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# Introduction

Today’s world could be described as a world of globalization, which gives a lot of opportunities and challenges as well. Consumers can get different kind of products coming from all parts of the world. The society that we live in can be called a consumer society (Akhter, 2007). Globalization has resulted in a great number of providers and competition is as a result of the globalization process, where companies struggle to get attention and market shares (Hammond & Grosse, 2003). From the other side, consumers stand in a much stronger position because there are plenty of good choices that can serve even the smallest needs.

Globalization has been a powerful tool of economic growth over the past decades, it has also posed new problems and challenges (Hawkes, 2007). The actual effects of globalization processes are highly dependent on the global, national, and household contexts in which they are operating (Labonte, 2004). The globalization processes can have different outcomes for different groups of people. Some groups of people may be satisfied that globalization led to a greater choice of foods available in the markets, and there are groups of people that see this as the disadvantage, because globalization also created more opportunities for unqualified goods to flow within different countries and cultures (Hawkes, 2007).

Changes in consumption patterns receive a lot of attention right now (Karwala, 2005) because people can get access to a large amount of different products.

Some consumers are willing to pay a premium for products they believe are made in, grown in or product of a particular country, that can be their own or a foreign country (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). Very often, the “made in” factor plays an important role in consumer decision making process.

Han (1989) defines country-of-origin as an intangible product characteristic that consumers use to estimate the quality of the given product. The conception about how to assess a country can be done in two different ways. Whether as a cognitive assessment, where personal stereotypes and assumptions come into play, or as an effective evaluation, where country-of-origin is assessed from ethnocentrism, animosity and xenophile (Iversen & Hem, 2001). The central of the basis of this interpretation, is a country’s reputation and reputation linked to the specific product categories. If the country has a good reputation for a particular kind of products, then it will be promoted emphasizing the country-of-origin, for example: “Italian Pizza”, “French wine”, and “Belgium chocolate” (Iversen & Hem, 2001). However, if the reputation of the country is negative, the producers will most likely emphasize other product attributes that can play an important role in the buying decision making process.

It is suggested in various literature sources (Chryssochoidis et al., 2007; Essoussi & Merunka, 2007; Jo et al., 2003) that the country-of-origin of a product affects consumers’ purchase decisions, as they tend to evaluate the quality of a country’s products from its national image (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). So the “made in” cue becomes an important factor for the product manufacturers and marketers.

The aim of the following thesis is an empirical study about the influence of country-of-origin on the perception of Eastern European food products towards Danish consumers. First of all, it has to be noted that there exists various discussion of what is called an Eastern Europe. The definition will be thoroughly discussed in chapter 3.1. Also, according to Browaeys and Price (2008) Eastern Europe like many other zones can be called “geographical cultural affinity zone”, which resemble national, cultural groups and “cultural affinity classes”.

It is interesting to study Danish consumer perceptions and attitudes on food products coming from Eastern Europe because Denmark is a country that has high quality standards for food products (Poppe & Kjærnes, 2003). There is an increase in the organic food consumption in Denmark, and Danes are willing to pay more for a qualitative, healthier products (Poppe & Kjærnes, 2003). Quite often, some of the Eastern European countries are being mentioned as a distributors of unsafe, unhealthy, and less qualitative food products (Zukin & Maguire, 2004). For example, Danish Veterinary and Food Administration strongly advices not to import food derived from cattle, pigs, sheep’s, goats or other cloven-footed animals from Bulgaria because of the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (Foedevarestyrelsen.dk). It also suggest not to import any kind of pork products from Lithuania because of the outbreak of Classical Swine Fever (Foedevarestyrelsen.dk).

This to a great extent affects the image of the country and can encourage consumers not to buy goods coming from these countries that have a bad reputation within the export market. It might be that consumers will consider all food products unsafe because of the negative relations to some product categories (Hawkes, 2007).

What is more, a very brief screening was done on the Danish consumer’s perception towards the opening of Lithuania-Polish grocery market in Arhus, called “Amber”. It gave an inspiration to analyse Danish consumer perceptions towards Eastern Europe food products due to the fact that this Eastern European supermarket received a lot of critique from the Danes, as well as some positive reactions. It gave an idea to investigate how Danes create particular images of Eastern European products, and why Danish consumers are or are not willing to buy them.

## 1.1 Problem formulation

After reviewing different literature sources and concerning personal experience, the researcher finds it interesting to investigate the country-of-origin image and its potential effects on consumers’ product evaluations. It should be added that the researcher could not find any studies that investigated Eastern Europe’s and its food products images in the minds of Danish consumers, which makes this research more interesting.

It is suggested in the COO literature that the county-of-origin of a product affects consumers’ purchase decision, as they tend to deduce the quality of a country’s products from its national image (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001).

In this study, I am going to look for the relationship between the image of a country, the image of the products made in that country and willingness to buy.

The overarching research question is as follows:

***How the image of Eastern Europe influences Danish consumer’s attitudes towards its food products, and the intensions to purchase?***

What is more, it was decided to investigate consumers’ perception towards the food products because of the availability of these products in the retails shops. A small store check was done before the start of the research to find out what kind of Eastern European products are available in the markets, and to make sure that there are products originating from Eastern European countries. I found out that in most of the supermarkets in Aalborg, the customer can easily find mushrooms, herbs, frozen berries, marinated vegetables (pickles, potatoes, paprika) and other food products originating from one of the Eastern European countries, such as Poland, Lithuania, Bulgaria and others. Also, the advantage of using food products for investigation is due to the fact that COO has become an important factor in this market (Erdener, 2002), and what is more, it is relatively easy to identify the country-of-origin of food products.

Food shopping is an essential and routine activity. Many studies have concluded that women holds the purchasing power over the food products (Lindquist & Kaufman-Scarborough, 2004; Goncourt & Goncourt, 2013; Sherman, 2013), however, modern social and demographic shifts are causing men to become more and more engaged in this task (Mortimer & Weeks, 2011). Gender differences in the context of food shopping is a rich topic for the popular media, yet this subject has only recently become an area of academic interest (Gardner, 2004; Raajpoot et al., 2008; Helgesen & Nesset, 2010; Mortimer & Weeks, 2011). Researchers argue that recent social and demographic movements are causing changes to traditional gender roles within the household, with implications for things like food shopping (Murcott, 2000). Women now have an opportunity to seek for equal employment to men, as a result, more males feel the necessity to do the food shopping because increasing number of women have limited time to engage in it (Gardner, 2004; Harmon & Hill, 2003).

Considering this information, the researcher has decided to investigate both – male and female consumers’ product evaluations.

Furthermore, different cultures base a lot of credibility of another country based upon what they may see in the media or hear from friends and relatives, however the information the consumer receives from these sources is not always the “true” image of a country (Schneider, 2004). Media and friends play an important role in forming so called stereotypes about particular countries. Stereotypes constantly persist until people are better educated about the differences between groups and cultures, and the best way of educating is experiencing the object yourself (Blair et al., 2001). The fear of the unknown is what drives the existence of stereotypes, which is not necessarily the true in all cases. People may know about the country or a products and still form stereotypes.

Stereotypes continue to be generated from individuals who fear others that are of a different race or culture, the unknown (Jackson & Hogg, 2010). By experiencing, which in this study means, visiting the country-of-origin, consumer has a possibility to convert the “unknown” into “known”, and form his/her opinion about the country-of-origin by seeing and experiencing the culture. For that reason, the researcher has decided to make sure that there are participants in this study who have visited one or more of the Eastern European countries and contrary. In this way, the researcher can contribute to the literature that states that consumers who visit the country-of-origin has a different perceptions of its products than those who did not (Jackson & Hogg, 2010).

## 1.2 Structure of the thesis

Here, I will present a structure for the thesis, which will be a guide for a reader. The purpose of it is to give basic understanding about the study being taken.

In chapter 1, the introduction to the thesis is presented, which leads to the problem formulation of the research. In this part of the analysis I present basic arguments for the chosen topic.

Chapter 2 presents the methods used for the collection and analyses of the data. It presents the chosen paradigms, research design, data collection methods, chose sample group, and methods for analysing the data.

Chapter 3 explain the theoretical aspects of the thesis that create basis for the analysis as well as the interview guide. In this chapter I discuss:

* The definitions of COO and Estern Europe
* Country-of-origin
* COO and product categories
* COO and demographic characteristics
* COO and ethnocentrism
* Consumer familiarity and experience with the product and the country
* Country image construct
* Developed vs developing countries
* Cultural theories

The chapter ends up with the interview guide, which was made based on the above mentioned theories and researches.

Chapter 4 starts with the analysis of the definitions of COO and Eastern Europe that Danish consumers shared during the interviews. Afterwards it discusses the perceived images of Eastern Europe considering different country’s dimensions: politics, economics, social desirability and technological advancement. Thus, it discusses the attitudes towards Eastern European food products and the relationship between the country image, the product image, and willingness to buy.

The final 5th chapter presents the conclusion of the present study that was made considering interviewee’s responses and literature review.

# Methodology

In the methodological section, it will be discussed, what paradigm was chosen for the research, the arguments behind the choice Thus, the research design will be discussed, which explain the purpose of the thesis which is to explore and describe the phenomenon. Later on, the chosen methods of analysis will be revealed by taking into consideration its advantages and disadvantages. The sampling method will be discussed too, explaining the chosen method and presenting the table of participants of the interviews. And finally, the chosen methods for analyses will be discussed too.

## 2.1 Research paradigm

It is important to get deeper into the philosophical roots of the thesis, by touching upon the concept of research paradigm. Kuhn (1962, p.10) defines paradigm as:

*“The set of beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed”*

And according to Merrian Webster Dictionary (2007) a paradigm is:

*“A philosophical and theoretical framework of a scientific school or discipline within which theories, laws, and generalizations and the experiments performed in support of them are formulated”*

Scientists and researchers may have a different view on the same topic or issue, and in any case there is a paradigm that shapes your stance on the issue. Paradigms are a way of forming what we know. In social science there are few predominant paradigms each with its own ontological and epistemological perspectives. Further, the chosen ontological and epistemological considerations will be addressed.

### 2.1.1 Ontology

Ontology aims to answer the question ‘what is reality like?’ a constructivist paradigm is being followed since the data is collected mainly by conducting semi-structured interviews. It is crucial to understand how social realities are dealt in this thesis. There is no “*objective social reality out there*” (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p.455). Every individual holds his own, unique constructed realities based on how he sees and interprets the world. This research is focused on the way in which every person perceives his/her surroundings and since for each of these persons reality is relative, there is no one valid truth (Guba, 1990; Flick, 2004).

Social actors develop images of the realities based on different variables, such as gender, age, education, occupation, social class, culture he belongs (Denin & Lincoln, 2011), their entire experience that was gained during the life determines how they see and interpret things. Consequently, I have a presupposition that every participant in this study, holds his own understanding on the topic of this thesis, and I am not aiming to find the ultimate answer on how Danish consumers make sense of country-of-origin and how does it affects the evaluation of the products coming from Eastern Europe but rather to explore how Danish male and female consumers make sense of the Eastern European food products in their daily lives.

According to Flick (2004, p.90):

“…knowledge is constructed in processes of social interchange”

For that reason, human interaction in this thesis is very important and vital if the purpose is to understand individual interpretations on the relevant topics. Thus, I believe that it is impossible to separate myself from what I already know and who I am because it is an essential part of how we understand others and the world being studied (Lincoln et al., 2011).

As a constructivist I have to admit the subjectivity in this study because some of the steps of the thesis may be influenced or affected by my Lithuanian heritage, which is a part of Eastern Europe that is chosen for this research. What is more, it has also affected the choice of the topic and how I conduct and interpret the data. From the other hand, it does not mean that the study’s results will be subjective, guided solely on the researcher’s background and understandings.

The chosen ontological position allows the participants of the study to have their own perception of the reality, so they will be able to have multiple interpretation of what the image of Eastern Europe is, and how it affects products made in these countries. It is extremely important that the participants may have multiple images of the Eastern Europe, because as noted by Cuba and Cocking (1997) the image is created based on individual beliefs, experiences and impressions.

### 2.1.2 Epistemology

In order to understand ‘How is it possible to discover what the world is like?’ an interpretivist or in other words - relativist approach will be taken.

The interpretive paradigm is concerned to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Social reality is seen as being little more than a network of assumptions and intersubjective shared meanings (Burell & Morgan, 1979). In other words, meaning of the phenomenon is negotiated mutually in the act of interpretation; it is not simply discovered (Schwandt, 2000).

It is not possible to get an objective information from the real world, because in the interpretative paradigm there is no ‘real world’ (Lee, 1991). The world is socially constructed and multiple realities exist. Different cultural values, traditions play a role in creating a particular way of understanding what is real (Saunders et al., 2009).

The interpretivist approach is subjective due to the fact that knowledge here is something interpreted by individuals and no objective true exists (Samaja, 2004). The aim in this thesis is to interpret participants’ views and opinions on the image of Eastern Europe and how it affects their evaluations of Eastern European food products and willingness to buy.

Hence, it is important to mention that by adapting the interpretivist paradigm, I may come up with surprising findings because I will interpret other’s interpretations (Sekaran, 2003; Bryman 2012). The differences between individuals and groups need to the understood, taking into consideration that they all have different sociological and demographical backgrounds. Saunders et al (2009) believes that all participants being studied have a strong and significant impact on the world.

The ontological and epistemological considerations discussed above affect the methodological choices that are used in the elaboration of this project.

## 2.2 Research design

This thesis aims to both explore and describe how Danish male and female consumers make sense of Easter European origin in the food sector. The topic is still after investigation and unexplored. Due to the globalization processes it became easier to transport goods all over the world. However, from the other hand, globalization makes it easier to collect information about the products or countries the consumer is interested in, and if the product/country has a negative image, it is very possible that consumers will look for other alternatives. According to Sounders et al (2009), there are three different ways of conducting exploratory research:

* A search for different kind of literature, which means exploring on what is already known about the topic
* Making interviews with ‘experts’ in the field
* Conducting interviews

It was decided to conduct exploratory research by searching for relevant literature and by conducting interviews with Danish male and female consumers. The literature review was made in order to find relevant theories about the country-of-origin, its effects and other relative topics. The review of the literature helped me to see what topics concerning the COO affect need to be further investigated and how can I contribute to the current theories and studies. The interviews were conducted to find out how Danish consumers evaluate Eastern European food products, and how this evaluation is influenced by the images of Eastern European countries that consumers hold in mind.

One of the advantages of using exploratory approach is that it can be very flexible (Stebbins, 2001). If new information or data is collected during the literature reviews or while conducting the interviews, the direction of research can be changed. At the initial stage, research focus is broad but then it is progressively narrowed down as the research progresses (Sounders et al., 2009).

At the same time, it is also significant to describe the phenomena as the research also aims to understand the ‘how’ of social construction. Capturing how Danish male and female consumers make sense of Eastern European food products may be challenging. ‘Danish male and female consumers’ is a complex group because they have different social and economic backgrounds, are from different sub-cultures and of different ages.

It is my intention to grasp different nuances in the group being studied, to report multiple perspectives, identify different factors that affect their choices and make the larger picture of the topic.

Similarly, the study is constructed with inductive approach, which means that theory is the outcome of the research. The existing theories in the field of country-of-origin, country’s image and culture are examined since it helps to gain an understanding about the topic. Inductive reasoning is particularly relevant for qualitative studies that are used to extend existing theories into a new setting or to develop understanding and theory where almost none currently exists (Fox, 2008)

Hence, the induction approach of data collection and analysis is methodological but it relies on more flexible research structure, the results may give unexpected insights, so the contribution to the theory can be made.

## 2.3 Data collection methods

There is a distinction made between two broadly used data collection methods – the qualitative and quantitative approaches. The choice of the method depends on the selected theme of the study and problem formulation. It is vital to choice the method that would be most appropriate for the group being studied in order to answer the problem question.

Each method is different, and has his advantages and disadvantages. Separately or as a combination, they can be successfully adapted.

A qualitative data collection method was chosen for this research because it helps to answer the problem formulation in the best possible way. The aim in this study is to gather consumer’s perceptions and attitudes towards Eastern European countries and its products, and how this knowledge affects the purchasing decision. As Bryman (2012) stated, qualitative research is about words rather than numbers, which makes this method more reliable for this study, since the aim is to discuss different images of Easter Europe and different images of food products made in Eastern European countries and how people create those images. This research is not concerned to analyse numbers but rather address different perceptions and interpretation of the topics under investigation. The data remains at the level of word, pictures and reports (Patton, 1990; Hogan et al., 2009).

