, we should have had a gondola”. Just because they think it is fun. While if it is about a different type of business or industry, people listen to specialist expertise. (Informant B, 2023)

On the other hand, more and more people spend time travelling, and the tourist's demands are changing. The tourism industry is therefore to a great extent dependent on destination management to cope with the developing tourism industry and emerging trends in the society. Leadership within tourism is often shared among several actors at a destination, and is therefore dependent on collaboration to function. However, even though the role of leadership often is shared, it is important to have someone functioning as a leader to coordinate, influence, motivate, inspire, and get things done faster. Several informants are calling for a person to take on the role as a tourism manager, preferably integrated with the destination management organization.

Destination Management Organization (DMO). As referred to in the literature review, a DMO is important in the role of developing a destination, strategic leadership, and marketing, to reach the shared goal of the destination (Cooper, 2016; Morrison, 2013; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). All 12 informants talked about the importance of belonging to a DMO, and that the DMO in Hardanger is working for the region as a holistic destination.

However, several informants expressed concerns about the fact that the regional DMO is only consisting of three employees. Informant I stated that "*they could possibly have more resources. More people who work there, for example*". As referred to in the literature review, the success of the destination is to some extent connected to the success of the DMO, which in the case of the Hardanger region can be seen as critical due to the lack of resources (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). Informant H stated that the newly started company in the region and the DMO could have merged into one, to reach a higher level of resources, while several other highlights the need for a person to come in as a tourism manager of the region.

The informants explained that through a membership fee, all actors who wish can become members, and will then be marketed through the destination company. The DMO will give advice and support, and also contribute with information. However, informant B stated

that *“if you want something out of it, you will have to put something into it”*. Likewise, informant C said that *“it is up to you how well or how much you get out of your membership”*.

Informant C further said that *“the destination company is absolutely essential to reach out”*. Out of seven tourism actors that were part of this project, all seven of them said that they are a member of the regional destination company. Kamfjord (2015) highlighted the importance of product marketing, giving information and doing sales. In this process, digital media such as home pages and social media are also found to be of high relevance. Both informant C and informant J stated that much of their website traffic comes from their local DMO. All informants categorized as tourism actors also mentioned that through a membership in a DMO, they see the importance of getting a membership in bigger DMOs, such as Visit Norway and Fjord Norway.

Tourism manager. Informants stated that there is a need for a person that goes in front, and meant that the destination management organization (DMO) should be the one to go in front and take control of sustainable development, and for example then to achieve the label for sustainable destinations. However, informant I expressed insecurity about their resources with so few employees, and then thought that the process would take far too long, and that the labelling would be a thing that was set aside. Due to the lack of resources also within the DMO, the informants suggested that there should be created a completely new position in the region, who is to work on tourism- and sustainable development. Informant F stated that *“I think we need a person who works only with that. That we need a resource who works on it full-time”*. Informants highlighted that resources are the biggest challenge to sustainable development, and highlighted the concern that the label for sustainable destinations requires a lot of work, both to achieve and the permanent job of maintaining it. Furthermore, to achieve the label of sustainable destinations, a destination management is required. Therefore, if the DMO does not have the capability to focus on sustainable

development, as shown through the high degree of uncertainty about whether the DMO is focusing on the label today or not, the relevance of getting a new person to fill this position is shown to be crucial.

Informant K stated that due to the amount of work connected to sustainable development, and especially the amount of documentation it takes to receive the sustainable destination label, there is a need for someone to help in the process. The informant further stated that *“it costs both time and money, and when one is being a small actor, the time is needed for many other things”*. Informant K further said *“I think that the biggest downside to becoming sustainable is that you get eaten up by the system”*.

Annual meetings – with a great lack of attendance. An important part of the DMOs’ job is to facilitate for better collaborations, partnerships, and networks (Cooper, 2016; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). To provide facilitation, informants mentioned that the DMO in the region is arranging an annual meeting before the summer season starts, for all actors that are relevant to tourism in the region. Informant I stated that this event is held so that all municipalities and tourism actors can present themselves, and to get to know other actors in the region. Informant J highlighted the importance of everyone attending, but on the other hand, several informants mentioned the disappointing number of actors meeting on these meetings. At the same time, several informants mentioned the need for better collaborations, communication and networking with other actors in the region, and one could therefore set a question mark to why people are not attending when such events are actually being held annually.

Collaboration

Collaboration is found to be of high importance regarding the development and success of a tourism destination, and a critical factor is found to be the importance of focusing on a destination as a holistic aspect (Fyall et al., 2012; Miocic et al., 2016; Ness et al., 2014).

As the region is facing challenges regarding the destination management, collaboration is key. To get an insight into the collaboration in the Hardanger region, the informants were asked to tell about their perception of collaboration. According to the informants, collaboration tend to be diverse, much depending on the fact that the actors vary a lot in size and that there is a great variation on how dependent the different villages are on the tourism. Informant K stated that some businesses will need all the tourism activity they can possibly get. Informant F stated that

It is always difficult. The companies may be a bit preoccupied with their own business, so they are unable to look up. And then there are usually small family businesses, like in such places, that it is difficult to look up and look at collaboration overall.

(Informant F, 2023)

Likewise, informant F stated that “*small actors, possibly family businesses, have more than enough to do with their own operations, and then it is difficult for them to look up*”, and further talked about the possibility of it being easier for the smaller businesses in the region to see the gain if someone else is ahead. All actors at a destination will, either indirect or direct, be connected and depend on each other (Ford et al., 2011). Even though there are imbalances on size, power, knowledge and resources amongst the actors in the region, good communication and working towards a joint goal will be critical for the success and to survive in a market where the competition is high.

Informant C also mentioned that it is difficult to have the same approach to collaboration around the entire fjord when there are so many different starting points. As other informants also were mentioning, informant A stated that “*some strive to always be better, while some are completely comfortable with how they are, and do not yearn to grow*

and expand". Informant I also stated that *"it is the same businesses that goes again and collaborate"*. On the other hand, informant A further stated that *"it has forced itself forward in a way, because the actors are so small that if they want to survive, they have to collaborate with others and be flexible"*, which is something many other informants mentioned as well.

As highlighted in the literature review, collaboration is also found to be critical factor in the role of sustainable development and reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Graci, 2013; Hall, 2019). Even though most informants showed positiveness to working towards sustainable development and also the sustainable destination scheme, they all again mentioned the challenge connected to the high number of small actors in the region. Informant C stated that *"there are a lot of very small actors, and those who are not so very small, they are suddenly very large compared to the small ones"*. However, as highlighted in the literature review, no destinations are capable of handling the development and arising demands of the future tourists by themselves (Ford et al., 2011; Perkins et al., 2020). Even though the informants expressed a varied opinion on whether the collaboration in the region is good or not, they all proposed the need for improvement on collaborations, to work together through networks to cope with the developing industry, and to maintain competitiveness both on a short- and long-term perspective. Several informants highlighted the collaboration between the cider producers as unique and something to look up to. They were referred to as a good example on how to wish luck to your own neighbors and seeing how increased value for others also might become increased value for yourself.

Helping and seeing value of others

Throughout the interviews, collaboration was further referred to as helping each other up and forward, getting more legs to stand on and as something that opens up for more sales channels. As highlighted in the literature review, collaborations are important for destinations facing economic challenges. Informants said that collaboration is absolutely necessary and

that one will not get anywhere without collaborating. Informant B stated that *“it is important to contribute to others getting good. It is necessary and important to us that others are good, so that we have something to show to that we know is good”*. Informant K stated that *“we are always sending the tourists to someone else if we do not have the capacity one day, so that the tourists will have an offer anyways”*.

Further, Informant B mentioned that through collaboration they are able to share employees with one of the bigger tourism actors in the region, leading to them being able to get higher qualified employees, and the other actor is being able to build a bigger team and a more varied working day for their employees. This is showing a great example of sharing resources and knowledge, which further will impact both the economic- and social aspect of sustainability. One actor gets the opportunity of using the knowledge of the other actor's employees, while at the same time the environment and varied work-day for the employees are increased.

As presented in the literature review, actors will through collaborations be able to see value and beneficial outcomes from other actors' resources, strengths and knowledge in the end, which was something several informants clearly showed an understanding towards (Ford et al., 2011; Mintzberg et al., 2009; Tritto & Fun, 2019). On the other hand, both informant C and H mentioned that tourism actors in the region are having difficulties of seeing the value of a collaboration and that several actors are terrified of losing value to others. It can be seen that actors are having difficulties of sharing their resources, which then will lead to a difference in actors' contributions, again leading to lack of trust. However, as the region consist of actors with a great variation of sizes, there will naturally be power imbalance. The only way of seeing changes will therefore be if the bigger actors are challenged, and that the smaller actors contribute as much as possible.

On the other hand, some informants are aware of the importance of collaboration to increase value for all actors in the region. Informant C stated that “*growth at the neighbors’ can in a way benefit them again*”. Informant K stated that “*there will always be jealousy, but it is important that everyone sees the benefit of the added value, the marketing value, that this has*”. Furthermore, informant F stated that “*there are some who try and want to, but it is difficult to achieve*”. Informant D stated that “*the challenge in Hardanger is that we have many small villages, and we have many small chiefs, and so the municipalities collaborate a little, but they also collaborate very poorly*”.

Municipal borders: The extremes of the world

In this section, informants were asked about collaborations across the different municipal borders in the region. Informant A quickly said “*yes, absolutely!*”, when being asked if there are collaborations across borders. Likewise, informant F stated that “*I think it is much easier to collaborate across municipal borders*”.

On the other hand, other informants were more aware of the size of the region, and immediately started talking about all the rural communities that historically have their own perceptions of things. Informant H quickly mentioned that there have been very much municipality by municipality, and further stated that “*there has been a great deal of the king of the mountain. In other words, very little collaboration, because one is scared of losing the turnover to the neighbor instead of getting it yourself*”. Informant G further stated that “*I experience that between the municipalities here, it is very tiring*”, while informant J stated that “*you will notice it very quickly when it comes to money*”. Informant L stated that “*it can sometimes be described as thinking that municipal borders are the extremes of the world*”.

