

Article

Building People-Centred Organisational Resilience in Remote and Highly Seasonal Tourism

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Abstract

Tourism and hospitality organisations in remote, highly seasonal Arctic and sub-Arctic destinations face persistent workforce instability, multicultural team dynamics, and well-being risks that threaten service reliability and organisational continuity. Previous research has focused mainly on destination- and community-level resilience, while giving less attention to how resilience is built within tourism organisations through everyday workforce-related practices. This study examines people-centred organisational resilience through a qualitative comparative design in two northern contexts: Iceland and Finnish Lapland. The empirical material comprised semi-structured interviews in Iceland and interviews, organisational documents, and field observations in Finnish Lapland, collected in autumn 2025. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings identify four recurring resilience mechanisms: leadership under seasonal and environmental pressure; employee experience across employment phases; living conditions and belonging; and ethical governance. Here, “mechanisms” refers not simply to broad topics but to organisational processes through which recurring practices support resilience in remote, highly seasonal tourism settings. Together, these mechanisms show that resilience in remote tourism is built not only through operational flexibility or crisis response, but through people-centred organisational practices that support continuity, coordination, safety, and trust across seasons. The study contributes a workforce-centred extension of resilience theory in tourism and offers a comparative account of how these mechanisms operate across two northern tourism settings.

Keywords: organisational resilience; employee experience; ethical leadership; seasonal employment; multicultural teams; workforce retention; Arctic tourism



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1. Introduction

Tourism has become an important economic activity in remote Arctic and sub-Arctic destinations such as Iceland and Finnish Lapland, but this growth has also intensified organisational challenges linked to seasonality, labour shortages, housing pressure, and increasingly multicultural workforces ([Helgadóttir et al., 2019](#); [Lundmark & Müller, 2010](#); [Müller, 2025](#); [Saarinen, 2013](#)). These pressures are especially visible in remote tourism settings, where small local labour markets, geographic distance, and demanding environmental conditions shape both everyday operations and workforce stability. For organisations operating in such contexts, maintaining service quality and continuity depends not only on market demand or destination attractiveness, but also on their ability to recruit, support, and retain employees during recurring seasonal peaks.

Research on tourism resilience has so far focused mainly on destinations, communities, and broader systems of sustainability and adaptation ([Berkes & Ross, 2013](#); [Hall et al., 2023](#);

Jiang et al., 2019; Magis, 2010). This work has generated important insights into place-based resilience but tells us less about how resilience is built within tourism organisations themselves. This is a noteworthy gap because in highly seasonal tourism, organisations must repeatedly recruit, onboard, and coordinate temporary staff, often under time pressure and with a strong reliance on international labour (Baum, 2012; Baum, 2018). Recent work on tourism employment has also underlined the importance of workforce-related pressures such as volatility and retention, and the need to treat tourism work as a central analytical issue rather than a peripheral operational concern (Ladkin et al., 2023). What remains underexplored is how resilience is enacted through workforce-related practices in remote, highly seasonal tourism settings, where staffing continuity, employee voice, living conditions, and everyday coordination are tightly interconnected.

This article argues that organisational resilience in remote and highly seasonal tourism is fundamentally people-centred. Instead of treating workforce issues as secondary HR concerns, the study conceptualises them as core resilience capabilities that shape whether organisations can maintain coordination, safety, trust, and continuity across seasons. A central premise is that in remote tourism, resilience is built not only through operational adjustment, but through the ways organisations structure work, support employees, and sustain continuity across seasons. This perspective is especially relevant in remote tourism, where work, housing, and social integration are closely connected, particularly for seasonal and international employees. Research on employee experience has shown that work should be understood as a longitudinal experience shaped by multiple organisational aspects rather than by isolated moments or practices (Plaskoff, 2017). In seasonal tourism settings, this is specifically important because instability often emerges at transition points: before arrival, during peak workload, and after the season ends.

The study draws on a comparative qualitative design based on tourism organisations in Iceland and Finnish Lapland. These two contexts are comparable because both are remote northern tourism settings characterised by strong seasonality, reliance on international labour, and constraints on housing and infrastructure. At the same time, they differ in seasonality profiles, scales, and operational uncertainty. Lapland represents a large-scale, winter-intensive seasonal context with a strongly international workforce, whereas the Icelandic cases highlight remote operations in which environmental instability and safety-related judgement are especially central. This comparison makes it possible to identify shared organisational mechanisms of resilience while also showing how these mechanisms take different forms across remote tourism contexts. Against this background, the article addresses the following research questions: (1) How do remote, highly seasonal tourism organisations build people-centred organisational resilience through leadership, employee experience, and ethical governance? (2) What practices matter most across employment phases? and (3) How do housing and living conditions shape well-being and cohesion?

Drawing on comparative qualitative material from Iceland and Finnish Lapland, the study examines how tourism organisations translate recurring seasonal pressures into everyday practices that support employee well-being, continuity, and adaptive capacity. By doing so, it contributes to tourism and hospitality research in two main ways. First, it shifts attention from destination-level resilience to organisational- and workforce-level resilience in remote tourism. Second, it identifies four connected people-centred mechanisms through which resilience is built in highly seasonal tourism: leadership, employee experience, living conditions and belonging, and ethical governance. The article's main theoretical contribution is to offer a workforce-centred extension of resilience theory to remote, highly seasonal tourism. Its secondary contribution is comparative: it shows how these recurring mechanisms take different empirical forms across two northern tourism settings.