Qualitative studies are often full of detailed information about the social world that may become irrelevant in further processes of the analysis because it does not help to answer the problem questions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). However, it is still important to have that data because qualitative studies give an emphasis to the contextual understanding of social behaviour (Flick, 2007). Thus, it means that consumer behaviour, values and other information have to be understood in particular context (Flick, 2007; Bryman, 2012). Very often, in qualitative research, participants’ behaviour may be seen as odd or not relevant but it can actually make sense when it is understood in the context in which that behaviour takes place (Patton, 1990; Seymour, 2001).

What is more, qualitative method helps to ensure that as many important topics of the study are considered (Bryman, 2012). This method is mainly based on such data collection methods as interviews, observations, ethnography, netnography and others (Patton, 1990).

The method also allows participants to raise issues that the researcher did not even considered relevant for the study and that can be investigated (Kuada, 2012). Very often the participant touches upon the aspects of the topic that are familiar to him, based on his/her experience. Indeed, it is quite normal, because the researcher cannot be an expert in all fields being discussed.

Qualitative research investigates culture, behaviour, society through an analysis of people’s world (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Hogan et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the qualitative approach differs from quantitative in many significant aspects. It tends to focus on smaller samples because the purpose here is not to generalize results. It seeks to engage in a more complex process between the questions asked and the information collected. During the process of collecting data, new questions may arise and change project directions. Similarly, this research is approached in qualitative way; the research in conducted by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews with a small sample of Danish male and female consumers who are more or less familiar with Eastern European products.

Such qualitative research methods as interviews that will be discussed later in methodological section helps to go deeper into people’s view of the phenomena, to view the world from the eyes of the social actor being studies (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The world ‘out there’ can be understood and described by analysing participant’s individual experiences that are related to their everyday practices.

From the other hand, there is a tendency to think that in qualitative studies, researchers often relies on unsystematic views of what is significant and what is not (Seymour, 2001). It cannot guarantee that the researcher fairly represents all different viewpoints shared by the participant group.

### 2.3.1 Sampling

This thesis aims to find out Danish consumer’s perceptions and attitudes towards Eastern European food products. In order to find out people that can take part in the research, no limits regarding the number of participants were settled down, which means that I decided to stop the search for the participants, when I thought I had enough information about the topic. All kinds of information regarding the country-of-origin topic can be useful and give new insights, but it does not mean that all of it is going to be used. However, according to some researchers (Neuman, 2003; Flick, 2007) a high number of respondents would give a more comprehensive view of the topic.

The assumptions that gender differ in their consumption behaviour is widespread and underlies much consumer research and can be found in most textbooks and studies (Schaefer, 1997; Kumara & Ashan, 2004; Buaman & Phuengsukttechasit, 2011). Earlier studies have produced conflicting results about the differences between males and females in making purchasing decisions based on the country-of-origin (Iversen & Hem, 2001). You can read about the gender differences in chapter 3.4.

Considering the possibility that there are gender differences regarding the country-of-origin, the purpose of this thesis is to explore whether males and females from Denmark have different views and attitudes toward food products originating from Eastern European countries and do they pay different level of attention to the COO.

There ae two ways of sampling the potential respondents – probability sampling and non-probability sampling. The sampling technique used in this thesis is non-probability sampling, more in particular – purposive sampling. This sampling method was chosen because the researcher does not seek to sample the participants of the research on a random basis. Thus, the purposive sampling was chosen because the researcher needed to have participants who have visited one of the Eastern European countries and those who have not, so to see how the actual visitation affects the perception on Eastern European countries and its food products.

While using purposive sampling, the researcher has a possibility to sample potential respondents in a strategic way, so the chosen sample size is relevant to the research and the research questions being posed (Bryman, 2012). The researcher seeks to sample the participants in a way that ensure a great variety in the resulting sample, so that the respondents differ from each other in terms of gender. By using the purposive sampling, the respondents for the interviews are selected because of their relevance to the study (Anfara & Mertz, 2006), which means having a sufficient amount of males and females, so to be able to compare these two groups. What is more, it was important to find participants that have visited one of the Eastern European countries and contrary, since I had a presupposition that consumers who visited the Eastern European countries have a more positive attitudes towards in products. The sample being studies is not representative of the Danish population, but for since the research pursues qualitative research design, this is not considered to be a weakness (Yin, 2011).

In the table below, you can see the list of all the participants:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Gender | Age | Education |
| Casper | Male  | 23 | Sociology |
| Lasse | Male | 29 | Biology & Chemistry |
| Anders | Male | 39 | Physiotherapy |
| Christian | Male | 31 | Graphic design |
| Mads | Male | 34 | Statistics & Mathematics |
| Rune | Male | 25 | Business Administration |
| Anders | Male | 43 | Economics & Business Administration |
| Karl | Male | 39 | Electronics |
| Frederik | Male  | 40 | Economics & Business administration |
| Camila | Female | 24 | Tourism |
| Tenna | Female | 47 | Cook |
| Lærke | Female | 29 | Journalism |
| Birthe | Female | 36 | Children Pedagogy |
| Hanne | Female | 44 | Human resources management |
| Tine | Female | 25 | Tourism |
| Christina | Female | 28 | Energy technology |
| Ingrid | Female | 53 | Physical activity & Lifestyle |

There were 17 interviewees in total who took part in this research, 9 males and 8 females. All interviews were held personally, face-to-face in Aalborg. The interviews took place in respondents’ personal environment, which is their own houses and apartments, and also in different cafeterias. The age of the interviewees varied from 23 till 53, however it is important to mention that I was not looking at the age when selecting the respondents, since it is not the purpose of the study to compare different age groups or educational backgrounds. The information about age and education was gathering in order to know more about the participants, and as it turned out later on, the education was an important determinant of how Danish consumers evaluate Eastern European countries due to the fact that they gave many examples of their experience with Eastern Europeans in the working environment. Thus, the interviews lasted from 35-50 minutes.

### 2.3.2 Qualitative interviews

There are different ways of conducting qualitative data. The chosen method in this thesis is interviews. It is one of the most popular methods applied in constructivist inquiry (Silverman, 2011). By using interviews, the researcher can access areas of reality that can remain inaccessible such as experiences and attitudes (Rossetto, 2014). Interviews can be divided into structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Bryman, 2012; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Rossetto, 2014). Each method has his own advantages and disadvantages and based on the theme and problem formulation of this thesis, it was decided that semi-structured interviews would be most appropriate. As mentioned earlier, the aim of the study is to investigate people’s perceptions, feeling ant thoughts about Eastern European food products, their view on the products and what stands behind that.

Semi-structured interviews gives a certain level of freedom for the interviewer to adapt each interview to the interviewee in terms of wording, verbal and non-verbal communication, as well the sequence of the questions (Erlandsson et al., 2013). The semi-structured interviews were also chosen due to the fact that I had a presupposition that new insights will come up during the interviews that can be very useful in understanding how Danish consumers create particular images of Eastern European food products. It is a two way communication, were both parts create a conversation (Rossetto, 2014; Desai, 2010). What is more, semi-structured interviews gave a possibility to follow up a scenario which consisted of prepared questions (the interview guide) and also gives an opportunity for the respondents to share their own experience and thoughts on the topic. The researcher then can elaborate on the themes that throughout the interview seem more important.

It is also important to mention that in connection with constructivist paradigm, interview inquiry is not possible without an active participation of the researcher (Desai, 2010). So, the questions and themes of the interviews can be affected by the background of the researcher. To add more, semi-structured interviews leaves space for both parts to go beyond the actual path of the ‘script’ and pursue themes that were initiated by the interviewee (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Very often the data obtained from semi-structured interviews will provide not just answers but the reasons for the answers, which is also very crucial in this thesis, because it aims not only to know if people like/dislike Eastern European food products but what stands behind their choice and how they came up to think like this.

The disadvantage of using this type of qualitative interviews is that the interviewer may give out unconscious ‘signals’ that guide the respondents to give answers expected by the interviewer (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Thus, it may be difficult to analyse the data coming from the interviews, for example, deciding on what is relevant and what is not (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). The interviewer needs to take into consideration the fact that respondents may not be fully honest and answers are not always accurate, which makes the research less valid (Packer, 2011).

All the interviews in this thesis were held personally, recorded and then transcribed. Interviewing people personally may produce a better communication between the two parts, and may help to generate more ideas and process more topics (Packer, 2011). Recording helps to ensure that even the most detailed information is noticed, and guarantees that the interviewer did not make mistakes when referring to a particular interview.

A more thorough examination of the answers can be done due to the transcriptions, which is a time consuming method but may be very important in qualitative studies (Bryman 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

## 2.4 Qualitative data analysis

The first step in qualitative data analysis is to go through the data (in this case, the text), to break it down into pieces, to examine closely, compare the relations, find similarities and differences between the responses of the interviewees (Kvale, 2007). Thematic analysis of the context or text is preferred because it is a simple method of analysis (Flick, 2014). It is a very common method and well-applied in qualitative studies, where:

*“…the researcher review all the data, make sense of it, and organize it into categories or themes that cut cross all of the data sources.” (Creswell, 2009, p. 175).*

Also, I seek to find out particular themes in the respondent’s answers such as the positive and negative images of Eastern Europe and how they are constructed. Thus, I expect to get information about consumer familiarity with the product and the country, the influence of ethnocentrism, the importance of country-of-origin as an informational cue, and the relationship between the image of Eastern Europe and its products. Thus, the additional themes are going to be created based on the information received from the participants.

After each of the interviews, the responses were carefully familiarized, by spending some time reflecting upon the interviews and writing down the main topics/themes. The data from the interviews then is coded.

To build concepts rom a textual data source, it is needed to open up the text and expose the meaning, ideas and thoughts in it (Seers, 2012). One of the processes of analysing textual data is open coding that is also used in this research. When using the open coding, the researcher went through the data several times and then started to create “labels for chunk of data” (Grbich, 2012), that helps to summarize what you see happening. This is not based on the existing theory but rather on the meaning that emerges from the data.

According to Sullivan (2009), qualitative data analysis consists of three main parts: noticing, collecting and thinking about the interesting things.

Notice things

Analyze data

Collect data

Source: Workflow of qualitative data analysis, adapted from (Sullivan, 2009)

So, at first you collect the data, then notice the most important and interesting themes of the data (“coding”). As you continue on collecting information, you may notice new things and need to think about them (Kvale, 2007).

In the analysis phase, when you go through all the data, the most important parts are marked and descriptive names or codes should be added (Sullivan, 2009; Grbitch, 2013).

The benefit of using open coding is that in the process of the coding, the concepts emerge from the raw data and later on it is grouped into conceptual categories (Grbitch, 2013). As it is built directly from raw data, the process itself ensures the validity of the work (Seers, 2012*;* Dierckx de Casterlé, et al., 2012).

## 2.5 Limitations

Every research has its own limitations that have to be considered. First of all, I do not claim that the results of this study represents all Danish male and female consumers or any other countries or individuals. The focus on all region rather than on particular countries is more complex than it may be seen in the beginning. Some of the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees may be more applicable to certain countries rather than the whole region. Individuals tend to share the images of the countries they know more about rather than all, however, some of the participants associated one country with all the region while treating it as one entity.

It was not always clear if the images projected by the interviewees arise from their experience with a particular country or other sources. It should be also mentioned that the differences between the images of Eastern Europe and its products may occur due to the fact, that respondents talked about different countries, so not in all cases the answers were related to the same entity. As a consequence, it should be mentioned that Danish consumers shared their images of Eastern Europe based on what they perceived as Eastern Europe, and not what different literature sources define as Eastern Europe.

# 3. Theoretical considerations

In the theoretical part some of the most important components used to explain and understand country-of-origin and its effects will be discussed. Also, it should be noted that in all parts of the discussion, previous researches were identified on a particular topic, because it may help to understand how Danes make sense of Eastern European origin. Thus, some of the theories being discussed are rather relativist, trying to find all possible images the consumer may have, so in this way putting them in such kind of framework. Since this thesis follows constructivist paradigm, it should be noted that the theories discussed here are considered as basis for the analysis but I do not think that consumer attitudes and perceptions could be generalized based solely on the theory being presented. The authors tries to explain the phenomenon of COO but every individual is different and constructs images based on factors that are not necessarily described here. The chapter starts with the discussion of the definition of Eastern Europe.

## 3.1 Definition of Eastern Europe

This study is concern about the Danish consumer perceptions on Eastern European products, and for that matter, it is important to discuss what Eastern Europe is, and how different sources define it.

According to Zielonka and Pravda (2001) Eastern European countries have something in common – they are all characterised by communist governments until the late 1980s and early 1990s. They were all dominated by the USSR at that time. Some of the Eastern European countries, like Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were a part of USSR and some others (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia) belonged to Yugoslavia (Zielonka & Pravda, 2001). A former Yugoslavia was not dominated by the USSR but it was still a communist state. The rest of the countries that belong to Eastern European block were independent countries but still under the influence of the USSR (Poland, Hungary, Check Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania)

Because of the political differences, very often Central and Eastern European countries along with the USSR were seen as one block, the USA and Western European countries to be the other one, and then the third world of ‘developing countries’, that were mostly countries of South American and Africa. For that matter countries of Eastern Europe had been regarded as similar culturally and politically (Ooi et al., 2004).

Clottey and Lennon (2003) examined US travellers’ attitudes towards some Eastern European countries, like Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. Most of the times, US travellers saw culture and heritage to be the growth point of Eastern European countries rather than family vacations (Clottey & Lennon, 2003). And the reason for that is safety and political stability. US traveller did not see Eastern countries as safe to spend their vacations and because of the political instability.

According to Master (2007) Eastern Europe cannot be seen as a former communist countries anymore because since 2004 it was divided in two parts, when eight of the region’s most progressive countries economically, joined the EU. However, this does not mean that it has changed dynamics of the regions, but just thinking of the fact that it changed a lot. Those countries were a part of communist version of EU (Master, 2007), they were undemocratic with little self-determination. Being a member of EU gave those countries an opportunity to lower the trade barriers, opened opportunities to increase exports in the hiking economy where borders do not exist, and democracy and human rights are above everything (Hughes & Allen, 2008). Master (2007) adds that together with the Baltic countries, former Yugoslavian countries, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Albania, Ukraine, Russia and Georgia are also a part of Eastern Europe.

Western European countries plays a huge role in strengthening the process of democratic consolidation in Eastern Europe (Zielonka & Pravda, 2001).

If looking into the online sources, The Free dictionary defines Eastern Europe as:

*“…the eastern part of the European continent”*

It is important to mention that besides that it states that there is no consensus as to the precise are it refers due to the fact that:

*“…the term has a wide range of geopolitical, geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic connotations”*

However, the countries are put together mostly because of the historical ties with Russia, the use of Slavic languages and the Cyrillic alphabet.

If looking at the definition of Eastern Europe by the United Nations Statistics Division (2014), Eastern European countries include Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, as well as Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. It is also states that in some sources, Eastern Europe is defined as:

*“…the nations bordered by the Baltic and Barents seas on the north; the Adriatic, Black and Caspian seas and the Caucasus Mountains on the south; and the Ural Mountains.”(UNSD, 2014)*

If seeing Eastern Europe like this, besides the countries indicated by United Nations Statistics Division, former Yugoslavia also belongs to Eastern Europe (in UNSD stated as South Europe), as well as Baltic republics (in UNSD stated as the North Europe), and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia that according to UNSD are western Asian countries.

Based on Oxford Dictionary, Eastern European countries include the former Eastern bloc countries, former Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, as well as the Baltic States and former Soviet republics of Belarus and Ukraine, along with Russia.

As stated in New World Encyclopedia (2011):

*“The boundaries of Eastern Europe, therefore, are subject to considerable overlap and fluctuation depending on the context in which they are used, which makes differentiation difficult. Global regions are often of social constructs defined by abstract, neutral criteria and not necessarily strict physical features”.*

**

Source: The World Encyclopedia, 2011

As it can be seen, Eastern Europe is defined in many different ways, and different sources indicate different countries as Eastern European. However, Eastern European region encompasses various different cultures, ethnicities, languages and histories, so it is problematic to group it as one, which is why very often countries are offended if called ‘Eastern Europe’. Countries that are labelled as Eastern European are trying to change what they call as “mis-categorization” (UNSD), while stating that they are in Central Europe, in South Europe or in North Europe.

What is more, it is very clear that what Eastern European countries have in common is the fact that until the 1990s, they were very different from that of Western Europe, and this may be the reason, why people still hold the attitudes of Eastern European countries as the communist or anti-democratic.

