

## Rising global temperatures and tourism: Decoding the ‘coolcation’ trend in Nordic destinations

**Jorge Rivera García\***

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (España)

**Asunción Fernández-Villarán\*\***

Universidad de Deusto (España)

**Ricardo Pastor Ruiz\*\*\***

UNIR. Universidad Internacional de La Rioja (España)

**Abstract:** Climate significantly impacts tourism, influencing destination choices and activities. As global temperatures rise, cooler climates are becoming attractive alternatives, leading to the ‘coolcation’ trend, which addresses climate change challenges. The aim is to explore and define the new term ‘coolcation’, while identifying its characteristics, implications, and its potential impact on the tourism industry, through a qualitative research design. This study explores how Destination marketing organizations (DMO) from various Nordic destinations make sense of the concept of “coolcation”. The primary data collection method will consist on semi-structured interviews with representatives from Destination Management Organizations (DMO) of Nordic destinations. The rise of “coolcations” presents both opportunities and challenges. It opens new pathways for tourism in colder climates, potentially boosting local economies. On the other hand, it may also cause excess pressure on local infrastructures and natural resources. For this reason, the DMOs agree that is crucial to promote responsible tourism practices to ensure the sustainability of these destinations.

**Keywords:** “Coolcation”; DMO; Rising global temperatures; Nordic destinations; Making sense framework.

### Aumento de las temperaturas globales y turismo: Descifrando la tendencia de las «vacaciones frescas» en destinos nórdicos

**Resumen:** El clima tiene un impacto significativo en el turismo, ya que influye en la elección de destinos y actividades. A medida que aumentan las temperaturas globales, los climas más frescos se están convirtiendo en alternativas atractivas, lo que ha dado lugar a la tendencia de las «vacaciones frescas», que aborda los retos del cambio climático. El objetivo es explorar y definir el nuevo término «coolcation», identificando sus características, implicaciones y posible impacto en la industria turística a través de un diseño de investigación cualitativa. Este estudio explora cómo las organizaciones de marketing de destinos (DMO) de diferentes destinos nórdicos interpretan el concepto de coolcation. El método principal de recopilación de datos consistirá en entrevistas semiestructuradas con representantes de las organizaciones de gestión de destinos (DMO) de destinos nórdicos. El auge de las coolcation presenta tanto oportunidades como retos. Abre nuevas vías para el turismo en climas más fríos, lo que podría impulsar las economías locales. Por otro lado, puede ejercer presión sobre las infraestructuras locales y los recursos naturales. Por esta razón, las DMO coinciden en que es fundamental promover prácticas turísticas responsables para garantizar la sostenibilidad de estos destinos.

**Palabras Clave:** Coolcation; DMO; Aumento de las temperaturas globales; Destinos nórdicos; Marco de interpretación.

\* <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1868-647X> ; E-mail: jriveraga@uoc.edu.

\*\* <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2647-8526> ; E-mail: asun.fvillaran@deusto.es.

\*\*\* <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9302-7792> ; E-mail: ricardo.pastor@unir.net.

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## 1. Introduction

Climate has significant and direct impacts on tourism operators, destinations, and tourists. Climate is considered an important factor in explaining tourism demand, as climate and environment conditions influence, for example, the choice of tourist destinations and activities (Matei *et al.*, 2023). Hall & Saarinen (2020) pointed out that research on climate change and tourism has visibly increased and diversified over the last two decades. However, Scott & Gössling (2022) have made a call for more analysis about the relationship between tourism and climate, as the last three decades of research have failed to prepare the sector for the net-zero transition and climate disruption that will transform tourism in the 2050 horizon.

Scott (2021) emphasised that one of the main challenges facing tourism in the context of climate change is adapting to the multifaceted environmental and socio-economic impacts of an increasingly climate-disrupted world. In this line, as global temperatures rise, many regions traditionally popular for summer tourism are experiencing adverse climatic conditions, including extreme heat, droughts, and in certain periods even increased health risks for travellers (Hajat *et al.*, 2010; Kjellstrom *et al.*, 2009). In this context, destinations with cooler climates are emerging as viable and attractive alternatives. The data from Finland serves as an example of a broader trend observed in the colder countries of Northern Europe. According to a survey commissioned by the DMO Visit Finland (Visit Finland, 2023a), global online searches related to Finland have been on the rise. Similar patterns can be seen in other Nordic countries, where travellers are increasingly drawn to the experiences offered by colder climates, such as the Northern Lights, outdoor activities, and cultural heritage (Visit Finland, 2023b). These destinations, located in mountainous regions, coastal areas with cool breezes, or at higher latitudes, provide not only a refuge from the heat but also unique and diverse tourist experiences (Becken, 2013).