Rather than proposing a universal model of resilience, the article offers an analytically rich qualitative comparison of how people-centred resilience is organised in context.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on organisational resilience research that understands resilience as a dynamic capability rather than a fixed trait. In this perspective, resilience is built through organisational routines, coordination, leadership, and learning processes that help organisations anticipate challenges, cope under pressure, and adapt over time (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). This framing is particularly relevant for remote, highly seasonal tourism, where disruption is not always exceptional but is often embedded in recurring seasonal peaks, labour instability, and demanding environmental conditions.

2.1. Organisational Resilience

Organisational resilience refers to an organisation's ability to maintain functioning and adapt when conditions become difficult or unstable (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Following Ducheck (2020), resilience is understood here as a process involving three interrelated capacities: anticipation, coping, and adaptation. Anticipation refers to recognising and preparing for likely pressures before they fully emerge. Coping refers to responding effectively when pressures intensify. Adaptation refers to learning from experience and embedding these lessons into future routines and practices. This process-based understanding is important for the present study because it shifts attention away from resilience as an abstract organisational attribute and towards the concrete practices through which organisations remain functional across time. In remote and seasonal tourism, these practices are often linked not only to formal planning but also to workforce continuity, leadership, and everyday coordination.

2.2. People-Centred Resilience

Although resilience is often discussed in strategic or operational terms, human factors are central to its presentation in practice. A people-centred perspective emphasises employee well-being, psychological safety, leadership, and ethical norms as key elements that shape how organisations anticipate pressure, cope under strain, and adapt over time (Cvenkel, 2018; Kalshoven & Boon, 2012). Employees who experience support, trust, and psychological safety are more likely to share concerns, collaborate under pressure, and contribute to problem-solving and learning (Ahsan & Khawaja, 2024; Athota & Malik, 2019). Leadership is therefore important not only because it directs action, but because it shapes the relational conditions under which employees feel able to coordinate, speak up, and exercise judgement. Research further suggests that ethical and inclusive leadership strengthens resilience by improving trust, fairness, and collective commitment, especially in settings marked by uncertainty and organisational strain (MacIntyre et al., 2013; Mei et al., 2024; Onsoni et al., 2025). In this article, people-centred resilience refers to resilience that is built through these social and relational conditions rather than through operational systems alone.

2.3. Employee Experience as a Driver of Organisational Resilience

Employee experience has increasingly been understood as a holistic and longitudinal perspective on how employees perceive and live their relationship with an organisation over time (Bridger & Gannaway, 2024; Plaskoff, 2017). Rather than focusing solely on engagement or satisfaction at a single point, this perspective encompasses multiple employment aspects, including recruitment, onboarding, daily work practices, leadership interactions, and exit or re-entry transitions. This is especially relevant in seasonal tourism, where continuity is repeatedly disrupted and rebuilt. In such contexts, the employment

relationship is shaped not only by peak-season work itself, but also by what happens before arrival, during the season, and after the contract ends (Baker, 2024).

For remote tourism organisations, employee experience extends beyond the workplace in a narrow sense. Housing, access to services, social integration, and adaptation to demanding local conditions all shape how work is experienced and whether employees remain, perform well, and return in future seasons. Research on tourism and hospitality work shows that working conditions, well-being, and retention are closely connected, particularly in demanding service environments (Ariza-Montes et al., 2019; Krekel et al., 2019; Ladkin et al., 2023). Employee experience is therefore useful in this study as a way of understanding how organisations create continuity, reduce instability, and support resilience across recurring seasonal cycles.

2.4. Multicultural Teams and Organisational Behaviour in Seasonal Tourism

Remote tourism organisations in Arctic and sub-Arctic settings often rely heavily on international and multicultural workforces because local labour pools are limited. Multicultural teams can provide important benefits, including broader language skills, diverse competencies, and greater service flexibility, but they may also face challenges related to communication, expectations, conflict management, and inclusion (Stahl et al., 2010). These challenges tend to become more visible under stress, time pressure, and fatigue, especially during peak seasons (Calderón Nurmi, 2025; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018).

For the present study, the key point is not to explain such differences through broad national culture models, but to understand how organisations manage them in practice. Research suggests that multicultural teamwork functions more effectively when leaders establish explicit norms, create psychological safety, and provide practical support mechanisms such as mentoring, buddy systems, and structured communication channels (Horváth & Kenesei, 2023). In remote and seasonal tourism, these practices are especially important because coordination problems can directly affect both service quality and safety.

2.5. Ethical and Inclusive Leadership in Remote Tourism Organisations

Ethical leadership is particularly important in seasonal tourism because these organisations often involve unbalanced employment relationships, especially for international and temporary workers. Such workers may depend on the employer not only for income, but also for housing, information, local orientation, and access to social networks. Under these conditions, ethical leadership shapes employees' experiences of fairness, dignity, trust, and inclusion (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Ghanem & Castelli, 2019). Research suggests that ethical leadership contributes to longer-term organisational resilience by strengthening trust, reducing turnover, and aligning organisational practices with stated values (Lowe, 2010; Onsori et al., 2025).

