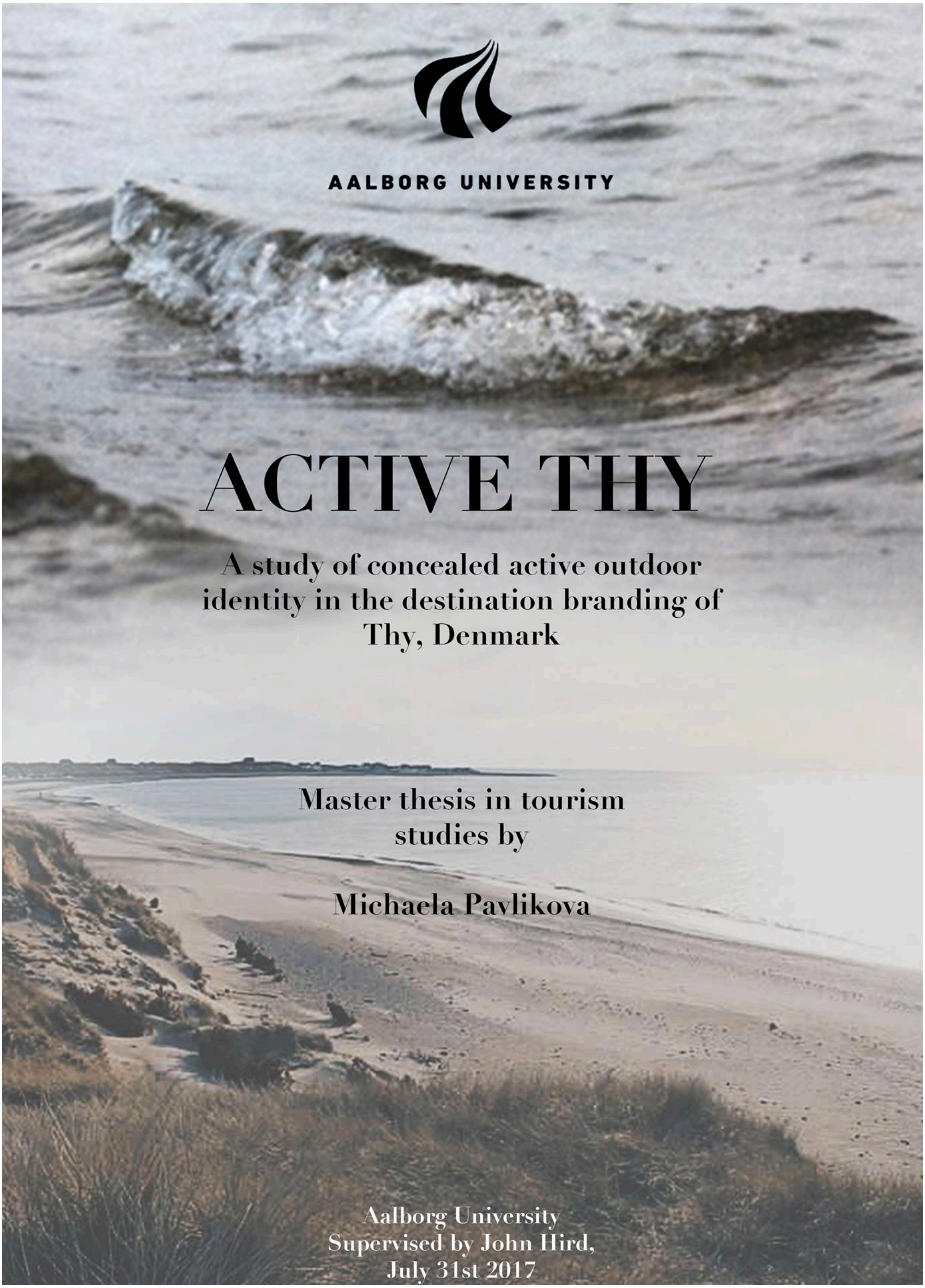

AALBORG UNIVERSITY

ACTIVE THY

A study of concealed active outdoor identity in the destination branding of Thy, Denmark

Master thesis in tourism studies by

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Abstract

This master thesis reviews the field of active outdoor tourism in Thy, Denmark and examines the active outdoor identity in a destination branding context. It approaches destination branding from a supply-side perspective revolved around destination brand identity through an examination of the Destination Marketing Organisation's (DMO) and the active outdoor stakeholders' perspectives on the present active outdoor brand identity. VisitThy is the DMO in Thy which positions the active outdoor brand identity within the sub-brand of Thy National Park in the current destination branding strategy. However, the active outdoor identity is not particularly visible through VisitThy's branding and the sub-brand of Cold Hawaii appears to be favoured since it pulls tourists to the destination. The research is relevant since outdoor tourism is trendy and more tourists are requesting nature-based active holidays. The thesis seeks to examine whether this specific group of stakeholders' identities are represented in the brand identity constructed and communicated by the DMO. Theoretically, all stakeholders should be involved in the branding process in order to construct a successful branding strategy. Further, the natural resources in Thy create a favourable frame for active outdoor activities and therefore it is implied that the active outdoor identity could be more visible in the branding strategy. The purpose of the research is to examine the underlying aspects of brand identity creation and whether the findings call for a new branding strategy. It is approached through an interpretive paradigm conducted through the use of various types of qualitative interviews founded on the supply side perspective. Due to the social constructivist approach emphasising subjectivity, the findings decline generalisation. The empirical data is examined by the implementation of a content analysis and the findings are structured as a gap analysis between the DMO's and the stakeholder's reality constructions, and through a model adopted from organisational identity theory in order to identify different identity types. The literature reviews the concepts of destination branding, destination brand identity and introduces theories related to active outdoor tourism. Based on the empirical and theoretical findings, it is found that the DMO constructs a complex multiple brand identity which is reflected in the stakeholders' inconsistent positioning in and between sub-brands represented in the branding strategy. The DMO favours diversity branding through multiple sub-positioning messages. On the other hand, the stakeholders' collective meaning making, in a focus group interview, suggests umbrella branding as an approach to branding a unified identity through master brand messages and simultaneously embracing the establishment of an active outdoor network. It is proposed that the DMO initiates, facilitates and encourages a collaborative approach to branding the active outdoor identity which is founded on co-creation between the DMO and the committed stakeholders.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my dad who introduced me to sports and nature from the moment I could take my first steps. Outdoor activities make me feel alive, more connected and free, which are feelings and experiences that I wish to share with more people. This work is a tribute to the diversity within destinations and particularly the variety of activities that can be experienced in nature.

I would like to thank Aalborg University for allowing me to work on a subject that I am very passionate about, and tourism studies that have given me the opportunity to explore my interests academically. I would especially like to thank my supervisor John Hird for providing me with helpful feedback, for showing interest in the subject of branding active outdoor tourism in Thy and for being very patient and understanding, when I did not meet my own deadlines.

I am thankful for all the inspiring and open-hearted people I met in Thy and who took time for interviews, invited me for dinner or even gave me presents. Thank you very much for making this thesis a reality! A special thanks to Ole Riis Christensen for setting time aside to answer questions and sharing his work in VisitThy with me. I am grateful for this collaboration and I look very much forward to turning theory into practice in September when discussing options for establishing an active outdoor network in Thy.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge some lovely people close to me, who supported me throughout the writing process. My mom who hung up on me whenever I was whining too much, and my sister for contributing with a beautiful front page. I am also appreciating the assistance of Kirsten who was always there for me when I needed to discuss the topics or just keeping me alive during my time in the writing isolation cell. Eventually, I would like to thank Malene and Anne-Louise for the encouragement.

What is more, I believe that being active in nature makes you happier, broadens your mind and makes you better at whatever you do.

Enjoy the reading, and first of all, enjoy life (outside)!

Michaela

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Introduction

This thesis in tourism studies presents a supply-side perspective on the overall subject of destination branding. It sets out to explore the sphere of an active outdoor (AO) identity in the destination branding of Thy, which is a destination in the north-western part of Denmark (Figure 1). VisitThy (VT) is the Tourist Board of Thy and a Destination Management Organisation, however due to the fact that the research revolves around branding, it is referred to as a Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO). According to the marketing manager of VT, Thy is particularly known for its nature, tranquillity and open spaces (Riis, marketing manager of VT, exploratory (E) interview, appx. 4). He further implies that the world is changing together with its trends towards nature-based tourism and AO recreation, which contributes to placing Thy among the most attractive tourism destinations in Denmark (ibid). Margaryan and Fredman (2017) claim that commercialisation of outdoor recreation is a process, which is expanding and branching out globally. Accordingly, the supply-side of the outdoor field is among the most competitive and fastest growing types of tourism based on the demand for active holidays in nature (Stipanovic, Rudan, and Kovacic 2016).

By visiting the destination several times, it appears to me that contemporary outdoor tourism trends (see next chapter) may be implemented advantageously, since Thy as stated by VT, holds "some of Denmark's most beautiful, diverse, and unique landscape" (Thy brochure 2017:2), creating opportunities for both active and peaceful outdoor experiences (Riis, E, appx. 4).

Figure 1 Thy, Denmark. Source: (VisitThy 2017).

According to Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), a destination is a complex entity containing multiple identities caused by the presence of many different stakeholders. Further, Wheeler et al. perceive destination branding as “a socially constructed process, taking account of local destination characteristics and the values embedded in that context” (Wheeler et al. 2011:24). At the present time, VT is branding the destination through a categorised branding strategy including four sub-brands or ‘pillars’ (as labelled in this thesis), namely; Thy National Park, culture / heritage, wind energy and Cold Hawaii (Riis, E, appx. 4). As stated by VT, these branding pillars define Thy, however the National Park and Cold Hawaii are the most dominant sub-brands within the destination (ibid).