## 3.2 Country of origin

To be able to answer the problem statement, the discussion of COO is needed. As it was mentioned in previous chapters, the impression that a product provides to the consumers is affected by many factors, which can be intrinsic cues like taste, design and extrinsic cues like price, the brand name (Bertoli & Resciniti, 2012) which can affect the consumers’ perception about the product quality and the overall evaluation (More about product cues in chapter 3.7 – Product cues). Country-of-origin is seen as one of the most important extrinsic cues that is used by consumers who create an opinion about the product (Lee, 1997; Magnusson et al., 2011; Bertoli & Resciniti, 2012). Especially nowadays, in times of globalization, consumers in their home countries have a large selection of products to choose from that are made in different countries and have different characteristics.

In most of the literature country-of-origin is simply defined as the country where a given product is originally made (Thorelli et al., 1989; Schweiger et al., 1997; Hinck, 2004). However, other scholars argue that the COO is defined as a country where a given product’s headquarters are placed (Joliansson et al., 1993; Lee, 1997). Later on, to avoid misunderstandings and frauds, British Merchandise Marketing Act was introduced. The law, which was a protectionist action and which confirmed that the country-of-origin stated on the product should be based on where the product was produced (Schweiger et al., 1997). The intention of the law was to protect British producers and consumers against competitors false trade descriptions. It subsequently introduced other countries with the same principle, and today it is a common definition used globally. However, the importance is held not only on where the product is made, but it is also used by companies and brands as a characteristic of a product, of course, if the country has a positive image among customers (Lee, 1997; Ntounis & Liu, 2011). Also, some companies use it as a direct or indirect part of the manufacturer’s trade name or it is expressed in product packaging design. In the global market with ever more identical products and growing competition, many companies try to use the nationhood as a part of positioning and differentiation strategy. What is more, the globalization led to so-called hybrid products manufactured, designed, developed and assembled in different countries, so it is difficult to describe hybrid products (Wang & Yang, 2008).

A product’s COO is used by consumers to create initial perceptions about the products (Han, 1989; Ntounis & Liu, 2011; Bertoli & Resciniti, 2012), and is usually followed by the phrase, “made in”. The use of county of origin as an extrinsic cue by the customers is growing (Han, 1989). The increase in the usage of country of origin information by producers and encouraged to generate research interest in product and country images. (Han, 1989) gives three main explanations for that. First of all, very often, consumers’ try to make the information more simple, using country of origin as a surrogate indicator of product quality and social acceptability. Secondly, there is an increase in consumers’ awareness and familiarity with foreign products and brands. And finally, the growing usage of country of origin by marketers and manufacturers so to find the best positioning strategy and fight with the competitors, thus, at the same time help and protect domestic buying (Han, 1989).

What is more, the research made by Erickson et al. (1984) noted that the country of origin affects consumers’ evaluations only on specific product attributes, but does not affect consumers’ overall perceptions about the product.

The importance of country-of-origin as an extrinsic cue is well established in the international literature. There are many studies in relation to country-of-origin which ended up in different results, depending on researchers’ background, the chosen product categories and the chosen countries for investigation.

The importance of COO as an extrinsic cue was first established by Schooler in 1965 (Pereira et al., 2005). And later on, Baker and Al-Sulaiti (1998) even offered to include country-of-origin as a fifth element of the marketing mix, which currently consist of product, price, place, and promotion. Unlike the tangible characteristics of a product, a change in extrinsic cues has no direct bearing on the product’s performance (Lee, 1997). Consumer uses extrinsic cues because it is hard to evaluate product’s tangible cues before the purchase, and like already mentioned earlier, prior experience and familiarity with the country or its products may influence the impact of COO on product evaluations.

Previous researches confirm that COO has an effect on consumers’ willingness to purchase different products (Jacbsy et al., 1971; Han, 1989; Volkova, 2012; Jervelainen, 2012; Sui, 2014). Jacbsy et al (1971); Shapiro (1982) are among those who have proven that the COO has a noticeable effect on consumer’s evaluation of goods. When consumer knows the country the product comes from, then he believes he can say some characteristics of that product. For instance, a customer may know very little about the tangible attributes of a meat product coming from Poland, so he is unable to make appropriate evaluations based on tangible, intrinsic cues. However, the same customer may believe that Poland produces extremely good, qualitative and fresh meat, and this country stereotype would lead the customer to think that Polish meat is better than any other. It has been well established that COO connotes different product images or stereotypes in consumers’ minds (Han, 1989).

Thus, country of origin has been characterised as a multidimensional construct (Lee, 1997). Customers might judge products based on such criteria as price, style, quality, availability and others. However, these product-traits might shift because consumers’ perceptions change with increased exposure to the country (Lee, 1997).

## 3.3 COO and different product categories

Danish consumers may evaluate Eastern European products differently if they are asked about a different product category. Some of the products may have a more positive image among the consumers and others not. For that reason, it is important to look at the level of importance attached to country-of-origin for different product categories.

Han and Terpstra (1998) suggest that the effect of COO needs to be examined in the context of specific product categories. Based on previous studies, it can be said that people perceive different products in different ways (Eroglu & Machleit, 1988; Agrawal & Kamakara, 1999; Giraldi & Ikeda, 2007).

Thus, it may be expected that when consumers purchase products that possess features that are more complex and hard to evaluate, they may be more likely to rely on the country of origin image of a product.

In fact, a lot of work has been done in order to compare the effect of country of origin for different type’s pf products, such as luxury goods, food products and consumer goods (Laroche et al., 2003). The authors concluded that the effect of COO is higher on technologically more complex products and there is a degree of importance of different cues, such as COO, brand and price in relation to different types of products.

For example, de Jonge et al (2008) investigated whether country of origin perception biases existed across such product categories as electronics, food products, fashion merchandise and household goods. Responses were gathered from a group of Canadian consumers and indicated that quality perceptions also tended to be product-specific. Consumers in one country can rank high on one product category and low in another.

For example, Japan was ranked very high in electronic goods, but very low in food products, and very similarly, France was ranked high in fashion goods but low on all other product categories being investigated (Laroche et al., 2003). Japan is known as a country that depends on other nation to supply food products. In this sense, Laroche et al (2003) concluded that Japanese electronic products are generally well reviewed unlike the food from this country.

According to Kamakara and Agrawal (1999), the country of origin information is generally more relevant to agricultural products than for products manufactured, because of the association between production and country of origin. What is more, with regard to products from developing countries, negative assessments exist of luxury goods or goods involving financial and technical performance (Schnettler et al., 2008). In the study by Han (1989), automobiles and televisions coming from Japan and the US were better evaluated than those of Korea. Developed countries are known to have highly industrialized economies, so they generally delegate the manufacturing less complex products to other parts of the world.

## 3.4 Demographic characteristics and types of consumers

According to Giraldi and Ikeda (2007) a different kind of literature exist as regards to the impact of COO on products, but there is a constant impasse about the magnitude of the effect, especially considering other product information in their assessment, and in relation to environmental factors and cultural factors that can influence confidence in the country.

In this context, with respect to different types of evaluators within the research of country of origin, Chao and Rajendran (1993) conducted and exploratory study where their looked at how the variety of consumers may impact perception on the products, considering the country’s information of the origin by setting two specific consumer profiles with different professional occupations – a teacher and a construction builder. The results led to the conclusion that the teacher is more likely to purchase products from these countries. However, the foreman is more faithful to American products, which leads to note the influence of the level of education of consumers, when evaluating the COO products. According to Chryssochoidis et al (2007), education is important. Knowledge of the individuals about other cultures and tolerance on differences between countries increases when getting a higher education.

In turn, the study of Reardon et al (2005) compares the evaluation of goods between the end users and organizational buyers with respect to the COO effects, considering brand name, warranty, price, and other information related to the product. The results, found out by the researchers point out that for organizational buyers product design is more important in the purchase decision than the brand name or warranty. For the end consumer, the two sources (design and warranty) have the same degree of importance, but the brand name is more important than the other two. The authors argue that the differences in assessment of the attributes depends on the type of product and buying nature. They conclude that in case of the organizational buyers, there is a more focused interest in product innovation, hence the attention is on the design country, and final consumers are most exposed to mass advertising, which reflected the emphasis on the brand name. In general, organizational purchasing agents are seen as more rational and better informed than the final consumers.

With regards to demographic factors, according to Wong et al (2008), age exerts an influence on the assessment of foreign products, younger consumers are more willing to by foreign products.

According to Hong and Toner (1989) studies that take into account the gender of the respondents, have shown conflicting results.

This may be due to the fact that men and women hold different purchasing power and receive the information about the products in different ways (Kumara & Ashan, 2004). A study made by Heslop and Wall (1985) found out that males and females have different evaluations depending on the type of product. For example, female consumers pay more attention to country-of-origin when buying shoes, clothes, cosmetics (Perviz et al., 2014), and males pay more attention on country-of-origin on such products as automobiles, mobile phones.

One group of researchers have found that female consumers engage in more extensive information processing, using many different cues, whereas male consumers are more likely to concentrate on few cues that are less complex and easier to access (Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991; Schaefer, 1997). Some other researchers also suggest that females may be more likely to use interpretative, subjective product information than males:

*“…who are more likely to focus exclusively on objective attribute information” (Schaefer, 1997, p. 817)*

However, important to notice that not all studies can share the same results. Tongberg (1972) found no effect of gender in evaluating products from foreign countries. Han (1988) argued that female consumers are keener on buying domestically produced goods so they pay more attention to country-of-origin cue. This was also supported by Ai-Sulati and Baker (1998), who also agreed that females pay more attention to country-of-origin and have preferences for locally produced goods. These contradictory results may be because of the fact that there is a lack of a theoretical or conceptual basis for predicting why people who belong to a particular demographic category should or should not be favourably disposed to foreign products (Hong & Toner, 1989). What is more, the given example of the study that was investigating the connection between the country-of-origin and gender differences was conducted more than 30 years ago using different country of origin, product category and sampling techniques.

Thus, according to different researchers, consumers’ perceptions of products made in different countries seem to vary depending on a number of contingences, such as nationality of the consumers being studied, the product category and attributes under consideration (Papadopoulos et al., 1991; Roth & Romeo, 1992).

Thus, the literature shows evidence that different types of consumers, either with regard to demographic characteristics, level of education, behaviour or type of involvement in the buying process, sees the country of origin information in different ways (Wong et al., 2008; Raajpoot et al., 2008).

## 3.5 COO and ethnocentrism

It is one of the important concerns for marketers of a product whether the “foreignness” of a product will make it less preferable to consumers in different countries (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004). A number of studies have shown that very often domestic products are chosen over the foreign ones (Watson & Wright, 2000). Consumer ethnocentrism studies helped to explain why particular consumers are more biased than others against foreign products (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004). Thus, it should be added that consumer ethnocentrism varies between different product categories and between product’s specific origins. To add more, consumer evaluations of, or preferences for, foreign products can be product-, origin-, or product/origin – specific (Belabanis & Diamnatopolous, 2004).

Consumer ethnocentrism encompasses:

*“…the beliefs held by the consumers about appropriateness, indeed morality, or purchasing foreign-made products.” (Chryssochoidis et al., 2007, p. 1520)*

It can play a role on how Danes evaluate Eastern European products because according to (Saffii & Walker, 2005) consumer ethnocentrism influences significantly the preferences of consumers, and not just indirectly through the evaluation process of each product attribute but also by affecting the formation of positive or negative purchasing intentions (COO effect).

Roth and Romeo (1992) have formulated a theory for the relationship between consumer preferences for a country’s products, and perceptions of a country’s culture, economy and politics. They argued that consumer perceptions on a particular product from a specific country are based on the match between product and country. If consumer sees a match between the product attributes and the country-of-origin, he will evaluate that product more positively, and will not pay that much attention to the fact that it is a foreign product (Roth & Romeo, 1992).

Ethnocentrism encourages individuals to give importance to their own customs, traditions and what differentiates them from others. Each consumer group believes that their beliefs are right (Klein, 2002). According to some authors (Kleg, 1993; Lantz and Loeb, 1996) , the concept of ethnocentrism determines the world distribution into "them" and " us", " good and bad ", " powerful " and " weaker ", as well as forming the foundations of patriotism and willingness to sacrifice the interests of their own group (Li & He, 2011).

By purchasing domestically produced goods, individuals believe that they will help their country’s economy, which would be damaged if local people would purchase imported goods, which can also end up in higher unemployment rates and is not patriotic (Klein, 2002).

As it can be seen, consumer ethnocentrism can have some importance in explaining why consumers do not buy foreign products, however it is highly dependent on the country and the products being investigated.

## 3.6 Consumer experience with the product and the country

As mentioned in the methodology section, sampling of the participants was done based on the strategic process rather than randomly. The aim was to recruit Danish consumers with different level of relations to Eastern Europe, which means consumers who have direct experience with Eastern Europe, and those who have not. Consumer familiarity and experience with Eastern Europe and its food products or absence of it, may influence how the images of Eastern European products are constructed. During the interviews, participants are asked about their experiences with Eastern Europe and familiarity with its food products, which enables me to find out how they construct images of Eastern Europe and also to examine whether the halo/summary construct finds place for the chosen sample.

Considering the studies on consumer familiarity with products and focusing on the nature of information processing, Han (1989) contributed a new light on the studies of COO. According to the author, country of origin effect can be used as a stereotype or function as a replacement relative to other product attributes. The evaluation by the consumers who do not have much familiarity with the product, COO image acts as the halo effect in understanding the characteristics of those products, affecting their shopping attitude (See chapter 3.6.1). In contrast, when consumers become familiar with a product, COO summarizes the belief of consumers regarding this product (See chapter 3.6.2), reducing the amount of information to be processes in decision making.

According to Wang et al (2011), in the case of vehicles derived from Western Europe, an intense advertising and marketing operations in the US as well as positive experience with the products, lead to the formation of beliefs favourable on luxury goods and expensive goods from these countries, and consequently lead to a good evaluation. Thus, with this knowledge already consolidated about Western European products, country of origin information serves as a summary of the quality associated with the product from this location.

The processing of information about cars by consumers are further due to high respondent engagement, perception of high financial risk and high availability of information on this product. The results, of the Lim and O’Cass (2001) suggest that with increasing familiarity with the products, intrinsic cues are used for a quality assessment.

The research by Lim and O’Cass also suggests that the decrease in the engagement with the product, the use of intrinsic cues would be reduced. Thus, for the less sophisticated products, consumers take into account such extrinsic cues as brand and COO. This is probably the case of convenience goods, in which consumer involvement is low and which are also seen as low-risk products (Orbaiz & Papadopoulos, 2003), and therefore a level of in-depth information is not necessary about the product when making a purchase decision.

According to Beerli and Martin (2004), information about a country and its people can be obtained weather through contact with the country or the media and cultural productions such as: television, radio, magazines, newspapers, art, school books, movies and etc. Thus, direct contact level influences the objectivity of perceptions of a consumer about a country (Belabanis et al., 2002).

The extent to which consumers experience unknown or so called exotic lifestyles affects their preferences for foreign products (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). Consumers might favour and be closer to the values and traditions of foreign countries and for that reason accept their products or look at them more favourably. There are some studies that produced positive results on that. For example, Sharma et al (1995) introduced the concept of “openness to foreign cultures”, and verified that it correlates negatively with consumer ethnocentrism and also resulted positive consumer attitudes toward imported, foreign goods.

Orbaiz and Papadopoulos (2003) noted that “culturally pluralistic” consumers have a greater acceptance for imported products and are more willing to buy them. He also stated that consumer interest associated with different nations may also vary and influence their product evaluations. Based on the study done by Juric and Worsley (1998), it can be said that consumers that have a stronger interest in foreign countries rate imported food products much better than those who are less interested. For example, the reason that Chinese consumers prefer Japanese goods is that they like their culture and feel some kind of connection to it (Juric & Worsley, 1998). All the studies discussed in this chapter give more light on the fact that the more the consumer is interested in a given country, the better the evaluations on that country will be and the more positive attitudes towards its food will be addressed.

What is more, there is a significance between the images of those consumers who visited the country and between non-visitors (Awaritefe, 2004). According to Awaritefe, images held by consumers who have visited the country are more favourable than the ones who have not. Investigating the role of travelling in relation to COO effects may be important. Only few studies have examined the possible relationship, which creates a need for further investigation. According to Nebenzahl (2001) tourism has a positive influence on consumer evaluation of the destination and its products when the tourist returns to his home country. Since, there is a lack of evidence, proving the relationship between travel and COO, findings from current research may shed light on how consumers use their experiences and emotions gained from their traveling to make sense of COO in food product evaluations.