Inclusive leadership complements this perspective by emphasising openness to diversity, responsiveness to employee voice, and shared responsibility in decision-making. In multicultural and seasonal settings, this is especially relevant because temporary employees may otherwise hesitate to raise concerns or challenge unsafe or unfair practices.

Together, ethical and inclusive leadership provide an important basis for understanding how organisations create legitimacy, cohesion, and continuity in remote tourism settings where labour dependence and vulnerability are high. In the present study, these perspectives help explain how workforce-related organisational practices contribute to resilience in remote and highly seasonal tourism.

2.6. Context: Tourism in Finnish Lapland and Iceland

Tourism plays a central role in both Finnish Lapland and Iceland, shaping local economies, cultures, and debates about sustainability, development, and community well-

being. Although the two regions differ in scale, geography, and population patterns, both have experienced rapid tourism growth in recent years, with significant economic benefits and growing challenges. Finnish Lapland is centred around the Arctic Circle, with much of the region located at or north of it, which contributes strongly to its Arctic tourism profile (Finavia, 2025). Iceland is situated in the North Atlantic, just south of the Arctic Circle, with tourism demand shaped by sub-Arctic/subpolar seasonality, including long summer days and short winter days, and weather-dependent access to nature experiences. Both Lapland and Iceland attract visitors primarily for their natural environments and unique seasonal experiences. In Lapland, phenomena such as the midnight sun and the Aurora Borealis, combined with winter recreation opportunities, contribute to Finland's reputation as an Arctic destination (Visit Finland, 2026). Lapland has its peak season during the winter months, typically driven by snow-dependent activities and aurora-focused travel between November and March. (Statistics Finland, 2026). Iceland's appeal is similarly built on geological wonders, such as volcanoes, glaciers, geothermal springs, and rugged coastlines, especially attractive to adventure travellers and nature photographers. Iceland's peak season is mainly from June to September. Nevertheless, due to strong marketing, Iceland is also now very popular during the winter months, supported by campaigns and packages focused on Northern Lights viewing and ice-cave visits, with the ice-cave season typically running from around November to May (Visit Iceland, 2025). The country is further promoted as a short city break to Reykjavik and as a stopover destination on transatlantic itineraries, for example, through "stopover" products and dedicated Northern Lights city-break packages (Icelandair, n.d.).

Taken together, the comparison between the two regions is not based on identical tourism systems, but on comparable workforce and organisational pressures. In both contexts, organisations must rapidly scale labour during peak periods, integrate seasonal teams, often multicultural, and maintain service continuity under conditions of labour scarcity and limited housing availability. The key difference is that Lapland reflects a highly concentrated, winter-intensive destination context, whereas the Icelandic cases highlight remote operations in which environmental instability, workload fluctuations, and safety-related judgement are especially central. The Iceland–Lapland comparison, therefore, makes it possible to identify shared people-centred resilience mechanisms while also showing how these take different forms depending on seasonality structure, organisational scale, and operational environment.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study uses a comparative qualitative design to examine how remote and highly seasonal tourism organisations build people-centred organisational resilience. It compares two Arctic tourism contexts: remote organisations in Iceland and seasonal tourism settings in Finnish Lapland. The aim is not statistical generalisation, but analytical generalisation, that is, to identify recurring organisational mechanisms that support resilience across different but comparable remote tourism settings. The comparison is appropriate because both contexts share key structural pressures: remoteness, strong seasonality, dependence on international or seasonal labour, and workforce-related challenges linked to housing, retention, and coordination. At the same time, they differ in seasonality profile, organisational scale, and operational uncertainty. This enables the examination of both shared mechanisms and context-specific expressions of people-centred resilience.

Case selection followed a purposive logic. Iceland and Finnish Lapland were chosen because both are northern tourism contexts marked by remoteness, seasonality, labour dependence, and pressures related to housing, retention, and coordination, while also

differing in analytically important ways. This made them suitable for examining whether similar people-centred resilience mechanisms appear across comparable but non-identical settings. Practical access to rich qualitative material also supported the selection, but the cases were chosen primarily for their theoretical relevance to the research questions.

The study draws on two complementary evidence streams. The Icelandic material is primarily interview-based and captures organisational experiences and practices in lived operational settings. The Lapland material combines interviews, organisational documents, and observations, making formalised practices, site conditions, and operational environments more visible. Although the two evidence streams are not methodologically identical, the comparison is based on analytical comparability rather than strict equivalence of data type. In both contexts, the material was examined through the same research questions and a mechanism-focused analytical framework centred on leadership, employee experience, living conditions, belonging, and ethical governance.

3.2. Data Sources

The empirical material comprises several complementary sources. It included eight semi-structured interviews with owners and/or managers focusing on resilience practices and HR innovation under seasonal and environmental pressure. Five interviews were conducted in Iceland and three in Finnish Lapland. Topics included leadership and coordination during peak seasons, recruitment and retention in small labour markets, safety, trust, professional judgement, employee experience and belonging, and learning and development.

In Iceland, the material drew on interviews with representatives of five companies from different sectors: aquaculture, wellness tourism, horse-related tourism activities, and seasonal visitor attractions. Although the sectors differed, all operated in remote communities under demanding natural and seasonal conditions. No formal observations were conducted in Iceland; instead, the analysis was informed by the author's long-standing contextual knowledge developed through more than a decade of work and engagement in Icelandic tourism.