Thy National Park has been the first Danish National Park since 2008, caused by the quite strong wind that over thousands of years created notable dunes, wet hollows and countless lakes resulting in a unique dune landscape along the west coast. The National Park offers diverse AO experiences through e.g. innumerable marked hiking and biking trails in varied terrain offering good vantage points along the way (Thy brochure 2017). When looking over the North Sea, the area of another sub-brand is noticed. Cold Hawaii is a sub-brand covering thirty-one official surf spots along the west coast in Thy (Cold Hawaii VT 2017a), which are “north Europe’s best surfing and windsurfing spots” (Thy brochure 2017:15). Cold Hawaii offers primarily water sport activities and organises surfing events. For instance, in September, Vorupør in Thy and Copenhagen will co-host the 2017 ISA World StandUp Paddle and Paddleboard Championship for the first time in Denmark (Copencold 2017). Furthermore, Cold Hawaii has initiated a collaboration between Thisted municipality in Thy and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil regarding sustainable surf tourism (Cold Hawaii Rio 2016) and the sub-brand is even visible on local beer labels (Cold Hawaii beer 2015). Cold Hawaii has reached both national and international brand awareness and recognition, which works as valuable advertisement for the destination and attracts a great quantity of tourists (Cold Hawaii LU 2015).

The DMO’s established and categorised branding of Thy, presents a main focus on the constructed and communicated brand identity in the thesis, which is “what the DMO wants to be seen as” (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011:417). The four branding pillars represent the destination’s nature, renewable energy, culture / heritage and water sport activities. Indubitably, Cold Hawaii represents distinctive surfing conditions, which contribute to differentiating Thy from other destinations making it a significant sub-brand and displaying it in the destination’s branding. Nevertheless, AO tourism (excluding surfing) does not appear to be represented clearly in the destination branding strategy. The marketing manager claims, that the pillar of Thy National Park includes nature experiences and with that the AO sphere (Riis, E, appx. 4). The question is, whether the stakeholders' (term used in this thesis referring to the destination's AO tourism operators, excluding surfing operators representing Cold Hawaii) identities are represented in the current branding strategy. This is relevant from a theoretical perspective, since a successful branding strategy requires the involvement of all stakeholders in the branding process (Temporal 2015). Furthermore, due to the unique natural resources in Thy and tourists' current requirements, this thesis seeks to analyse whether the AO identity should be more visible in the destination's branding efforts. For instance, by interviewing a stakeholder, an absence of a visible AO identity in the destination branding was addressed (Højlund, appx. 4).

As an example of the subject's contemporary relevance, it may be mentioned that Silkeborg, a city located in Central Jutland, was launched as Denmark's Outdoor capital in May this year (TV midtvest 2017). In this context, a new website labelled OutdoorDenmark emerged displaying outdoor sport events in Jutland (OutdoorDenmark 2017). Nevertheless, it does not seem to include Thy (ibid). In this context, a stakeholder expresses his AO business' desired branding: "We wanted to be the outdoor place" (M. Mark, appx. 4). In line with these stakeholders, I perceive the AO brand identity as concealed in a destination branding context, which gave rise to the motivational background for this specific research. The aim of the thesis is to examine the underlying aspects of the current branding situation and whether the findings call for a new branding strategy.

The term 'active outdoor' is selected and applied in the thesis, because it characterises both activity in and experience of nature (Andkjær and Arvidsen 2015). This concept is chosen since 'active' emphasizes a focus on physical activity, and due to nature being the foundation of Thy as a tourism destination (Riis, E, appx. 4), applying 'outdoor' indicates being in nature. Due to the Cold Hawaii sub-brand's potential influence on tourism growth (ibid), the research is limited to a focus on an AO identity excluding surfing, which is explicitly represented by Cold Hawaii.

The research underpins a Scandinavian approach to Problem-based Learning which, briefly explained, is "based on the belief that robust knowledge and understanding occurs through dialogue, activity, and interaction around meaningful problems and tools" (Kuada 2012:23). Under a social constructivist paradigm, the research question will be answered through qualitative interviews with

VT and the AO stakeholders in Thy and through a focus group interview with some of these stakeholders in order to examine their interactions and collective meaning making regarding AO tourism at the destination. Thus, in order to access relevant data interaction with the DMO and the stakeholders is required. The analysis will be founded on a content analysis of these findings and structured through the implementation of a model adopted from organisational identity theory. In line with Zenker, Braun and Petersen's (2017) notion that disciplinary distinction between tourism studies and place marketing is outdated, the research includes interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives.

Problem Formulation

This thesis sets out to explore VT's branding of AO tourism in a destination context. It aims to examine brand identity creation in connection with the AO stakeholders at the destination and whether their identities are represented through the brand identity constructed and communicated by VT. The thesis further examines the relevance of a new destination branding strategy based on these findings. This brand identity analysis requires the researcher to interact with VT and the AO stakeholders in order to analyse whether these stakeholders are represented within the branding pillar of Thy National Park or the findings for instance call for a separate branding pillar. The objective of this analysis is to question whether the DMO's current branding of the AO identity is sufficiently inclusive, representing the destination stakeholders' multiple identities.

Research Question

To what extent are the AO tourism stakeholders' identities represented in the brand identity constructed and communicated by VT, and do these findings call for a new destination branding strategy?

Contemporary outdoor tourism trends

Current outdoor tourism trends affect this research, because they bring a general, contemporary and external demand-side perspective to the supply-side destination branding. These trends are relevant when dealing with branding of AO tourism: “The overall offer on the tourism market is moving towards a healthier lifestyle and better quality of life, aiming at replacing the everyday stressful modern lifestyle. Therefore, outdoor offer emerges as the result of new tourists’ requirements” (Stipanovic et al. 2016:448).

Global tourism trends suggest a search for well-being and a demand for nature, encouraging markets such as nature, sports and health tourism. Many countries are focusing on promoting new niche markets. For instance, major sports events attract a specific target audience and is connected with diversifying tourism beyond capitals and other big cities (OECD 2016). Furthermore, there are some contemporary demographic and social trends observed by the OECD that are relevant when dealing with AO tourism. For instance, multigenerational travel (e.g. three generations of a family on holiday together) is becoming more ordinary. Additionally, “Trips are becoming shorter and people are searching for more unique, personalised experiences in alternative destinations. The growing demand for unusual tourism experiences extends to tourism services” (OECD 2016:31). Margaryan and Fredman (2017) notice that outdoor recreation is becoming more and more commercialised all over the world and express an example with an elementary outdoor activity as jogging which is transformed into a multi-million-dollar business. In this context, simple non-commercial outdoor recreation is moving towards a more advanced demand oriented commercial sector (Margaryan and Fredman 2017). In this frame of reference, Stipanovic et al. suggest that stakeholders should collaborate through “tourism product clubs” in order to develop the outdoor offer (Stipanovic et al. 2016:448). They further claim that offering outdoor tourism is beneficial for the place in sense of potentially extending the season, growing consumption, creating new jobs for locals, entrepreneurial collaboration, welcoming tourists to a destination proud of its cultural and natural heritage and healthier living (ibid).

In the context of Denmark, outdoor recreation is currently dominated by trips of shorter duration, and if possible, travelling shorter distances to undisturbed and unspoilt areas are preferred over long distance travel (Gentin and Jensen 2007 in Andkjær and Arvidsen 2015). Newer Danish studies show, that people – particularly adults – are increasingly using natural habitats for recreational purposes

(Larsen 2003; Pilgaard 2008, 2009 in Andkjær and Arvidsen 2015). However, research on children and teenagers' orientation towards nature do not portray the same trend (Paltved-Kaznelson 2009 in Andkjær and Arvidsen 2015). Despite this, Andkjær and Arvidsen (2015) recommend people – and believe it should be promoted - to pursue outdoor activities given the numerous benefits of health and well-being connected with visiting nature. Throughout their study, they conclude that natural environments appear to have a major effect on individuals' physical activity.

Methodology

In this chapter, the research design is presented, which is the action plan or framework of the research (Kuada 2012). With that, the methodological choices are considered and discussed. Initially, the research philosophy is introduced and in what way these perceptions have an effect and how. Subsequently, the approaches, considerations and strategies shape the research design leading to new knowledge and understanding about the subject of AO tourism in Thy.

Research philosophy

A paradigmatic point of departure is essential for a research paper since it influences the comprehensive strategy of the research (Kuada 2012). According to Guba, a paradigm is "a basic set of beliefs that guides action (…)" (Guba 1990:17). It consists of three positions founded on the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions (Guba 1990). The ontological and epistemological positions determine how reality is perceived and how knowledge is constructed. The ontological question is "whether there is a 'real' world 'out there' that is independent of our knowledge of it" (Marsh and Stoker 2002:18). Simultaneously, the epistemological question relates to whether a researcher can "identify 'real' or 'objective' relations between social phenomena" (Marsh and Stoker 2002:19). Eventually, the methodological question concerns how the researcher gains knowledge (Guba 1990). These positions assist in selecting a paradigm, which is the foundation of how the scientific research is conducted. In Marsh and Stoker's (2002) opinion, the ontological position affects the epistemological position, yet it does not determine it. Moreover, Guba (1990) argues that questions of methods are secondary to questions of paradigms.

Since the objective of the thesis is to examine the fundamental aspects of the present branding situation and whether the findings call for a new branding strategy - based on interaction with informants - the research is primarily a subjective matter. The research acknowledges the perspective that the AO stakeholders in Thy construct their own realities which are all valued equally. Based on the nature of the problem formulation, the paradigm of moderate social constructivism has been selected and is elaborated in the sections below.

As an introduction to the adopted paradigm, Jonassen (1991) describes constructivism as internally mediated reality which is a contrast to objectivism. As a constructivist, reality exists in the mind of the knower in the sense that the knower constructs a reality or an interpretation of it, based on how this person's mind puts new information into context (ibid). In this regard, many constructions are possible and there is not a fundamental method to choose amongst these (Guba 1990). Social constructivists believe that a given phenomenon does not exist independently, however it is constructed "through collective human action, thought, discourse, or other social practices" (Collin 2013:3). "The term *social construction* was first used by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their 1966 work, *The Social Construction of Reality*" (ibid), since then the constructivist position has branched out and become more extensive (Collin 2013). As a result of this paradigm, the research does not portray an ultimate truth about the branding of AO tourism in Thy, rather it introduces and examines various realities through the stakeholders' interpretations.