Furthermore, informant C clearly stated that there was no faith whatsoever in the municipalities being able to enter into a collaboration on sustainable development, but that there could be more motivation to do so municipality by municipality. On the other hand,

informant E made it clear that “*the tourists do not see municipal borders*” and do not see why there should be any problem regarding collaborations across the borders. Informant G stated that “*I wish that we could be in a larger community that work with tourism*”. Informant L highlighted that by collaborating, one will gain more power than one can manage individually, and that one has to create a common arena that creates added value that one will not get by operating alone. Informant C further stated that

Collaborations are something we are working very much on. We do not just work on offering an activity, we work a lot on developing the places as tourist destinations as well. And then you kind of have to have everyone on the same team. Law of Jante is very strong. If you come here and just want something, without people on your side, you can face a lot of hardship”. (Informant C, 2023)

As referred to in the literature review and also found through the interviews, the competition in today’s tourism market is high, and one will have to differentiate to stand out. Informants are aware of the importance of building a unique brand, and collaboration between municipal borders are therefore critical. The Hardanger region is a geographical area consisting of four municipalities, and to gain success all municipalities must see the value of each other. If one is to aim for the sustainable destination label, one criterion is also found to be a set geographical area, a common strategy plan, and collaboration. As one can see, the municipalities will have to start collaborating and build the brand of Hardanger together, to stay on track with the ongoing development and to not disappear among competitors.

The brand Hardanger: A future glue

Even though the national tourism organization, Innovation Norway, is building the brand of Norway, it is critical for the Hardanger region itself to make sure that it is not

disappearing among the other tourism destinations in Norway. For destinations it is important to find its own position in the competition with other destinations, and it is therefore of high importance to differentiate and build the brand of the destination and communicate it as a whole.

Informant J stated that *“what we are trying to do is that everyone collaborates as much as possible. We are trying to lift up other players. We cannot stand alone. Because the more people, the better it will be”*. Informant L further stated that *“it may be that some individual factors are not optimal for you at all times, but the result is that it is far better than operating individually”*.

Informant H stated that the region has got minimal knowledge about destination development. However, the destination management organization should be involved and lead the process of building the brand, but at the same time, the brand will have to reflect upon good collaboration. Informant H further stated that *“the brand must cover the entire Hardanger, because the sooner it covers everything, the stronger the brand. It is only then the glue will become strong. When we collaborate”*. Informant H further mentioned that if all actors are to stand alone and fight their own fight, Hardanger will become a very difficult region to travel to and understand. Informant J then highlighted that there is a need of getting together and market the region as a whole. Informant H further stated that *“one has to gain trust, that Hardanger will become a strong magnet in terms of tourism. So, one will have to collaborate”*.

An important part of destination branding, is to build an image on something unique to differentiate from and compete with other destinations (Morrison, 2013). Even though some of the informants found it difficult to admit, a few informants mentioned that they are aware that they do need the bigger tourist attractions in the region, such as Trolltunga. They further highlighted that due to these landmarks, more people will get their eyes opened to Hardanger,

something that will rub off on everyone in the end, and lead to a long-term competitiveness. Informant C said that *“it is the icons that draw people to the region”*. Informant G stated that *“we must be able to work as Hardanger, and people need to understand the importance of Trolltunga and other lighthouses, and connect to them. Cause these are the things people know of and use as a mark”*.

However, as referred to in the introduction of the paper, nature experiences and attractions are playing an important role of the Western Norway, and also for the Hardanger region. As informant B mentioned, one of the biggest tourism attractions in Hardanger is at risk of melting, due to climate changes. Furthermore, another big tourism attraction, Trolltunga, is leading to degradation of nature, and littering. As unique experiences and attractions, and the increasing focus on sustainable solutions in today's society, sustainability should be playing an important role in a destination's brand. The brand must therefore reflect the tourist's expectations of sustainability to build brand loyalty, satisfaction, and positive word-of-mouth.

All informants are aware of the importance of collaboration, and is showing an understanding of the fact that collaboration is needed to achieve a good brand that is showing the desired image of the destination, highlighting the landmarks that will increase the value of the brand. On the other hand, even though they are showing an awareness about the importance of a common brand for the whole region, the largest proportion of the informants kept talking about their own municipality instead of focusing on Hardanger as a total. Informant G further stated that

I think everyone needs to wake up and talk about Hardanger, instead of Ullensvang, Eidfjord, Ulvik, and Kvam. One must work together. The tourist, it says that it looks at

larger units, brand names and such, right. Hardanger has got a brand name.

(Informant G, 2023)

Informant L further stated that *“it is important to speak up for the entire region and ensure that one is influencing matters to what is perceived as the best for Hardanger”*.

Informant G stated that *“You do not compete against Ulvik, Eidfjord, Ullensvang. You compete against Bergen, Lofoten and Tromsø”*.

A newly started company: The collaboration who came out lopsided

For collaborations and networks to function and have a positive impact on all the actors that are involved, a critical factor is the importance of good communication. Even though there will be imbalances between the different actors, trust and mutual engagement will be of high importance. However, all 12 informants mentioned a newly started company one or more times during the interview, both connected to collaboration and sustainable solutions within the region's tourism. Informants highlighted that this company is initially made to sell packages in Hardanger, and is going to function as a common place for booking. Informant H stated that the company was made to *“develop an infrastructure, so that tourists can navigate and get around in Hardanger, and that one can book all the actors in one and the same place”*, something that is highly needed in the region. Tourists today are looking for unique experiences and the possibility of booking a single-price offering. Package deals are therefore found of high importance to strengthen the brand and sustainable development of the region.

However, the informants' attitudes towards this company are very divided, as only two out of four municipalities in the region are part of it. Informant B stated that *“it came out very lopsided, and then you are getting reefs in the sea already before it is started”*. Informant L further stated that the company *“did not get the start that it could and should have, with the*

whole region taking part of it". When referring to the company, informant J said that "*it is almost a war*". Likewise, informant G stated that

I would like all municipalities to be involved. Then we would have let go of tug of wars and silly nonsense debates like this, which we only spend a lot of time and energy on. Instead of saying that ok, everyone is on board, we will make this happen, now it will be like this. But it is such a pettiness. (Informant G, 2023)

This conflict is a result of lack of communication, trust, and the reality of some actors being afraid of losing value to other parts of the region. The municipal borders are again showing to be strong, and one can see a lack of collaboration across the borders. On the other hand, some actors showed positiveness to the company. However, one could easily see a connection between the actors' location, and whether they themselves were part of one of the municipalities involved in the company or not. The actors in the municipalities involved, found it easier to show positiveness towards the development of the company, than those in the municipalities that are not included.

When talking about same company, informant F said "*I have great faith in it. It will become the tour operator or actor who sells and distributes*". Further, informant F also mentioned that by this new company, the actors can think of more packages together, and that "*it very automatically will become collaboration*". Informant G stated that "*it is a large and comprehensive collaboration that will eventually incorporate the other municipalities as well*".

Longer stays and package deals

Informant A, along with several other informants, mentioned the most important part of sustainable development to be the fact that there is a need of getting the tourists to stay in

the region for a longer period of time. Likewise, informant D stated that *“there are far too many people who come, go to Trolltunga, and then leave again”*. As referred to in the literature review, Kamfjord (2015) defined four different types of travel patterns. People coming to the destination for a shorter period of time can be seen as round-trips, and are not found very sustainable. As the informants are showing a high interest in getting tourists to stay for a longer time, lay-still-stays and base stays are found of highest relevance, and are also found at a higher level of sustainability. Informant G stated

What we are not good enough at here in Hardanger is to be coordinated in tourism. That we like to talk each other forward and send people on, and work on the extra sales. Make them stay here several days. (Informant G, 2023)

Likewise, informant E made it clear that *“they need a good offer if they shall, if they come to the region to do one thing, for example go to Trolltunga, then the region as a whole will lose”*. Informant J further mentioned that when the tourists are staying in the region for a longer period of time, they will leave more money at more businesses, like restaurants, shops, activity businesses, and so. Informants further highlighted that if one wants to get the tourists to stay for a longer period of time, at least two nights and hopefully more than three, the region need to facilitate for more low-threshold products as well. Informant E also highlighted the importance of collaboration and lifting each other, and stated that if the tourist gets several things to see and do in the region, they will *“travel back where they came from, and recommend Hardanger to a greater extent as a destination”*.

As a solution to getting people to stay in the region for a longer period of time, all informants highlighted the importance of package deals. Informant D stated that

We are very bad at such an overarching booking solution, which helps tourists get an overview of what they can do and where they can do things. So, in terms of sustainability and collaboration, it is in a way to grasp this and merge the function that makes it easier for people to get around. (Informant D, 2023)

Informant G stated that *“booking is an infrastructure that makes it difficult for us. Collaboration would have been easier if everyone had been connected to the same booking”*. Both informant G and J, further mentioned the importance of creating package deals. In this context, several informants highlight the new package that is being created, Hardanger in a nutshell, and says that such is important to create some volume and make it easier for tourists to book.

Sustainability

Travel and tourism industry are found to have a great potential of contributing in the process of reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while at the same time being an industry that will have to face the challenges and consequences connected to sustainability. As sustainability has shown to play an important role in the value creation, and one will have to focus on a sustainable development to stay on track with the long-term competitiveness, sustainability has gradually been accepted by society (Graci, 2013; Guo et al., 2019; Kamfjord, 2015). To introduce the informants to sustainability, they were asked what first came to their mind when hearing the word sustainability.

Informants said that sustainability was something one was talking a lot about previous years, but that it has become more and more natural, which was also highlighted through the literature review. Furthermore, informant A stated that *“there is an incredibly large focus on sustainability today, and it only becomes more and more important within tourism as well”*. Likewise, informant F stated that *“it is something everyone has to think about”*, and further

mentioned that *“there is a change in attitude among people in general”*. Likewise, informant G stated that *“sustainability has become a hygiene factor”*. The requirements for destinations are becoming greater and greater, both in terms of focusing on sustainability and certification. Several informants also expressed that more and more tour operators are starting to set very strict requirements, and informant B stated that *“guests do not want to come to destinations that do not take care of themselves”*. Both tour operators and to a great extent generation Z, are having a great focus on sustainable solutions. They do reward businesses based on how they are behaving towards sustainability and environmental issues. It is therefore important to keep this in mind through the destination development and marketing.