The concept of 'Coolcation', an amalgamation of the terms 'cool' and 'vacation', has emerged as a significant trend in the tourism industry (Kingston, 2024). This phenomenon refers to the choice of tourist destinations characterised by cooler climates, particularly in response to rising global temperatures and increasingly frequent heat waves, especially in southern Europe (Visit Norway, 2024; Visit Sweden, 2024). The trend towards Coolcations is not only a response to the search for relief from the heat but also reflects a growing interest in sustainable and responsible tourism (Hall, 2008). Cool destinations can be promoted as more sustainable options due to the lower need for energy resources for cooling and the possibility of enjoying outdoor activities without the negative impacts of extreme heat (Smith, 1990; Buhalis, 2000). Additionally, these destinations can attract a niche market of travellers concerned about their carbon footprint and the environmental impacts of tourism (Scott & Gössling, 2022). This new trend has hardly been studied; however, it is being promoted by lifestyle magazines and marketers around the world (Paulsson, 2024).

This research aims to explore and define the new term coolcation, identifying its characteristics, implications, and potential impact on the tourism industry, and to investigate whether its adoption by tourism organisations reflects a strategic response to rising global temperatures or merely a marketing tactic. This study provides a novel contribution to the elucidation of new trends in tourism by analyzing interviews with DMOs to answer the research question: How do they understand the concept of coolcation? The aim is to contribute to a more complete and critical understanding of an emerging phenomenon. In summary, this study sets out to explore the DMOs' perceived meaning of the term and thus make sense of the concept coolcation through a qualitative text analysis. This study helps to explore how coolcation can be used strategically to position specific tourism destinations and how it relates to the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change (Scott *et al.*, 2012) and how this can contribute to a more sustainable and resilient tourism model (Wall & Badke, 1994; Wang, 2011).

The structure of the document is as follows: First, a review of current tourism trends and the impact of rising global temperatures on destination preferences is presented followed by the specifics of the methodology employed. Next, the main conclusions are presented and the implications for the management and promotion of tourist destinations are analyzed. Finally, the implications for the tourism industry will be discussed, offering recommendations for destinations seeking to adapt to changing climate conditions and traveller preferences. The conclusions section highlights the limitations of the study and provides input for future research.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Rising global temperatures and tourism

In recent years, scholars such as Qiu *et al.* (2023) and policymakers have acknowledged the detrimental effects of tourism activities on surrounding environments, including pollution, ecosystem degradation, carbon emissions, and overexploitation. Furthermore, most literature on climate change and tourism has focused on the impacts of rising global temperatures and the implementation of adaptation strategies, as highlighted by Steiger *et al.* (2023).

Climate change has had a profound and multifaceted impact on the tourism industry. We find research that focused on climate as a tourism resource, examining how climate change is impacting on different types of tourism. Such studies have focused on mountain tourism (e.g. Balbi *et al.*, 2013), beach tourism (Amengual *et al.*, 2014), wine tourism (Sottini *et al.*, 2021), heritage and cultural tourism (Pioppi *et al.*, 2020), winter (sport) tourism (Bischof *et al.*, 2017) and sun, sea and sand mass tourism (coastal and island tourism) (Atzori *et al.*, 2018). All of these tourism destinations and activities are highly dependent on climate and vulnerable to climate change, affecting essential attributes and impacting destinations' attractiveness.

According to the Copernicus Climate Change Service (López, 2024), 2023 is recognized as the warmest year ever recorded, highlighting the urgent need for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Global warming is leading to an increase in temperatures worldwide, significantly impacting various regions and their tourism appeal. Existing publications on global models of economic loss in tourism activity due to climate change are scarce (Miró & Olcina, 2020). Most studies on rising temperatures focus on the change in climate comfort in tourism activity in those destinations where temperature increases may cause a greater negative impact (e.g. Sánchez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2024). Scott *et al.* (2012) noted that many regions are experiencing longer and hotter summers, which can make traditional summer destinations less attractive due to the discomfort associated with extreme heat. This phenomenon is particularly evident in regions that have historically relied on their mild summer climates to attract tourists. As temperatures rise, these areas face a decline in their competitive advantage, as tourists seek out destinations that offer a more comfortable climate (Scott *et al.*, 2012). Becken & Hay (2007) highlight that the discomfort caused by extreme heat is not just limited to physical unease but extends to the quality of the overall tourist experience as high temperatures can deter outdoor activities, limit sightseeing opportunities, and generally reduce the enjoyment of a holiday.