### 3.6.1 Halo construct model

There are many different researches made that tried to assess the role of country’s image in customer’s choice behaviour across different nations, analysing its impact on (Bertoli & Resciniti, 2012):

1. Consumers’ attitudes towards products and brands
2. Consumers’ intention to purchase certain products
3. Consumers’ perceptions of certain product attributes
4. How a product category affects other categories from the same country.

Han (1989) was the first scholar who started to discuss that perceived country image can be explained following to constructs:

1. Halo
2. Summary

According to the first one - Halo construct, customers use their perceived image of a country when they are not so familiar with the product (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1999; Jimenez & Martin, 2009; Shin et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2013). The perceived country image is created based on different kind of knowledge the consumer has about the country, including different dimensions of country’s image, that can be people, economic development, politics, social desirability and etc. (Han, 1989).

The halo construct model argues that consumers may not buy unfamiliar foreign products only because they may take unfavourable evaluations about the quality of the product because of their lack of familiarity with products coming from particular country (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1999; Shin et al., 2012). Country’s image as a halo helps people to evaluate a set of alternatives when making a purchasing decision, without getting too much into details. The study by Johansson et al. (1985) showed that country’s image affect the evaluation of product attributes but not the overall evaluation in the automobile sector. Another study by Erickson et al. (1984) showed that country’s image affects certain product attributes rather than the overall image of the product. The halo construct model argues that when consumers are familiar with the country’s product category, they will rely less on such extrinsic cues as country of origin (Magnusson et al, 2011). After Han introduced the model in 1989, different scholars started to make empirical researches and some of the results did not support the halo model (Zhang, 1995; Bloemer et al., 2009). These results indicated an increase in the propensity to use the country of origin information when familiarity was high (Zhang, 1995). Such kind of results weaken familiarity-based explanations. So, to explain the results that contradicted to Han’s (1989) Halo model, Johansson (1989) proposed that country image may serve as a summary construct, which will be explored in the next sub-chapter.

Country of origin image

Belief

Brand or product image

Source: Halo construct model adapted from Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001, p.42

As it was noted by Shapiro (1982, p.20):

*“Uncertainty about the quality is a widespread and important feature of markets for most firms’ goods and services. Virtually all goods and services are impossible to evaluate until they are used…Even many products that we buy quite frequently have unobservable attributes: restaurant meals (taste) and clothing (will it fade or shrink?) are two examples. The rise in complexity of products has increased the importance of these information problems”*

The halo view is very similar to the role of pricing in the evaluations of goods (Bertoli & Resciniti, 2012). Some studies have shown that price like country of origin, also serves as a surrogate for other information. Consumers are more willing to use price as an indicator of product’s quality if they are not so familiar with it and information is missing (Bertoli & Resciniti, 2012). In this case, the higher price would stand for a better quality

### 3.6.2 Summary construct model

Summary construct is when customers evaluate country’s unfamiliar products based on their experience (direct or indirect) with another products from the same country (Shin et al., 2012). Consumers use this experience and knowledge to form their perceived country image. Consumers’ experience is not necessary individual, it can be gained through other information flows such as word-of-mouth or mass media (Liu et al, 2013).

Experience

Country of origin image

Belief

Brand/Product attitude

Source: Summary construct model adapted from Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001, p.43

Bertoli and Resciniti (2012, p. 31) states that:

*“Regardless of consumers’ level of familiarity with a country’s products, country image and product beliefs are used simultaneously and in different degrees to shape attitudes towards the product”*

Summary construct model maintains that customers recode individual elements of information into higher order units or “chunks” (Naresh & Wu, 2002). It is easier for the customer to retrieve the information chunks from long-term memory. Customers may abstract the information about country’s products because brands with identical country of origin have similar attributes (Han, 1989).

## 3.7 Product cues

Consumers may evaluate products based solely on country-of-origin or consider other attributes, for that reason it is important to find out how Danish consumers prioritize different product attributes, and if the COO is a significant attribute for Danish consumers.

According to Teas and Agarwal (2000), the physical attributes are intrinsic characteristics of products, which can be related to the quality perceived by the consumers in a more direct way, and extrinsic, in turn, are intangibles factors such as brand, price and channel distribution. In this sense, country of origin is considered as an extrinsic cue (Jover et al., 2004). When consumers do not have sufficient information to assess the products (the intrinsic cues), he often uses extrinsic elements.

Common to most studies about multiple influence of country image on the product, is the notion that consumer perceptions are important because they will influence their choices for a product (Teas & Agarwal, 2000). A large number of studies have shown that the extrinsic cues act as a quality indicators (Parker, 1994). Consumers evaluate products and services not only based on their intrinsic characteristics, such as design, shape and colour, but also consider extrinsic characteristics, such as price, warranty, brand name, manufacturer’s name and country of origin. In this context, consumers use country of origin information, as an extrinsic cue when evaluating products and services (Teas & Agarwal, 2000; Jover et al., 2004).

In this context, the first subsequent studies were made by Schooler (1965). He aimed to verify the existence of country of origin as an extrinsic cue through empirical research. The objective was to try to measure the influence of country of origin information on product evaluations. The studies were conducted in different countries for a variety of product categories, industrial buyers and final consumers. Much of this work have focused on assessing the occurrence and significance of the effect of country of origin for the different products. However, the research had too descriptive and not exploratory approach, the tests were designed to verify the existence of the effect by comparing the evaluation of the product coming from different countries, to detect the preference of consumers for products of a specific origin. There are also other studies that applied the same approach (White & Cundiff, 1978; Bannister & Sanders, 1978). They were also seeking to measure consumer evaluations in respect of the same product coming from different countries.

This approach was extended through addition of other variables in the process of evaluation of products (Insch & McBride, 2004). For example, consideration of price, brand trustworthiness or the pursuit of evaluating the different classes of different products such as electronics, food products, fashion products and others (Insch & McBride, 2004).

Bilkey and Nes (1982) published a study that reviewed the researchers of country of origin until that year. The study aimed to evaluate the results of 25 studies of country of origin in order to raise major issues involved in this area. They questioned the validity of previous studies, and the limitations mentioned by authors were:

* The use of country of origin as the only information cue about the product in its evaluation process tends to increase the COO effect in qualifying these products;
* The information provided in most of the studies was only verbal information about the products and not the actual tangible product, which affected the evaluation process;
* In many studies, the internal and external validity were not addressed properly, leading to divergent results on the effect of the COO on product evaluation

Through this work, Bilkey and Nes (1982) concluded that the country of origin, as an extrinsic cue has a limited influence on the perceived quality of the products. These arguments stimulated a range of theoretical explanations about the effect of COO.

In this regard, Johansson et al (1985) found that the impact of country of origin should be studied in a more complex way; the familiarity with the product should be taken into account; the demographic characteristics influence the assessment of the products. Complementing these results, the research conducted by Eroglu and Machleit (1988) was structured with the aim of reducing the limitations placed by Bilkey and Nes (1982), such as research on evaluation of multiple variables to presentation of the physical product. It concluded that there is a difference between the evaluation of COO effects in different product categories, and it is influenced by the demographical profiles of the respondents.

There were studies made afterwards that made new conclusions:

* Based on Johansson’s (1988) study, if country of origin is used by people with a high familiarity with the product, processing occurs in a summary construct manner, avoiding processing unnecessary information
* Products coming from the same country are evaluated differently based on the product dimensions. For example German products were highly rated in prestige, but not in maintenance (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Despite this fact, the effect of country of origin was confirmed.
* In general, some countries enjoy a better image than others. For example, Japan is one of a country’s that improved its image substantially over the years (Darling & Wood, 1989).
* Some studies show no evidence that country of origin is used as a substitute for other product information such as price and quality (Johansson et al., 1985).
* Multiple countries, represented by hybrid products (products prepared in more than one country) should decrease the influence of the COO on product evaluations (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1989).

Generally, the focus of researchers changed in understanding the effect of country of origin, investigating the information that the respondents holds about the country and what role it plays in the formation of attitudes and buying decision (Bernues et al., 2003). Anyway, there is evidence that there is an effect of COO on product evaluations for a variety of categories of products, such as technological products, food products, luxury goods, and etc. Furthermore Bernues et al (2003) observed that most of the studies of COO contained conflicting results, which highlights the need for continued research in the area.

## 3.8 Country image construct

According to Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) there is confusion in the literature which refers to the conceptual specification of the country of origin image. Some authors consider the country’s of origin image as perceptions, associations or impressions linked to the countries (Nebenzahl et al. 2003). In this context of consumption, perceptions refer to the selection process, organization and interpretation of intrinsic stimuli (smells, sounds, colours, tastes) and extrinsic cues (brand, price, and COO) by consumers (Solomon et al., 2006). Consumer perception can help understand the effect the country of origin has when evaluating products.

Other authors specify the countries of origin image as stereotype or schemes (Bernues et al., 2003), which relate to cognitive structures arranged from prior knowledge or experience of abstractions. Prior, belonging to cognitive facet of attitudes (Zoltan et al., 2013). However, the concept of perception only includes the interpretation of information about the country, not enough to support the understanding of reviews and consumer attitudes resulting from this interpretation. The stereotypes and schemes, according to social psychology literature, belong to the cognitive facet of attitudes (Paswan & Sharma, 2004). However, images have cognitive and affective components and the conceptual specification of the country’s of origin image that best translates these two components is the belief about the countries, which allows positive and negative evaluations within an affective sphere about product.

According to Sheth et al., (2001), attitudes are developed from experience with the object or the accumulation of information about it. Often above behaviour, whereas can be configured only as thoughts, not necessarily be transformed into actions. According to Ayrosa (2010), among existing attitude models, there is the three-component model, which consists of these elements: cognitive, affective and conative or behavioural. According to Paswan and Sharma (2004) these three components interact with each other in the consumer decision process, which is widely model consistent with the literature. Much research has shown that COO is not merely a cognitive track. The impact of the country of origin cannot be entirely explained by the process of evaluating the quality (Zoltan et al., 2013). The countries of origin image has symbolic and emotional significance for consumers, enabling the association of products with status, exoticism and authenticity (Erdener, 2002). Erdener argue that consumers associate the country not only to product quality, but also the feelings of national pride and travel stunted

As mentioned previously, various studies have shown country of origin to be seen as an extrinsic cue that affects consumer preferences when choosing between identical or almost identical products coming from different countries. However, more recent studies started to focus on the examination of the factors that lead consumers to prefer products from certain countries (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Maher & Carter, 2011). For example, people may have favourable evaluations of products from a certain country because they perceive that country to be highly competent (Maher & Carter, 2011).Such findings led to the emergence of a construct that is termed country image.

The images of foreign countries held by people are made up of cognitive, affective and conative (or behavioural) components (Heslop et al., 2004). Eagly and Chaiken (1993) define the cognitive component as perceived characteristics of the countries – thoughts, opinions, ideas and beliefs that an individual has about the particular country. The affective component can be defined as a “like or dislike” of the cognitive components, it consists of feelings, emotions and psychological reactions experienced by people. And finally, the conative or behavioural component can be defined as a set of actions or behaviour towards them which the individual sees as appropriate components. The findings of (Belabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008) show that inferred beliefs about one attribute influence other attribute beliefs.

Consumer attitude theory serves as a framework for operationalization of the construct of Country of origin image. Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) found that one third of the scales used in the literature focuses only on the cognitive aspect and that even studies using the three components (cognitive, affective and conative) fail to operationalize the construct through the proposed scales.

There is also a three fundamental belief types: (1) descriptive – these beliefs comes from direct experience with the product, (2) inferential - are formed by making deductions based on past “episodes” that relate to the current stimuli (Zoltan et al., 2013), and (3) - informational – beliefs that are influenced by outside sources such as advertising, friend and relatives and etc. Consumers’ belief and attitude structures about the products are influenced country of origin but the COO does not determine physical or performance characteristics (Zoltan et al., 2013).

According to (Belabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008), an individual holds many beliefs about a given object; many different characteristics, attributes, values, and objects are positively or negatively associated with the object.

The following are some considerations about each of the components of country’s image.

### 3.8.1 Cognitive component

The information processing models that lead to the consumers’ decision making, generally assume that the assessment of product quality is influenced by the cognitive components (Samiee et al., 2005). The cognitive component usually includes beliefs about another country’s technological advancement, economic development, political orientation and social desirability (Pappu et al., 2007).

In this context, the country image is understood as mental representations of people, products, culture and national symbols of a given country (Samiee et al., 2005). For example, consumers can understand that a product which involves high technology and innovation must be developed by a workforce highly qualified, so there tends to be a perception that technological products would be best when produced in developed countries (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Studies have further found that cognitions of another country influence product beliefs and product evaluations in addition to willingness to buy product’s made in that country (Maher & Carter, 2011).

The political element of country’s image include consumer knowledge about other country’s laws, government agencies (Kotler et al., 2009). The economic element consists of income distribution, which is income, prices, savings, debts, and credit availability. The third element – technological advancement is about country’s abilities to drive innovation, technological changes and the adaptation of the newest technology available (Kottler et al., 2009). In the last element – social desirability, the consumer is supposed to discuss such things as the diversity of societies, urbanization level, education available, household patterns, migration and other similar topics. It should be noted that it is not expected that consumers will have knowledge about each of the elements since they are very broad and requires deep understanding. What is more, it is also considered that Danish consumers will evaluate the four elements based not solely on pure facts about country’s political, economic, social and technological elements but also on their perceptions and opinions about the elements, which can be influenced by such factors as indirect information sources or visitor/non-visitor experiences.

As mentioned in the previous section, the cognitive component is the most explored as a way of understanding the country of origin information by the consumer. It is the processing of perceptions and stereotypes about a given country when assessing products and services. According to the review made by Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999), the COO is processed as cognitive when it is interpreted as a cue of quality of the product.

According to (Carvalho, 2009), stereotypes of a country include a number of beliefs about the landscape, culture and economy of this country. Thus, according to these authors the image of a nation consists of three dimensions: socio-economic, cultural and geographical, among some examples we can mention: “Spain is sunny”, “Belgians are calm”, “Germans are punctual” and “Japanese are efficient”. These enable consumer stereotypes, makes some inferences on the product itself, as regards its quality or its expected performance.

Verlegh (2001) formulated a theoretical model in which he is arguing that evaluations of the products are based on correspondence with their countries of origin. There would be a positive evaluation if the “forces” of the country are perceived corresponding to the conditions and skills needed for the manufacture of product.

According to Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), cognitive component is often operated in the literature by some dimensions constitutive to the country’s image, including: economy, politics, technology, environment, nature and climate, with respect to a country facet of a way general and other dimensions related to people of the country, such as competence, creativity, standard of living and training of professionals.

Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) add that the choice of different cognitive factors is dependent on the research objectives. For example, climate and nature must be important for the assessment of food products or the tourism, but probably irrelevant to the evaluation of industrialized products (Paswan & Sharma, 2004).

### 3.8.2 Affective component

Danish consumers may evaluate Eastern Europe based on their emotions and attitudes towards it. Some studies have found that consumers hold strong feelings towards countries that are developed based on their direct or indirect experience with it.

To Verlegh (2001), the COO cannot only be attributed to product quality signage, as people raise emotions and feelings that can be formed in travel, from the contact with foreigners or by indirect experiences with countries and their citizens, such as through art, education or media. Thus, the country of origin information can also be processed affective, when has symbolic value and is emotional to consumers. However, researchers have paid less attention to the affective component (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Compared with the cognitive component, the affective one has a more immediate effect on purchase intentions (Heslop et al., 2004).

Consumers can either react to their affection and form attitudes, or do not consider their affection, depending on whether they believe it is a “sound basis” of judgment or not (Wang et al., 2011). Customers can make judgments of any target by assessing their feelings at a given time and this forms the basis of their attitudes (Wang et al., 2011). What is more, affective component can play a crucial role in determining which beliefs are formed, how they are evaluated and how strongly they are weighted in the formation preferences.

According to Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), regarding the inclusion of affective component in the operationalization of the construct of the image of country of origin, the literature does not present many studies with this focus.

### 3.8.3 Conative or behavioural component

The conative component is related to the results of the processing of information about the individual in the context of the consumption process. In other words, the conative component manifests as a behavioural response related to other components of the theory of consumer attitude. However, according to Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), in using this theory as foundation for the operationalization of the construct of country image, the conative component would not enter the construct of the composition, as is the result on consumer behaviour resulting from its processing and evaluation of the other tourism literature, in which the image concept of a destination is formed by cognitive and affective factors only (Thakor & Lavack, 2003).