Gössling et al. (2012) and Tudorache et al. (2017) highlighted that considering the rapid growth of the tourism industry, tourism is becoming less and less sustainable, and tourism actors tend to focus more on earning money rather than also showing a focus to the local's satisfaction and the impact on the environment, which to some extent also was the focus of the actors in the region as well.

When first talking about sustainability, informants they tended to talk about it at a national or global level, before further expressing that there is no particular focus on sustainability in the region today, and that the Hardanger region is starting to fall behind. Informant L stated that *“we have a restoration job, because we have a number of activities, processes and things that are not sustainable as of today”*. The informant further mentioned that one of the superior actors have tried to push for sustainable development, but not succeeded, and believed that it is the DMOs that should have taken the lead much earlier.

On the other hand, even though the informants showed an awareness of the importance of sustainability, some of them also showed an uncertainty to the concept. Informant J stated that *“sustainability has become a word that is misused so much these days. It is a very comprehensive word. There is so much in it”*. Furthermore, informant D said

I am afraid that the concept of sustainability will soon destroy development. It is used so much now that it sets limits. And sustainability is not the same for anyone else. It will be difficult in the end when a certain amount of sustainability is used for everything. (Informant D, 2023)

Likewise, both informant K and informant I found sustainability to be a trend word that is getting a bit worn out. It is used so freely, and everyone is starting to talk about it, so that it has gotten too many definitions.

Impact on sustainable development

During the interview, the informants were asked who they thought would have the greatest impact if the region was to work to become more sustainable. Two out of twelve informants immediately stated that the guest are the ones with the greatest impact, due to tourist not wanting to come to destinations that do not take care of themselves. By boycotting destinations, guests are therefore to a great extent impacting the destination's focus.

The answers further varied, but at the same time they all somehow came to the same conclusion. All informants stated that the municipalities or the state authorities will eventually be the ones who have the greatest impact, and that the most important factors are that things must be imposed, and there must be incentives and support. Informant F stated that *“either you have to start at the municipal level, or you have to start regionally”*.

Further, it was highlighted that the municipalities, or the state authorities, must push the actors to focus on sustainability, and to motivate by showing what will happen when focusing on it. Giving information is therefore critical. Informant H stated that *“they can give us tourism strategies with sustainability goals and things like that, but as long as it is voluntary, there are a lot of people who just ignore and focus on what they have done before”*.

Informants further highlighted the importance of setting guidelines and common goals for everyone, but also requirements for the various actors. The importance of having a common strategy plan and joint goal to work towards is therefore once again mentioned.

Another factor that the informants found essential, was that choosing sustainability must be lucrative. Informants stated that for the tourism actors to get motivated to use sustainable solutions, they will have to get something back. Furthermore, the actors must more actively get help and financial support for sustainable development, as well as knowledge to help them achieve this. Financial support schemes, like the one Innovation Norway is having, is therefore important, along with knowledge from external actors and organizations. Informant C stated that

It can happen faster if all municipalities in the region, maybe a little over time, but if they get together and, for example, give financial incentives to those companies that do it in a way. Or financial help to implement it, the process. (Informant C, 2023)

Furthermore, informant D stated that *“it is a collaboration that is needed to achieve even better sustainable development. So, collaboration between all organizations needed there, and the municipality, that is probably an important progress plan to make it more sustainable”*. During the interviews, the informants were also asked about how they think collaboration’s role is, in the process of sustainable development. All 12 informants agreed on collaboration being essential and of high importance and that it is not possible to reach a sustainable development without collaborating with other actors in the region. Informant G stated that

It is connected. If a company does things sustainable by the book, while the neighbor does not, then it will ruin the reputation for everyone. In a way, you have to work together on it. You cannot say that a destination is sustainable if there are only two companies that are designated as sustainable. (Informant G, 2023)

Informant J highlighted that they are constantly thinking through who they are collaborating with, how to do it in the best possible way, and as sustainable as possible. Informant J also stated that *“we try to stay within brands that stand for the same visions as we do”*. Again, a common goal, vision and strategy is needed, to better be able to enter good collaborations with a higher number of actors.

Furthermore, informants highlighted the fact that the process of becoming sustainable takes time, and that it will take time to get everyone understand the importance of sustainability to make it work. Informant B stated that *“what it is about overall, is that actors have to see the value of others”*. Likewise, informant C mentioned that *“we need to collaborate better to make everyone get a better understanding of how things are functioning”*. Informant A stated that *“everyone has to pull in the right direction, otherwise it will not work. Everyone must be engaged and everyone must care”*.

National Sustainable Destination Scheme

Innovation Norway has created a voluntary tool that will help tourism actors into the right direction when focusing on sustainability; The National Sustainable Destination Scheme, considering all three dimensions of sustainability (Innovasjon Norge, 2023). When the scheme was brought to the table, informant A said that *“I think that many people think that yes, but we are sustainable, so why should we pay so much money to get this brand”*. Likewise, informant D said *“basically, we have the environment as a basic philosophy, so it is*

not really something that we need to have". Informant H also stated that *"as long as it is voluntary, it will not be prioritized"*.

However, other informants mentioned the sustainable destination scheme as a competitive advantage, and that more and more people these days are expecting that destinations are having it and choose their destination based on who has got the label. Likewise, Innovation Norway highlighted the fact that the label is showing that destinations are prioritizing sustainable solutions, ethics, and all dimensions of sustainability. It is therefore shown to be a great competitive advantage, also at a long-term perspective, especially amongst the developing tourism segment, Generation Z, and tour operators. Informant C stated that *"we will fall behind if we do nothing. I do not think that we are any less sustainable, but it is showing it through established arrangements that in a way gives trust"*. Likewise, informant K stated that *"it is having documentation that is important"*, and informant L further stated that *"I believe that Hardanger must get it in place as soon as possible, because it has an impact on the visitor numbers in the region"*. The label will be showing that the destination is contributing to the Sustainable Destination Goals, following strict guidelines ensuring less environmental footprints, economic considerations, and that there is a focus on both the local communities and local heritage.

On the other hand, uncertainty is also emerging among the tourism actors as to whether this certification actually is being worked towards yet in the region, or not. However, they are all aware that the destinations that have gotten labelled by the sustainable destination scheme is having a competitive advantage and are constantly being promoted. Furthermore, one of the informants are unsure whether the region can work towards the label as a whole. While referring to the cruise tourism, informant I expressed uncertainty about; *"can we do it on a regional level when Eidfjord is Eidfjord?"*. The destination management organization, or

the long-awaited tourism manager, should therefore get on the field to update and give information to clarify the situation.

Informants found the motivation of such work to be divided. Some informants stated that they think that there is motivation in the region to start this work, while others highlighted the fact that there is a great need for convincing the importance of the label. Informant G stated that *“I think the biggest actors would certainly be on board, and the biggest who really want to wager on tourism, they know how important this is”*.

However, informants highlighted that sustainable development is both comprehensive, time consuming and involving a high level of investment, that all are difficult to bear for small tourism companies located in a rural area, such as they do in the Hardanger region. Informants stated that there are lack of resources and capacity to start such extensive work as it is to be certified as a sustainable tourism destination, and informant F stated that the use of resources is what slows them down the most. As mentioned in the literature review, the process of the sustainable destination scheme is time consuming, both the work to achieve it, but also to maintain it. It is therefore important to have the resources for it, and as the informants mentioned, someone to go in front. Either a destination management organization, or a tourism manager.

Furthermore, informant H stated that *“it cost a lot of money, so it is a difficult investment that is difficult to carry for the small actors located in the districts”*. Actors tend to think more about profitability than about sustainability. However, it can be seen that informants tend to not understand that sustainable development can also lead to an increased number of visitors and increased value. On the other side, informant L highlighted that there are financial resources that one can apply for in such situations. As referred to in the literature review, Innovation Norway offers economic support to destinations that are in the process of getting labelled as a sustainable destination. However, before getting to start of the process,

and then also to get the economic support, the destination will have to go through a strict list of checkpoints.

Informant K highlighted the amount of paperwork that needs to be done throughout the process, and after. Informant C therefore stated that “*one might have to work together even more closely and do something like that together*”. The informants clearly stated that if there should be any possibilities for sustainable development in the region, collaboration is key, and highlighted that it would be easier by sharing the bigger businesses’ resources with the smaller ones.

Furthermore, informant F mentioned that collaboration has an important role in the region, when referring to its importance and dependence in order to achieve the label for sustainable destination. The label is not possible to achieve without collaboration between actors, the municipality and the destination management organizations, and collaboration is therefore a critical factor for success when aiming for the label.

However, a criterion for the sustainable destination scheme is to have a tourism strategy plan, which includes the destination’s goals of sustainability, and also to have a system for how the destination is financing their joint tasks (Visit Norway, n.d.-a). As the destination does not have an optimally functioning destination management organization, and neither do have a strategy plan, this will first have to be implemented.

Generation Z

As presented in the literature review, Generation Z has emerged to becoming the largest customer group, with a great focus on sustainable solutions in their decision-making process. In this part of the interview, the informants were asked about how they feel about the fact that the younger generation, generation Z, is having a higher focus on choosing destinations that are focusing on sustainability. Informant A stated that “*the younger ones are holding us in our ears to make it work, and the adults are not too far behind either, they are*

starting to care too". Informant C stated that *"if we do not listen to the younger generation, who have clear goals and opinions, then what we are doing will not be very forward-oriented"*.

Furthermore, informant K highlighted the importance of being up to date, to also be able to reach more of the younger generation. Generation Z is used to spending a lot of time on social media, and when growing up they were therefore to a great extent exposed to information about global- and ideological crisis. Due to this, they are concerned and feeling responsible for saving the future, and destinations should therefore target their marketing at the Gen Zers, through social media, to show that the destination is having a great focus on sustainable solutions.