In Lapland, the material also included internal organisational documents and observations from three cases: a large amusement park, a large resort, and an animal farm offering tourism activity (see Table 1). The documentary material included internal presentations, planning materials, and supporting case documents. Observations took the form of non-participant site visits and informal field-based interactions, recorded through field notes written during and immediately after the visits. They focused on staff accommodation, transport and commuting, visitor intensity, working and living conditions in remote locations, and the everyday organisational environment in which seasonal work was carried out. These materials were used not only as background context but also to support triangulation and refine the interpretation of organisational practices.

Data collection took place in autumn 2025, during a lower-intensity period between peak seasons. This timing made access to managers and sites more feasible while also allowing discussion of recent peak-season experiences and preparations for the next seasonal cycle. All interviews lasted approximately 25–35 min. In Iceland, interview participants included owners and managers; in Lapland, they were managers.

The study involved adult professional participants interviewed in their organisational roles. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained before each interview, and all material was anonymised during analysis and reporting. No sensitive personal data was collected. Formal ethical approval was not required, as the study involved non-interventional qualitative interviews with adult participants and minimal risk.

Table 1. Overview of cases, data sources, and analytical focus.

Region	Case Type	Main Data Sources	Main Analytical Focus
Iceland	Aquaculture company in a remote coastal community	Semi-structured interview	Safety culture, professional judgement, internal training, long-term commitment
Iceland	Wellness tourism company in a remote setting	Semi-structured interview	Nature as a staff well-being resource, employee recovery, workplace atmosphere
Iceland	Horse-related tourism company	Semi-structured interview	Flexible staffing, seasonal adaptation, returners, service consistency
Iceland	Seasonal visitor attraction	Semi-structured interview	Community spirit, authenticity, belonging, emotional commitment
Iceland	Remote tourism company in a small community	Semi-structured interview	Team cohesion, local integration, remote work realities, practical HR support
Finnish Lapland	Large seasonal tourism operator	Organisational documents, observations, interview-based insight	Seasonal scaling, international workforce, onboarding, accommodation, retention, governance
Finnish Lapland	Large visitor attraction setting	Observations and supporting material	Visitor concentration, operational intensity, staffing pressure, working environment
Finnish Lapland	Animal-based tourism setting	Observations and supporting material	Everyday work conditions, seasonal coordination, service-delivery context

3.3. Data Analysis

All organisational identifiers, including company names, personally identifying details, and specific location markers beyond the country or regional level required for interpretation, were removed or masked before analysis. The cases are therefore reported in anonymised form, for example, as “seasonal tourism setting in Finnish Lapland”.

Documents and observation notes were analysed alongside the interview material rather than treated only as descriptive background. They were used to contextualise interview accounts, triangulate emerging interpretations, and make site conditions and formalised organisational arrangements more visible, particularly in the Lapland cases. The material was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To strengthen trustworthiness, the study combined deductive and inductive coding, compared themes across interviews, documents, and observations where available, and used cross-context comparison to assess whether emerging interpretations were case-specific or more broadly recurring.

A deductive starting structure was developed from the literature on organisational resilience, people-centred resilience, employee experience, multicultural teamwork, and ethical leadership. However, the analysis did not remain restricted to this framework. During coding, new issues were added whenever the material pointed to practices, conflicts, or contextual conditions that were not fully outlined in the literature. Several aspects of the final interpretation, especially the role of living conditions, community ties, and nature as workforce-related resilience resources, were therefore strengthened through inductive engagement with the empirical material.

The analysis proceeded in five steps. First, the Icelandic and Lapland materials were analysed within their respective contexts to preserve the integrity of each setting and

source type. Second, the full dataset was read repeatedly to support familiarisation and identify recurring organisational issues, constraints, and practices. Third, initial coding was conducted across interviews, documents, and observation notes. Fourth, codes were grouped into broader themes through iterative comparison, and these were then compared across the Icelandic and Lapland material to identify both common mechanisms and contextual differences. Fifth, the themes were refined and organised into the final narrative structure: leadership under pressure, employee experience across employment phases, living conditions and belonging, and ethical governance. The final thematic structure thus emerged through cross-context integration rather than by collapsing all material into a single undifferentiated dataset at the outset.

The analysis focused on organisational mechanisms rather than individual attitudes alone. In other words, attention was directed to what organisations do, how practices are connected, and why they matter under recurring seasonal pressure. This is consistent with Duchek's (2020) understanding of resilience as a dynamic capability shaped by anticipation, coping, and adaptation. Because the two contexts were based on partly different evidence streams, the analysis also considered what each type of material made visible. The Icelandic interviews provided stronger insight into managerial reasoning, operational judgement, and lived organisational experience, while the Lapland documents and observations made formalised practices, site conditions, and organisational arrangements more evident. This asymmetry was handled analytically by comparing recurring mechanisms rather than assuming equivalence between source types. Table 2 summarises the comparative logic of the analysis by presenting the main shared organisational pressures and the key contextual differences between Iceland and Finnish Lapland.

Table 2. Comparative logic of the study.