### 3.8.4 Relationship between components

An important consideration of consumer attitude model is that the elements that comprise (cognitive, affective and conative) are not independent of each other, there is a causal relationship between them (Mikael & Olof, 2006).

According to Ayrosa (2010), there may be a combination of the three components that the consumer processes, but there will be a predominance of one of them. Furthermore, different attitude objects can trigger different reactions in individuals corroborating this vision, Verlegh (2001) states that the cognitive, affective and conative processes do not act separately as determinants of preferences and behaviours, but interact.

Affect also takes an important role in determination of how beliefs are designed, how they are evaluated and how strongly they weigh in forming preferences and buying behaviour. An individual may like a country (affect) because he believes that this country is a place of beautiful scenery and hospitable people (cognition) and intend to visit this country (behaviour/conative).

But more recent studies consider a hierarchy of effects, wherein the component is a behavioural effect depend on cognitive and affective variables (Mikael & Olof, 2006). However, most studies conducted in order to measure the effect the country of origin, only considers the impact of cognitive factors, such as beliefs related to countries in relation to the purchase intention and evaluation of products, which represent the conative component, ignoring the emotional factor despite the importance attributed to it according to the theory of consumer attitude (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009).

## 3.9 Developed vs developing countries

Without no doubt Denmark is seen as a developed country in today’s world, and the level of development of Eastern European countries is in doubt. There is a tendency for developed countries to evaluate less developed market’s products less favourably (Sampson et al., 2008). This raises a questions, whether Denmark’s position as a developed country has something to do with the way Danes perceive Eastern European food products. (Nayyar, 2014) argue that consumers tend to trust more the products coming from developed markets or at least what the consumer thinks the developed markets are. This is due to the fact that it is perceived that developed countries has a strict control over the quality of the products and more qualified, educated work-force (Nayyar, 2014). Johansson and Nebenzahl (1986), in their study, also argues that products are seen differently if they come from a developed or developing country. The authors investigated consumer willingness to buy Volkswagen brand cars made in Germany and the same car made in Brazil. In turned out that consumer are more willing to pay higher prices for a car that was made in Germany, because it is seen as a modern and developed country (Johansson & Nebenzahl, 1986).

According to World Tourism Organization there is no definition of developed and developing countries. Countries have the possibility to decide themselves if they belong to one or another group (WTO). The countries that announce themselves as being developing make use of provisions available to developing countries (WTO). Whereas, The International Statistics Institute states that developing countries are defined based on their Gross National Income per capita per year. As mentioned previously, there is no clear definition of what Eastern Europe is, however, taking into consideration different definitions and interviewees responses, some of the Eastern European countries are listed in The International Statistics Institute. Those countries are[[1]](#footnote-1): Azerbaijan, Belarus, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Turkey, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia.

It should also be noted that developed countries have specific characteristics, like they are democratic countries, have free market economy, low level of corruption, more dependent on manufacturing than agriculture, and modern technology (Heslop & Papadopoulos, 1993). While developing countries have low standard of living, undeveloped industries, lack of modern technology, low level of education, healthcare and life expectancy (Heslop & Papadopoulos, 1993). Based on these characteristics, consumer can make his/her own understandings of whether a country-of-origin of a products seems developed or not.

##  3.10 Therkelsen – image formation

Most of the theories discussed in previous chapters do not consider culture as a factor that can influence consumer’s perceptions on country’s image. Therkelsen (2010) has studied how tourists form images about the destinations. Despite the fact, the authors talk about tourist destination images, it could be also applied to this study, since the research aims to find out how Danish consumers form particular images of Eastern Europe. According to Therkelsen (2010):

*“…destinations are culture-bound products which generate associations and meanings that are influenced by the cultural background of the potential tourist”. (p. 134)*

What can be said, is that consumers form images about the countries based on their culture, and that the whole culture or particular sub-groups can share similar associations and meanings that are shared internationally. The way people see the destination depends on the cultural and geographical environment they live in (Therkelsen, 2010). For example, consumers may compare their life and environment in Denmark with the potential destination, and if they find important differences, they will view the destination as being extraordinary and special, which does not imply that it will affect the destination image only in the positive way, but it can be also negative.

What is more, according to the author, the perceptions of the destination are dependent on the historical relations between the country-of-origin of a tourist (or consumer in the context of this research), and the destination. It can also be said that consumers may see the same object, event or destination in different ways depending on his/her personal background. As stated by Therkelsen (2010), the image formation of other cultures can be divided into two levels – an individual level and collective level. The later consists of impressions, attitudes and values. As author explains, impressions are based on the events that take place in a given culture, which do not occur often, so they may be forgotten after some time. However, impressions might turn into attitudes if they occur more often or if the image holder has a particular interest in the event or action. And finally values are created unconsciously because it has an affective basis (Therkelsen, 2010). What is more, it should me mentioned, that the image of a culture does not necessarily consists of all three levels. The author summed up the images of the visitors in a cognitive network which was divided into core images (the images that all the respondents have in common) and the extended images which exists to some of the respondents. The cognitive network a culture creates about the destination is specific to that country, and depends on the presents events and historical ties between the country-of-origin of the tourists and the destination (Therkelsen, 2010).

This theoretical model which includes culture as an important factor in explaining how images are created is very useful for this study. As mentioned in the beginning of this sub-chapter, most of the theories used described in the literature review, do not deal with the culturally determined perceptions. What is more, despite the fact this theoretical model was applied in the tourism context, it can be easily used in the country-of-origin studies, since destination image and country image are the same. The difference is that Therkelsen discusses the tourists’ perceptions on the destinations, and this research aims to analyse the images of Danish consumers towards Eastern European countries.

## 3.11 Hofstede’s cultural dimensions

The nationality and culture of the consumer affect how the consumer perceives products and countries (Chasin et al., 1989). It should be added that based on the constructivist inquiry, culture cannot be understood as static and unchanging (Martin & del Bosque, 2008). In this regard, it should be said that entire culture cannot be conceptualized. The purpose of this study is simply to explain some aspects of a cultural phenomenon (Osland & Bird, 2010).

Hofstede’s five cultural dimensions model analyses the distinction between different cultures and provides the basis for an understanding of cultural differences (Schwaighofer, 2014). The world’s population consists of diverse cultural backgrounds and are different from each other. There are also elements of another country that are similar to consumer’s own cultural background (Martin & del Bosque, 2008). When consumer finds similarities with another country, he might put more interest in that culture.

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions give an opportunity to achieve some insights into the background of some elements of a country’s culture (Schwaighofer, 2014). The five cultural dimensions are as follows:

* Power distance
* Individualism
* Masculinity/Femininity
* Uncertainty avoidance
* Long-term orientation

Hofstede has analysed Denmark based on these five dimensions, and the results will be discussed shortly, so just to get an idea of why Danish consumers may act in one or another way. Therefore, cultural values influences may be one of the most important factors affecting consumer’s perceptions on Eastern Europe.

Power distance deals with the fact that individuals in the societies are not totally equal. It should be noted that every consumer has another point of view in regards to this cultural diversity. Denmark ranks highest among EU members in terms of employee autonomy (Geert-Hofstede)[[2]](#footnote-2), which also means that Danish people believe in independency and equal rights. Power in Denmark is decentralized, and the management treat equally other team members and count on their knowledge and expertise in the field.

The next dimension of individualism analyses:

*“…the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members” (Schwaighhofer, 2014, p.48).*

According to the author, Denmark is an individualistic society, which means that Danes tend to focus more on oneself and the surrounding relatives (Geert-Hofstede). Individuals in Danish society are supposed to look after themselves and their family members only. Thus, Danes use very direct form of communication (Geert-Hofstede).

The third dimension is concerned about the issue of what motivates people, wanting to be the best or liking what you do (Geert-Hofstede). Denmark is considered to be a feminine country, which means that Danes tend to keep the balance between life and work. Individuals in such society value equality, solidarity and quality in their working environment (Geert-Hofstede).

The fourth element – the uncertainty avoidance, deals with the fact that a person can never know what will happen in the future. Should the person try to control the future or just let it happen (Geert-Hofstede)? Denmark scores low on this dimensions, meaning that Danes do not need a lot of structure and predictability in they work. Denmark is also seen as a curious nation, which drives Denmark’s reputation within innovation and design (Geert-Hofstede). It also indicates that Danes are heavy consumers for new and innovative products.

Finally, the last fifth dimension, so called “Long term orientation” describes:

*…how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future.” (Schwaighofer, 2014, p.50)*

A low score indicated Danish culture to be normative (Geert-Hofstede). They appreciate traditions and have a strong concern with establishing the absolute truth. Thus, they are not keen on saving for the future but rather live ‘today’.

To mention again, this description of Danish culture does not mean that Danish consumers will be seen based on the results of Hofstede’s five dimension’s analyses but rather it may give insights for understanding why they evaluate Eastern European countries in a particular way. Thus, I am not aiming to generalise national culture, which would mean following the functionalist paradigm. However, I do not reject completely the functionalist inquiry due to the fact that cultural nationality can be used as a point of reference. When analysing different cultures and its people’s perceptions and attitudes towards other cultures, it should be noted that individuals are all unique, and each person has its own characteristics that can be independent of where he comes from.

## 3.12 Interview guide

The interview guide was created based on the existing theories on country-of-origin and the previously done studies in various different countries concerning different products categories.

The interviews starts by giving information to the interviewees on the theme of the conversation, revealing the problem area, and the importance of the interviews. It is very important to make sure that the respondents feel comfortable and that there are no right or wrong answers, just opinions and thoughts. Secondly, the respondents will be asked to give a short description on their profile – name, age, education, so to get more familiar with interviewees.

As it was mentioned earlier, the three main topics were generated, that helps to answer the problem statement:

1. Country image
2. Product image
3. Willingness to buy

However, before asking questions about the country image, it is crucial to ask such questions:

* According to you, what defines the country-of-origin?
* How would you define Eastern European countries? What countries belong to Eastern European block?

It is important to know interviewees opinions and perceptions on these two definitions because country-of-origin, like Eastern Europe has different definitions, and respondents will give answers based on what they believe the country-of-origin and Eastern Europe are. The following analysis will be based on Danish consumer perceptions of what Eastern Europe is.

Afterwards, in the second section, the interviewees receive questions regarding their beliefs of the Eastern European image. There are different questions about Eastern Europe, which are designed to represent country’s image and consumer creates perceived country image based on his/her knowledge about the country, including different dimensions of country image (Han, 1989). According to the Han (1989), there are three different dimensions of country-of-origin:

1. Cognitive
2. Affective
3. Conative

Cognitive dimension states that image comprises what one knows ant thinks about the country and can be evaluated by asking questions regarding the political and economic situation in the countries, technological advancement and social desirability. Respondent’s knowledge of these four dimensions will be evaluated by asking such questions:

* What is your knowledge about political situation in Eastern Europe?
* What is your knowledge about economic situation in Eastern Europe?
* How advance, in your opinion, Eastern Europe is regarding the technology?
* In your opinion, what is the quality of life in Eastern European countries? How urbanized the countries are?

These questions help to see interviewees overall knowledge of the countries and how familiar they are with the country, because as stated in the literature review, it can be that if the consumer is not familiar with the product, he will evaluate it based on his knowledge about that country. It should be noted that the questions in this part of the interview are very broad, so to leave space for the consumer to share what he/she knows about the topic, instead of narrowing it down and asking a very specific questions about the countries.

Affective dimension states that image comprises what one feels about it (Martin & Eroglu, 1993), so this component can be measured through the questions:

* How much do you like Eastern European countries?
* What associations do you have with Eastern Europe?

It should be noted that expect interviewees to be in doubt with their feelings towards the countries because it is very normal that individuals may be not aware of what feelings they have or it is difficult to share those feelings. This is why the second question should help to see if the feelings towards Eastern Europe is more positive or negative.

And the last component of country image is conative, which states that image comprises what ones acts using the information he/she has (Martin & Eroglu, 1993):

* Have you ever visited at least one of the Eastern European countries?
* Are you planning to visit it again?

I expect here to find how the particular knowledge about the country influences consumer decision of visiting the country.

The third section of the interviews aims to figure out what is the perceived image of Eastern European food products. The purpose of this section is to find out how Danish male and female consumers evaluate different features of Eastern European food products. Important to mention that product images as well as country image can be measured by cognitive, affective and conative components. Cognitive component of the Eastern European food products can be evaluated by asking questions regarding the intrinsic (taste, packaging) and extrinsic cues (price, store image, country-of-origin). Cognitive component can be measured by asking if the respondents buy Eastern European products, and affective component can be measured by asking questions of how the interviewees feel about those products:

* Do you look at the country-of-origin before you buy a food product?
* Have you bought Eastern European food products before and why?
* What types of food products you associate with Eastern Europe?
* How do you evaluate food products made in Eastern Europe in terms of taste, packaging?
* How do you evaluate food products made in Eastern Europe in terms of price and quality?
* Do you think Eastern European food products have a positive image among Danes?
* How much do you like Eastern European food products?
* If an Eastern European product is not different from a Danish a Danish product in any way, which product would you purchase?

By asking the above question, I expect to find out if Danish consumer’s willingness to buy or not to buy Eastern European products is related to consumer ethnocentrism theory.

* When you consider to purchase a new product and you don’t have sufficient information about that product, would you purchase it on the basis of country-of-origin?

And the latest question here, helps to see if Danish consumers perceive Eastern European product image as a single cue, which means based only on the country-of-origin information.

# 4.Analysis

The main objective of the analysis part is to explore how Danish male and female consumers evaluate food products made in Eastern Europe and how they came up with those evaluations. It is expected to find differences between Danish male and female consumer’s attitude towards country of origin and willingness to buy. The theoretical concepts discussed in the previous chapter will guide the analysis.

It should be mentioned that the purpose of this analysis is not to generalize consumer behaviour and attitudes but rather represent participant’s perceived images of Eastern Europe and its food products, associations and perceptions regarding the country of origin. What is more, despite the fact the analysis section aims not just to analyse but find similarities or differences between Danish male and female consumers, the findings do not stand for every single male and female consumer in Denmark. The analysis section should also help to find out new insights of how the country-of-origin information is used in order to evaluate food products coming from one of the Eastern European countries.

## 4.1 Perceived definitions

The first two questions being presented in the interview guide aimed to find out how Danish consumers perceives the country of origin definition as well as the concept of Eastern Europe. Since as mentioned in the theoretical section, there might be different interpretation of the two definitions, and since this thesis follows a constructivist paradigm, it is acknowledged that every single participant can have different view of what it is and this highly influences the way they see Eastern Europe and its food products.

### 4.1.1 Consumer definitions of country-of-origin

As it was stated in the theory section, the country-of-origin is mostly defined in two different ways. According to Thorelli et al (1989), Schweiger et al (1997) and Hinck (2004), the country of origin is defined as a country where a given product is originally made.

Most of the interviewees, both male and female sees the country-of-origin based on this definition (R=1, R=2, R=3, R=4, R=6, R=7, R=8, R=9, R=10, R=12, R=14, R=15, R=16, R=17). Such definitions as:

*Where the product is manufactured (Lasse)*

*Where the products are produced (Lærke)*

were widely used, and despite the fact interviewees used different words (“manufactured”, “produced”, “made in”, “comes from”) to describe it, they all mean the same.

The second definition used in the literature review was of Joliansson et al (1993) and Lee (1997), they argued that the COO is a country where a given product’s headquarters are placed. There were few respondents (R=5, R=7, R=11, R=14) that agrees with these scholars.

*Where the company of a product or service is located (Tenna)*

So as it can be seen, there are two types of definitions used by the consumers to describe the country-of-origin and the way they define it, leads to the specific answers in the later discussions.

### 4.1.2 Consumer definitions of Eastern Europe

It should be mentioned that when asked to define Eastern Europe and name the countries that form Eastern Europe, there was not even two exact answers. Every single male and female participant had a unique perception of what Eastern Europe is and what countries belong to this region. It is especially crucial to know how people define Eastern Europe because later on they use the mentioned countries when talking about Eastern Europe. And since every single consumer had his own idea of what Eastern Europe is and what countries belong to the term, no differences between genders could be found.

However, consumers used particular words or phrases to describe Eastern Europe that can be grouped into different categories, starting with Geography. Most of the respondents connected Easter Europe with a geographical location (R=2, R=7, R=R=16, R=17):

*A geographical region in Eastern part of Europe (Christina)*

It is easily understandable why consumers use ‘geography’ to define Eastern Europe because the term itself says about the location – “Eastern”. What is more, some respondents sees Eastern Europe in terms of geography and culture.