On the other hand, some informants found it more important to focus on sustainability due to employment of Generation Z, instead of only focusing on it due to the wish of becoming an attractive destination to visit. Informant J stated that *"we are very dependent on the new generation that is growing up. We are constantly thinking about being aware of operating as sustainable as possible. Both due to tourists, but also within employees"*. Likewise, informant H found it most important to think of sustainable solutions due to them being interested in hiring young people.

Furthermore, some informants mentioned that Generation Z is not the most typical customer of their business. However, as Gen Zers are the future of travel and tourism, they are the ones that will give shape and give value to destinations in the future. Gen Zers are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly offers, and are well known for boycotting. When going on a travel, they tend to look for different sustainability labels, showing the importance of a destination being labelled by the sustainable destination scheme, and also using it throughout the marketing.

Marketing

The use of sustainability in marketing have also been a theme of discussion through the interviews. Six out of twelve informants said that they found it relevant and of high importance to be able to use sustainability in their marketing. Furthermore, it is found important that sustainability is reflected in the brand of the region, which further will be marketed to the destination's tourism segment (Zouganeli et al., 2012). Informant C stated that *"I think that over time it has become more and more the case that people are looking for some kind of label. If you do not have it, you will simply not be selected"*. Likewise, informant D mentioned it as *"absolutely essential for success in the future"*.

As referred to in the literature review, the destination management organization (DMO) is seen as a critical factor in connection with giving information to the destination's visitors, tourism actors, and other important actors, both before, during and after a stay. Informant J highlighted the importance of using emotional marketing in the process of becoming a sustainable destination, something that can be done through social media and at the destination. Informant J further stated that

It does not help to talk about "pick up your rubbish", it does not help and people do not bother to care. But when they see that it damages nature, it is a good way to be marketing it. The best way is to show animals that are in pain, it goes into people's hearts. (Informant J, 2023)

As highlighted in the literature review, Generation Z tend to have a high focus on ethics and sustainability in their decision-making process. On the other hand, when arriving to a destination, they do not manage to show the same attitude and engagement. At a destination, the older generations are showing a higher degree of sustainable behavior and practices. This

shows to the importance of not only giving information about sustainability before a travel, but also at the destination. As mentioned, the DMO is important in this role, and should spend time on information about sustainable impacts.

Informants further pointed out that the region consists of many small actors that do not have knowledge about marketing, and that there is a great need for someone with a higher point of knowledge that can help them make content. The informants showed a willingness to contribute with information, but stated that they are missing resources to create content of high quality. Informant G stated that *“I have limited resources. Both time and knowledge. And I am not really a tourism person or a marketing person, so bringing in external expertise is good”*. When talking about marketing, informant F mentioned the regional DMO and stated that *“they are very good at marketing, at modern marketing. Yes, so they sort of find the trends”*.

On the other hand, informant F stated that *“I do not choose a destination based on sustainability or what sustainability label they have”*, and further mentioned that sustainability in marketing will just have to come a little by little.

Environmental considerations

Through the interviews, the word sustainability was presented, and informants also mentioned concerns and importance of the environmental dimension of sustainability, which is also found to be an important part of several of the 17 goals and 169 targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (The World Tourism Organization, n.d.-b).

Informant G stated that the nature and the cultural landscape is an important part of the tourism in the Hardanger region, which also was highlighted through the introduction and literature review. Informant J said *“I am thinking nature, leave as little footprint as possible, littering, i.e. leave nothing in the nature”*. Informant L stated that sustainability is about *“conversion to smaller footprints. What we do must not cause us to degrade the environment”*.

As highlighted in the literature review, the SDGs involve the importance of focusing on bio diversity and waste handling. To cope with both littering and pollution, which is having a negative impact on the region, collaboration is essential. It is not enough if one actor at the destination changes, all actors will have to set a joint goal.

Furthermore, the three informants G, J, and L, found it import that tourism should not abrade the nature in the region. Informant J stated that there is a huge challenge connected to littering in the mountains, and stated that it is not under control. Informant J also highlighted the problem of whether the path to Trolltunga now has become a road, but believes at the same time that it has been sacrificed for the benefit of nature elsewhere in the area.

Tourism is found to be one of the problems regarding sustainability, due to the high degree of CO₂ emissions, but at the same time will have to face the consequences of it (Kamfjord, 2015). Informant B also mentioned that “*we have an attraction that may be about to disappear. Through melting*”, while talking about the importance of Folgefonna Glacier as a tourist attraction in the region. Likewise, informant H mentioned that sustainability is essential because of how the environment is evolving and global warming, and further stated that “*tourism represents a burden on the environment. So, then one will have to join in and contribute to a solution to the madness*”.

Informant G stated that there is a problem regarding the fact that tourists are camping wherever they want to and uses the nature as their toilet. Likewise, informant J stated that this has been, and still is a huge problem in the area of Trolltunga. Informant J further stated that the Norwegian law to roam the countryside has become a problem, and stated that as soon as something is free, tourists care a little less. This problem is not only a degradation of nature, but can also be seen as a social impact, being a factor of great irritation for the local residents.

Local traditions and heritage are also found of importance to tourism’s vulnerable resources. Informant G stated that “*cider from Hardanger is a protected geographical*

designation”, and further stated that *“there is a desire to bring up gastronomic experiences that complement cider, and that Hardanger can become a place of gastro tourism”*. Along with local cider, which the informants show pride in, informants further stated that it is of high importance to be aware of using local food. Through the interviews, it was also mentioned that local farms are willing to produce the vegetables that are needed in the restaurants, giving a great example on collaborating towards more sustainable solutions. This is further contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals in reducing the degree of CO₂ emissions, by using local food and drinks instead of importing it from other places.

Environmental certification. Out of 12 informants, only three of them mentioned that they have got some kind of environmental certifications, such as Miljøfyrtårn. As highlighted in the literature review, tourism consist of several vulnerable resources, like cultural landscapes and magnificent nature (Hall, 2019). Environmental certification can therefore be positive in showing that a business is focusing on the importance of sustainability, to contribute to avoiding negative impact on the environment. Informant H stated that *“many young people do not choose employers who do not think of sustainability, so that can be seen as a reason to become certified within environmental certification”*. Likewise, informant K stated that it is important to be labelled to be visible. However, Informant A stated that *“all the small actors cannot afford to obtain environmental certification on their own”*, which often comes from lack of resources like time and money.

Transport. All informants highlighted the biggest disadvantage of Hardanger to be the difficulty of travelling green by using public transport, and the fact that there is a lot of potential for improvement within transport in general. Informant D mentioned the most important improvement within sustainability to be correspondences, that everyone can travel around by bus and not to be completely dependent on a car to get around. Likewise, informant E and G stated that there are problems connected to transporting people around in the region,

and several informants mentioned the difficulty of needing to access several websites to book transport to get around in the whole region. Again, this states that there is a need for collaboration and improvements connected to booking, if one wants tourists to travel to the region and stay there for more than one night. If one is to travel to one destination and have a base at one place, better public transport is needed. This can be seen as a major challenge for the region. If the tourists find it too difficult to get around, the probability that they will only visit one place or attraction in the region is high, and they will then only stay in the region for a relatively short period.

Social considerations

Jobs and establishment. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) involves a common goal about eradicating poverty, in which tourism industry can be seen as a great contributor (The World Tourism Organization, n.d.-b). Creating jobs is found to be an important part of coping with this part of the SDGs, and when being asked about their thoughts about sustainability, several informants found jobs, and especially year-round jobs, as a factor of high importance.

Informant F mentioned the fact that the region consists of many season-based attractions and activities, year-round jobs are found to be a big challenge for the region. Likewise, informant C stated that “*our thoughts on sustainability are year-round jobs, a social approach, good pay scales and all there is, about building jobs and local communities*”. Informants mentioned the importance of not only offering part time jobs, but that the key to future development in the region is year-round jobs. Informant C stated that “*it is a tough venture, because there is not much going on here in October – March, but we have sort of decided that we are going to run a year-round tourism business*”. Informant B stated that “*you will not be able to keep good people if they only have a summer job*”. Furthermore, informant E made it clear that creating sustainable jobs contains good salary and conditions,

in order to manage to also create establishment in Hardanger. Likewise, informant D also mentioned the importance of making the region attractive, by creating jobs, to ensure that also youths want to move to the districts.

At the same time, informant L stated that *“we will experience more and more situations where advertised jobs do not get applicants”*. Furthermore, the informant mentioned that even though jobs get applicants, many will have to say no to a job due to a challenging lack of capacity within accommodation. Informant G stated that *“it is a huge challenge! That we do not have room for the workers to live in”*. Several informants therefore mentioned the big problem to be that they will not get any further in development without employees. As informant B mentioned, a collaboration of sharing employees has been to great help for them, and one can therefore suggest this solution to others as well.

Informant C mentioned that there are way too many seasonal businesses, and that they are only open when the tourists are around. On the other hand, informant G stated that it is found challenging to arrange activities when there are few customers, and that it is both demanding in terms of time and work. However, informant C stated that *“one will have to come together and run businesses together, so that it creates as much as possible, or good conditions for creating jobs, and creating good social conditions for those who work there”*.

Local residents. Collaboration is found of high importance to achieve success in both destination- and sustainable development, also connected to the local residents. Informants proudly talked about all the alive villages in the region, and farms that are operated along the fjord. They talked about all those people who are now planting new things, and those who are looking forward to moving back to the region and taking over at home. Throughout the interviews, the informants stated that this sustainability is enormous in the society of Hardanger these days.

Within the sub-category highlighting the locals, the statement “a good place to live is a good place to visit” was presented, and the informants were asked about how they felt that the tourism industry considered that the tourism did not come at the expense of the local population. Informants were quick to mention the importance of tourism also functioning for the locals, and the importance of keeping in mind that the locals are living here as well. It is found that tourism can easily come at the expense of the local population, and good collaboration and communication are therefore found to be essential. The local residents will also have a great impact on tourist’s experiences, and one will have to stay on team with them as well to make sure that they will be open for future development and be welcoming towards the tourists. If tourists feel welcome at a destination, they will go home and spread positive word-of-mouth, and possibly come back at a later occasion (Chiappa et al., 2019).