Ontology

In agreement with Marsh and Stoker's ideas, Jonassen (1991) claims that ontology describes the nature of reality, meaning the assumptions that a person has about the physical world. Ontology is further related to how the researcher perceives the relationship between humans and their environment, e.g. "a researcher's view of human nature" (Kuada 2012:59). According to Bryman (2012), social phenomena and categories are not solely created through social interaction, however they are constantly revised. This means that reality is constructed by a person's perceptions which evolve and change depending on his or her's experience (Marsh and Stoker 2002). As a researcher, I define how I perceive reality, since the researcher presents a certain version of social reality which cannot be considered definitive (Bryman 2012). The fundamental belief in this thesis is that every individual creates his or her own social world, which is subjectively constructed and a result of human cognition (Kuada 2012). Guba (1990) identifies the ontology of constructivism as relativism by the quotation below.

"Relativism is key to openness and the continuing search for ever more informed and sophisticated constructions. Realities are multiple, and they exist in people's minds" (Guba 1990:26).

This suggests that there is no universal truth since the paradigm stands for realities constructed by humans' interpretations. This further indicates that no construction is more 'real' or 'correct' than another one because reality is comprehended and constructed in various ways by different people (Guba 1990). In short, reality depends on the meaning that a person attaches to truth, which does not exist without meaning. When applied to the context of this thesis, relativism is acknowledged by realising e.g. the AO stakeholders' several mental constructions in order to reconstruct their "world", which leads to the understanding of whether a new destination branding strategy of Thy should be considered. In this aspect, the gained knowledge is a human construction (Guba 1990) and according to Bryman (2012), undetermined, given the multiple constructions. Hannam and Knox (2010) stress that tourism studies call for a constructivist ontology because this view is associated with an in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural contexts in which tourism occurs.

Epistemology

In Denzin and Lincoln's words, epistemology discusses "(…) the relationship between the inquirer and the known" (2005:22). As stated by Kuada, it is "how we know what we know" or what we conceive as a truth" (2012:59). The social constructivist approach is based on interpretivism (Marsh and Stoker 2002), which requires researchers to interpret elements of the study and integrates human interest (Research-methodology.net 2017). According to Guba (1990), the constructivist takes a subjectivist point of view because it is believed to be the only approach to discover the constructions created by individuals. Subjective interaction is essential to access what reality means to individuals (ibid). In other words, "meaning is a function of how the individual creates meaning from his or her experiences" (Jonassen 1991:10). In this context, my approach as a researcher is to enter the "world" constructed by the informants in Thy, which may be affected by my presence. By doing so it is possible to gain an in-depth understanding of the realities in relation to AO tourism at the destination. As a constructivist, I interpret information in the context of own experiences which then to some degree will be individualistic (Jonassen 1991). A subjective approach to reality accepted by a researcher is identical with an emic approach. The emic perspective attempts to represent participants' original meanings of real-world happenings from an internal perspective – usually that of the researcher (Yin 2011).

In order to fully understand social constructivism, it is key to look at two distinctions of social constructivism (Collin 2013). As claimed by Collin, initially there is a distinction between the 'physical world' and the 'social world' and secondly, the variation between ontology and epistemology in this context (ibid). Social constructivists discuss whether both the physical and social reality is a construction. The radical social constructivist is convinced that both the physical and social world is a construction while the moderate social constructivist solely perceives the social world to be constructed (Andersen 2005). These two divergences of radical and moderate social constructivism were introduced by Bredsdorff and Hacking (Andersen 2005). Nevertheless, it is relevant to keep in mind that this distinction determines what can be empirically regarded (Andersen 2005). As a researcher, I consider myself a moderate social constructivist, since I accept the physical sphere as a reality. Herewith I acknowledge the ontology of a 'social world' which is "constructed by collective human thought and practice" and the epistemic position regarding my knowledge and the knowledge gained throughout the research, is similarly a construction (Collin 2013:4). In practice, this means that the informants and I as a researcher co-create the findings of this research (Guba and Lincoln 2005 in Denzin and Lincoln 2005), thus interaction with the informants is essential. Moreover, the research depends on the researcher's own vantage point, meaning that researchers produce different studies of a specific social phenomenon (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005 in Denzin and Lincoln 2005). As a researcher, it is relevant to mention that I am familiar with and passionate about AO activities which are a part of my everyday life, however it is relatively new to me in the context of Thy. The aim is to gain insight into the AO stakeholders' various understandings of reality in order to construct informed knowledge about the possibilities of branding in relation to AO tourism in this destination.

Methodology

Methodology reports the reasons behind selecting and using specific methods in the research in order to gain knowledge (Kuada 2012). In essence, it presents an overall approach to the research (ibid) and how knowledge is collected (Guba 1990). As a moderate social constructivist I believe that the social world can only be understood by accumulating first-hand knowledge of the individuals connected with the research. In this context, the methodology revolves around individuals' interpretations of the world and how they experience it (Kuada 2012). The constructivist's aim is therefore to identify the various constructions that are out there and "bring them into as much consensus as possible" (Guba 1990:26). Guba argues, that this process consists of two characteristics. The first is a hermeneutic approach which reconstructs individuals' interpretations of the social world as accurately as possible. The philosophy of hermeneutics claims that meaning cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context of its interpreter – in this case the researcher – who contributes with own prior understandings to the research (Longhurst et al. 2004). Nevertheless, the term hermeneutics is mainly associated with interpretation and understanding of texts and literature (Research-methodology.net 2017), which is applicable to this research, since documents and texts (e.g. personal transcriptions) regarding experiences, positions and interactions are to be analysed. Thus, the hermeneutic cycle is an analysing process refers to understanding the meaning of the research subject from each individual's perspective, and at the same time, the individual's meaning originates in understanding the whole (SAGE research methods 2017). The second approach is a dialectic approach, which is founded on comparing and contrasting these constructions of reality. This approach is "a way of discovering what is true by considering opposite theories" (Dictionary.cambridge.org). In this matter, it is further important to regard the researcher's, in this case my own, constructions of the examined realities (Guba 1990). Through this last approach it is feasible to bring about a smaller number of constructions linked to a "common" view (ibid). Since reality is determined by the individual's context, it cannot be generalised and as a result it must exclusively be drawn to other similar contexts. Punch argues that by comparing different aspects it is possible to reach more abstract ideas at the bottom of the empirical data (Punch 2005).

Based on the nature of the problem formulation and the ontological and epistemological considerations presented previously, this research is conducted exclusively by means of qualitative research methods, because these do not limit human interaction. According to Hannam and Knox, applying qualitative methodologies to tourism research should be ongoing, since these, among other good points, "allow greater opportunity to spend time with our sources, our subjects and our 'data'" (Hannam and Knox 2010:175). In this way, it is possible to avoid limited interactions with informants and through this "open-minded" process new and unanticipated knowledge may contribute to the research (Hannam and Knox 2010). This is in line with the social constructivist paradigm which acknowledges multiple mental constructions in connection with the various AO stakeholders who function as informants in the research. In order for the research to be executed, it is essential to examine these stakeholders' world views regarding the constructed and communicated destination brand identity. These perspectives may contribute to the future branding of specifically AO tourism in Thy. In agreement with Hannam and Knox (2010), this paradigm fits the research since the problem formulation calls for an understanding of the socio-cultural contexts in which the research subjects exist, and therefore stakeholders' multiple mental constructions are key.

Qualitative research has often been criticised and considered unrepresentative and unconventional, however it cannot be used as a model or generalised since soft data is presented (Marsh and Stoker 2002). Qualitative methods are associated with an interpretive epistemology (ibid), which is applied to this research. Furthermore, Kuada (2012) states that it is advantageous to employ qualitative data collection methods, seeing that the informants are usually interviewed and observed in their everyday environments. Hannam and Knox state that three main categories of qualitative methodologies exist; "participant observation, interviews and focus groups, and discourse analysis" (2010:180). Specifically, the objective is to gain new knowledge about branding of AO tourism in Thy through the methods of different interview types and a focus group elaborated below.

Methods of data collection

In this section, the specific data collection methods and approaches applied to the research are described. In the light of the three elaborated levels of understanding that represent the paradigm of moderate social constructivism, qualitative methods have been adopted. In relation to collecting the primary data, I have visited Thy multiple times in order to interact with the research subjects in their natural setting.

Qualitative interviews

"The qualitative research interview is a construction site for knowledge" (Kvale 2007:7). Qualitative interviewing is useful when the purpose is to gain knowledge about the actual experiences of the informant. "It provides you with the opportunity to listen to what respondents themselves say about issues that you investigate in their own words" (Kuada 2012:98). From a constructivist point of view, "the interview is a collaborative, meaning-making experience involving both the interviewer and the interviewee" (Hiller and Diluzio 2004:2). When conducting interviews confidentiality needs to be considered in order to respect the informants' privacy (Kvale 2007). Prior to interviewing all informants are asked for their consensus regarding their statements to be published. In Kvale's opinion, it is important that the interviewer is familiar with value issues and both ethical guidelines and ethical theories, since he or she is the primary "tool" to gaining knowledge (ibid). Moreover, the interview guides vary depending on the informants caused by their different identities and purposes in relation to the destination. For instance, the interview guides used for interviews with the DMO (see appx. 1) consists of both exploratory and focused questions, while the guide for the AO stakeholders (see appx. 1) is the same for each stakeholder and quite focused.

According to Kvale (2007), the questions should be understandable, brief and the academic language should be avoided. Furthermore, all informants are interviewed in their native language (in this context Danish) in order to avoid language barriers or possible limited expressions. When the interviews are conducted, the content for the analysis is translated into English as professionally as possible with a focus on meaning, since it is to be used in a qualitative content analysis. According to Punch, using the terminology by Fontana and Frey (1994), the main difference between types of interviews are whether they are structured, semi-structured or unstructured, which influences the depth of the interview (Punch 2005). The overall approach to interviewing is the semi-structured approach to interviewing. In general, interviewing is a flexible approach to collecting data (Punch 2005), however it is also complex since interviews are situated and textual (Silverman 1993 in Punch 2005).