Dimension	Iceland	Finnish Lapland	Shared Analytical Relevance
Remoteness	Remote communities, small labour pools, weather exposure	Remote northern tourism settings with labour constraints	Staffing continuity depends on organisational support systems
Seasonality	Strong fluctuation across sectors	Highly concentrated winter peak	Seasonal reset creates recurring coordination and retention pressure
Workforce	Small teams, returners, practical reliance on trusted staff	Highly international seasonal workforce	Integration, belonging, and communication become resilience issues
Main operational pressure	Weather, safety judgement, workload fluctuation, small-community constraints	Large-scale winter expansion, accommodation, multicultural coordination	Leadership and employee experience shape how pressure is managed
Living conditions	Community integration, practical support, quality of life in remote places	Accommodation capacity, privacy, commuting, isolation	Living conditions shape retention, belonging, and everyday recovery
Key resilience resources	Flexibility, community ties, connection to nature, practical HR support	Organised onboarding, accommodation, multicultural coordination, formal governance	People-centred practices stabilise organisations under recurring pressure

In this study, the final themes are interpreted analytically as resilience mechanisms. A mechanism is understood here as a recurring organisational process through which people-centred practices contribute to continuity, coordination, safety, or adaptation un-

der seasonal pressure. Concrete practices, such as onboarding routines, mentoring, staff housing arrangements, or review structures, are treated as the observable elements through which broader mechanisms operate. The term “theme” refers to the coding-based analytical category, whereas “mechanism” refers to its interpretive significance for explaining how resilience is enacted in practice.

4. Findings: People-Centred Mechanisms of Organisational Resilience

The findings show that organisational resilience in remote, highly seasonal tourism is built through recurring people-centred mechanisms rather than isolated crisis responses. Across the Icelandic and Lapland material, resilience is expressed less as recovery from exceptional shocks than as the ability to maintain coordination, safety, and workforce continuity under recurring seasonal pressure. Following Ducheck’s (2020) capability perspective, four connected mechanisms stand out: leadership under pressure, employee experience across employment phases, living conditions and belonging, and ethical governance. These mechanisms form a people-centred resilience architecture through which organisations anticipate strain, cope during peak periods, and adapt between seasons.

What is shared across the two contexts is the centrality of continuity under pressure: in both Iceland and Lapland, resilience depends on whether organisations can stabilise teams, protect judgement, and reduce avoidable disruption across recurring seasonal cycles. What differs is the organisational expression of that challenge. In Iceland, people-centred resilience is articulated more strongly through safety judgement, flexibility, returners, and community-based support in small, remote settings. In Lapland, the same broad logic appears in a more formalised form, with stronger emphasis on accommodation, onboarding, multicultural coordination, and governance across organisational boundaries. These differences show that people-centred resilience has a shared organisational logic but context-specific practical forms.

Across the Icelandic interviews, three broad challenges were repeatedly highlighted: strong seasonality, isolation in small communities, and safety or pressure in demanding conditions. As one interview synthesis put it, companies faced “a sharp contrast between high season and low season,” had to operate in places with a limited labour pool, and needed to protect both physical and mental well-being under heavy workloads and changing natural conditions. The Lapland material revealed closely related pressures in a more winter-intensive setting. These included rapid seasonal expansion, strong reliance on international labour, operational dependence on accommodation, and varying degrees of subcontracted service delivery. Taken together, the findings indicate that people-centred resilience depends on how organisations organise work before, during, and between seasons.

4.1. Leadership Under Seasonal and Environmental Pressure

Across the cases, leadership emerges less as a matter of personal style than as a practical mechanism for maintaining coordination, safety, and employee voice under pressure. What differs between the two contexts is not whether leadership matters, but how it is performed. In Lapland, leadership is tied more closely to the rapid integration of a highly international seasonal workforce during an intense winter peak. In Iceland, leadership is expressed more strongly through the protection of professional judgement when weather, visibility, road conditions, or other environmental factors change quickly. In both settings, leadership supports resilience by helping teams perform reliably under pressure.

In Lapland, this mechanism is especially visible in the management of multicultural seasonal teams. The study indicates that communication differences, limited support networks, and the speed of winter scaling can undermine team cohesion if integration is treated

as informal or automatic. Leadership is therefore closely linked to structured onboarding, mentoring, predictable scheduling, visible feedback channels, and practical support during the first phase of employment. Rather than assuming that belonging will develop on its own, organisations must build it actively through routines that help newcomers become operationally reliable and socially integrated. Analytically, this means that leadership supports resilience by shortening the time it takes for a temporary workforce to become confident enough to ask questions, raise concerns, and work effectively under pressure.

The Icelandic cases point to a related but more safety-oriented leadership logic. Managers repeatedly described remote tourism work as requiring constant re-evaluation of plans when natural conditions shift. Here, resilience depends not on maintaining flow at all costs, but on preserving the legitimacy of slowing down, redesigning, or cancelling activities when necessary. Briefings, debriefings, and trust-based communication matter because they give employees room to speak up and adapt collectively. Several interviewees stressed that resilient organisations trust experienced staff to use local judgement rather than pressuring them to continue in order to meet schedules or customer expectations. In this context, one interviewee stated, “The captain on each vessel makes the final call on whether conditions are safe to go out to sea,” which captured a broader culture of responsibility. This corresponds closely with research on psychological safety and leader inclusiveness, which shows that teams perform more reliably when members can express uncertainty and raise concerns without social penalty (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). It also supports broader arguments that leadership contributes to resilience by shaping the conditions under which trust, clarity, and coordinated adaptation become possible (MacIntyre et al., 2013; Mei et al., 2024).