As noted by various authors (Pröbstl-Haider *et al.*, 2015), climate change and the associated rise in temperatures will lead to a divergence in the fortunes of tourist destinations. Some locations will benefit from the shifting climate patterns, becoming more attractive and accessible to tourists, while others will suffer adverse effects, potentially losing their appeal and economic viability. Research commissioned by the European Union (European Commission, 2023) indicates that climate change may trigger a significant shift in travel patterns across the continent. In its most concerning scenario, where global average temperatures rise by 4°C, Greece could experience a decline in tourism demand of over 7% compared to 2019 levels. Conversely, northern European countries such as Sweden, Denmark, and Finland could see an increase in demand exceeding 6% as travellers seek out cooler, more temperate climates. This dichotomy underscores the critical need for adaptive strategies in the tourism sector to mitigate negative impacts and capitalise on emerging opportunities (Landauer *et al.*, 2017).

Consequently, there is a growing interest in cooler destinations that offer a respite from the heat. This shift is driven by tourists seeking more comfortable climates, which can impact the economic viability of traditional summer tourism hotspots. The shift in tourism patterns due to rising temperatures is supported by the findings of Wall & Badke (1994), who provide an international perspective on tourism and climate change. They argue that as certain regions become less desirable due to heat, other, cooler regions may experience a surge in popularity. This can lead to an uneven distribution of tourism benefits and challenges globally, necessitating adaptive measures in both declining and emerging tourist destinations. Smith (1990) was one of the early voices in the discourse on tourism and climate change, noting that temperature increases could lead to significant shifts in tourism demand, pointing out that tourists would likely migrate towards higher altitudes or latitudes in search of cooler climates. Scott & Gössling (2022) reinforce this perspective by reviewing recent research on tourism and climate change, noting that the trend towards cooler destinations is becoming more pronounced. They suggest that destinations traditionally perceived as summer retreats may need to diversify their tourism products to include attractions and activities that are less dependent on favourable weather conditions. This

could involve investing in indoor attractions, cultural tourism, or health and wellness tourism, which are less impacted by external temperature changes.

## 2.2. Understanding and making sense of Coolcation

The term coolcation can be understood through the study of word formation and neologisms. Plag's (2023) analysis of word morphology highlights how new terms emerge and are interpreted in contexts such as tourism marketing. Plag explores how new words are created, including through processes like blending, which combines elements of existing words. coolcation, a blend of 'cool' and 'vacation', exemplifies this process. There is significant media interest in the new term coolcation, where travellers increasingly opt for cooler, less crowded destinations, which suggests that tourists might choose Nordic countries and other temperate destinations over the traditional Mediterranean hotspots as global temperatures rise (Kingson, 2024; SVT Nyheter, 2024a; SVT Nyheter, 2024b).

Weick (1993) introduced 'sensemaking' as an alternative approach to understanding complex phenomena. This term refers to how we structure the unknown so that we can act on it (Ancona, 2012). Sensemaking enables leaders to better understand what is happening in their environment, which facilitates other leadership activities such as visioning, relating and inventing. The 'Make Sense framework' can be applied to better understand the trend of coolcation by analysing how individuals interpret and give meaning to their travel choices in response to global changes, such as climate change (Gelter *et al.*, 2022). According to Klein *et al.* (2006), people seek to align their actions with their understanding of the world around them. Mills *et al.* (2010) further add that it also includes knowing how to understand an ongoing process of change and anticipating trajectories, as well as acting accordingly. In the case of coolcation, travellers may interpret rising global temperatures as a signal to seek out cooler, more sustainable destinations, such as those in Northern Europe, that offer relief from the heat and an alternative to traditional mass tourism.

## 2.3. Strategic positioning of destinations by Destination Management Organizations

The promotion of cooler destinations as *low-impact alternatives* is a growing trend in the tourism industry, responding to the increasing demand for more responsible and climate-conscious travel. Rather than claiming full sustainability, these destinations are often associated with practices that reduce environmental impact, such as energy-efficient technologies and renewable energy sources (Dubois & Ceron, 2006). Becken (2013) highlights the relevance of responsible tourism strategies that support sustainability goals, including eco-certification schemes and the promotion of local culture to limit long-haul travel.