*Called Eastern Europe because of geography but also because of the culture (Christian)*

So, Christian states that Easter Europe is seen in both ways, it is called like that because of its location and because of the cultural similarities. It can said that Christian together with some other interviewees (R=6, R=9, R=12) believe that Eastern European countries share the same culture. However, I cannot say if the reason of seeing Eastern Europe as a ‘same or similar culture’ is because of its locations or there are other reasons.

The other way of defining Eastern Europe is based on the historical roughs. Anders defines Easter Europe as:

*The countries that came up after the collapse of the Soviet Union*

For quite some interviewees (R=3, R=8, R=11, R=13, R=14), Easter Europe associates with Soviet Union. They believe that all Eastern European countries belonged to Soviet Union, since the Union had collapsed it is now called Eastern Europe. When thinking about Eastern Europe consumers inevitably name Russia and Putin, and despite the fact this is a history people still have strong association with it, which can be also explained by the conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

Birthe is one of those few respondents that connects Eastern Europe and the collapse of Soviet Union:

*Eastern Europe is Soviet countries that belonged to Putin’s Russia (Birthe)*

However, what is also interesting in her answer is the fact that according to her, Eastern Europe belonged to Putin’s Russia and based on the historical facts at the time when some of the Eastern European countries were a part of Soviet Union, Putin was not a leader of a country. Birthe’s way of thinking could be influenced by the fact that Putin is a current leader of Russia and is the president of the third time. It could also mean that the respondent is not aware of the historical facts and creates her own understanding based on some other factors.

When asked to define Eastern Europe, Casper and Tine sees Eastern Europe as poor countries:

*I think Eastern Europe is mostly poor countries, working a lot and hard (Casper)*

*A region in Europe which consists of poorer countries (Tine)*

They see Eastern Europe as a poor region in Europe where people live hard and work a lot. According to Casper he associates Eastern Europe with poor countries based on few things, namely the occupation by Soviet Union, the low wages and based on his own experience while visiting some of the Eastern European countries:

*They were all affected by the Soviet Union occupation many years ago…also they have a way lower salaries than us – Danes, and when I was in Lithuania and Bulgaria, I saw those grey/orange apartment blocks that looked really poor and it was many of them, not saying that all people there are poor but probably most of them (Casper)*

In this case, Casper base his understanding on his own experience together with his prior knowledge about Eastern Europe. As mentioned in the theoretical section, usually people that are directly involved with a country, for example, had travelled there are more positive towards the country and its products (Belabanis et al., 2002; Awaritefe, 2004), however like (…) also said, it depends on the length and purpose of the stay.

Camila also expressed the feeling that Eastern Europe consists of poor countries, she was also asked to explain her thoughts on that:

*…Where people earn low salaries or it is difficult to find a job and also they live in poor houses, like really old, made from old materials, and people are making a lot of crimes to survive (Camila)*

What is common between Casper and Camila is that they both think that Eastern Europe is poor countries because of the Eastern European buildings. As mentioned earlier, Casper described them as “grey/orange apartment blocks that looked poor” and Camila just says ‘poor houses, really old’. However, the difference here is that Casper visited Lithuania and Bulgaria and Camila has this image of Eastern Europe based on other informational sources, like TV. What

What is more, it should be mentioned that Camila also sees Easter Europe as a region which:

*…share the same communist culture and because of the crime and corruption rates. (Camila)*

Seeing Eastern Europe as a part of Soviet Union was discussed earlier but Camila believes that Eastern Europe is still a part of what she calls a “Communism culture”. Thus, she thinks these countries share similar rates of crime and corruption which makes them Eastern European countries.

And finally, Tenna argues that Eastern Europe is called so because of the low salaries and ‘typical mentality:

*…A territory with…low wages…A typical mentality they have like us Scandinavians, that’s why it’s called Eastern Europe and I think nobody wants to be a part of Eastern Europe. (Tenna)*

As we can see besides the fact Tenna sees Eastern Europe as countries of lows wages and typical mentality, she also expresses negative feelings towards it when saying that nobody wants to be a part of Eastern Europe.

In the above analysis of the definition of Eastern Europe, it can be seen that every consumer shares different thoughts of what Eastern Europe is to them and it is not surprising because there is no clear definition of what Eastern Europe is and what countries belong to it. For that reason consumers create their own understandings and explanations based on their direct or indirect experience with the countries. What is more, in this part of the analysis, I did not aim to find differences in how males and females sees Eastern Europe because as mentioned in earlier chapters in methodology and theory, the differences should exist between male and female consumers regarding the country-of-origin information and willingness to buy and not the way consumers interpret Eastern Europe or other definitions.

Thus, it should be noted that most of interviewees see Eastern Europe as one entity, which can mean that consumers use their mental images of Eastern Europe when making sense of its origin.

Besides answering the question of what Eastern Europe is, they were asked to name Eastern European countries, and in the table below, you can find the results:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Respondent** | **Countries** |
| 1. Casper
 | Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland |
| 1. Lasse
 | Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Czech Republic, Baltic countries, Belarus |
| 1. Anders
 | Poland, Baltic countries, Ukraine, Belarus, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Georgia, Azerbaijan |
| 1. Christian
 | Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine |
| 1. Mads
 | Poland, Balkan countries, Baltic countries, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova |
| 1. Rune
 | Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Ukraine, Croatia. Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia |
| 1. Anders
 | Hungary, Poland, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus |
| 1. Karl
 | Poland, Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria, Baltic countries, Romania |
| 1. Frederik
 | Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, part of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania |
| 1. Camila
 | Romania, Greece, Hungary, Bulgaria, Latvia, Turkey |
| 1. Tenna
 | Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Georgia |
| 1. Lærke
 | Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Czech Republic, Baltic countries, Ukraine, Belarus |
| 1. Birthe
 | Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania |
| 1. Hanne
 | Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic |
| 1. Tine
 | Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Ukraine |
| 1. Christina
 | Ukraine, Turkey, Bulgaria, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia |
| 1. Ingrid
 | Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Hungary  |

As you can see in the table, there are different countries listed as Eastern European, starting with Poland that was mentioned 16 out of 17 times, and finishing with Azerbaijan, mentioned by Anders (R=3). When talking about the images of Eastern Europe and its food products, Danish consumers talked about the images of those countries they have mentioned as Eastern European. I as a constructivist researcher believe that there is no right or wrong answer here and since there is no clear definition, the Eastern Europe will be analysed based on what the chosen target defines as Eastern Europe.

## 4.2 Images of Eastern Europe

In this part of the analysis, I am going to analyse the images that the studied group has about Eastern Europe. This section is divided into smaller subsections, where I am going to discuss images about the (1) Political system, (2) Economic system, (3) Technological advancement, (4) Social desirability, (5) The level of development, (6) The level of urbanization and images of a (7) poor region.

As mentioned in the literature review, the country’s image is going to be analysed by considering the cognitive aspect of the image, which are political, economic, technological advancement and social desirability, affective and conative components, plus the additional themes that were created based on the interviews.

**Political system**

As stated in the literature review, people’s perception on the political system of a country together with other country’s image dimensions helps the consumer to create an overall image of a country and may influence their perceptions and attitude on Eastern European food products.

When asked to describe the political system in Eastern Europe, some of the respondents described it while considering Eastern Europe as one entity, the others took an example of the specific country they know about. According to Casper:

*Eastern European politicians are not very popular topic in Denmark (Casper)*

This could be the reason why respondents are not so well aware of the political aspects of the Eastern European countries. However, Casper together with other respondents still hold some kind of political image about Eastern Europe. Casper says that:

*They have problems with Putin. After the occupation they recovered and now they are trying to reach the average standards of living in Europe (Casper)*

Here again, the interviewee mentions the occupation by the Soviet Union and the current president of Russia. What is more, by stating that Eastern European countries are trying to reach the standards of living in Europe, he implies that Eastern Europe isn’t as developed as other European regions.

What is more, political stability and corruption are used quite often when describing political situation. Lasse says:

*They are very corrupted, but basically the political situation is stable. Politicians violate the rights of the Hungarian people or the media…Politicians are controlling it. (Lasse)*

Some of the respondents like Lasse sees Eastern European political system as stable while others have an opposite opinion:

*I don’t think it’s very stable especially in Croatia and all that part, of course also Ukraine and Belarus, these countries are like a part of Russia still… (Anders, R=3)*

*In the Ukraine the political situation is not very stable because of the war (Christian)*

When talking about political instability in the region, respondents mention particular countries, since they have more knowledge in those countries and then they tend to assign that information to all Eastern European countries, since according to the chosen group, Eastern Europe is seen as one unit, so consumers tend to think that political situation and other country’s images are similar to all the Eastern countries.

Christian also mentions corruption as one of the determinants of Eastern European politicians:

*Corruption is wide spread between the politicians, they are all very rich and the people of the country are poor… (Christian)*

The same image of the political system is hold by Karl, Camila and Birthe, who also used the word ‘corruption’ in their answers.

Thus, according to Frederik:

*The region is marked by poverty, a little political instability, crime, but it’s democratic (Frederik)*

Frederik uses more negative phrases to describe the politicians, such as poverty, instability, crime. It was noted that most of the interviewees uses negative words to describe political system:

*Politician are highly corrupted (Camila);*

*Seeks benefits for themselves (Birthe)*

*They are aggressive, not very cosmopolitan and liberal (Hanne)*

However, it should be also noted that interviewees could not say that much on the political system, most of the answers were very general:

*I am not very familiar with their political system (Ingrid)*

*Cannot say that much (Christian)*

The other two images hold by the interviewees is that Eastern European countries are democratic and they try to be closer to the Western countries. The later image may imply that Easter Europe is different from the Western part, and that Western part is somehow better because:

*The politicians are trying to be closer to the Western side, wanting to be similar to the rest of European countries (Mads)*

It also implies that Eastern European countries are seen differently from Western Europe, while looking more favourably to the Western countries. But despite the fact that most of descriptions about political system in Eastern Europe are negative, there are some positive images, too. Anders (R=7), thinks that:

*…politicians are calm there, no big drama, no fighting against each other. (Anders)*

And according to Lærke:

*It’s pretty stable, no bigger political fights. I think politicians are doing a lot so Eastern European countries can get closer to the West (Lærke)*

However, to sum up the images of Eastern European political situation hold by the studied group, it can be said that the most common images used are: political stability and instability, corruption and democracy.

**Economic system**

The way people evaluate things, and make sense of what is important or not depends on their cultural identity. According to Holfsede’s 5 dimensions model, Denmark is an individualistic country, which means that they emphasize personal rights, freedom, self-expression and other things that were discussed in the theoretical chapter. This explains why some Danish consumers tend to talk about freedom when evaluating country’s image from economic point of view. Lærke states that:

*…in some countries like Bulgaria and Balkan countries as well, you don’t have that much freedom in speech, it is more controlled by the government (Lærke)*

The interviewee believes that freedom is very important when evaluating the country. What is more Danes are very much aware of their high standards of living which let them to see Denmark as a better country from economic point of view compared with some other European countries:

*It is not as good as economic situation in Denmark (Lasse)*

*…most of the numbers, like inflation, GDP, employment are worse than in Denmark or other Scandinavian and Western countries (Mads)*

*I think their gross domestic product is very low compared to Denmark and Germany (Birthe)*

Thus, when talking about Eastern European economy, Danes also tend to mention low salaries and unemployment as an important indicators of country’s economy. For many respondents low wages and unemployment stand for a bad economic situation:

*People struggle in finding jobs, the unemployment rates are high, especially after the financial crisis in 2008 (Mads)*

Danish consumers think that wages in Eastern Europe are low, and that unemployment is high, this can explain why some of them see Eastern European countries less developed and poor. From the other hand, Denmark’s GDP’s is in the 20’s highest in world and the wages are one of the highest too, so they could evaluate most of the countries as poorer because their living standard are not as high as them.

What is more, despite the fact most of the interviewees tend to see Eastern European economic situation more negatively than positively, Mads believes that it is getting better:

*It is getting better, they are improving their economic wealth fare in many different sections…they are recovering but not so fast (Mads)*

According to Anders (R=7), in some of Eastern European countries the economy is increasing, in the others not:

*I know the economy is kind of booming in the Baltic States…But for example in Georgia and Ukraine, the situation is bad (Anders, R=7)*

The answers about the economic situation are contradictory, when talking about the same indicator, like GDP or inflation, interviewee tend to see it differently, some of them based their views on what they heard while travelling to Eastern European countries, some of them heard on the TV or read on the newspaper or just heard from someone else.

It is also important to mention emigration and investments as the indicators of Eastern European economy, Karl says that:

*…many of them are leaving the country, that’s why you find so many immigrants in every corner of the world coming from Eastern Europe and especially Poland (Karl)*

And Hanne explains that:

*Most of the countries are a part of EU and NATO, which gives them certain bonuses and more investments, so they can grow and support its people (Hanne)*

As it can be seen, Danish consumers tend to explain the economic situation in different, contradicting ways. In his 5-dimensions model, Hofstede argued that Danes have a tendency towards optimism and they possess a positive attitude. However, in the current study Danish consumers tend to have more negative attitude towards Eastern European politicians, economic system and other dimensions that will be discussed in the following chapters.

**Technological advancement**

Technological advancement is the other dimension of the country’s image (Pappu et al., 2007). Respondents were asked to elaborate on this topic. According to Casper:

*Eastern Europe is a bit behind, when you are talking about technology. I think they don’t have smartphones, computers and so on, but I think it when you are working on a fabric or something like that, they don’t have all kind of smart machines…using more human force instead of robots (Casper)*

Casper, like some other interviewees sees Eastern Europe as less advanced in technology. This may be due to the fact that most of them also sees Eastern Europe region as less advanced economically and not so positive from the political point of view. Lasse even compares it with technological advancement of other continents from the negative perspective:

*I know it’s more advanced than African countries…but some of the things are still like in Africa (Lasse)*

Mads also uses Africa, Asia and South America for a comparison with Eastern Europe, but he acknowledges the fact that it is more technologically advanced but less than North Europe, Germany or UK.

By arguing that Eastern Europe is less advanced or not advanced, respondent use such explanations:

*I heard they don’t even have electricity or no mobile phones (Christian)*

*They lack modern technology, new automobiles, newest smartphones and computer (Camila)*

Christian even thinks that some of the areas in Eastern Europe lack the main things that modern countries have, like electricity. I should add that one respondent even used the phrase ‘back into the stone age’, which says that he believes Eastern Europe to be really behind Denmark and the rest of developed countries.

However, not all interviewees are negative about the technological advancement of Eastern Europe, few respondents think that Eastern Europe is at the same level as Denmark (Anders, Ingrid) and some stated that it is very advanced and in some areas even more advanced than Denmark:

*I think in some spheres it is more advanced than us, for example IT, but it is hard to compare (Anders)*

*I think they are good in one thing, we in another (Karl)*

*…in some spheres very advanced, more advanced than Danes (Frederik)*

*I know Latvia and Lithuania re developing its harbours and maritime technology is quite advanced…they have strong software engineers, they are good with computer and programing, their specialists are valued around Europe (Christina)*

The main advantages and positive images of Eastern Europe from technological angle are connected with IT, harbours, maritime technology, software engineers, and programming. Ingrid, for example, was in doubt whether having electrical buses means being less advanced or is it more environmentally friendly. So, it seems that some of the consumers are not sure how to evaluate technological level of the countries, which is understandable because it is not easy to evaluate how advanced the country is, there are many aspects that need to be considered. And for people that are less engaged with the technology, it is harder to make evaluations. Like mentioned earlier, Hofstede stated that Danes have a more positive attitude towards new things, despite the fact Danish consumers were less positive on political and economic dimensions of country image, they showed some positive attitudes to technological aspects by arguing that Eastern European countries are at the same level as Denmark or in some areas even more advanced.

**Social desirability**

Social desirability, the quality of life in Eastern Europe was also defined in different ways. It is influenced by consumers’ familiarity with the country, travelling experiences that will be discussed in later chapters.

For Casper, the quality of life in Eastern Europe associates with bad salaries, however he still stays that:

*…the quality of life in Eastern Europe is just fine (Casper)*

He acknowledges the fact that there are poor people in the Eastern countries and not so poor, but this is normal in there because they have a completely different culture and they are used to live like that. For Lasse the quality of life is somehow measured by having or not having an iPhone. It seems that having an iPhone to him means a better a life and it shows the quality of life at some matter. This could also be influenced by the fact that almost anyone can afford an IPhone in Denmark (Lasse), so if the country’s people do not have expensive phones, it stands as a sign that country’s overall situation is not good. Thus, he strengthen his opinion by stating that in Denmark it does not really matter what kind of job do you have because every person in Denmark is paid enough to get a smartphones that stands for a better quality of life.