Semi-structured individual interviews

Semi-structured interviews are – as the name implies – both structured and unstructured and are rather informal. They are open for additional information and directed by both the researcher and the informant (Hannam and Knox 2010). "Semi-structured interviews result in the social construction of knowledge as interviewers and interviewees negotiate meanings and understandings" (Hannam and Knox 2010:182). Kvale defines the semi-structured interview as "an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale 2007:8). In this way, it is clear that both the informant and the interviewer play an active role in the construction of meaning. The purpose of using this method is to gain insight into an individual perspective through personal verbal exchange (Punch 2005). The aim is to conduct in-depth interviews in order to create a multidimensional picture of the branding situation. The purpose of in-depth interviews is about listening to individuals and gaining insight into their world-views and how they perceive phenomena (Marsh and Stoker 2002). During the interview, the constructivist researcher's function is basically being "a professional listener" whose focus lies on the interviewee (Hiller and Diluzio 2004:14). The interviews are based on Kolb's four stages of in-depth interviews: An *opening* stage where the purpose of the interview is announced and trust regarding confidentiality and ethics is created. Then the *questioning* stage initiates through predetermined questions. The *probing* stage includes follow-up questions founded on the informant's answers. Eventually, in the *closing* stage the researcher expresses her gratitude to the informant and answers potential questions (Kolb 2008a). The ideal in this research is to conduct interviews of considerable length, since it gives the informant time to express his or her ideas completely (ibid). Eventually, the list below displays the name of the selected AO stakeholders, occupation (divided into activities, events or both), location (private (P), neutral (N), at work (W)), date and duration. The setting and time is adjusted to the individual informant's wishes and availability. The informants are selected through a "segmentation" that includes offering physical activities, events or both in outdoor settings and excludes surfing (which is well branded through Cold Hawaii). The aim is to interview as many diverse AO stakeholders through the segmentation in order to collect as many different world views as possible. However, due to time and space restrictions of this thesis, it cannot be promised that all existing AO stakeholders in Thy are included in this research. The segmentation further includes both AO stakeholders represented through VT as VT members (VTM) and those that are not VT members with the intention to reconstruct a holistic image of AO stakeholders in Thy.

Name	Relevant occupation	Location	Date	Duration
Flemming Søvndal Nielsen (Søvndal) (VTM)	Manager of ThyRace (events)	Snedsted, Thy (N)	05/01/17	(20:00)
Tvillinggaardthy (Tvillinggaard) (VTM)	Horseback riding in Thy National Park (activity)	Thisted (P)	06/04/17	(40:00)
Mette Åkerstrøm (Åkerstrøm)	Horseback riding in Thy "Horseback riding in Thy" (activity)	Thisted (P)	06/04/17	(1:10:00)
Mikael Nymann (Nymann)	Manager of a cycling event "A spring day in Thy" (activity and event)	Thisted (W)	06/06/17	(32:00)
Michael Mark (M. Mark) (VTM)	Manager of Agger Athlon (event)	Aalborg (N)	06/07/17	(1:00:00)
Peter Emil Højlund (Højlund)	Manager of MTB Tours Cold Hawaii (activity)	Klitmøller (P)	06/13/17	(1:20:00)
Michael Ruby (Ruby) (VTM)	Manager and project manager of Northwest Safari (activity)	Hurup, Thy (W)	06/13/17	(1:10:00)
Jesper Tilsted (Tilsted) (VTM)	Manager of HP Kayak & Leisure (activity)	Klitmøller (N)	06/16/17	(50:00)
Vahine Itchner (Itchner)	Manager of Vahine Therapy (yoga) (activity)	Klitmøller (W)	06/16/17	(45:00)

Table 1 List of individual informants. Source: Own.

Semi-structured group interviews

Comparably with the individual interviews elaborated previously, the group interviews are conducted via a semi-structured interview guide. Bloor and Wood define a group interview as "an interview in which several respondents are simultaneously questioned by the researcher" (Bloor and Wood 2006:99). This method is used in combination with the method above with the purpose of acquiring multiple views of the same subject (Frey 2004). Frey (2004) points out an issue with this method which may be that the group informants are likely to have similar views rather than express diversity. However, it allows efficiency and makes it possible to gather several responses in that setting and at that moment (ibid). According to Morgan, group interviews are a general term which includes focus groups (Morgan 1997 in Bloor and Wood 2006). Group interviews vary from focus groups in three ways. First, group interviews contain multiple topics while focus groups are focused on one specific topic. Then, group interviews are used to gather data from more than one informant at the same time. Lastly, in a group interview it is the individuals' views that matter and not how the informants as members of the group are discussing specific issues (Bryman 2001 in Bloor and Wood 2006). Thus, the group informants are questioned close to identically with the individual informants.

Names	Relevant occupation	Location	Date	Duration
Kenneth Kristensen Per Kristensen (K. Kristensen) (P.Kristensen) (VTM)	Manager and co-manager of Thy National Park Marathon & Duathlon (events)	Thisted (N)	05/31/17	(30:00)
Jane Thode Jensen Hermann P. Jensen (J. Jensen) (H. Jensen) (VTM)	Managers of Northwest Orienteering Club and Easter run (activity and event)	Thisted (P)	06/13/17	(50:00)
Lone Mark (L. Mark) Peter Sørensen (Sørensen) (VTM)	L. Mark is the manager of Ladywalk in Agger (event) (Interview together with her partner)	Agger, Thy (P)	06/13/17	(1:20:00)

Table 2 List of group informants. Source: Own.

Expert interviews

These two interviews represent the DMO's supply-side perspective. At the beginning of the research process, an exploratory expert interview is conducted with the marketing manager of the DMO VT in order to gain insight into the DMO's overall branding of the destination (first interview, Table 3). "An expert interview is conducted to gather factual information about a problem from someone with a specific product, consumer or industry knowledge" (Kolb 2008a:8). In this context, the marketing manager is selected for an expert interview caused by his expert knowledge of the destination's branding and marketing. Since expert interviews typically are conducted during the initial phase of the research in order to throw light on the research problem (Kolb 2008a), the interview is prepared for the marketing manager of VT through a semi-structured interview guide. This method gives me a factual understanding of how the organisation works and more knowledge about and new perspectives on the subject (Kvale 2007). In spite of the script, I am not too committed to it, since the purpose is to be open to changes during the interview and give the informant freedom to explain the reality. This is further due to the fact that the expert interview only contains an *opening* and *questioning* phase (Kolb 2008a). Though the interview should be kept short, because the expert in most cases is a busy professional (Kolb 2008a), the actual interviews extend into the length similar to an in-depth interview. Nevertheless, the purpose is to gain factual information (Kolb 2008a). Lastly, the marketing manager is interviewed once more through an expert interview focusing on the DMO's branding of AO tourism for a more specific perspective (last interview, Table 3).

Name	Relevant occupation	Location	Date	Duration
Ole Riis Christensen (Riis, E)	Marketing Manager of VT	Thisted (W)	02/14/17	(50:00)
Ole Riis Christensen (Riis, F)	Marketing Manager of VT	Thisted (W)	07/03/17	(45:00)

Table 3 Expert informant. Source: Own.

Focus group interview

A focus group interview allows the researcher to gather a selected number of individuals in order for them to discuss the issues that are central to the research subject (Kuada 2012). The focus group was originally a sort of group interview applied to marketing and political research, however the term is used more homogeneously today (Punch 2005). Punch further argues that various types of group interviews exist (ibid), however the focus group designed for this research is based on a semi-structured interview script leaving options for follow-up questions, which is a flexible and dynamic process. In order not to restrict the discussions and to allow unanticipated information (Merton et al. 1990 Redmond and Curtis 2009), the interview script includes a few open-ended questions. Unlike the in-depth interview, the focus group interview is merely structured through three phases with *building a rapport* through introduction, guidelines and an opening question, *probing* by uncovering useful information to help answer the research question, and *closing* to understand the depth of discussions (Kolb 2008b). It is important to mention that my function in the focus group changes from an interviewer to a moderator (Punch 2005). "(…) the researcher will be facilitating, moderating, monitoring and recording group interaction" (Punch 2005:171). In fact, the interview is also filmed. Through this projective technique (Kolb 2008b) it is possible to gather data regarding the group culture and dynamics, e.g. participants' behaviour (Punch 2005), and more practically, avoiding mixed up data of the participants. This is due to the male voices that may easily be confused by solely listening to an audio file. In addition, Redmond and Curtis claim that the data collected through focus groups is both verbal and observational (Redmond and Curtis 2009). I have been in charge of focus group interviews previously, which makes me familiar with the interviewing process. The moderator of the group introduces the subject that is to be discussed and it is her responsibility to create a tolerant atmosphere in which personal and contradictory positions can be expressed freely (Kvale 2007). Through a more unobtrusive technique of interviewing, the aim is to collect as many different perspectives as possible (ibid). According to Morgan, group interaction is the essence of a focus group interview which can enrich the entire research (Morgan 1988 in Punch 2005). One of the advantages of a focus group is that the collective interaction may contribute to more spontaneous and emotional expressions that are less accessible through individual interviewing (Kvale 2007). According to Kolb, focus groups are useful when new ideas are to be explored in the context of effective marketing campaigns, messages and the choice of media (Kolb 2008b). This is relevant, since the themes that the focus group deals with are of branding purposes. However, the interview is founded on the internal suppliers' perspectives. Kolb (2008b) further stresses that focus groups are useful for examining possible issues in depth and thereby contributing with ideas that could help a company (in this case VT) solve problems.

The objective of conducting a focus group is to examine how the AO stakeholders collectively make sense of the subject and create meanings (Bryman 2004 in Redmond and Curtis 2009), and to look into whether – and if at all - the findings call for a new destination branding strategy. The participants are AO stakeholders in Thy, who know each other. Though the number of participants preferably should be between six and ten (Kolb 2008b), other authors argue that the number of participants may vary from three to fourteen (Redmond and Curtis 2009). This focus group is founded on four participants, since one participant had to cancel. Nevertheless, the four selected participants can in my opinion generate sufficient data, given the expectance of them contributing to a significant discussion while interacting with each other (Morgan 1997 in Redmond and Curtis 2009). The existing AO stakeholders in Thy were invited to participate in the focus group and had the option to select a date of their choice within a two-week time frame. Selecting the participants thus mainly depends on their availability, resulting in the selected date of June 22nd 2017. However, the participants are further selected based on their knowledge and expertise on the topic (Talbot 1995; Polit and Tatano 2006 in Redmond and Curtis 2009). The participants are suitable for this method, since they all represent various aspects of the AO sphere and with different educational backgrounds that create personal contexts (see table 1). Despite that, the participants are VTMs, which may to some extent frame limitations to reconstructing a holistic picture through this method.