These destinations attract environmentally conscious travellers due to their potential for lower energy consumption and minimized ecological disruption, aligning them more closely with sustainable tourism principles without necessarily fulfilling the strict definition of sustainability.

DMOs play a pivotal role in promoting these cooler regions as responsible alternatives to heat-affected areas, enhancing their attractiveness through outdoor activities and healthier environmental conditions (Becken, 2013). Scott & Gössling (2022) point to the growing awareness of eco-conscious travel and emphasize the importance of distributing tourism's environmental and social pressures more evenly across space and time by diversifying offerings (Hall, 2008). As outlined by Buhalis (2000) and Wang (2011), DMOs are essential in marketing and managing these destinations by coordinating with stakeholders to construct effective climate-sensitive branding. In doing so, they help improve destination competitiveness and contribute to tourism models with reduced environmental impact, addressing challenges associated with climate change (Gössling *et al.*, 2013; García & Ruiz, 2022).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

The choice of qualitative methodology is justified by the need to capture the complex and multifaceted nature of the phenomena under study. Quantitative methods, while useful for measuring trends and patterns, may not adequately reveal the underlying reasons and motivations behind the adoption of coolcation (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Following Wilson & Hollinshead (2015), we will employ qualitative methods as this is a new area of research and previous work is insufficient for theory-building. In such cases, exploratory work is essential to clarify research topics and support both scientific inquiry

and practical application. In this study, individual experiences of the concept of coolcation are analysed by carefully listening to destination stakeholders, which provides a means for sense-making at the individual level (Starbuck, 2015).

The interviews help to create meaning and convey knowledge (Ivanova-Gongne & Törnroos, 2017). A single interview is not enough to capture the full complexity of change, so it is necessary to combine them to identify variations and commonalities (Vaara et al., 2016). In fact, the analysis of multiple qualitative interviews in this study allows for a complete picture of the situation (Starbuck, 2015).

### 3.2. Sense-making analysis

This study is based on the methodology and phases proposed by Gelter *et al.* (2022). The first step in the analysis of sense-making is to map the relevant domains. We focus on destinations in the Nordic countries. The analysis of the coolcation concept, guided by the Make Sense framework, involved semi-structured interviews with twelve key informants, each representing a different Destination Management Organisation (DMO) in cold-weather destinations, including Visit Finland, Innovation Norway, Visit Lyngenfjord (Norway), Visit Faroe Islands, Visit Åland, Visit Levi, and Visit Arctic Coast, among others. These DMOs encompass both national and regional or local organisations. Conducted between July and September 2024, these interviews aimed to capture in-depth insights into how DMOs perceive and promote the coolcation trend in response to climate change and evolving traveller preferences. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility while maintaining a consistent thematic focus on tourist behaviour, destination characteristics, and marketing strategies related to coolcations. The interview guide (Table 1) features open-ended questions designed to explore and understand the concept of colocation. Each interview began with questions regarding the interviewee's familiarity with the term 'coolcation' and the extent to which it has been incorporated into their destination's tourism strategy. Follow-up questions probed more deeply into the characteristics of their destination that align with the idea of a coolcation, the types of tourists they had observed, and any economic or social impacts from promoting such experiences.

**Table 1: Interview guide**

Item	Question	Purpose
1	Have you recently experienced a growth in international tourists attracted by a cooler climate?	Based on Scott & Gössling (2022) and Becken & Hay (2007). To understand if the destination has observed changes in tourist flows and the impact of climate change on each destination.
2	Have you heard of the term coolcation before? How would you define coolcation in the context of your tourist destination?	To gather a definition based on the perception and experience of each DMO.
3	What characteristics do you think a destination should have to be considered ideal for a coolcation?	To identify the specific elements that make a destination attractive for this type of vacation.
4	What type of tourist demand have you observed for 'coolcations' in your destination (e.g., demographics, preferences, travel behaviour)?	To understand who are the tourists interested in 'coolcations' and what characteristics or preferences they have. We can even discern if they are perceived as more sustainable.
5	What strategies has your DMO implemented to attract tourists interested in 'coolcations'?	To reveal the tactics and policies DMOs are using to promote this type of tourism, linking it with sustainability efforts.