Likewise, informant A stated that it is important that “*everyone thrives and are comfortable with the situation that tourists are coming*”. Informant F stated that “*harmony between the tourist and the resident is one of the most important things, that they should not hinder each other*”. Informant D stated that “*the goal is that in some way an industry should be created, where you go hand in hand with the people who live here*”. However, informant I stated that while some tourism actors are thinking more holistic, some are also only thinking of making as much money as possible.

As referred to in the literature review, the local residents are to a great extent the ones that will have to live with the impacts caused by tourism, and informant G highlighted a greater dissatisfaction with tourists throughout high season, and further mentioned that tourists occupy roads and camp wherever they want. Informant G further stated that “*I kind of support some form of tourist tax, or something like that, which goes to those not staying in hotels or do not use the facilities that are, those who are just freeriders*”. Furthermore, Informant G stated that

If tourism takes us who live here into account, no. Especially on the roads, they do not. But it is, what can one say, that tourism shows too little respect, it is that the roads we have are too bad. (Informant G, 2023)

On a question regarding the locals' attitude toward tourism, Informant B stated that *"they realize that it is something they cannot stop, so they are making it happen in a good way. But that is connected to them being used to the fact that there have always been tourists here"* Likewise, informant G stated that *"people who live here are used to tourists being here, and they are an important part of the ecosystem"*.

Economic consideration

Sustainability also involves an economic dimension, and informant G highlighted the importance of the tourism being economic in what one does. As Hall (2019) highlighted, it should also focus on the future economy. Furthermore, informant G stated that tourism has become an additional industry for many of the locals in the region, which means a lot for their profitability. Informant C stated that it is important to *"be financially robust to survive over time"*. Likewise, informant D stated that *"it is clear that we try to get the highest possible value creation around what we do"*. Informant B also made it clear that *"you do not earn money on everything you do. Some things are just support functions"*. Informant H further stated that

If you do not have the finances, you will not be able to act on your own sustainable development on other areas. And in order to achieve a sustainable economy, you must have some volume on your visitor base. (Informant H, 2023)

On the other hand, informant D mentioned that due to the mass tourism to Trolltunga, and the fact that they are gone for a hike during the whole day, when the cash registers are open, they only leave behind irritation, environmental footprints and too little money. Likewise, informant F stated that *“one will need to have a cash register where the cruise tourists are, and find out what they want to buy. Not just be negative about them, but do something with it”*.

Informant G stated that everyone wants the best for their own business. However, informant D stated that within economy it is important to not only think of yourself, because *“it will benefit everyone if one gets a good collaboration”*. Likewise, informant C stated that

Most people collaborate well, but when the economy is not very good, they mostly fight for themselves. So, if there had been a good economy and a good platform to work from, I think the collaboration could have been even better. (Informant D, 2023)

Informant D also found it important to *“create activities that provide income for tourism, which also provides income for others”*, and also mentioned the importance of creating attractions that are open year-round, and not only seasonal, to ensure income all year round.

Conclusion

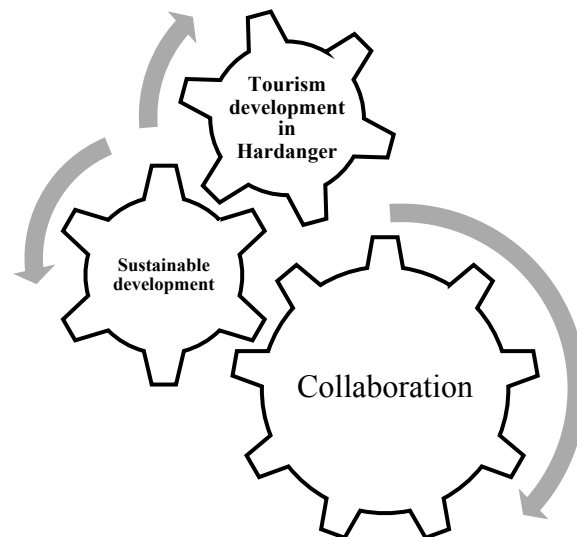
This master project aimed at investigating “collaboration as means for sustainable tourism destinations and throughout this conclusion the three research questions will be answered. To obtain a greater understanding of the phenomenon, the Hardanger region in Western Norway was used as a case. The region is experiencing an increase number of visitors and are facing several impacts from tourism. As previous research highlighted, the Hardanger region itself is aware of the developing importance of sustainability to cope with

the development, and the region was therefore found relevant to use as a case for this project. To gain an understanding of the topic, various articles, books and papers that highlighted collaboration, sustainability and tourism were reviewed. 12 semi-structured interviews helped reaching a saturation level of information from actors connected to the tourism industry in the region.

All 12 informants in the region of Hardanger stated that tourism is of high importance and it can be seen that the region is not able to survive without it, both due to economic impact and the creation of workplaces. Tourism has been important, is important, and will be even more important in the future. Yet they cannot adapt to this growth without collaboration and if not acknowledging the value of this solving their problems they will continue having the same stagnations as before. The management of a region in a vulnerable situation is of high importance, which is also something that the informants brought up. There is in fact a lack of resources and competence, which makes it even more difficult to get this going right away, but a critical factor to implement. It has to be a priority of the region as a whole to have this as part of their economic strategy, since this will be a ground-breaking step towards a better collaboration and development.

Figure 4

Collaboration for a sustainable tourism development



To elaborate the findings of the thesis, it is easier explained with a model. Figure 4 represents a chain of wheels where the connected parts are collaboration, sustainable development and tourism development in the region of Hardanger. As visualized, collaboration is the most important foundation to begin the process of general development, and is the crucial part to start with. The informants have showed an understanding of the importance of communication and collaboration, but putting it into action has proved to be difficult for a small region where the culture and municipal borders are deeply rooted. This is something the region will have to work on, due to collaboration being the steering wheel of reaching bigger accomplishments.

Solving the issue of collaboration will open up a lot of possibilities, such as aiming towards a common goal within sustainable development. Doing so, there will be a huge need of a strategy plan that every tourism actor is agreeing on. This is a process that will take time, due to relevant discussions, interests, ideas, economy, and other elements that needs to be in

place. However, it is worth the effort since there will be a more gathered region that can provide, adapt and develop together. This will also strengthen the destination when unforeseen situations happen.

The strategy plan will be the starting point of the last wheel; Tourism development in Hardanger. Even from the beginning of the implementation, one will start to see results by learning-and-doing. For the destination to be able to survive in the competition among other large tourism destinations, it is of high importance to keep on track and work together on following the evolving trends of the industry, and also the changing requirements from the evolving generations and future customers.

Even though this is the wheel you will work within, tourism development in Hardanger, you should not forget the two other steering wheels. One should never neglect the importance of good collaboration and communication. Everything starts with a good working relationship, but this it is vulnerable and needs maintenance. As proved through this thesis, Hardanger has such a huge potential for reaching their goals, but their biggest hurdle is to acknowledge that they are stronger together.

Future research

As the concept of sustainability is comprehensive and includes several dimensions, it is possible to study the project's purpose in even more detail. Future research can therefore to a great extent dig into each dimension of the concept; environmental, social, and economic. A study that focuses on one dimension at a time could lead to a greater focus and contribute to more detailed knowledge about collaborations role in sustainable development. On the other hand, the implementation of a quantitative research to get the local residents' opinions about the situation would have been interesting. Furthermore, it is possible to use this project as inspiration and do the same research at other destinations. An interesting study could also

have been to start a research at a destination that has already gotten the label of sustainable destination, and see how the collaboration's role was in their process of achieving the label.

An interesting discovery that emerged through one of the interviews, but which was not entirely relevant for this topic of this project, was the differences between the concepts of Hardanger and Hardanger fjord when working on destination branding. Future studies could therefore be a study on the two concepts' influence on the destination brand.

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Appendix 1: Information letter to informants (Norwegian)

Vil du delta i forskingsprosjektet

«Samarbeid som middel for bærekraftig reiselivsdestinasjon – ein casestudie av Hardanger»?

Dette er eit spørsmål til deg om å delta i eit forskingsprosjekt der føremålet er å læra meir om viktigheita, utviklinga og fokuset på bærekraft og samarbeid på turistdestinasjonar. Eg ynskjer å få innsikt i samarbeidet og fokuset på bærekraft i Hardanger-regionen i dag, samt forventningar og korleis dette kan bli styrka. I dette skrivet gir eg deg meir informasjon om målet for prosjektet og om kva deltakinga vil innebære for deg.

Føremålet med prosjektet

Dette prosjektet er avsluttande masteroppgåva for Marte Bratteteig Ahlsen, der formålet er å få innsikt i korleis samarbeid kan bli brukt som middel i arbeidet mot bærekraftig destinasjonsutvikling. Gjennom semi-strukturerte intervju håpar eg å få ein innsikt i korleis dagens samarbeid er i Hardanger-regionen, samt kor mykje fokus det er på bærekraft. Eg har eit ynskje om å få intervjuja både aktørar innan reiselivsbedrifter og innføre destinasjonsselskap. Eg er interessert i å snakka med fleire aktørar i regionen, for å få ein vidare innsikt og for å få innblikk i ulike perspektiv og tankegangar.

Den innsamla informasjonen vil bli brukt i mi masteroppgåva. Her vil den bli brukt til diskusjon og sett opp mot informasjon som er innhenta gjennom andre intervju. Dataene vil bli brukt for å komma fram til ein konklusjon om korleis samarbeidet og fokuset på bærekraft er i regionen i dag, samt forbetringar eller tilrettelegging for meir samarbeid og bærekraftig arbeid i tida som kjem.

Kven er ansvarlege for forskingsprosjektet?