Taken together, the cases suggest that leadership supports resilience in three connected ways: it stabilises coordination in temporary and diverse teams, fosters psychological safety and employee voice, and protects professional judgement when operational pressure intensifies. Leadership, therefore, matters not mainly as inspiration or motivation, but as an everyday mechanism through which reliable action becomes possible under seasonal and environmental pressure.

4.2. Employee Experience Across Employment Phases

The study made clear that employee experience functions less as an in-season satisfaction issue than as a continuity system across recurring seasonal cycles. In both Iceland and Lapland, organisations face a repeated seasonal reset: recruitment, rapid onboarding, team integration, and movement toward reliable performance. Resilience, therefore, depends on reducing the disruption this cycle creates. What differs is how this is organised. In Lapland, employee experience is more formalised through onboarding processes, support routines, and accommodation arrangements. In Iceland, it is expressed more through practical flexibility, retention of experienced staff, and people-centred arrangements that help staff cope with remote life and seasonal pressure. Across both contexts, employee experience is treated less as an employer-branding issue than as a practical response to instability created by seasonal change, which supports work that conceptualises it as a longitudinal organisational phenomenon rather than a one-time engagement issue (Bridger & Gannaway, 2024; Plaskoff, 2017).

Before arrival, the key issue is expectation alignment. A large seasonal tourism operator in Lapland consistently emphasises clear onboarding, realistic information, and structured support before and upon arrival. Because recruitment often takes place through international partners, schools, and networks, many incoming staff arrive with limited knowledge of Arctic living and working conditions. Here, the manager therefore stresses language preparation, clearer information on employment terms and rights, and a more

explicit orientation to housing, commuting, and daily life in a remote destination. The Icelandic cases reinforce this point. Managers repeatedly noted that unclear expectations about pace, workload, environment, or local realities can quickly strain teams in remote settings. In this sense, pre-employment communication acts as a resilience practice by reducing preventable instability before the season begins.

During the season, employee experience shifts from attraction to stabilisation. Across the study, this includes onboarding and training, feedback collection, well-being monitoring, recognition, predictable scheduling, and development opportunities. The Icelandic interviews add more concrete examples. One recurring theme was flexible staffing combined with retention of core staff. As one interview noted, companies hire temporary staff in peak periods but try to retain key employees who carry “knowledge and stability from one season to the next.” This was especially visible in the wellness tourism and horse-related tourism cases, where managers stressed that without experienced returners, it would be difficult to maintain quality and consistency during rapid seasonal expansion. These returners reduce pressure on supervisors, support newcomers informally, and help teams become functional more quickly.

Training and development were also linked directly to retention. Interviewees noted that staff are more likely to return when each season builds confidence, competence, and responsibility rather than simply repeating the same tasks. This was particularly visible in the aquaculture case, where an internal academy was described as building “skills, leadership, and professional growth,” thereby strengthening both performance and long-term commitment. The Icelandic cases also made clear that people-centred support in remote settings does not mainly mean remote work or digital flexibility. None of the interviewed companies offered remote work because the jobs required on-site presence and teamwork. Instead, support focused on practical measures that made remote life and work more sustainable, including rotation systems, staff housing, transport support, quality meals, and opportunities for recovery between intense work periods. Employee experience was therefore shaped as much by everyday life and recovery arrangements as by the formal job itself.

After the season, continuity becomes relational rather than purely contractual. Several organisations, especially in Lapland, described the off-season as an active strategic period, referring to flexible off-season employment models, collaboration with local partners, and professional development during quieter months. This points to a different understanding of seasonal labour: not as disposable peak labour, but as a workforce that can be retained, reactivated, and strengthened over time. Employee experience, therefore, contributes to resilience by aligning expectations before arrival, stabilising performance and belonging during the season, and preserving relationships and knowledge between seasons. Organisations that do this well reduce early exits, lower onboarding pressure, and increase the likelihood that trained staff return with prior trust, tacit knowledge, and social integration already in place.

The key analytical takeaway is that employee experience supports resilience when organisations treat it as a continuity system across the full seasonal cycle rather than as an in-season satisfaction issue alone.

4.3. Living Conditions, Well-Being, and Belonging

Living conditions emerge in both contexts as part of the workforce system rather than as a peripheral employment benefit. In remote seasonal tourism, staffing cannot be separated from accommodation, transport, privacy, recovery, and everyday life. What is shared across Iceland and Lapland is that employees are more likely to remain, perform well, and return when work is supported by stable and manageable living conditions.

What differs is the form this takes. In Lapland, the issue is most visible in accommodation capacity, commuting, and the organisation of everyday life in winter-intensive tourism settings. In Iceland, it is expressed more through community integration, team spirit, and practical support, which makes remote life feel sustainable. These differences show that people-centred resilience is built not only through what happens inside the workplace, but also through the wider conditions that make remote work liveable.