**Source:** Authors

The next stage consists of a vertical analysis focused on the content of the statements and arguments using linguistic resources in the form of keywords to identify the dominant themes (Gelter *et al.*, 2022). To support this analysis, a word cloud will be created using the transcriptions of all interviews conducted with DMOs, to visualise the frequency and prominence of these keywords. This approach is justified as word clouds offer a clear and accessible way to identify key themes and patterns within qualitative

data by providing a quick overview of the dominant language used, which can subsequently guide more detailed analytical processes (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014).

The third step consists of a thematic analysis to identify the most relevant issues of coolcation for stakeholder awareness (Gelter *et al.*, 2022). Following the collection of interview data, an iterative process of thematic analysis was conducted. This process involved several readings of the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns. Initially, a broad coding approach was undertaken to label key ideas, which were then refined and organised into overarching themes reflecting the main findings. The repeated analysis was crucial for achieving depth and rigor. By reviewing the data multiple times, we were able to uncover details and connections that might have been missed in a single reading. This approach also allowed for the validation of findings, as consistent patterns across different interviews reinforced the credibility of the conclusions drawn. Furthermore, the iterative analysis facilitated a reflective approach, where emerging insights were continually compared against the existing literature and research questions. This not only helped to refine the theoretical framework, but also ensured that the findings of the study were based on empirical data, thus strengthening the validity of the research.

### 3.3. Ethical Considerations

This study will adhere to the ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring they are aware of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Keywords

The word cloud (figure 1) reveals that the concept of 'coolcation' is clearly the main term under discussion. DMOs see it as a combination of 'cool' and 'vacation'. The terms 'destination' and 'international destination' emphasize the importance DMOs place on promoting certain destinations with cooler climates, both locally and internationally, as attractive options for tourists. The term 'summer' highlights that cooler destinations become especially important during this season. The words 'climate' and 'temperatures' reflect how DMOs are leveraging cooler temperatures to attract tourists, particularly in the context of global warming and heat waves in other parts of the world. 'Tourism', 'experiences', and 'activities' refer to how DMOs are exploring ways to position the concept of a 'coolcation' as a travel alternative that combines cool weather, nature, outdoor activities, and sustainability. In the interviews, certain northern European countries like Norway, Finland, and Sweden, known for their cooler climates, are highlighted. The words 'impact', 'markets', and 'increase' reflect how demand for 'coolcations' has grown or is expected to grow in certain markets, and how this impacts the local economy. Although 'sustainability' and 'responsible tourism' are not the most prominent terms, they suggest that DMOs are considering how this type of tourism can reduce pressure on traditional destinations affected by mass tourism. Finally, the words 'marketing' and 'tourist' stand out, indicating that 'coolcation' is likely seen as a key marketing tool to attract tourists looking to escape the heat. Promotional strategies can focus on highlighting the advantages of these cooler destinations compared to warmer ones.

### 4.2. Thematic analysis

The analysis of responses from Nordic destination managers provides detailed insights into the concept of coolcation and its impact on tourism. The interviews reveal varying levels of engagement with the coolcation concept. While some DMOs, like Visit Arctic Coast, have integrated the term into their nature-based tourism strategies, others, such as Visit Levi, are hesitant, fearing it could "undermine" their current positioning. This diversity suggests that while some destinations view coolcations as a way to attract new market segments, others are reluctant to promote it, especially as they consider that their appeal extends beyond climate-based factors.

The findings reveal a growing preference among international tourists for cooler climates, driven by heightened awareness of climate change and its effects. Destinations with temperate weather are seeing increased tourism, particularly during the hotter months in tourists' home countries. National DMOs have reported this surge in interest, reflected in rising internet searches and longer overnight stays, as travellers seek relief from extreme heat.

Figure 1: Word Cloud of Keywords from DMO Interviews



**Source:** Authors

National DMOs are leveraging this trend through targeted marketing campaigns, partnerships with media and influencers, and the development of tailored travel packages that highlight cooler climates and unique seasonal activities. Regional DMOs have observed some growth in international tourism and an increased interest in cooler destinations. However, while they recognize the appeal of cooler climates, they frequently lack specific data or strategies focused solely on coolcation tourism. Instead, the efforts of these local or regional DMOs are generally part of broader strategies to enhance summer tourism and develop infrastructure.

Those DMOs who have defined coolcation during the interviews generally describe it as a vacation experience centred on enjoying cooler climates, including outdoor activities in natural landscapes, cultural experiences, and wellness options like saunas. The definitions commonly emphasise the avoidance of extremely hot destinations, especially in the context of climate change. An ideal destination for a coolcation is characterised by a moderate climate, particularly in summer, with diverse natural landscapes suitable for outdoor activities. Comfortable and cosy accommodations, along with cultural and wellness experiences, are also deemed essential. Managers highlighted the importance of offering a wide range of attractions to cater to different visitor segments, ensuring that destinations can appeal to tourists seeking a respite from extreme heat.