Anders in his answers also mentions the fact that Eastern Europeans cannot afford as much luxury goods as Danes, meaning that for him luxury items stands for the quality of life.

According to Christian:

*…people are starving, not all but more the ones living far from the bigger cities, they use old cars…and they don’t have good specialists, like doctors (Christian)*

His knowledge about the starving people and old cars comes from the movies and TV shows. He sees movies as an adequate source of information to evaluate countries, and he thinks that most of the things he sees are the true reality of the countries being presented there. As it was said by Awaritefe (2004), consumers that are not directly involved with the countries, tend to rely on secondary sources of information, like TV, word-of-mouth and newspapers. They do not know how to prove the information they get being right or wrong but if there is no other experience involved they rather trust that small information they get, which can be Christian’s case, and explains why he sees Eastern Europe in the way he does.

Few of the respondents named drinking alcohol as the feature of Eastern European social life (Rune, Anders, Frederik). For Frederik:

*The countries suffer from alcoholism (Frederik)*

What is more, he talks about Denmark being more welcome and caring for people, which is due to the fact that Denmark receives a lot of refugees from African and Asian countries, and according to him Eastern Europeans are nationalists and racists for that matter.

Tenna (R=11) thinks that the quality of life in Eastern Europe is not good, and that people are not happy there. She also thinks that Eastern Europeans are greedy people because:

*They go to other countries and they complain about their people, about their food, about the tax system and how stupid we are, and that we live like in a safe zone, never seen a war or a bigger tragedy (Tenna)*

Her opinion about Easter Europeans being greedy can be based on her own experience at Denmark. She works in the restaurant and she meets a lot of different international people, with whom she communicates. So, it can be said that the way consumers form images about the countries depends not just by educational background as stated by (Chryssochoidis et al., 2007) but also by the particular type of job the consumer has, and what kind of experience he/she gains while facing Eastern Europeans at work.

When talking about the quality of life in Eastern Europe, Lærke argued that Eastern Europe cannot be seen as a one unit, and that every country or region has different quality of life. She finds different reasons, why one country is happier and another is not, for example:

*I think Balkans, Hungary, Slovakia, Check Republic and other down there are happier because they have a good weather, a lot of tourism, so the atmosphere is more joyful (Lærke)*

For Lærke good, warm weather stands for happiness and qualitative life and low wages together with lack of rights - for a bad.

For Birthe (R=13), Eastern European air is polluted, it is unclean and not safe, so the quality of life is not good. She based her understanding of Eastern European’s people’s life and environment based on her two days trip to Romania and what she saw on the TV.

Christina is more positive towards Eastern European quality of life. She expressed a positive attitude towards the people by saying that they are simple and like having fun. Thus, she relates good quality of life with the seasons of the year:

*…in summer time, people feel more relaxed and happy, in winter time it looks so dark and grey, and not so cosy (Christina)*

Christina spent a lot of time in some Eastern European countries, mainly Latvia, she feels closer to their culture and she does not have any bad experience. The fact that Christina had to sessions in Latvia at different times of the year, let her to see the way people live there on the colder months and contrary. Christina does not say that the quality of life is good or bad, she only states that:

*…it depends what kind of job do you have and which part of the country you live (Christina)*

So, she is not aiming to generalize how people live there but says that it depends on the different circumstances.

Ingrid (R=17) lived in Lithuanian city Kaunas for six weeks, so she had a change to get to know the country better. She thinks that people in Lithuania think more about the money than Danes do but the reason for that is the fact that they have low wages and need to live from ones month salary till the other (Ingrid). From her direct experience with the country, she states that life is harder for mothers with children and seniors who struggle to survive with the low social contribution they get from the government. She also experienced Lithuanians to be nationalists because they are not so friendly to foreigners who come to their own country but they emigrate elsewhere themselves and believe they have to be welcomed (Ingrid).

From the results above, as well as the following analysis, it can be said that the way Danish consumers create images of Eastern Europe depends a lot on their travel experience to the countries, also the length and the purpose of the stay. A longer period of stay, could give more experience to the visitors and help to get more familiar with their culture and people (Juric & Worsley, 1998).

**The level of development**

It is important to mention that participants of this study have a lot of concerns about the development of Eastern European countries. While discussing different images of politics, economics, technology, the quality of life and then product images, interviewees talk about the development of the countries. Like discussed earlier in the literature review, the development of the country has a lot to do with how people perceives that country’s products.

According to Casper, Eastern European countries are less development in terms of everything, he mentions transport as one example. His opinion about the development of the countries is based on his own experience while visiting Lithuania. He saw old houses in the rural parts of the country that had no modern bathrooms or toilets, and thus, the internet connection and wireless signal were weak, which also made him think that Lithuania is less developed. People have different perceptions of how a developed country should look like, and for the participants of the study Denmark is seen as very developed country, and there is no doubt about the development of Denmark in the current literature. So, it is very reasonable that Danes compare those countries with Denmark and such things as ‘outside toilets’ may seem as a return to the “old times”.

Lasse shares a very similar view when talking about the development of Eastern European countries, he mentions the life of rural areas in Hungary, where he spent some time with his girlfriend, and he had to use ‘outside toilet’. Both of the interviewees created this image of Eastern Europe and particularly rural areas, based on their experience. Thus their visitation was not simply touristic but visiting family and relatives, so they had an opportunity to be closer to their culture and saw their everyday life.

Anders also acknowledged that Eastern European countries have old technology, but he find justification for that and do not see it as a negative attribute:

*…it’s harder to be in the same level as the Western countries, because they were dependent on Russia for so many years, and Russian were taking all their skilled workers to Russia, stealing all the machinery and killing people, so it took time to rebuild the system. (Anders, R=7)*

What is more, Anders also says that in the field of mobile phones, technology, TV’s and similar, Eastern European countries are equal to Denmark and it seems normal for him because:

*…the distance between two countries is not big…so it’s normal that it is at the same level (Anders)*

Camila also sees Eastern Europe as a less developed region because of the lack of modern technology, modern cars, computers and smartphones. However, Camila based her knowledge on indirect information sources, like television, where she saw Russian movies and the technology they use in the movies.

As it can be seen, people have different perceptions of what are the characteristics of a developed country, and some people build their understanding based on their personal experience with the culture and the countries, while others rely on movies and other similar sources of information because they did not visit the countries, so that’s the only image they have.

**Urbanization**

When asked to evaluate the urbanization level of the countries, respondents were not so explorative. Most of the interviewees agreed that life in urban area is harder and that it is more beneficial to live in the bigger cities and capitals. According to Lasse, the situation in the rural areas is not good because people struggle finding jobs, however, he also thinks that the situation is very common in other European countries as well.

Anders (R=3) and Mads, do not have a lot to say about the urbanization level, however they believe that Eastern European countries are as urbanized as any other European country or at least at the very similar level. Tenna also holds a position that the life in urban areas is better, she believes that the number of people living in the urban areas is increasing, and this is due to the:

*…difference between wages in rural and urban regions, and in rural area there are mostly farmers… (Tenna)*

However, Lærke thinks that there is a lot of people living not in the urban regions but rural, and she explains it just by saying that agriculture is an important niche for Eastern European countries, so it is beneficial to live in those areas, you grow your own food. Birthe and Tine also holds a similar positon by pointing out that more people in Eastern European countries work in farms rather than business units or fabrics.

It can be said that the respondents have three types of answers, (1) either they do not know about it, so they just skip the question, (2) they think that more people live in the urban areas because it is easier to find a job, the wages a bigger and the life is better, or (3) more people live in the rural regions because the countries are depended a lot by agriculture and farming.

## 4.3 Affective component of the image of Eastern Europe

The affective component of the country image deals with consumer’s feelings about a particular country, which in this case is Eastern Europe. The feelings that consumer has about Eastern Europe may have an impact on their willingness to buy food products originating from one of the Eastern European countries.

Both Casper and Lasse, when asked to say how much do they like Eastern European countries, said:

*…I guess it is fine (Casper)*

*It’s fine, because I got to know some of the countries quite well… (Lasse)*

Casper admits that it is hard to answer this question, but he also said that Eastern Europe is not for vacations because there is nothing that impressive for him and also for Casper vacations are associated with the Southern part of Europe, like Italy and Spain. He also mentions that his reason of going to Lithuania is because he has a girlfriend from there, so he just visits her family. He also associates Eastern Europe with such things as low salaries, less advanced technology, hard work, corruption, thieves and the fact that it is unsafe country. So, his feelings about Eastern Europe are not so positive based on his direct and indirect experience with some of the Eastern countries. Like mentioned earlier, Lasse also thinks that Eastern European countries are ‘fine’. Like Casper, Lasse also has direct experience with Eastern Europe, he had an ex-girlfriend from Hungary so he knows the country quite well. His feelings are more positive and he associates Eastern Europe with better weather, nice and hardworking people, who are also simple according to him and fight or their countries. Both of the respondents have or had a girlfriend from one of the Eastern European countries. Despite the fact, they both think Eastern Europe is ‘fine’, they have different feelings and associations about it and that might be because of the fact that they visited different Eastern European countries – Lithuania and Hungary.

Anders, for example, says that:

*I like them, not all of them, I like Azerbaijan, it was something exotic, but I don’t really have any negative feelings about any of them, maybe just Poland a bit, don’t really like the people… (Anders)*

Eastern Europe does not have one, ultimate definition, so people have a different understanding of what Eastern Europe is, however, in none of the descriptions and discussion of what Eastern European countries are, Azerbaijan is mentioned as a possible ‘candidate’, since it is not perceived as a part of Europe. However, this thesis does not use a concrete definition of what an Eastern Europe is. The idea is to see how Danish consumers perceive Eastern Europe and what countries they see as Eastern Europe and why. In this context, Anders perception of Azerbaijan as Eastern European country, is accepted. So, Anders have positive associations with Eastern Europe, based on his trip to Azerbaijan, and his associations are also affected by this trip (spicy food, potato dishes, outside markets). As it was said by Verlegh (2001), consumers raise emotions and feelings that can be formed during the travelling, the contact with foreigners or through education and media. It should be noted that these are the most common ways of forming images about Eastern Europe used by Danish consumers.

Respondents who have not been in any Eastern European country or been there only for a day or two, are not sure if they like Eastern Europe or not:

*I don’t know if I like them or not (Christian)*

*I am in a neutral position (Mads)*

*Cannot say that I don’t like, but I don’t know (Rune)*

When asked to say if he has more positive or negative feelings about it, Christian said that it is more negative because he simply does not know what can be good there. So his associations are also negative: poor people, old houses, old cars, Russian busses and horses.

Mads feelings about Easter Europe are affected by Danish media:

*…in Danish media we have this term (Eastern Europe) when something bad happens. Like…about burglars, car stealers, thieves at the shops or contraband of cigarettes and alcohol. (Mads)*

Mads mentions few stories in Danish media in relation to Eastern Europe and its people, and according to him, the media influences his opinion, since he also does not have any personal experience with Eastern Europeans. Since, he only sees news about burglars and thieves from Eastern Europe, he associates them with the term Eastern Europe.

Rune says that he has more negative feelings towards Eastern Europeans, and especially Polish people, despite the fact he have not been there and personally does not know any people from it. His opinion is based on word-of-mouth, what he heard from friends and family.

Anders (R=7) view of Eastern Europe has changed since his visit to Latvia. After the visitation, he started to like it, however he also admits that he does not like all the countries, only Latvia and Lithuania. The only two negative associations he has is about the poor people living in the villages and because it is not as safe as in Denmark. Anders thinks that people from Eastern Europe are simple and warm, he enjoys the food there and nature.

Frederik could not define his feelings towards Eastern Europeans because according to him the people cannot be labelled the same:

*…they are different, they might be similar but not like exactly the same, if I hear a Russian killed someone in Denmark and something like that, it doesn’t mean I will hate all Russian from now on (Frederik)*

Frederik thinks that Danish people just hold stereotypes about the Eastern European countries and people saying that they are all poor, ‘drinking pure vodka, still communistic, not developed enough’ and so on. From the other hand, he contradicts himself in the later answer when saying that:

*…corruption, it’s not just a criminal act, it’s a whole culture because they don’t see stealing as a very harmful crime, it’s something normal there… (Frederik)*

Once he says that people from the same country cannot be labelled as one and later on he says that corruption is something cultural there.

Camila is the only interviewee that could directly say that she does not like Eastern Europe, and her decision is based on the fact that she thinks Eastern Europeans are not very civilized, with communistic thinking. Camila is also an example of a Danish consumer who is influenced by the media and word-of-mouth.

Hanne could not say if she likes Eastern European countries or not, she just feels sorry for them because of their history and she also thinks that the current generation just inherited the culture from their parents and grandparents, so it is hard to change.

So, it can be said that respondents had difficulties in expressing their feelings towards Eastern Europe. They were not sure how they feel about it, however it was easier to make associations that were highly dependent on their experiences. Respondents who had longer stays in Eastern European countries, have more positive attitudes than those who created images about Eastern Europe from media channels and friends.

## 4.4 Conative component of the image of Eastern Europe

Based on the images the consumers create (cognitive component) and the feelings they attached towards those images, he/she makes a decision, which could be to visit the country or not. It should be noted that the respondents in this study who have some relations to Eastern Europe, family or friends living there, are willing to go there:

*When I’m going with my girlfriend to visit her family again (Casper)*

*Latvia for sure, because of my girlfriends family, we go there at least once per year (Anders)*

*It’s always better to go to a country where you know some people… (Karl)*

*I want to go one day because I have colleagues from Poland (Tine)*

*I made friends in Latvia and Lithuania, so we meet sometimes (Christina)*

Despite the fact some of them have negative images and feelings about Eastern Europe, the fact that they know someone from there is an important motivator of going there.

Some of the respondents who have never been there are also not willing to go there because they hold negative images, and for that reason Eastern Europe is not on their countries to visit list:

*…I don’t know what to do there (Rune)*

Lasse, Tenna and Mads are planning to go because they think that Eastern Europeans share a different culture, so it would be a chance to get closer to it and to the beautiful nature.

Lærke already visited many Eastern European countries, and she had more positive than negative images about it but she would prefer to travel somewhere she has not been before. For her, exploring new countries and cultures is more important and after she visits the countries she wanted, she is planning to come back to the ones she liked the most.

It could be said that the main reason of going to Eastern European countries for the first time or for repeat visit, is due to the fact that those Danish consumers have people to visit there – colleagues, friends, and couple’s homeland. What is more, Danes who have been in some of the countries just for holidays and had more positive images about the countries are also willing to travel to Eastern Europe but mostly to the new, unknown places.

The table below sums up the results discussed in this chapter. It illustrates the core images of Easter Europe that all or almost all the participants had in this study, and also the extended images.

**Extended image**

**Core image**

Unemployment

Agriculture

Nightlife

Farmers

Low pensions

Unsafe

Starving

Alcoholism

Emigration

Rural areas

Nationalists

Avoiding responsibility

Racists

Greedy

Old houses

Old cars

Software engineers

Computer technology

Maritime technology

Human force

No iPhones

Harbours

Putin

Russia

Not developed

Polluted air

Old machinery

Government control

Inequality

Debts

Soviet Union

Unstable

Corruption

Democracy

Cheaper prices

Low wages

Low GDP

Poor

Less luxury goods

Unclean

Source: own creation, based on Therkelsen (2010) – Imagining Places

It should be also noted that cultural backgrounds of the consumers have an influence of how they form images about Eastern Europe. Danish consumers tend to compare their own culture with Eastern European and find the differences. Individuals are closely connected to their cultures and societies, and what happens in their own country. Danish consumers tend to evaluate countries based on what happens in their own country, and as stated by Therkelsen (2010) when the action or event occurs more often, it becomes an attitude and affects the way individual perceives Eastern Europe. It should be also mentioned that there are elements of Eastern Europe’s culture that are similar to respondents own cultural background, and this leads to a greater interest in the region and better evaluation of its image.

## 4.5 The image of food products

In this part of the analysis, the images of Danish consumers towards Eastern European food products, will be presented. The aim here is to find out how Danes perceive Eastern European food products in terms of different product attributes and how it is affected by the images of the country-of-origin.

### 4.5.1 The importance of the COO

As stated in the literature review, males and females pay different level of attention to the country-of-origin, females carrying more about the “made-in” cue. Based on the current studies of the Danes male and female perceptions towards the country-of-origin, it can be said that both groups of consumers somehow care about the COO. It should be noted that all the female interviewees said that they look at the COO or that they do it depending on the product, which contributes to the study of Han (1992) who noted that female consumers pay more attention to the COO cue. Camila states that she looks at the COO very often and more often on such products as meat, berries, and milk products. The same opinion was shared by Christina, who also said that she cares about the COO when buying beef and chicken.