Universitetet i Stavanger, Det samfunnsvitenskapelige fakultet

Norsk hotellhøgskole

Student:

Marte Bratteteig Ahlsen

Veileder:

Marie Christine Lundberg

Kvifor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Deltakarar/informantar til dette prosjektet er valt ut blant aktørar som er relevante for reiselivet i Hardanger-regionen. For å få ein større innsikt på temaet for prosjektet, er det sett saman eit utval av både større og mindre aktørar. Det er om lag 10 deltakarar som har blitt spurt om å delta i dette prosjektet.

Utvalet blir kontakta direkte gjennom meg, Marte Bratteteig Ahlsen, eller gjennom andre kontaktpersonar innan det aktuelle firmaet. Dette skal vera gjort via e-mail eller telefon.

Kva inneber det for deg å delta?

Dette prosjektet er basert på eit intervju som vil bli held fysisk, på ein avtalt stad. Intervjuet er berekna til å ta om lag 40-60 minutt. Spørsmåla omhandlar samarbeid og bærekraft, der det blant anna vil bli snakk om korleis dagens situasjon i Hardanger-regionen er når det kjem til samarbeid og fokus på bærekraft, kva forventningar ein har til bærekraftig utvikling, samt korleis ein tenker at samarbeid kan styrkast og forbetrast. Spørsmåla i intervjuet er vil vera opne og gi rom for refleksjon, deltakarane sine eigne tankar, erfaringar

og meiningar. Det er ingen svar som er feil, og ingen vil bli pressa til å svara på noko ein ikkje ynskjer.

Under intervjuet vil det bli tatt lydopptak på ein godkjent lydopptakar, og deretter vil det bli transkribert. Ved transkribering vil informasjonen bli gjort anonym. Lydfilene vil bli lagra i krypterte mapper, fram til prosjektets slutt. Vidare vil dataene bli brukt i analyse og diskusjon, saman med informasjon innhenta gjennom andre intervju og litteratur. Når prosjektet er slutt og karakteren er sett, seinast 7.September 2023, vil alle lydfile og informasjon bli sletta.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Dersom du vel å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake utan å gje noko grunn for dette. Alle personopplysningar om deg vil då bli sletta. Det vil ikkje føre til nokon negative konsekvensar for deg dersom du ikkje ynskjer å delta eller seinare vel å trekke deg.

All informasjon blir behandla i streng samanheng med personvernsregelverket og vil ikkje bli delt. Personopplysningar blir behandla i prosjektperioden, men i sjølve masteroppgåva vil all informasjon vera anonymisert.

Ditt personvern – korleis eg oppbevarer og brukar opplysningane dine

Eg vil berre bruka opplysningane om deg til føremåla eg har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Eg behandlar opplysningane konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Marie Christine Lundberg, veileder for dette prosjektet, vil kunne få tilgang til opplysningane
- Under intervjuet vil lydopptak bli gjennomført med godkjent lydopptakar. Det er ikkje mogleg å komme på nett med denne, og lydfilene vil bli lagra i krypterte mapper med

kode, for å sikre at all personleg data blir bevart etisk og sikkert. Alle namn, på både personar og bedrifter, vil bli kryptert og åtskild frå resten av dei innsamla dataene.

- Det vil ikkje bli mogleg å spore tilbake til nokon informantar, og i masteroppgåva vil derfor alle personopplysningar vera heilt anonymisert. Informasjon som vil bli brukt er at informasjon er innhenta frå «aktørar som er relevante for reiselivet i Hardanger».

Kva skjer med opplysningane dine når eg avsluttar forskingsprosjektet?

Personopplysningane blir anonymisert når prosjektet er avslutta/oppgåva er godkjend.

Dette prosjektets slutt er datert 7.September 2023. *Alle innsamla opplysingar, som lydfiler og notater, vil innan denne datoen bli sletta.*

Kva gjer meg rett i å behandla personopplysningar om deg?

Eg behandlar opplysningar om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag frå Universitetet i Stavanger har personverntenesta ved Sikt –

Kunnskapssektorens tenesteleverandør vurdert at behandlinga av personopplysningar i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettar

Så lenge du kan identifiserast i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- Innsyn i kva opplysningar eg behandlar om deg, og få utlevert ein kopi av opplysningane
- Få retta opplysningar som er feil eller misvisande
- Få sletta personopplysningar om deg
- Å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlinga av personopplysningane dine

Meir informasjon

Dersom du har spørsmål til studien, eller om du ynskjer å vita meir eller utøva rettane dine, ta kontakt med:

Universitetet i Stavanger, via Marte Bratteteig Ahlsen og veileder Marie Christine Lindberg (christine.lundberg@uis.no).

Dersom du har spørsmål knytt til vurderinga av prosjektet frå Sikts personverntenester kan du ta kontakt via:

- E-post personverntjenester@sikt.no eller telefon +47 739 84 040

Med vennlig helsing,

Marte Bratteteig Ahlsen

263863@uis.no

+47 974 38 101

Samtykkeerklæring

Eg har motteke og forstått informasjonen om prosjektet «Samarbeid som middel for bærekraftig reiselivsdestinasjon – ein casestudie av Hardanger», av Marte Bratteteig Ahlsen, og har fått moglegheit til å stille spørsmål. Eg samtykker til:

- Å delta i intervju
- At det blir tatt lydopptak under intervjuet
- At informasjon om meg kan brukast i prosjektet, anonymisert
- For at personopplysningane blir lagra til slutten av prosjektet

Eg samtykker til at opplysningane minne kan behandlast fram til prosjektet er avslutta, 07.september 2023.

(Signert av prosjektdeltakar, dato)

Appendix 2: Information letter to informants (English - Translated)

Do you want to participate in the research project

«Collaboration as mean for sustainable tourism destination – a case study of Hardanger»?

This is a question for you to participate in a research project where the aim is to learn more about the importance, development and focus on sustainability and collaboration in tourist destinations. I would like to gain insight in collaboration and focus on sustainability in the Hardanger region today, as well as expectations and how this can be strengthened. In this letter, I give you more information about the aim of the project and what the participation will mean for you.

The purpose of the project

This project is the final master thesis for Marte Bratteteig Ahlsen, where the purpose is to gain insight into how collaboration can be used as means in the work towards sustainable development. Through semi-structured interviews, I hope to gain an insight into what current collaboration is like in the Hardanger region, as well as how much focus there is on sustainability. I would like to be able to interview both actors within tourism companies and within destination companies. I am interested in talking to several actors in the region to gain deeper insight and to get an insight into different perspectives and ways of thinking.

The collected information will be used in my master thesis. It will be used for discussion and seen in connection to information obtained through other interviews. The data will be used to reach a conclusion about how collaboration and the focus on sustainability are

in the region today, as well as improvements or arrangements for more cooperation and sustainable work in the future.

Who is responsible for the research project?

University of Stavanger, The Faculty of Social Sciences

Norwegian School of Hotel Management

Student:

Marte Bratteteig Ahlsen

Supervisor:

Marie Christine Lundberg

Why are you being asked to participate?

Participants/informants for this project have been selected from actors who are relevant to tourism in the Hardanger region. In order to gain a greater insight into the theme of the project, a selection of both larger and smaller actors have been put together. There are approximately 10 participants who have been asked to participate in the project.

The selection will be contacted directly through me, Marte Bratteteig Ahlsen, or through other contact persons within the company in question. This will be done by e-mail or telephone.

What does participation involve for you?

This project is based on an interview that will be held physically, at an agreed location. The interview is estimated to take around 40-60 minutes. The questions concern collaboration and sustainability, where among other things, there will be a talk about what the current situation in the Hardanger region is like, when it comes to collaboration and focus on sustainability, what expectations one has for sustainable development, and how one thinks that collaboration can be strengthened and accelerated. The questions in the interview will be open and give room for reflection and the participants' own thoughts, experiences and opinions. There are no wrong answers, and no one will be pressured to answer something they don't want to.

During the interview, an audio recording will be taken on an approved audio recorder, and then it will be transcribed. When transcribing, the information will be made anonymous. The recorded files will be stored in encrypted folders until the end of the project. Furthermore, the data will be used in analysis and discussion, together with information obtained through interviews and literature review. When the project has ended and the grade has been set, no later than 7th of September 2023, all recorded files and information will be deleted.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time, without giving any reason for this. All personal data about you will then be deleted. It will not lead to any negative consequences for you if you do not wish to participate or later choose to withdraw. All information is processed in strict accordance with the privacy regulations and will not be shared. Personal information will be processed during the project period, but in the master thesis itself all information will be anonymized.

Your personal privacy – how I store and use your information

I will only use the information about you for the purpose I have described in this information letter. I treat the information confidentially and in accordance with the privacy regulations.

- Marie Christine Lundberg, supervisor of this project, will be able to access the information
- During the interview, audio recording will be carried out with an approved audio recorder. It is not possible to get online with this, and the recorded files will be stored in encrypted folders with a code, to ensure that all personal data is preserved ethnically and securely. All names, both individually and companies, will be encrypted and separated from the rest of the collected data.
- It will not be possible to track back to any informant, and in the master thesis all personal information will therefore be completely anonymized. Information that will be used is that information has been obtained from “actors who are relevant to tourism in Hardanger”.

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

All personal information will be anonymized when the project is completed/the thesis has been approved. The end of this project is dated 7th of September 2023. *All collected information, such as recordings and notes, will be deleted within this date.*

What gives me the right to process your personal data?

I process information about you based on your consent.

On behalf of the University of Stavanger, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Your rights

As long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- Get access to the information being processed about you, and being given a copy of the information
- Request a correction of personal data that is being incorrect or misleading
- Have personal data deleted
- To send a complaint to The Norwegian Centre for Research Data, regarding the processing of your personal data

More information

If you have any questions about the study, if you would like to know more or to exercise your rights, contact:

University of Stavanger, via Marte Bratteteig and supervisor Marie Christine Lundberg (christine.lundberg@uis.no).

If you have any questions related to the assessment of the project from NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data, contact:

E-mail personverntjenester@sikt.no or by telephone +47 739 84 040

Yours sincerely,

Marte Bratteteig Ahlsen

263863@uis.no

+47 974 38 101

Consent form

I have received and understood the information about the project “Collaboration as mean for sustainable tourism destination – A case study of Hardanger”, by Marte Bratteteig Ahlsen, and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I agree to:

- Participate in an interview
- That an audio recording is taken during the interview
- That information about me can be used in the project, anonymized
- For the personal data to be stored until the end of the project

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the project is finished, 7th of September 2023.