The demographic profile of tourists attracted to coolcation destinations generally leans towards older, independent travellers. Visit Faroe Islands noted that “many of their coolcation visitors are over 45 years old and are particularly drawn to outdoor activities such as hiking and bird-watching”. This aligns with findings from Visit Lyngenfjord, who observed that many of their visitors are middle-aged couples seeking both relaxation and outdoor experiences. Regional DMO from Arctic Coast added that their tourists prefer experiential and independent travel, particularly in cooler, quieter environments.

In terms of tourist demand, managers observed that those interested in coolcations in many cases come from warmer climates and seek to escape the heat. These tourists are usually middle to upper-middle class, ranging from young professionals to retirees, and they favour sustainable travel options and authentic experiences. However, while some general patterns have been noted, many managers lack detailed data or specific research on the demand for coolcations in their regions.

Regarding strategies to attract tourists interested in coolcations, some DMOs have begun to promote their regions' cool climates and seasonal activities through marketing campaigns, influencer collaborations, and tailored travel packages. However, most have not yet adopted a specific strategy centred on the coolcation concept, focusing instead on sustainable tourism and offering authentic, year-round experiences. For example, Visit Norway emphasises nature and sustainability without using the term 'coolcation' in public campaigns, while Visit Arctic Coast plans to market seaside resorts and nature activities as part of their coolcation offering. Visit Lyngenfjord noted that their summer climate has naturally become a selling point, although not explicitly framed as a coolcation. Despite this, some managers are hesitant to aggressively market coolcations in response to climate challenges elsewhere, preferring not to capitalise on these difficulties. These varied responses reflect a cautious but growing interest in integrating coolcation into broader tourism strategies, especially as destinations seek to differentiate themselves as cooler alternatives amid rising global temperatures.

## 5. Discussion

The analysis of the interview data reveals a multifaceted and cautious approach to the concept of coolcation among DMOs in Nordic destinations. While there is an underlying acknowledgment of the potential attractiveness of cooler climates, particularly in light of rising global temperatures and changing tourist preferences, several complex considerations emerge.

### 5.1. Definitions and divergent perceptions

The variability in how coolcation is understood underscores a fundamental challenge in using it as a cohesive marketing tool. For example, while Visit Arctic Coast in Finland sees coolcation as an opportunity to extend their peak tourist season by attracting families and digital nomads, Visit Levi remains sceptical, arguing that their cooler climate is just one element among many others of their vast attractive, rather than the primary driver for visitors. This difference in perception suggests that the success of coolcation as a marketing concept will depend heavily on how well it aligns with the destination's existing identity.

In particular, destinations as Faroe Islands and Aland, which market their moderate climate and outdoor activities, seem to naturally fit within the coolcation framework, even if they have not formally adopted the term. Meanwhile, Norway DMO focus remains on broader nature and sustainability themes, signalling their cautious approach towards adopting emerging tourism trends.

### 5.2. Tourist Demand for Coolcations

The demand for coolcations is primarily driven by several demographic factors. Tourists from warmer regions such as Southern Europe, the United States, and parts of Asia are increasingly seeking destinations with cooler climates. Families, in particular, find the cooler temperatures more suitable, as they provide a more comfortable environment for outdoor activities and relaxation (Wallwork, 2024). This demographic trend is shaping the appeal of cooler destinations, especially during peak summer months when extreme heat becomes unbearable in many parts of the world.

In terms of preferences, these tourists are drawn to authentic and sustainable travel experiences that offer a connection to nature and a break from the intense heat. Cooler destinations provide opportunities for more active vacations, allowing travellers to engage in outdoor activities without the discomfort of extreme heat (Wallwork, 2024). Coolcation tourists tend to travel during the hottest months in their home countries, many times extending their stays to fully experience the refreshing environment. This trend highlights a shift in seasonal travel patterns, with cooler destinations gaining popularity in the summer, as tourists seek more temperate climates for relaxation and adventure.