The setting for conducting the focus group should be easily accessible and neutral for most participants, and therefore a meeting room at VT's office in Thisted is arranged. This is a familiar location for the majority of the participants, and they are placed in a comfortable circular seating (Krueger 2002). An inviting atmosphere is created by offering free beverages and foods, which may be used as incentives (ibid). VT's marketing materials, e.g. brochures, screenshots of VT's website and VT's branding strategy (appx. 5), are placed on the table in order to help gaining information (Kolb 2008b). Initially, exercises were planned in the script concerning individually writing three adjectives on post-its regarding the contemporary and the desired branding of AO, but when observing the flow of discussions, these exercises were considered distracting (see appx. 1). The interview duration is an hour and twenty minutes, which is in line with Redmond and Curtis' (2009) general notion of a focus group lasting between one and two hours.

Name	Relevant occupation	Educational background
Michael Ruby (Ruby, F)	Manager of Nordvestsafari	Graphic design and marketing
Flemming Søvndal Nielsen (Søvndal, F)	Manager of ThyRace	Head kitchen chef
Michael Mark (M. Mark, F)	Manager of Agger Athlon	Bachelor in sport studies
Per Kristensen (P. Kristensen, F)	Co-manager of Thy National Park Marathon & Duathlon	Accountant and business consultant

Table 4 List of participants. Source: Own.

Approaching a literature review

"A literature review is a descriptive and/or analytic summary of the existing material relating to some topic or area of study. The term also refers to the process of producing such a review" (SAGE research methods 2017). Thus, it is relevant to describe the approach to creating this review which frames the theoretical section. The review is founded on the context of the research and therefore literature is selected on the basis of relevance and content in relation to the subject of the thesis. According to Fink the literature review is a "systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesising the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners" (Fink 2005 qtd. in Booth, Papaioannou, and Sutton 2012:1–2). Literature is constantly approached critically with the intention of constructing a general and systematic overview. Consequently, the review has a "narrowing down" structure from introducing destination branding (and destination branding in the context of place branding) and brand identity to a focus on the AO sphere as special interest tourism, which are the main components of this research. A table is presented below that displays the word searches for each key concept relevant to the research subject. The words are combined interdisciplinarily across the key concepts within the overall context of destination branding.

1. Key concept	2. Key concept	3. Key concept
Destination brand*	Brand identity*	“Special interest tourism”
“Destination branding”	“Brand identity”	“Active outdoor”
“Place branding”	“Brand identity creation”	Sports tourism
“Place brand*”	Stakeholder*	Adventure tourism
“Destination marketing”	“Destination marketing organisation*” OR DMO	Active* tourism

Table 5 Words and key concepts. Source: Own.

Approaching theories

On the foundation of the literature review which presents relevant literature, the theoretical chapter unveils existing knowledge about the research subject (Kuada 2012). Theory may broadly be defined as “a set of interrelated ideas or concepts relevant to the explanation or interpretation of a particular topic or domain” (SAGE research methods 2017). Thus, the theoretical chapter provides a specified theoretical framework for the successive analysis in the context of the extensive subject of destination branding. Accordingly, it zooms in on main topics as destination brand identity creation, DMO and stakeholder collaboration and destination branding strategy that are to be analysed later on. The first two entities are elements of the destination brand identity creation process, while the last refers to the outcome of this collaborative process. In this context, AO theories are excluded, since these do not contribute with relevant knowledge to answering the research question. As a contrast, these are required in the literature review, because the aim is to position the research within a broader context. On the other hand, theories present ideas and concepts that are to be implemented. In order to examine the research subject more comprehensively, theories are approached from different fields (e.g. tourism, marketing, place branding, organisational disciplines). Different approaches are claimed to be possible since the destination identity research is considered to be sparse (Saraniemi 2010). Despite this, tourism literature is prioritised given the fact that it is a tourism based research. The structure of the chapter is then explained in the beginning of the theory.

Content analysis

Krippendorff (2013) states that a content analysis can be used both qualitatively and quantitatively and that these approaches are indispensable for a text analysis. However, since this is a qualitative research, the analysis will be shaped accordingly. When implementing a content analysis as a qualitative research technique, the aim is "to interpret meaning from the content of text data (…)" (Hsieh and Shannon 2005:1277). There are various types of text data occurring verbally, in print or electronically found in e.g. open-ended survey questions, interviews, focus groups, articles, books, manuals (Kondracki and Wellman 2002 in Hsieh and Shannon 2005). In this context, it is a flexible method (Cavanagh 1997 in Hsieh and Shannon 2005), but this makes it problematic to create a clear definition (Tesch 1990 in Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Nevertheless, Hsieh and Shannon define qualitative content analysis as " (…) a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh and Shannon 2005:1278). In order to analyse the text data (both secondary data, which is the already existing data, and the primary data assembled through interviews) this technique would be relevant. This is due to the relativistic ontology that favours approaches which acknowledge potentially multiple interpretations by a variety of individuals – that Krippendorff terms "the many worlds of others" (Krippendorff 2013:89). He argues that a researcher constructs the contexts of the analysis which accepts the 'worlds of others'. Simultaneously, the researcher is following own research questions and the analytical approach is founded on literature or information about the text's contexts (Krippendorff 2013). Krippendorff's construction of the research technique is implemented in this research and visualised in the figure below (see Figure 2).

The research presents an analysis of both the primary and secondary text data, in order to categorise its interpreted meaning into themes or patterns (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). As a researcher, I am interested in exploring each informant's mental picture and meanings within his or her own context. In order to do so and analyse the content in-depth, the audio files of the interviews have been listened to repeatedly. In this way, it is possible to fully understand and gain a sense of the entity (Tesch 1990 in Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Throughout the interview process it becomes clear that some themes or patterns can be established. In practice, this is carried out by highlighting words and sentences that seem to capture main thoughts or views (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). In this process codes consisting of multiple thoughts are identified and then arranged into categories depending on their meanings (ibid). Simultaneously, relevant theories and additional findings are applied to and discussed in the research. First and foremost, knowledge gained throughout this content analysis is founded on the research subjects' distinctive perspectives (ibid). Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind not to generalise when carrying out qualitative research. As referred to in the epistemic section, social constructivist researchers produce different studies of same phenomena which also concerns the analysis, given that the researcher contributes with own preceding knowledge.

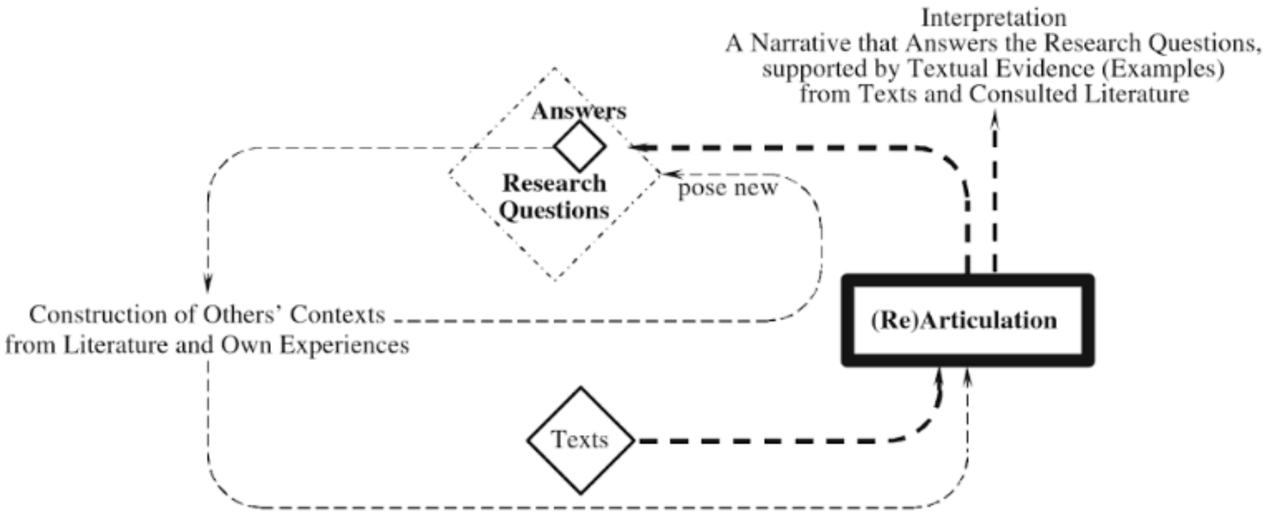

Figure 2 Qualitative content analysis. Source: (Krippendorff 2013:90).

Krippendorff's approach is comparable to Hsieh and Shannon's conventional approach to content analysis, since it is based on coding categories taken directly from the text data as elaborated previously (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Explained briefly, the conventional approach is typically used to describe a phenomenon in which categories are not predetermined, but emerge from the data also known as inductive category development (Mayring 2000 in Hsieh and Shannon 2005). "Codes then are sorted into categories based on how different codes are related and linked" (Hsieh and Shannon 2005:1279). Through this content analysis technique, it is possible to gain knowledge based on the informants' and participants' individual world views which establish the essence of the research.

The analysis is a self-analysis formed from the supply-side perspective of destination branding. It further contains a gap-analysis by implementing a model that has an assistive function when examining whether the stakeholders' identities are aligned with the constructed and communicated brand identity by VT (elaborated in the theoretical chapter).

Eventually, the analysis considers the contexts and other e.g. cultural and social aspects through a critical analysis (Hannam and Knox 2010). Throughout this research, it is particularly important to consider positions and ideas that appear natural, which are in point of fact "socially, culturally and historically specific and constantly reconstructed and renegotiated" (Rapley 2007:4). Furthermore, the analysis is mainly examining the stakeholders' knowledge regarding their own expert area and whether they are represented within the destination brand identity that does not portray the sphere of AO clearly. Staying critical to this research approach is crucial, since it may be anticipated that the stakeholders seek explicit identification within the destination brand identity.

Literature review

This chapter presents a systematic overview of contemporary literature relevant for the main subjects of destination branding and AO tourism in order to position this research in relation to the extent of existing literature and previous studies done on this subject (Kuada 2012). The literature review contributes to the theoretical foundations on which this research is based.