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix 3: Interview guide 1 – Superior actors (Norwegian)

Intervju guide 1: Øvrige aktører – Master i Service Leadership in International Business, Universitetet i Stavanger, våren 2023

«Samarbeid som middel for bærekraftig reiselivsdestinasjon – ein casestudie av Hardanger»

Introduksjon:

Informasjonen innhenta i dette intervjuet blir brukt i mi masteroppgåve, den avsluttande oppgåva i master i Service Leadership in International Business. Temaet for oppgåva er «samarbeid som middel for bærekraftig reiselivsdestinasjon – ein casestudie av Hardanger».

Deltaking i dette intervjuet vil innebera personopplysningar, men all personleg informasjon som kan sporast tilbake til deg vil bli anonymisert og kryptert. All informasjon som vert nytta i masteroppgåva vil altså bli heilt anonymisert og ikkje mogleg å spora tilbake.

Under intervjuet ynskjer eg å ta i bruk ein lydopptakar, som er godkjend av retningslinjene til UiS. Lydfilene er berre til personleg bruk for at eg skal kunna ta i bruk informasjonen og ha eit godt nok grunnlag for analyse i masteroppgåva. Lydfilene vil bli kryptert og ingen andre enn meg vil få tilgang til dei. All informasjon vil bli sletta ved prosjektslut. Intervjuet er estimert til å ta 40-60 minutt, alt ettersom kor mykje informasjon du vil gi. Dette er heilt opp til deg. Eg har om lag 20-25 spørsmål.

Eg har tatt med eit informasjonsskriv, som du og fekk tilsendt på førehand. Har du fått lest gjennom det? Eg vil og at du ser på det no. Om du godtar vidare deltaking i dette intervjuet,

samt at eg tek i bruk lydopptakar, kan du ver så venleg å skriva under på samtykkeerklæringa?

Lydopptak vert starta her.

Reiseliv i Hardanger

Kva er di rolle og arbeidsoppgåve i regionen?

Har Hardanger eit fungerande destinasjonsselskap som arbeidar aktivt for utviklinga av destinasjonen?

Kva type arbeidsoppgåver har de som destinasjonsselskap?

Korleis jobbar dei for reiselivet – jobbar dei for heile regionen? Må ein vara medlem?

Kan du sei litt om reiselivsnæringa her i regionen. Kor viktig er reiselivet for regionen?

Finnes det ein «ledar» eller «ansvarleg» for regionen, som jobbar med t.d.

destinasjonsutvikling, marknadsføring, osv., for destinasjonen som heilheitleg destinasjon?

Bærekraft

Kva tenker du når du høyrer ordet bærekraft?

Kor viktig vil du sei at bærekraft er for Hardanger-regionen?

Korleis jobbar regionen med bærekraft i dag?

Korleis vektlegg de sosiale-, økonomiske- og miljømessige dimensjonar ved bærekraft?

Kjenner du til Innovasjon Norge sitt merke for bærekraftig reisemål?

Er regionen miljøsertifisert eller sertifisert som bærekraftig reisemål?

Korleis synes du dette har fungert?

Korleis trur du motivasjonen mot å arbeida mot dette merket hadde blitt?

Har Hardanger det som skal til for å oppnå ein bærekraftig destinasjon?

Korleis tenker du at reiselivsnæringa i regionen kan bli meir bærekraftig?

Dagens yngre generasjon, generasjon Z, har eit større fokus på bærekraft enn tidlegare. Er dette noko som er fokus på i regionen – korleis?

Ser de det som viktig å kunna bruka bærekraft i marknadsføring – kvifor?

I reiselivet seier en ofte «ein god stad å bu er ein god stad å besøka». Korleis føler de at reiselivsnæringa tek hensyn til at reiselivet ikkje går på bekostning av lokalbefolkninga?

Korleis er lokalbefolkninga si haldning til reiseliv og turistar?

Samarbeid

Samarbeider reiselivsaktørane i regionen?

Korleis er samarbeidet mellom ulike aktørar i regionen?

Kva positive og sider ser ein ved samarbeid?

Korleis vil de sei samarbeidet er på tvers av kommunane i regionen?

Tidlegare har det vore ein del snakk om kommunegrenser og at når du kjem til ei kommunegrense i regionen er det «stopp». Korleis er denne situasjonen i dag?

Ser de moglegheiter for forbetring innan samarbeid i regionen?

Kva ser du for deg framover?

Korleis tenker du at det kunne blitt lagt til rette for betre samarbeid i regionen?

Samarbeid og bærekraft

Finnes det nettverk for bærekraftig reiselivsutvikling i regionen?

Korleis arbeider desse?

Korleis tenker du at samarbeid si rolle er, dersom regionen skal jobba saman for å bli meir bærekraftig, og t.d. oppnå merket som bærekraftig reisemål?

Kva positive og negative sider ser du?

Korleis trur du aktørane i regionen hadde greidd å samarbeida?

Kva ser du som dei største utfordringane med samarbeid og bærekraftig utvikling i regionen?

Korleis ser du føre deg det vidare arbeidet med samarbeid for å oppnå bærekraftig utvikling i regionen?

Avslutningsvis har eg eit litt større spørsmål og lurar på kven du tenker at har størst innverknad dersom reiselivet i regionen skal bli mest mogleg bærekraftig?

Er det reiselivsnæringa sjølv? Kommunen? Statlege myndigheter? Innbyggjarar?

Gjestene?

Avslutning

«Har eg forstått det rett at...»

Er det noko me ikkje har prata om som du tenker er relevant å ta opp eller ynskjer å leggja til?

Tusen takk for at du hadde moglegheit til å setta av tid til dette intervjuet. Det er til stor hjelp, og utan dette hadde ikkje mitt prosjekt vore mogleg å gjennomføra. Arbeidet vidare kjem no fyrst til å bestå av transkribering av intervju. Deretter blir det analyse og diskusjon.

Til slutt vil eg spør deg om du ynskjer at eg sender deg det transkriberte intervjuet for godkjenning? Og kan eg ta kontakt med deg igjen, dersom eg har nokre spørsmål?

Tusen takk!

Appendix 4: Interview guide 1 – Superior actors (English - Translated)

Interview guide 1: Superior actors – Master in Service Leadership in International Business, University of Stavanger, spring 2023

“Collaboration as mean for sustainable tourism destination – A case study of Hardanger”

Introduction:

Information collected in this interview will be used in my master thesis, the final thesis of master in Service Leadership in International Business. The topic of the thesis is “collaboration as mean for sustainable tourism destination – A case study of Hardanger”.

Participating in this interview will be anonymous, and all personal information that can be tracked back to you will be anonymized and encrypted. All information used in the master thesis will be completely anonymized.

During this interview, I would like to use an audio recorder, which is approved by the guidelines of UiS. The recorded files are only for personal use, so that I can use the information. The files will be encrypted and no one but me will have access to them. The interview is estimated to take 40-60 minutes, depending on how much information you want to give. This is entirely up to you. I have about 20-25 questions.

I have brought an information letter, which you also were sent in advance. Have you read through it? I also want you to take a look at it now. If you accept further participation in this interview, and that I use an audio recorder, could you please sign the consent form?

Audio recording is started here.

Tourism in Hardanger

What is your role and work task in the region?

Does the Hardanger region have a well-functioning destination company that works actively for the development of the destination?

What kind of work tasks does the destination company have?

Does the destination company work for the whole region? Do you have to be a member?

Could you say something about the tourism industry in the region? How important is the tourism to the region?

Is there a “leader” or “responsible” for the region, who works with e.g. destination development, marketing, etc., for the destination as a holistic destination?

Sustainability

What do you think of when you hear the word sustainability?

How important would you say sustainability is for the Hardanger region?

How does the region work with or focus on sustainability today?

How do you think the Hardanger region could be more sustainable?

How is the social-, economic- and environmental dimensions of sustainability emphasized?

Are you familiar with Innovation Norway’s label for sustainable destinations?

Has the region got any certifications or is it certified as a sustainable destination?

How do you think this has functioned?

How do you think the motivation to work towards this label would have been?

Does the Hardanger region got what it takes to become a sustainable destination?

Today's young generation, Generation Z, has a greater focus on sustainability than previous generations. Is this something in the region's focus – how?

Do you find it important to be able to use sustainability in marketing – why?

In tourism, it is often said that “a good place to live is a good place to visit”. How do you feel that the tourism industry considers that tourism does not come at the expense of the local population?

What is the local population's attitude towards tourism and tourists?

Collaboration

Is there any collaboration in the region?

How is the collaboration between different actors in the region?

How do you see the collaborations across municipal borders in the region?

Previously, there has been a lot of talking about municipal borders, and that when you get to the border of a municipality here in the region, there is a “stop”. How do you feel that this situation is today?

How important would you say collaboration is?

Do you see any possibilities of improvements on the collaboration in the region?

How do you see the collaboration in the future?

How do you feel that better collaboration in the region could have been facilitated?

Collaboration and sustainability

Is there a network for sustainable tourism development in the region?

How are they working?

What do you think is the role of collaboration, if the region is to work to become more sustainable, and e.g. achieve the label as a sustainable destination?

What positive and negative sides do you see?

How do you think the actors in the region would have managed to collaborate?

What do you see as the biggest challenges with collaboration and sustainable development in the region?

How do you see the future work with collaboration to achieve sustainable development in the region?

In the end, I have a slightly bigger question. Who do you think has the greatest impact if tourism in the region is to become as sustainable as possible?

Is it the tourism industry itself? The municipality? State authorities? Residents? Guests?

Summarizing

“Have I understood it correctly that...”

Is there anything we have not talked about that you find relevant to bring up or wish to add?

Finally, I would like to ask you if you would like me to send you the transcribed interview for approval? If I have anything else I am wondering about, can I contact you?