The Lapland cases make this especially clear. In one large case, a substantial winter workforce depended on a limited number of staff beds, so accommodation capacity became a practical ceiling on recruitment and growth. Field observations across the Lapland cases reinforced this point by highlighting commuting difficulties, a lack of privacy, winter isolation, distance from services, and the cumulative strain of cold and darkness. Employees and managers described remote tourism work as attractive and distinctive, but also as difficult to sustain when housing, transport, and social support did not align. In this sense, living conditions affect more than comfort: they shape whether employees can recover, feel secure, and experience themselves as part of a viable community rather than as temporary labour.

The study in Lapland also shows that belonging depends on practical conditions of daily life. It is not only a question of adding beds, but of improving privacy, adapting food and leisure arrangements, strengthening social activities, and helping employees feel like full members of the team. This matters because belonging depends not only on organisational culture in an abstract sense, but on whether everyday living and working arrangements support inclusion in practice. It also aligns with broader research showing that working and living conditions are strongly linked to retention and perceived work quality in tourism and hospitality (Baum & Robinson, 2024; Ladkin et al., 2023).

The Icelandic interviews point in the same direction from a somewhat different angle. Managers repeatedly linked resilience to community and team spirit, and several described small communities as both demanding and supportive. In family-run and community-based cases, personal relationships, local integration, and authenticity were presented as central to staff motivation and loyalty. One case described resilience in a small seasonal business through a strong sense of belonging that helped keep both staff motivated and customers returning. In another case, practical support mattered greatly: rotation systems, staff housing, transport support, quality meals, and time for recovery were described as ways to make remote work more sustainable rather than simply more efficient.

The Icelandic cases also highlighted how nature itself could become a workforce resource. In the wellness tourism case, staff were encouraged to enjoy the same calm environment and wellness atmosphere that attracted guests. As one case synthesis put it, nature was not only part of the service, but also part of HR. This is analytically important because it shows that well-being in remote tourism is not only protected by reducing stressors; it can also be supported positively by the environment itself.

Across the material, managers and case materials referred to several practical responses, including treating staff housing as a year-round asset, improving staff facilities, strengthening pre-arrival preparation, clarifying terms and benefits, and supporting everyday balance through transport, meals, and recovery time. These interventions matter because they reduce avoidable stressors that would otherwise turn remoteness into attrition. Living conditions, therefore, shape resilience in three main ways: they affect whether organisations can recruit enough staff, whether employees can sustain performance and recovery during the season, and whether they feel settled enough to return in future seasons. In remote tourism settings, resilience is built not only through work design and leadership, but also through the conditions that make work socially and practically liveable.

4.4. Ethical Governance and Long-Term Commitment

Ethical governance appears most explicitly in the Lapland cases, where guest experiences are often co-produced across organisational boundaries and where growth, outsourcing, and multicultural employment create risks of inconsistent standards. In this context, ethical governance is not treated as a symbolic values statement, but as a practical way to align expectations, monitor conduct, and protect trust across internal teams and external partners. The Icelandic material points to a related logic, though in a less formalised way: resilience there also depends on professional responsibility, trust in expertise, and clear behavioural boundaries under difficult conditions. What is similar across the two contexts is that resilience requires visible standards and legitimate decision-making. What differs is the degree of formalisation. In Lapland, ethical governance appears more infrastructural and systematised, whereas in Iceland it is expressed more through managerial judgement, responsibility, and trust-based practice.

In one Lapland case, ethical governance was articulated in case materials and organisational development practices as a broader governance package rather than a single policy. The case referred to an Ethical Leadership Code for staff, a Contractor Conduct Charter for partner organisations, ethics-focused leadership training, a train-the-partner approach, an academy or partner certification pathway, an annual ethics survey, whistleblowing protections, and a Responsible Growth Board reviewing growth plans, partner compliance, ethical metrics, and workplace concerns. As a case example, this shows that ethical inconsistency was treated not as a marginal HR issue, but as an organisational resilience risk requiring formal alignment, monitoring, and correction across internal and external actors. These governance practices matter because they make ethical expectations visible in everyday organisational life. They address fair treatment of workers, safe working conditions, anti-discrimination, animal welfare, environmental responsibility, and procedures that allow workers to raise concerns without retaliation. The Responsible Growth Board is particularly significant because it connects ethical issues directly to strategic development decisions rather than leaving them at the level of HR or CSR rhetoric. In contexts marked by temporary or seasonal work, multicultural teams, and uneven power relations, such structures help protect trust, strengthen retention, and sustain organisational legitimacy over time (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Ghanem & Castelli, 2019; Onsori et al., 2025).

Ethical governance, therefore, contributes to resilience in closely connected ways. First, it reduces ambiguity by clarifying expectations for both internal and external actors. Second, it creates monitoring and correction mechanisms in settings where temporary or less powerful workers might otherwise remain silent. Third, it links long-term commitment to visible fairness and consistency in both operations and growth decisions. Ethical governance thus supports resilience when organisations make values visible through routines, review structures, and accountability across organisational boundaries.