A fraction of destination branding

The branding technique's starting point is the identity of a place established through discussions of local norms, values and practices, in which local actors are in the middle. On this basis, marketing tactics are constructed for tourists (Therkelsen and Halkier 2004). Thus, branding is the most essential component of marketing, or as Kotler frames it, "branding is the art and cornerstone of marketing" (Kotler 2003:418 qtd. in Blichfeldt 2005:389). Branding analyses further regard "(…) *demand patterns* and *images* of targeted place consumers in relation to a particular place; And identifying the *position* of the place in view of competitors and hence the unique qualities to be highlighted (Buhl and Dahl 1993 qtd. in Therkelsen and Halkier 2004:3–4). Simply explained, there are three elements related to destination branding: identity, image and positioning (Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012). Temporal defines brand identity as the total promise made to the potential consumers (tourists) and thus, brand identity is how the DMO wants tourists to see the brand. On the other hand, brand image "relates to how consumers actually see the brand; i.e. the total sum of perceptions target audiences have about the brand" (Temporal 2002 qtd. in Ren and Blichfeldt 2011:417). Moreover, Temporal stresses that if marketers' communication to the tourists is successful, the identity will have a great effect on the brand image (Temporal 2002). "Branding is perhaps the most powerful marketing weapon available to contemporary destination marketers confronted by increasing product parity, sustainability and competition" (Morgan, Pritchard, and Piggott 2002:336). In essence, this thesis deals solely with a "fraction" of the destination branding process, namely the brand identity creation of Thy. This may also be termed the supply side of branding. Additionally, this "fraction" is limited to another "sub fraction" of brand identity through the focus on the AO sphere.

Destination branding as an aspect of place branding

In order to examine destination branding it is key to understand it in relation to place branding, which applies to advertising of a nation's economy, countries, cities and regions seeking to create and support a strong brand positioning strategy (Dahlén, Lange, and Smith 2010). According to Pedersen, place branding is not well established and lacks a clear definition. He claims that place branding deals with mastering the future in order to influence what is to come instead of documenting reality (Pedersen 2005). Zenker et al. on the other hand add more aspects to the concept and define a place brand as "a network of associations in the place consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design" (Zenker and Braun 2010 qtd. in Zenker, Braun, and Petersen 2017:17). There is a main focus on residents' function in the place branding process through this definition (Zenker et al. 2017) that is relevant to this brand identity research, because the AO stakeholders' role in place (and destination) branding is examined. Nevertheless, Blichfeldt (2005) contributes with an even more holistic social constructivist perception of place brands by stating that "a place brand has as many dimensions as it has audiences" (Blichfeldt 2005:390).

According to the new research by Zenker et al., destination branding and place branding are not to be perceived as unconnected entities, and both place brands and destination brands are multidimensional (2017). The concept of place branding originates in the 1990s as a consequence of the use of product marketing. It first appears in place marketing literature and later a small number of academic articles concerns place branding (Therkelsen and Halkier 2004). This indicates that the concepts of both place and destination branding are relatively new existing for a bit over two and a half decades. Hankinson reports that in 2001 there is a scarcity of published studies on this subject, however it receives more attention (Hankinson 2001), which according to Therkelsen and Halkier is still valid in the subsequent three years (Therkelsen and Halkier 2004). Hankinson further claims that branding places is a more complex process than branding conventional products and services (Hankinson 2001; Blichfeldt 2005), which is in contrast to Morgan and Prichard's notion that "places can be branded in the same way as fast-moving consumer goods and services" (2000:281). "Place branding does not just reflect a place, but actively takes part in creating what it is – and is not" (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011:430). The quotation implies that the branding of places is not guiltless and constructs a tourism destination which consists of complex aspects (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). Pedersen (2005) also states that place branding touches on the complex network of relations of people and involves the public, the government and organisations. These notions are in line with Zenker et al. (2017) who today argue that brand complexity is relevant for place brands.

Zenker et al. (2017) further discuss the close relation between place and destination branding, which according to them is not particularly well illuminated in tourism literature. They argue, that destination branding as a concept only is aimed at tourists, while place branding is associated with the general branding of places for all target groups e.g. residents, companies and tourists (Kerr 2006 in Zenker et al. 2017). They allegorise the relation between the two concepts as a family tree in which place branding is the tree itself and one of the branches is destination branding (Zenker and Braun 2010 in Zenker et al. 2017). However, destination branding has lately come to include other target groups such as residents (Zenker et al. 2017; Hanna and Rowley 2015; Palmer, Koenig-Lewis and Jones 2013). Freire stresses that destination branding requires 'local people', who may also affect the brand's competitive position among other destinations based on their nature (Freire 2009).Similarly to Zenker et al. (2017), Blichfeldt (Blichfeldt 2005) claims that destination branding is the tourism-focused dimension of place brands.

Blichfeldt (2005) argues that destination brands are to some extent 'unmanageable' because of their complex nature involving different industries, individual companies and agencies. The destination offers various services to the tourist who co-produces them. In this context, many individuals are involved in creating the tourism experience, thus the question of 'who' manages the destination brand arises. In this context, Morgan et al. stress that destinations have to deal with distinctive branding challenges because of many stakeholders within the destination, which means that marketers "have relatively little control" (2002:338).

Destination brand identity

As stated initially, according to Temporal, brand identity is the comprehensive promise made to potential tourists and therefore it is how the DMO wishes that they should see the brand (Temporal 2002). However, various understandings of destination brand identity exist, which are examined further in the theoretical chapter. It is crucial for a destination to define the brand identity which means identifying the key values and characteristics that represent the destination the best possible way (Therkelsen 2007 in Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012). According to Pike this is important in order to construct a unique and attractive brand (Pike 2004). The destination's brand identity has multiple functions. It is a unique series of associations which marketers' try to design and maintain, and simultaneously, it is a representation of an image that the destination displays to tourism segments (Konecnik and Go 2008; Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012; Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). Destinations are obliged to create a unique identity in order to find an opportunity to differentiate themselves from competitors. It is fundamental for the purpose of surviving in a globally competitive market place (Morgan et al. 2002). This is where Morgan et al. (2002) argue that branding is a very important marketing tool for destination marketers. When positioning the destination, both its ability and resources must be considered in order to deliver the brand promise (Cooper and Hall 2008 Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012). Pearce states that various types of Destination Management Organisations exist e.g. convention and visitor bureaus, state and local tourism offices, regional marketing organisations (Pearce 1992 in Ford and Peeper 2009). Regarding the latter, "(…) destination marketing organisations (DMOs) are concerned with the selling of places" (Pike 2004:1). In this context, it is significant to mention that in this thesis, VT, being the Destination Management Organisation of Thy, is viewed as a Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO), since the research solely deals with the organisation's marketing aspect. Destination Management Organisations have multiple functions since they e.g. unify local authorities in order to make more effective and economical organisational and marketing units, and permit the concept of branding rural destinations (Lane 2009). With the focus on branding, the DMO makes it possible to synergise marketing of local products and tourism beyond the region (Lane 2009). Overall, DMOs are actively involved in developing tourism all over the world and operate with a holistic approach for the present destination (Pike 2004).

Morgan and Prichard (2000) state that many destinations develop inclusive identity programmes in order to differentiate themselves to stand out from the competition and to highlight their uniqueness. In this research it is further important to understand the tourism region's branding in the context of national branding of Denmark, meaning that Thy simultaneously pursues a national sub-branding strategy (Morgan and Pritchard 2000). The ideal situation for a brand identity would be that all destination stakeholders (e.g. different companies, planned marketing communication and word-of-mouth) contribute to a coherent brand identity of a place (Moilanen and Rainisto 2009). Destination marketers bring forth vital communication between the local tourism industry and the different stakeholders in the destination. They are responsible for communicating the needs, wants, and expectations of each party to the other (Ford and Peeper 2009). Pike (2004) stresses that it is particularly important for private sector tourism businesses to acknowledge the political and resource-based challenges that public sector DMOs face. Nevertheless, "Opportunities exist for even the smallest of tourism operators to participate in, benefit from, and contribute to DMO planning and operations in some way" (Pike 2004:2). These operators are stakeholders, which is a broad term and may be explained as "owners and operators (who) have a stake in destination development" (Harrill 2009:450). Harrill (2009) claim that tourism destinations are challenging since multiple stakeholders within the destination have various perspectives about the development. For instance, the stakeholders include those who offer tourism related services, those who mainly offer services to local residents (and are affected by tourism development) and those who live in the region. Furthermore, they can be long-term residents with a history and identity connected to the place, or incomers who are relatively new to the destination (Harrill 2009). Collaboration among these stakeholders is key in order for the destination to deliver the brand promise (Ooi 2004 in Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012).

Active outdoor tourism

Through research in collaboration with a university librarian and as indicated by Andkjær and Arvidsen (2015), existing research on the AO sphere is debatable. Similarly, Margaryan and Fredman state that in particular the commercial supply side of this sector – primarily in the Nordic context – lacks research attention (Fredman and Tyrväinen 2010; Lundmark and Müller 2010 in Margaryan and Fredman 2017). This being said, AO is a grey area incorporating various aspects of tourism. Furthermore, tourism in this context is linked to the degree to which individuals travel from their homes and participate in official and commercialized activities rooted in AO (Hall 1992).

When introducing AO tourism, it is critical to perceive it as a segment of special interest tourism, which the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) describes as "specialised tourism involving group or individual tours by people who wish to develop certain interests and visit sites and places connected with a specific subject. Generally speaking, the people concerned exercise the same profession or have a common hobby" (WTO 1985:3 qtd. in Ritchie, Carr, and Cooper 2003:28). This research deals with a specific variety of tourism and on that account mass tourism is not applicable. The special interest tourist may be pursuing recreation, social interaction and physical activity through learning and focusing on strengthening his or her own identity. Usually, there is special knowledge, e.g. skills or practices, connected to the particular activity (Stebbins 1982, 1996 in Ritchie et al. 2003). Hall (1992) stresses that travel motivations and values related to adventure, sport and health tourism all underline improving quality of life and mostly require active participation in outdoor environments. According to Read (1980), special interest travel should be termed "real" travel in the sense that it would be a "rewarding, enriching, adventuresome, learning experience" (qtd. in Ritchie et al. 2003:28–29). Hall (1992) claims that the increase in outdoor activities is most likely a consequence of urbanisation issues and life in the late 20th century. Especially today, the number of activities that are carried out in nature for recreation motives is growing (Margaryan and Fredman 2017).