Thank you very much for taking the time to do this interview. It is a great help, and without it my project would not have been possible. Further work will consist of transcribing the interviews, then analysis and discussion.

Thank you!

Appendix 5: Interview guide 2 – Tourism actors (Norwegian)

Intervju guide 2: Reiselivsaktører – Master i Service Leadership in International

Business, Universitetet i Stavanger, våren 2023

«Samarbeid som middel for bærekraftig reiselivsdestinasjon – ein casestudie av Hardanger»

Introduksjon:

Informasjonen innhenta i dette intervjuet blir brukt i mi masteroppgåve, den avsluttande oppgåva i master i Service Leadership in International Business. Temaet for oppgåva er «samarbeid som middel for bærekraftig reiselivsdestinasjon – ein casestudie av Hardanger».

Deltaking i dette intervjuet vil innebera personopplysningar, men all personleg informasjon som kan sporast tilbake til deg vil bli anonymisert og kryptert. All informasjon som vert nytta i masteroppgåva vil bli heilt anonymisert og ikkje mogleg å spora tilbake.

Under intervjuet ynskjer eg å ta i bruk ein lydopptakar, som er godkjend av retningslinjene til UiS. Lydfilene er berre til personleg bruk for at eg skal kunna ta i bruk informasjonen og ha eit godt nok grunnlag for analyse i masteroppgåva. Lydfilene vil bli kryptert og ingen andre enn meg vil få tilgang til dei. All informasjon vil bli sletta ved prosjektslut. Intervjuet er estimert til å ta 40-60 minutt, alt ettersom kor mykje informasjon du vil gi. Dette er heilt opp til deg. Eg har om lag 20-25 spørsmål.

Eg har tatt med eit informasjonsskriv, som du og fekk tilsendt på førehand. Har du fått lest gjennom det? Eg vil og at du ser på det no. Om du godtar vidare deltaking i dette intervjuet,

samt at eg tek i bruk lydopptakar, kan du ver så venleg å skriva under på samtykkeerklæringa?

Lydopptak vert starta her.

Reiseliv i Hardanger

Kva er di rolle i bedrifta? Og kva driv de med?

Korleis er di/dykkar bedrift relevant for reiselivet i Hardanger?

Kan du sei litt om reiselivsnæringa her i regionen. Kor viktig er reiselivet for regionen?

Finnes det ein «ledar» eller «ansvarleg» for regionen, som jobbar med t.d.

destinasjonsutvikling, marknadsføring, osv., for destinasjonen som heilheitleg destinasjon?

Er de medlem eller del av et destinasjonsselskap?

Bærekraft

Bærekraft i bedrifta

Kva tenker du når du høyrer ordet bærekraft?

Har de fokus på bærekraft innad i bedrifta? Korleis?

Korleis ser de på viktigheita av bærekraft?

Korleis vektlegg de sosiale-, økonomiske- og miljømessige dimensjonar ved bærekraft?

Dagens unge generasjon, generasjon Z, har eit større fokus på bærekraft enn tidlegare. Er dette noko de har fokus på – korleis?

Ser de det som viktig å kunna bruka bærekraft i marknadsføring – kvifor?

Bærekraft i regionen

Kor viktig vil du sei at bærekraft er for Hardanger-regionen?

Korleis jobbar regionen med bærekraft i dag?

Korleis tenker du at Hardanger-regionen kan bli meir bærekraftig?

Kjenner du til Innovasjon Norge sitt merke for bærekraftig reisemål?

Er regionen miljøsertifisert eller sertifisert som bærekraftig reisemål?

Korleis synes du dette har fungert?

Korleis trur du motivasjonen mot å arbeida mot dette merket hadde blitt?

I reiselivet seier en ofte «ein god stad å bu er ein god stad å besøka». Korleis føler de at reiselivsnæringa tek hensyn til at reiselivet ikkje går på bekostning av lokalbefolkinga?

Korleis er lokalbefolkinga si haldning til reiseliv og turistar?

Samarbeid

Har de samarbeid med nokon andre i regionen?

Kva positive og sider ser ein ved samarbeid?

Samarbeider de på kryss av kommunegrenser?

Korleis synes du at samarbeidet er på kryss av kommunegrensene i regionen?

Tidlegare har det vore mykje snakk om kommunegrenser og at når du kjem til grensa mellom kommunar her i regionen så er det «stopp». Korleis føler du denne situasjonen er i dag?

Kor viktig tenker du at samarbeid er?

Ser de moglegheiter for forbetring innan samarbeid i regionen?

Kva ser du for deg framover?

Korleis føler du at det kunne blitt lagt til rette for endå betre samarbeid i regionen?

Samarbeid og bærekraft

Finnes det nettverk for bærekraftig reiselivsutvikling i regionen?

Korleis arbeider desse?

Korleis tenker du at samarbeid si rolle er, dersom regionen skal jobba for å bli meir bærekraftig, og t.d. oppnå merket som bærekraftig reisemål?

Kva positive og negative sider ser du?

Korleis trur du aktørane i regionen hadde greidd å samarbeida?

Kva ser du som dei største utfordringane med samarbeid og bærekraftig utvikling i regionen?

Korleis ser du føre deg det vidare arbeidet med samarbeid for å oppnå bærekraftig utvikling i regionen?

Avslutningsvis har eg eit litt større spørsmål og lurar på kven du tenker at har størst innverknad dersom reiselivet i regionen skal bli mest mogleg bærekraftig?

Er det reiselivsnæringa sjølv? Kommunen? Statlege myndigheter? Innbyggjarar?

Gjestene?

Avslutning

«Har eg forstått det rett at...»

Er det noko me ikkje har prata om som du tenker er relevant å ta opp eller ynskjer å leggja til?

Til slutt vil eg spør deg om du ynskjer at eg sender deg det transkriberte intervjuet for godkjenning? Dersom eg har noko meir eg lurar på, kan eg ta kontakt med deg?

Tusen takk for at du hadde moglegheit til å setta av tid til dette intervjuet. Det er til stor hjelp, og utan dette hadde ikkje mitt prosjekt vore mogleg å gjennomføra. Arbeidet vidare kjem no fyrst til å bestå av transkribering av intervju. Deretter blir det analyse og diskusjon.

Tusen takk!

Appendix 6: Interview guide 2 – Tourism actors (English - Translated)

Interview guide 2: Tourism actors – Master in Service Leadership in International Business, University of Stavanger, spring 2023

“Collaboration as mean for sustainable tourism destination – A case study of Hardanger”

Introduction:

Information collected in this interview will be used in my master thesis, the final thesis of master in Service Leadership in International Business. The topic of the thesis is “collaboration as mean for sustainable tourism destination – A case study of Hardanger”.

Participating in this interview will be anonymous, and all personal information that can be tracked back to you will be anonymized and encrypted. All information used in the master thesis will be completely anonymized.

During this interview, I would like to use an audio recorder, which is approved by the guidelines of UiS. The recorded files are only for personal use, so that I can use the information. The files will be encrypted and no one but me will have access to them. The interview is estimated to take 40-60 minutes, depending on how much information you want to give. This is entirely up to you. I have about 20-25 questions.

I have brought an information letter, which you also were sent in advance. Have you read through it? I also want you to take a look at it now. If you accept further participation in this interview, and that I use an audio recorder, could you please sign the consent form?

Audio recording is started here.

Tourism in Hardanger

What is your role in the company?

How is your company relevant to the tourism in Hardanger?

Can you say a little about the tourism industry here in the region? How important is tourism to the region?

Is there a “leader” or “responsible” for the region, who works with e.g. destination development, marketing, etc., for the destination as a holistic destination?

Are you a member or part of a destination company?

Sustainability

Sustainability within the business

What do you think of when you hear the word sustainability?

Do you focus on sustainability within the company? How?

How do you find the importance of sustainability?

How do you emphasize the social-, economic- and environmental dimensions of sustainability?

Today’s young generation, Generation Z, has a greater focus on sustainability than previous generations. Is this something in your focus – how?

Do you find it important to be able to use sustainability in marketing – why?

Sustainability in the region

How important would you say sustainability is for the Hardanger region?

How does the region work with or focus on sustainability today?

How do you think the Hardanger region could be more sustainable?

Are you familiar with Innovation Norway's label for sustainable destinations?

Has the region got any certifications or is it certified as a sustainable destination?

How do you think this has functioned?

How do you think the motivation to work towards this label would have been?

In tourism, it is often said that "a good place to live is a good place to visit". How do you feel that the tourism industry considers that tourism does not come at the expense of the local population?

What is the local population's attitude towards tourism and tourists?

Collaboration

Do you collaborate with others in the region?

What positive sides do you see with collaboration?

Do you collaborate across the borders of the municipalities?

How do you see the collaborations across municipal borders in the region?

Previously, there has been a lot of talking about municipal borders, and that when you get to the border of a municipality here in the region, there is a "stop". How do you feel that this situation is today?

How important would you say collaboration is?

Do you see any possibilities of improvements on the collaboration in the region?

How do you see the collaboration in the future?

How do you feel that better collaboration in the region could have been facilitated?

Collaboration and sustainability

Is there a network for sustainable tourism development in the region?

How are they working?

What do you think is the role of collaboration, if the region is to work to become more sustainable, and e.g. achieve the label as a sustainable destination?

What positive and negative sides do you see?

How do you think the actors in the region would have managed to collaborate?

What do you see as the biggest challenges with collaboration and sustainable development in the region?

How do you see the future work with collaboration to achieve sustainable development in the region?

In the end, I have a slightly bigger question. Who do you think has the greatest impact if tourism in the region is to become as sustainable as possible?

Is it the tourism industry itself? The municipality? State authorities? Residents? Guests?

Summarizing

“Have I understood it correctly that...”

Is there anything we have not talked about that you find relevant to bring up or wish to add?

Finally, I would like to ask you if you would like me to send you the transcribed interview for approval? If I have anything else I am wondering about, can I contact you?

Thank you very much for taking the time to do this interview. It is a great help, and without it my project would not have been possible. Further work will consist of transcribing the interviews, then analysis and discussion.

Thank you!