### 5.3. Coolcation strategies in Nordic DMOs

The strategies used by Nordic DMOs to attract tourists seeking coolcations reveal a clear distinction between national and regional approaches, as well as between practical applications and theoretical

frameworks found in the literature. National DMOs, such as those from Finland, Sweden, and Norway, among others, have successfully integrated the concept of coolcation into their broader marketing strategies. These organizations employ targeted campaigns that emphasize their cooler climates and unique seasonal offerings, aligning with literature that identifies the need for destinations to highlight their natural climate advantages (Paulsson, 2024). For instance, Visit Sweden explicitly uses the term coolcation in its promotional materials, promoting “11 ways to keep your holiday refreshing”, which directly aligns with the coolcation concept and its emphasis on moderate temperatures (Visit Sweden, 2024). Similarly, Norway markets itself through slogans like “Enjoy a coolcation”, highlighting outdoor activities and the temperate summer climate as attractive alternatives to heatwaves in other parts of Europe (Visit Norway, 2024). This approach has been effective, with measurable increases in tourist interest in these destinations, as seen in growing visitor numbers and search volumes (Paulsson, 2024).

These strategies align with Paulsson (2024), who emphasizes the role of national DMOs in utilizing their broader reach and marketing capabilities to capitalize on emerging trends like coolcation. Furthermore, the literature suggests that winter tourism is benefiting from changes in other regions, such as the Alps, where a lack of snow has shifted interest towards Nordic countries. Paulsson's work (2024) supports the idea that Nordic DMOs are not only responding to immediate demand but also positioning themselves strategically for long-term growth as global temperatures rise.

In contrast, regional DMOs, while acknowledging some increased interest in cooler destinations, are still in the early stages of incorporating coolcation into their strategies. Many have not yet developed specific marketing initiatives or gathered sufficient data on this trend. Instead, their efforts tend to focus on enhancing overall summer tourism, improving infrastructure, and providing a broader range of experiences, without explicitly leveraging the coolcation concept (Paulsson, 2024). This divergence highlights the challenges regional DMOs face in adapting to new trends due to their more limited resources, a point supported by Höjer (2006), who noted that regions normally struggle to market unpredictable or niche tourism trends effectively.

Several tour operators, such as Via Hansa & Borealis (2024) and KMS Travel Chile (2024), have begun to specialize in promoting coolcation destinations by offering activities tailored to different market niches, such as hiking, cycling, and cultural experiences. For instance, the European Ramblers Association (2024) has incorporated hiking experiences into its offerings, promoting both natural beauty and respect for local culture, in line with growing tourist interest in sustainability. These efforts are consistent with those of Höjer (2006), who noted that modern tourists seek both predictability and authenticity, with a preference for destinations that balance natural beauty with unique experiences.

Sustainability remains a critical focus in Nordic countries' marketing strategies, further aligning with trends in the literature. Visit Finland's 2021-2025 strategy aims to position its country as a leading sustainable travel destination, attracting the “modern humanist” tourist who values independent planning, authentic local experiences, and sustainable tourism (Visit Finland, 2023a). This strategy not only aligns with current travel preferences but also supports the long-term viability of coolcation as a concept, by ensuring that natural environments are preserved. Höjer (2006) noted that while some tourists are drawn to untouched destinations, others are influenced by social media, leading to a balance between popular and niche tourism trends. In the same line, Scott *et al.* (2012) discussed how regions with cooler climates can leverage their climatic advantages to attract tourists seeking relief from extreme temperatures by encouraging sustainable tourism practices.

However, despite these efforts, the widespread adoption of coolcation as a focused marketing strategy remains limited. Many regional DMOs, while recognizing the appeal of cooler climates, lack targeted campaigns and instead incorporate the concept indirectly into their broader strategies for promoting outdoor and sustainable tourism (Paulsson, 2024). This cautious approach mirrors the hesitation noted in Höjer (2006), where regions are likely to be slow to adopt emerging trends due to uncertainty about their long-term viability.

Finally, the broader question raised by Paulsson (2024) and others is whether coolcation is simply a business response to climate change, or if it signals a broader trend towards more sustainable and climate-conscious travel choices. The concept of coolcation may reflect both: a response to immediate tourism demand and a longer-term adjustment to rising global temperatures. As temperatures continue to rise, the demand for cooler destinations is likely to increase, making Nordic countries prime beneficiaries of this trend, as noted in both practical strategies (Paulsson, 2024; Via Hansa & Borealis, 2024) and sustainability-focused tourism frameworks (Visit Finland, 2023a; Höjer, 2006).