AO tourism originates in the wave labelled rural tourism, which is essentially tourism that occurs in the countryside (Robinson 1990 in Lane 2009). Clemenson and Lane (1997) argue that it is a complex umbrella concept that is founded on farm and agritourism, yet it contains many niche activities and continuously branches out (in Lane 2009). Among other, rural tourism includes ecotourism, activity tourism, sports tourism and food and wine tourism (Lane 2009). The concept of AO applied throughout this thesis is to some extent synonymous with activity tourism, which is identified as physical activity during a holiday usually taking place in rural areas. Some examples of activities are walking, climbing, cross country skiing and different kinds of cycling (Lane 2009). The umbrella concept further includes adventure tourism and sports tourism that are both related to AO tourism. Adventure tourism is not easily defined, however according to Hall "adventure tourism is categorized by the deliberate seeking of risk and danger by participants in outdoor activities" (Hall 1992:143). This term regards holidays that are different, challenging and individual (Lane 2009), but the aspect of risk is not particularly relevant to this research. For instance, some authors categorise surfing as adventure tourism (Hritz and Reynolds 2012; Ponting and McDonald 2013), but surfing is not included in this research and thus this type of tourism is not studied in depth. As a comparison, Hall (1992) perceives both mountain biking (MTB) and bicycle-touring as adventure tourism. In this context it is worth mentioning that people are different and some may experience physical activities in nature as risky or threatening. "People seek and get various experiences from being active in natural environments and have rather different preferences to the natural settings" (Andkjær and Arvidsen 2015:44). The concept of AO revolves around the individual physical – and to some degree challenging – experience in nature. In addition, sports tourism is similarly related to adventure and activity tourism (Lane 2009). Hall (1992) divides sports tourism into the categories of participants and observers. Sports tourism is a very broad term and may be divided into various types e.g. tourism with sports content, sports participation tourism, sports training, sports events and luxury sports tourism (Weed and Bull 2004 in Weed 2009). Weed's (2009) research acknowledges sports tourism as a mature field of study.

Theory

This chapter presents relevant theories in the overall context of destination branding. First, the 'destination brand complexity' is examined in order to understand the entity we are dealing with when branding AO tourism. Next, 'destination brand identity – various perceptions' is elaborated with the aim of creating a definition of the concept that is to be analysed. This is relevant since destination brand identity may be perceived in different ways. On this foundation, 'destination brand identity creation' stands for the process which includes 'DMO and stakeholder collaboration'. Branding collaboration is one of the main aspects in this research and therefore it is in focus. When this process reaches a conclusion, a 'destination branding strategy' is constructed which is essentially how the brand identity of AO is communicated to tourists. Thus, this theoretical journey mirrors the structure and foundation of the successive analysis.

Destination brand complexity

Destination brands are complex entities (Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012; Ooi 2004; Palmer and Bejou 1995; Pike 2005; Zenker, Braun, and Petersen 2017). "They have multidisciplinary roots, address a complex composite of stakeholders, landscapes, and social processes and thus, they possess multiple identities which may or may not happily coexist" (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005 in Wheeler et al. 2011:16). It is argued that branding is considered the only approach for DMOs to construct and communicate clear destination identities (Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride 2004). According to Berry (2000), three origins of brand meaning exist. First, an organisation's presented brand which is the organisation's controlled communication of its identity. Next, external brand communications e.g. word-of-mouth. Lastly, the tourist's experience with the organisation. According to Berry, the latter has "a primary impact on brand meaning" (Berry 2000 in Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012:13). This implies that tourists depend more on their own experiences and word-of-mouth than e.g. the DMO's marketing activities (Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012). In spite of this, the research deals primarily with the destination's communicated identity.

In the context of examining AO stakeholders' identities within the DMO's communicated brand identity, it is relevant to acknowledge the stakeholders' dual functions at the destination as both AO operators and residents. On this foundation, the conclusion by Zenker et al. may be applicable seeing that "brand complexity is relevant for place brands, but that the place brand for residents requires more complexity than a destination brand, while it imperative that both are integrative parts of an overall brand" (Zenker et al. 2017:15).

When examining a brand, many aspects may be considered. According to Cai (2002), a brand element can be "a name, term, logo, sign, design, symbol, slogan, package, or a combination of these, of which the name is the first and foremost reference" (Cai 2002:722). Behind this packaging, lies a brand identity, which includes components such as "values, key competitors, positioning statement, key attributes and benefits, and target audience" (Pike and Page 2014:211).

Destination brand identity – various perceptions

In order to initiate this section, Temporal's latest perception is introduced, since he perceives brand identity as "how the brand wants to be seen by its target audience and is therefore internally generated by those responsible for building and managing the brand" (Temporal 2015:88). The destination managers are compelled to identify the destination's identity based on the destination's natural resources which should attract tourists, and decide on a tourism objective through the interests of different stakeholders (Therkelsen 2007). Similarly, Moilanen and Rainisto (2009) emphasise a focus on own resources in place branding.

Brand identity consists of "a brand vision, mission, values, promise and character" which then is positioned (Temporal 2015:36). Accordingly, it has various roles. First, it is a series of brand associations that the brand strategist aims to construct and maintain. Secondly, it stands for a vision of how the target audience should see the brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). Thirdly, the aim of the estimations is to establish a relation between the brand and its consumers through values which may include benefits and credibility in order to support the brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). Ruzzier and Chernatony claim that values should be regarded, as they "drive behavior and the style of interaction between stakeholders can contribute to the basis for differentiation" (2013:47). Further, a place brand's personality is closely related to the personality of individuals who live the brand (ibid). Value creation is key when dealing with branding for both the supply and demand sides in the context of tourism (Saraniemi 2010). In the destination context, identifying brand values is the foundation of a brand vision (Niininen et al. 2007 in Saraniemi 2010).

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) have designed a systematic brand leadership model. In spite of the fact that Aaker and Joachimsthaler address branding in general and not specifically destination branding, the phases of the model can be applied in a destination context. Ruzzier and Ruzzier (2009) claim that it is instructive when examining brand identity strategically. They argue that this model is the most inclusive in the branding literature until 2009 and communicate that the analysis consists of three primary phases (ibid). These are: a tourist analysis, a competitor analysis, and a self-analysis (Konecnik and Go 2008). This is the basis of the strategic brand analysis framework created by Konecnik and Go (ibid). According to Konecnik and Go, the brand leadership model is noteworthy because it emphasises strategic brand management, how a brand should be represented through relevant stakeholders' and costumers' perspectives, and the communication of the desired brand identity (ibid). They stress that the destination should initially conduct the first two analyses before initiating the self-analysis (ibid). However, since this is a supply-side research of the brand identity focused on the branding of AO, it revolves around a self-analysis. This analysis should be critical and be carried out through a value chain approach aiming at creating an internal overview. It should further inform destination managers about different destination stakeholders' interests and desires. It is in fact a cooperative approach "as opposed to a single competition-oriented approach" (Konecnik and Go 2008:181). Thus, it is clear that internal cooperation is key when dealing with the characteristics in the process of destination identity creation (Konecnik and Go 2008). These ideas are similarly expressed by Ruzzier and Ruzzier (2009) who state that a such analysis should help a destination position itself in the market and for instance assist with examining the destination's cooperation: "destination managers should respect the interests and wishes of different stakeholders and manage them through a cooperative approach rather than a competitive one" (Buhalis 2000 qtd. in Ruzzier and Ruzzier 2009:70). However, within the tourist analysis there is an element of recognizing new trends, which has been addressed through contemporary outdoor tourism trends in the introductory chapter of this thesis.

Konecnik and Go (2008) further express that it is problematic for all researchers to agree upon a definition of brand identity, yet they consent to its connection to the supply-side of branding. They further claim that brand identity development may be comprehended best from the supply-side perspective and sympathize with Kapferer's simplified understanding: "before knowing how we are perceived, we must know who we are" (Kapferer 1998: 71 qtd. in Konecnik and Go 2008:179). From this supply-side perspective, it is the tourist destination that should determine the destination brand

and its content (Konecnik and Go 2008). In relation to ongoing globalisation, brand identity creation may contribute to a unique competitive advantage through a brand identity that captures the destination's culture with reference to the "extraordinary" (Smith 1989 qtd. in Konecnik and Go 2008:177). On this basis, Olins states that a brand identity may work as a network concept founded on historical, national (in this case regional) and cultural connections in order to construct a common view as a starting point for initiatives regarding change (Olins 2002 in Konecnik and Go 2008).

As an extension of Konecnik and Go' (2008) notion of the "extraordinary", Keller (2003) proposes two concepts that are relevant when examining a brand identity's unique characteristics. In his book concerning strategic brand management, the concept of points-of-parity and points-of-difference are revealed (Keller 2003). When a brand can be associated with connotations that other brands possess, the concept of points-of-parity is applicable. This means that these connotations are not solely possessed by this brand, however they are essential since the consumer (tourist in this context) expects their presence. As a contrast, the concept points-of-difference refers to positive qualities and characteristics that are associated with the specific brand and makes it unique to the tourist. Thus, in the potential tourist's decision making process, the points-of-parity do not contribute to selecting a destination brand rather than another, which leads to less competitive advantage. In line with this notion, Zenker et al. suggest that "too much perceived brand complexity could lower the distinctiveness of a place, as the features of said place would seem too similar to other places (…)" (2017:24). Thus, Keller's (2003) concept points-of-difference plays an important role in destination branding.