5. Discussion

This study offers a qualitative comparison of how remote, highly seasonal tourism organisations build people-centred organisational resilience in two northern contexts: Iceland and Finnish Lapland. Rather than proposing a general theory of resilience for all remote tourism organisations, the study identifies four recurring mechanisms: leadership under pressure, employee experience across employment phases, living conditions and belonging, and ethical governance, and shows how these operate across two comparable but distinct settings. The main theoretical contribution is a workforce-centred reconceptualisation of organisational resilience in remote and highly seasonal tourism.

Existing tourism resilience research has often focused on destinations, communities, crises, or broader dynamic capabilities (Hall et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2019; Duchek, 2020). The

present findings confirm resilience as an adaptive capability but show that in remote, highly seasonal tourism, it is enacted through workforce-related organisational mechanisms. In this sense, continuity, employee voice, living conditions, and everyday work arrangements are not peripheral concerns, but central organisational processes through which resilience is built (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011).

Regarding the first research question, resilience is built through connected mechanisms rather than isolated HR tools or crisis responses. Leadership and ethical governance function as enabling mechanisms because they stabilise communication, judgement, inclusion, and accountability in contexts marked by multicultural staffing, environmental uncertainty, remoteness, and partial outsourcing. Employee experience and living conditions then translate those enabling conditions into workforce continuity by shaping whether people can enter, function within, and return to seasonal work systems. This refines resilience models by showing that, in remote tourism, trust, ethical alignment, and coordination are integral to the enactment of anticipation, coping, and adaptation (Duchek, 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2013; Onsoni et al., 2025).

The second research question highlights that the practices that matter most across employment phases are those that reduce discontinuity. Before arrival, realistic expectation-setting, clear onboarding, and practical orientation reduce mismatch and early exits. During the season, repeatable support practices such as clear role expectations, scheduling, feedback, training, mentoring, recognition, and guidance help stabilise performance under pressure. After the season, returner pathways, continued contact, flexible off-season opportunities, and learning opportunities reduce knowledge loss and the cost of rebuilding the workforce each cycle. Employee experience therefore operates less as a satisfaction construct than as a continuity mechanism that counteracts seasonal reset, extending employee experience research in tourism beyond branding or engagement alone (Plaskoff, 2017; Baker, 2024; Ladkin et al., 2023).

As for the third research question, housing and living conditions shape well-being and cohesion by determining whether seasonal work is not only operationally possible but also socially sustainable. Housing capacity affects recruitment capacity, while housing quality, privacy, commuting, social support, and everyday manageability shape recovery, belonging, and retention. In remote tourism settings, cohesion depends not only on what happens at work, but also on whether employees can live in ways that sustain work. This extends the analysis of resilience beyond formal organisational routines to the wider conditions that support labour stability (Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003; Rahimić et al., 2019; Baum & Robinson, 2024).

Taken together, the findings suggest a coherent model of people-centred organisational resilience in which the four mechanisms are interdependent. Leadership and ethical governance create the conditions for safe judgement, voice, inclusion, and accountability. Employee experience translates those conditions into continuity across employment phases. Living conditions and belonging extend this logic beyond the workplace by shaping whether employees can recover, remain, and return. Resilience is therefore built through the interaction between organisational coordination, workforce continuity, and the practical livability of remote seasonal work.

The study also contributes comparatively by showing that these mechanisms do not appear identically across the two northern contexts. In Iceland, resilience is more strongly articulated through safety judgement, flexibility, community ties, and the use of nature and local belonging as resources. In Lapland, the same broad logic appears in a more formalised form, with stronger emphasis on multicultural coordination, accommodation, onboarding, and governance across organisational boundaries. The contribution is therefore not a single tourism-specific model, but a comparative account of how recurring people-centred

resilience mechanisms vary across northern tourism settings while still sharing a common organisational logic.

For practitioners, three priorities stand out. First, essential conditions include retaining experienced staff across seasons, creating trusted channels for judgement and employee voice, and ensuring workable living conditions, especially housing, transport, and recovery. Second, organisations need to treat transition points across the employment cycle as critical risk points by investing in realistic pre-arrival communication, strong onboarding, and returner pathways. Third, enhancing practices such as mentoring, off-season development, more formalised governance, and structured partner alignment can further strengthen resilience over time.

Some limitations should be acknowledged. The study is based on qualitative comparative material from two Arctic tourism contexts, which allows analytical depth but limits broader generalisation. The evidence streams also differ in character, with richer interview-based material from Iceland and stronger documentary and observational evidence from Lapland. The findings should therefore be read in relation to boundary conditions: remote northern tourism settings characterised by strong seasonality, labour constraints, and housing pressures. The mechanisms identified here may operate differently in less remote, less seasonal, or more urban tourism contexts, and applicability may also vary by organisational scale. Future research would benefit from longitudinal designs, stronger inclusion of frontline employees' perspectives, and broader comparison with other remote destinations where seasonality, housing pressure, and international labour intersect.

6. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that organisational resilience in remote, highly seasonal tourism is not only a matter of operational flexibility or crisis response but is enacted through four recurring people-centred mechanisms: leadership under pressure, employee experience across employment phases, living conditions and belonging, and ethical governance. By examining Iceland and Finnish Lapland comparatively, the article contributes a workforce-centred reconceptualisation of organisational resilience in tourism, showing how resilience is built through organisational processes that support continuity, coordination, safety, and trust across seasons. The findings further show that these mechanisms share a common organisational logic but take different practical forms across northern tourism contexts.

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