As mentioned earlier, based on the results on this study, Danish consumers care more about the COO when buying fresh foods, which is due to the higher risk:

*Because not all products are safe, the country of origin says a lot about the products, its quality and safeness (Birthe)*

If considering Danish male consumers, it can be said that they care less about the COO, there were some respondents (Casper, Anders, Karl) that do not care about the country-of-origin when buying food products. The other part of male interviewees stated that they care about the COO only sometimes, which is also dependent on the product category:

*Only when it has to be a fresh and ecological products…Some products might be dangerous to eat because of the conditions they are made at… (Frederik)*

According to Laroche et al., (2003) COO effect is higher on more complex goods. However, as we can see from the results obtained about Danish consumers, it directly depends on the type of product and not simply on the complexity of it.

As it can be seen, males as well as females care more about the country-of-origin for the fresh foods, and again for the same reason – food risk. Both male and female respondents who visited one of the Eastern European countries and who did not, considers that Eastern European products might not be so qualitative compared with Danish. However, it does not mean that they are all thinking Eastern European food is not qualitative. There are different reasons behind this perception. For example, Hanne thinks that it is not as qualitative as Danish because it is unknown product. So, it can be if she would get more familiar with the product, she would start to see it as qualitative.

Christina also cares about the COO meat products, because they need to be qualitative and fresh. Later on, she rush to explain that:

*I am not saying Eastern European or any others country’s meat isn’t qualitative, but it’s not so fresh because it takes time to transport… (Christina)*

What makes Christina think that foreign food products are not as fresh as Danish is the uncertainty about the transportation. She bears in mind the fact that there is a bigger geographical distance for meat coming from Eastern European countries, and her lack of knowledge of how it is transported, so it stays fresh, makes her think, Danish fresh products are better.

So, it can be said that females do care more about the country-of-origin of the food products, but both groups of participants (males and females) consider specific product categories, where the COO is more significant.

### 4.5.2 Fresh foods

The participants of the study mentioned many different kinds of food products and even dishes that they think are made in Eastern European countries. When evaluating food products, the most attention was given to meat/fish and other fresh foods, like vegetables, berries and etc. The interesting thing is that consumers that have never been in Eastern European countries and said they are not buying it, could easily find products that they associate with Eastern products. All the participants of the study said that they tried at least something Eastern European. As mentioned before, different kinds of meats, vegetables, berries, herbs and mushrooms were the most common food products than Danes associate with Eastern Europe. What is more, these are also the products that Danes were most uncertain about when talking about the food quality and safety. Thus, food safety is the main reason why some consumer prefer Danish products and not foreign. When looking upon the country-of-origin of the products, they also care more about the fresh foods. According to Lasse:

*…for the other products it doesn’t matter (Lasse)*

The reason why Lasse and some other respondents care about the meat products it is because according to them, there were some cases in the media, when they wrote about salmonella found in the meat coming from Eastern Europe. When asked if he did not hear about salmonella found in Danish chicken and beef recently, Lasse stated:

*…but I think they find it more often in foreign meat (Lasse)*

Lasse, like some other Danish consumers perceives Danish meat more qualitative and healthier:

*I still believe our products are better and tastier, and of better quality…Because we have a better technology, products are made in better condition, no pesticides, no chemicals. Eastern European products are more risky to buy. (Christian)*

As we can see from Christian’s answers, country’s image is significant while evaluating its food products, since Christian thinks that Denmark is more advanced and modern technologically, he thinks the products in Denmark are more qualitative and less risky.

Mads also talks about the food risk. He mentioned that he looks at the COO on some products that are vegetables, fruits, meat, eggs and other similar products, and his reason is:

*…probably because there is more risk they will be unhealthy with pesticides or somehow affected (Mads)*

Frederik is another example of a consumer that looks at the COO only when evaluating fresh products and his reasons are the same –food risk.

### 4.5.3 Packaging – not important?

Respondents in this study were also asked to comment on the packaging of Eastern European food products. Packaging is one of the intrinsic product attributes. It should be noted that interviewees could not say that much about packaging. It might be because of the fact that no single brand name of the Eastern European food products was mentioned. People have different products they associate with specific Eastern European countries or all of them as a unit, but none of them mentioned a particular brand. Most of the interviewees said that they do not care about the packaging, have not paid attention or that it is fine, nothing special:

*Haven’t paid attention. (Casper)*

*…the packaging, it’s like everywhere else, nothing special, more simple. (Lasse)*

*…packaging looked fine too, very similar to the Danish. (Mads)*

*The packaging is usually very simple, looks a bit cheap (Hanne)*

Both male and female do not pay much attention to packaging, which seems to be the less important product attributes for Danish consumers when evaluating food products coming from Eastern Europe.

### 4.5.4 COO as a single cue

As mentioned in the literature review, COO can be seen as a product cue for some consumers (Lee, 1997; Bertoli & Resciniti, 2012). Individuals tend to judge the quality and other attributes of the product based on where it comes from. All female consumers that participated in this study would look at the COO as a determinant of the product’s quality if the product is unknown. According to Camila it is because:

*…products represent countries and vice versa (Camila)*

*Or*

*…you know then what to expect from the product (Lærke)*

Some Danish female consumers argue that this is the only way to know product’s quality. None of the respondents considers reading the label, checking the composition of the product.

Male consumers had various answers, some of them would judge the product based on the COO but it depends on the product category. However, Anders (R=7) would rather look at other product attributes when evaluating an unknown product, like packaging and price.

It can be seen that female consumers rely more on the country-of-origin as an information cue when evaluating food products than male. Danish female consumers could not find any other way of evaluating food products than simply COO. And male consumers would look at the COO only for particular type of products, while also considering other product attributes.

### 4.5.5 Eastern European food and ethnocentrism

As mentioned in the interview guide, it was decided to include a question which asked the respondents to compare their feelings towards domestic and Eastern European food products, since as discussed in the literature review, ethnocentrism might affect Danish consumers’ willingness to but Eastern European food products.

Lasse and Christian would rather buy Danish food products because they think that Danish food is simply better, more qualitative and tastier. Rune, for example, is the only male respondent which stated that he would prefer Danish products:

*…because in this way I can also support Danish economy (Rune)*

He can be called an ethnocentric consumer because his decision of buying Danish products is not based on his attributes but rather on the fact that in this way he can support Danish economy.

Most of the Danish male consumers stated that the decision to buy local or foreign food products would be based on product attributes, such as price and taste:

*I wouldn’t care then, probably based on price (Ander, R=3)*

*…I would base my decision upon price (Anders, R=7)*

*It depends on price and taste (Caper)*

Similar evaluation are done between female consumers. Some of the respondents see Danish products as of superior quality, taster, and healthier, because it is made in Denmark, the others would look upon price and taste. Tine, for example, also mentions that she would rather purchase Danish food products so to support her own country.

So, it could be said that none of the two groups (males and females) are more or less ethnocentric when purchasing food products. There are males and females that care more about the well-being of their country, so they would buy Danish products, and there are those who thinks Danish product quality is just better, so they would also buy Danish goods. And there are those who do not care where the product comes from, the decision would be based solely on the product attributes – price and taste. The importance of ethnocentrism in food evaluation is highly dependent on the country being studies and the products being investigated. As it is seen from the results of this study, there are some Danes who can be seen as ethnocentric consumers, but it does not play the main role in the evaluation process.

## 4.6 Relationship between the country image and product image

The main purpose of this study is to find out whether the image of Eastern Europe affects Danish consumer’s perceptions on food products originating from these countries. First, it should be noted that all the respondents, both males and females had negative things to say about Eastern Europe when considering politics, economics, quality of life and technological advancement. However, it can be seen that the image of Eastern Europe affects the perceptions of food products mostly based on the fact, if the respondent visited Eastern Europe or not.

Even if the participant have more negative feelings about Eastern Europe but he visited some of the countries for a longer period of time or lived there for a while, have more positive attitudes towards Eastern European food products and are more willing to buy them. According to Lasse:

*…if you stay longer you can see that they have very similar products, eating habits and people are also nice. (Lasse)*

Lasse thinks that the familiarity with the country or the product makes a difference when evaluating Eastern European food products which was also stated by Awaritefe (2004). Lasse once had a girlfriend from Hungary, and he visited her family there, so he thinks that he is more familiar with Eastern Europe, so more objective, too.

It should be also said that respondent’s feelings and emotion towards Eastern Europe is also highly dependent on the visitation factor. Both male and female interviewees expressed positive feelings towards Eastern European food products if they stayed there for a longer time. So, they feel more connected with the country. The respondents who have been in Eastern Europe but do not buy Eastern European food products that often says that this is due to the fact that:

*…hard to find them here (Karl)*

*…bough in Asian supermarkets…because they have some of the ingredients that Eastern European also use that we don’t have and there is no Eastern European shop in Aalborg (Frederik)*

*…it was hard that I couldn’t get them here…couldn’t find some of the ones I needed (Ingrid)*

Respondents believe that there are products in Eastern Europe that are unique and different, and the problem in Denmark is that it is hard to find them in Danish supermarkets. Consumers are aware of different kind of Eastern European products in the local supermarkets, like herbs, berries, frozen products and etc. but this is simply not what they are looking for. Respondents who stayed longer in one of the Eastern European countries, started to like some of its food and are willing to buy it in Denmark if not the problem of its availability.

There are respondents that have relatives from Eastern Europe, so they go to Copenhagen and Arhus, to Eastern European shops, to buy the products that they relatives are consuming or to find the food that they liked when being in Eastern Europe.

Therefore, as stated in earlier chapters, the purpose in this study was also to find respondents that are familiar with the countries and the ones that are not, so to see if this makes a difference when evaluating food products from Eastern Europe and willingness to buy. As it was discussed, respondents that have stayed in Eastern Europe and have friends and relatives from there, are also more positive towards its food products. If talking about the consumers who have not been there, it should be noted that they are quite negative towards its food products. From the other point of view, they all bought some of the food products from Eastern Europe, despite the fact they have not visited the countries and they are not very positive towards the countries and food itself. For example, Camila, she has never been in any of the Eastern European countries, but she bought some Turkish and Bulgarian food products in Denmark. However, Camila says that she likes Eastern European products:

*…if there is no other choice (Camila)*

So, it seems that Camila only buys Eastern European products when Danish or other foreign products are not available. She said she liked the Turkish lavas, but only because they are very specific and you cannot find similar ones made by Danish producer. It should be also noted that Camila like other Danish consumers who have not been in Eastern Europe, create their understanding based on such information sources as TV and newspapers. All the respondents that have not been in Eastern Europe (Christian, Rune, Camila, Tine) or been only for some hours or few days (Mads and Birthe) mentioned that they hear and read negative things about Eastern Europe in the media. Respondents share different stories about the burglars and thieves from Eastern Europe, images from the movies. For some of the interviewees, TV and movies are an important and trustful source of information:

*All I know is from television…I think it’s basically true (Christian)*

*I heard it on TV and also from my friends, they heard some stories too (Rune)*

*I haven’t been but I saw on various movies, Russia is very popular in the movies and it is always on the bad side…Not everything is true, but at least they show their culture, language, how people look, how they dress and how they live (Camila)*

*You can see it on Danish TV, Polish meat isn’t welcome in Denmark (Birthe)*

Thus, TV and movies are not the only source of information that help Danish consumers to form images about Eastern Europe, it is friends, too. The word-of-mouth also influences how Danish consumer perceives Eastern Europe.

It is very important to mention that the literature about the country’s and product images do not consider the fact, that the way country’s image can affect consumers’ perception on products, is based on how the consumer obtains those images. Awaritefe (2004) stated that consumer who visited the country are more positive towards its products, however the author did not consider that those non-visitors who form their images based on indirect sources of information are more negative towards Eastern European products if they hear more negative stories about it.

Considering the halo and summary construct model (Han, 1989; Johansson et al., 1985) it can be said that the participants of the study, construct their images of “Eastern European origin”, mostly based on unspecified images of Eastern Europe. This could mean that Danes use initial country images as a halo-construct to understand Danish products that they see in the local supermarkets, rather than concrete images of Eastern Europe. This could be also explained by the fact that Danish consumers did not mention any specific Eastern European food brands, and also because a limited amount of Eastern European products are available in the Danish supermarkets. The consumer may not have sufficient information about the product, which takes to create basis for a summary construct.

What is more, the halo and summary construct models, can be criticized for seeing country-of-origin effects as a simple processes. The model does not consider consumers who buy Eastern European products despite the lack of experience with the country or the product. What is more, halo and summary construct model do not consider non-product related factors that also influences the country’s image, like travel experience, consumer ethnocentrism and others.

Consumers in this study have all shared some negative associations with Eastern Europe – corruption, low wages, instability and others. However, this does not affect their evaluation of food products, if the knowledge obtained about Easter Europe was gathered from personal experiences (visiting the country). Danish consumers who shared negative associations based on word-of-mouth, TV and movies are affected by the image of Eastern Europe, and it affects their attitudes towards Easter European food products and influences their decision making process.

# Conclusion

Considering the revision of existing literature and the interviews with 17 Danish consumers, I came up with some conclusions. First of all, it can be seen that very often Eastern Europe is evaluated not based on particular countries it consists of but rather as one entity. Despite the fact, respondents acknowledges the fact that Eastern Europe consist of many different countries and cultures, they tend to find more similarities than differences, and in this way to explain why they choose those particular countries s being a part of Eastern Europe.

What is more, all respondents, no matter of gender, age or education could list negative images of Eastern Europe regarding its four dimensions: political situation, economic situation, technological advancement and social desirability. Those images of Eastern Europe are formed in different ways and reflects differently on food evaluations. The way Danish consumers form images about Eastern Europe depends a lot on their travel experience. However, it cannot be said that the fact that person travelled to one of the Eastern European countries, makes his images more favourable towards Eastern Europe and its products. It is not the travelling that makes Danish consumers be more positive towards the countries, the importance is given to the length and purpose of the stay. Consumers who have been in one of the Eastern European countries for couple of hours or couple of days, could not see themselves as more familiar with the country and its products. However, the respondents that stayed longer and have friends or family members to visit there, feel more involved with the country and its culture.

Those consumers who have not visited Eastern European countries or have been there for a very short time, form their beliefs and attitudes towards Eastern Europe based on word-of-mouth and different indirect information channels, such as TV, movies and newspapers. It should be added that these consumer see indirect information sources as a trustful channels to get more familiar with other countries and cultures. Thus, most of the respondents, both male and female, believe that Eastern Europe has a negative reputation among Danes, which is highly influenced by the information disseminated by Danish media channels.

What is more, it was not a purpose to study the relationship between country-of-origin effects and education but I could not stop noticing that the way people form images depends a lot on the particular type of job the consumer has. This is due to the fact that respondents gain experiences with foreigners in their working environment that helps them to construct particular images.

Thus, most of the respondents perceive Eastern European countries as being less developed or developing countries. It should be added that Danes have different opinions of what are the characteristics of a developing country. This image of Eastern Europe could have an effect on how consumers evaluate food products originating from these countries because as discussed in the literature review, consumers tend to evaluate products coming from developing countries less favourably.

Also, when considering the importance of country-of-origin, it could be said that Danish female consumers care more about the COO cue. However both consumer groups being studied – males and females, give more importance to country-of-origin for fresh foods, like meat, fish, vegetables and berries. This is due to the fact that they see fresh foods being exposed to risk due to the length of transportation time and the conditions they are made in.

When considering the role of ethnocentrism, it should me said that some Danes hold ethnocentric believes, however, ethnocentrism does not play the main role in the evaluation process.

All the participants in this study, not considering their familiarity with Eastern European countries, have tried at least some of its products. Consumers who stated that they like the products’ taste and are satisfied with the price and quality, mentioned that the biggest problem is the availability of Eastern European food products in Danish retail shops. Consumers are not expected to find Eastern European products in local supermarkets, they rather look for it in Asian supermarkets or specialized Eastern European shops, such as “Amber” in Arhus. Consequently, it can be the reason why Danes could not specify any Eastern European brand name.

Finally, it can be said that the negative attitudes towards Eastern European countries does not affect their evaluations of food products if the knowledge obtained about countries was gathered from personal experiences such as travelling to the country. Danish consumers who expressed negative associations based on word-of-mouth, TV, movies and newspapers, are affected by the image of Eastern Europe, it also affects their attitudes towards Eastern European food products and willingness to purchase it.

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