The findings of this study closely reflect those of Paulsson (2024) and Höjer (2006), aligning with the strategies adopted by national DMOs, particularly in Finland and Norway. The growing adoption

of coolcation as a marketing tool demonstrates both an immediate response to climate-induced tourism trends and a potential shift toward more sustainable, climate-conscious travel, a trend also highlighted by the research of Höjer (2006) and Visit Finland (2023a).

While the concept of coolcation is increasingly recognised by DMOs, its integration into comprehensive tourism strategies remains notably minimal. The observed rise in tourists seeking cooler climates reflects a growing awareness and interest in alternative tourism experiences, particularly those aligned with climate considerations. However, this trend is not consistently or explicitly linked to the coolcation phenomenon within strategic tourism frameworks.

DMOs, although acknowledging the potential of coolcation as a niche market, appear to exercise a degree of caution in its adoption and promotion. Rather than embracing coolcation as a distinct and standalone concept, they tend to incorporate it into broader, more established tourism narratives that encompass sustainability, wellness, and adventure. This cautious approach suggests that while DMOs recognise the relevance of coolcation, they are hesitant to fully commit to it, possibly due to the novelty of the concept and the uncertainty surrounding its long-term viability and appeal. This restrained integration could indicate that DMOs perceive coolcation as a supplementary rather than a primary driver of tourism. By embedding it within existing frameworks, they could be seeking to diversify their offerings without disrupting their core strategies. Consequently, the coolcation phenomenon remains at the periphery of mainstream tourism discourse, with its potential yet to be fully realised or explored within the strategic planning of DMOs.

This conclusion underscores the need for further research and dialogue on how coolcation can be effectively leveraged by DMOs, potentially leading to more innovative and targeted marketing strategies that cater to the evolving preferences of climate-conscious tourists. Future research should focus on gathering more specific data on tourist demographics, preferences, and behaviours related to coolcations. These insights will help destinations improve their strategies and better tailor their offerings to meet the needs of this growing market segment. It will also be important to assess the long-term effects of coolcation tourism on local communities and environments to ensure lasting benefits while minimising any negative impacts.

In this context, the implementation of sustainable practices, the diversification of tourism offerings, and the adaptation to emerging climatic realities will be crucial for ensuring that European tourism remains a vital force for economic growth and cultural development across the continent.

Wall and Badke (1994) emphasised the need for the tourism industry to adapt its infrastructure to address health risks associated with heat. This adaptation involves providing shaded areas, air-conditioned facilities, and hydration stations at tourist destinations, enhancing comfort and safety while signalling a commitment to health and well-being. Incorporating health risk assessments into tourism planning is essential for creating sustainable strategies, necessitating collaboration among public health authorities, tourism planners, and local communities. Effective heat action plans should include early warning systems, public education on heat risks, and cooling centres.

The above results indicate that an increase in extreme temperatures conditions the behaviour of tourists and has an impact on an increase in tourist flows to destinations known as coolcations. In this way, destinations will be able to redesign or implement tourism management measures adapted to the new realities derived from climate change (Sánchez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2024). The need for measures to adapt the tourism sector to the climatic comfort of tourists' conditions both destinations and their establishments, making it possible to reduce the vulnerability of the tourism industry (Patterson *et al.*, 2006). Scott & Gössling (2022) highlighted the growing demand for eco-friendly travel options, noting that tourists are becoming more aware of the environmental impacts of their activities. This awareness drives the market for sustainable tourism products and services, which in turn encourages destinations to adopt greener practices. For example, destinations can develop and market eco-friendly accommodations, such as hotels with green building certifications or eco-lodges that operate on renewable energy.

Besides attracting environmentally conscious travellers, promoting cooler destinations as sustainable options can also help mitigate the impacts of over tourism in popular areas. Overtourism leads to environmental degradation, strain on local infrastructure, and negative social impacts on host communities. The concept of coolcation can be a powerful tool for repositioning tourism destinations in the context of climate change, offering travellers an attractive and healthy alternative to those overheated destinations.

#### **5.4. Limitations and Future Research Directions**

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The reliance on semi-structured interviews means that the findings are based on the subjective perspectives of a relatively small number of DMOs

representatives. While these insights are valuable, they may not fully capture the complexity of the broader tourism landscape. Future research should consider incorporating a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys and secondary data analysis to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the coolcation phenomenon.

The concept of coolcation offers a promising but complex opportunity for Northern European destinations. While it aligns well with the natural and climatic attributes of these regions, careful consideration is needed to ensure that it is integrated into a broader, sustainable tourism strategy that highlights the unique and enduring qualities of each destination.

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