Cai's destination branding model (2002) focuses on constructing a destination's identity through extending activation theory (a mix of brand components e.g. image creation, brand associations, marketing activities). In this context, image building is not solely connected to tourists, though it is also the image that the DMO seeks to project (projected image). He claims that in this way it is possible to bring the concepts of perceived and projected image closer together. In other words, Cai (ibid) is one of the first to differentiate the concept of destination brand identity creation from image formation. He perceives the concept of brand identity as a projected image in the sense that the DMO projects the destination image. He believes that destinations projecting a positive and clear image have a competitive advantage over those without. His concept of projected image is synonymous with Gunn's (1972) *induced image*, which essentially is the tourism industry's (in this case the DMO's) promotional attempts (in Gartner 1993). Overall, he emphasizes the importance of image formation, however, he is one of the first authors to highlight brand identity as a foundation for further research when dealing with destination branding (Cai 2002). Pike's perception of brand identity is to some extent in line with Cai's, since he argues, that the brand identity can be viewed as a self-image and a desired image in the market place (Pike 2004). In continuation of the emphasis on image formation, Ooi (2004) stresses that brand identity constructs a framework for tourists to visualize the destination prior to their visit. These pre-visit perceptions - whether authentic or biased - improve their experiences at the destination. In this way, brand images strengthen the tourists' preconceptions of the destination. Ooi implies that a brand "offers a story that tourists can build their experiences around" (Ooi 2004:113). Gartner (1993) argues, that understanding the formation of destination images is important when creating an image that is consistent with what the destination offers. In a study from 1977 of foreigners' perceptions of the United States it was found that images of states could be more related to images held of cities caused by e.g. receiving more media attention (ibid). Thus, Gartner suggests that "it is possible for a smaller entity to have such a strong image that it overpowers the large entity's brand image" (ibid:207). In this context, Moilanen and Rainisto (2009) claim that a strong country brand based on the nation's identity can enhance the nation. Additionally, if a country brand is managed excellently, it attracts companies, investors, talented segments, residents and visitors (ibid). These theories can be applied in the destination branding context of Thy when for instance considering Cold Hawaii as an influential sub-brand.

Wheeler, Frost and Weiler claim that product/service literature has dominated the sphere of destination branding (Wheeler et al. 2011). However, it is argued that one of the main features that differentiate destination branding from conventional branding is the central role that multiple stakeholders play in the branding process (Hanna and Rowley 2011). Consequently, place brands come to live through stakeholder networks and partnerships and are thus not solely in the hands of brand managers (Parkerson and Saunders 2005 in Hanna and Rowley 2011). In contrast, it is stressed that leadership by senior management plays an important role in determining the destination brand orientation. Particularly, "leadership by the CEO and the senior management team is likely to have a strong influence on both the direction and the implementation of brand orientation" (Hankinson 2012:977).

Wheeler et al. (2011) suggest that a sustainable brand should essentially be constructed internally through the values of local brand communities and networks instead of externally. Elementally, it is discussed how a destination could create memorable experiences for tourists and how the identity and character of this destination awakens through the individuals who experience it (ibid). In this context, the self-analysis by Konecnik and Go (2008) is relevant, since the AO stakeholders are individuals experiencing the destination on a daily basis and dealing with tourism. Thus, the brand content of the destination is to be identified collectively. Nonetheless, the core of the destination brand may seem inexplicit in relation to traditional product or service brands (Blichfeldt 2005; Morgan et al. 2004).

In addition, DMOs should take the multiplicity of already existing images and associations into account when branding the destination. This makes it more challenging for DMOs to communicate the destination's brand identity to tourists than for e.g. product/service marketers (Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012; Therkelsen 2007). This is due to the fact that tourism products and services are mainly intangible and cannot be tested prior to the purchase like ordinary products. Consequently, destination images are important for the potential tourist when e.g. selecting the destination, and for the destination "(…) images are strategic and tactical weapons in the competitive battle between destinations" (Ryan and Gu 2008:387 qtd. in Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012). There is a further active – passive differentiation between brand identity and brand image in the sense that brand identity is the active component in a place's marketing process while brand image is passive and an effect of long-term activities. However, the brand image may create the uniqueness of the place (Moilanen and Rainisto 2009).

In this context, Konecnik and Go (2008) and Ruzzier and Ruzzier (2009) stress that the branding analysis should combine both brand identity and brand image in order to understand the perspective of the supply and the demand side of tourism. I consent to this thought concerning destination branding, however this specific research examines brand identity creation based on the standpoints of the DMO and the AO stakeholders.

Theories concerning a single destination brand identity in relation to destination branding (Konecnik and Go 2008; Ruzzier and Ruzzier 2009; Therkelsen 2007), suggest that the concept should be perceived as a single identity for the destination. Wheeler et al. (2011) takes this notion a step further by accepting the destination brand as multidimensional and thereby acknowledging multiple identities of e.g. stakeholders, landscapes and social actions. Thus, these identities are as yet captured in a "(…) unique and appealing *identity*" (Wheeler et al. 2011:16). Consequently, they express the necessity of a more holistic approach to destination branding in order to accommodate the various stakeholders and their multiple identities (Wheeler et al. 2011). Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) agree with the notion that different stakeholders with multiple identities are to be found within destinations, since these are complex entities. However, they argue, that strategic diversity branding should be established in order to portray the complexity of the destination's identities and images. Thus, they underline the importance of a *multiple brand* (in the sense of brand identities) as a contrast to one single brand identity containing the various stakeholders. In this way, communicating the concept of "one clear image" is challenged through emphasizing "(…) an acceptance and subsequent strategic use of the diversity of not only the destination, but also its potential visitors" (Ren and Blichfeldt 2011:432). This notion is further underpinned by Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt (2012), who claim that multiple images or identities contribute to reflecting the various representations within a destination more faultlessly.

On the foundation of some understandings of brand identity elaborated above, and particularly inspired by Ren and Blichfeldt's (2011) notion, a personal definition of this concept is proposed. It is linked with the supply-side of branding and as Konecnik and Go (2008) suggest, it is a communicated brand identity:

A destination's brand identity is a representative multiple brand communicated to tourists, containing various identities constructed in collaboration between the DMO and different stakeholders.

Destination brand identity creation

Through the following quotation, Kavaratzis and Hatch create a link between branding and identity creation: "Branding has a role to play in all parts of identity formation and should be thought of as a set of processes that facilitate the whole identity process" (Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013:82). When examining to what extent the AO stakeholders' identities are represented in the brand identity communicated by VT, it is relevant to apply a theoretical model that specifically pays attention to the necessity of reducing the (potential) gap in identity perceptions between the organisation and its components (Illia and Lurati 2006). It is relevant for entities that have to deal with several identity types (Balmer 2012), as is the case of VT's objective. This model is adopted from organisational identity theory, however, it can be employed in this brand identity research as well, since it explores the connection between identity and stakeholder spheres (Illia and Lurati 2006). It may further be assistive to brand managers when creating, managing and maintaining a corporate brand (CB) (Balmer 2012). The CB may relate to "an industry, sector, or an alliance" (Balmer and Wilkinson 1991 in Balmer 2012:1069). Thus, it may be applied in a tourism context VT (viewed as the organisation) and stakeholder interconnectedness. The model is first and foremost implemented in the analysis of the DMO's communicated brand identity and brand promise of AO tourism in relation to how these aspects are perceived by the AO stakeholders. In other words, the contents of stakeholder interviews and DMO interviews are arranged in a gap-analysis of the current AO tourism branding situation through identifying the identity types in the model. The overall aim is to examine whether the stakeholders' identities are in line with the communicated brand identity(ies) by VT. In agreement with Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) and Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt (2012), Balmer (2012) acknowledges the perspective of multiple identities which he perceives as inclusive and multidisciplinary. These identities – such as CB identity – are displayed differently and have various "realities" (Balmer 2012:1072). Thus, my definition of destination brand identity can be regarded by applying this model to the research.

The original model is the ACID Test of corporate identity management created by Balmer and Soenen in 1999, which then led to the newer AC2ID Test (Balmer 2001), that has regard to managers, employees, competitors, media and consumers, that are the relevant components (Illia and Lurati 2006). The model structures a "gap test" between five types of organisational identities; actual, communicated, conceived, ideal and desired identities (Balmer 2001).

Nevertheless, the latest version of the original ACID Test is the AC4ID Test, which revolves around corporate branding through the identity approach (Abratt and Mingione 2017). The main reasons for selecting the AC4ID Test is that it is the most recent model and it can be used in different ways (Balmer 2012). For instance, it includes "strategic corporate marketing" (Balmer 2012:1067). The model is relevant, since the research deals with the present identity creation within a CB, which Abratt and Mingione define as "expressions and images of an organization's identity" (Abratt and Mingione 2017:129). In this context, various stakeholders play a central role (Abratt and Mingione 2017). The AC4ID model is used in synergy with the content analysis, however, it has a supplementary function in the analysis. The entire model consists of seven identity types that shape the CB, since two new types have been added to the former AC2ID Test: covenanted and cultural identities (Balmer 2012). The various identity types found in the AC4ID Test are displayed in the table below, of which the first five are used (See Table 6). Balmer (2012) stresses that “the AC4ID Test approach can be of assistance to corporate marketing managers in ensuring their corporate brands remain vital and meaningful to the firm, to its shareholders and to its other stakeholders” (Balmer 2012:1067). The applied and simplified version of the AC4ID Test is called “Corporate brand being” which zooms in on the corporate brand constellation in the current time frame (Balmer 2012:1081). This version (Figure 3) contains the actual, cultural, covenanted, communicated and conceived identity types (Balmer 2012). Applied to the context of AO tourism, the *actual* identity is the corporate identity and may be understood as the core abilities of AO supported by facts. To me this is the stakeholders’ identities and the event / activities they offer. The *cultural* identity is related to employees’ “collective feeling” of the CB (AO) and according to Balmer, this notion may include AO stakeholders who consider themselves a member of a CB community (Balmer 2012:1079), essentially VTMs. Though organisational culture is meant, in this research I apply this concept to the collective constructions of the AO Brand identity in the focus group interview. The *covenanted* identity refers to a number of promises and relations linked with the CB identity of AO (e.g. the CB’s visual identity). I see this as VT’s brand promise and positioning of the AO brand identity. The *communicated* identity is what VT communicates to tourists and stakeholders about the CB of AO. In this context, stakeholder identifications become relevant through *conceived* identity, which ultimately are the constructed perceptions or images of the CB of AO. The last identity type is important for both individuals and groups when creating brand meaning (Balmer 2012), and thus, brand advocates, brand detractors and brand terrorists exist (Balmer 2005a in Balmer 2012). Since these identity types may be identified, in my opinion, this version makes the complexity of the corporate branding more feasible. In this context, Zenker et al. state that “(…) complexity is theoretically still not comprehensively derived in place studies” (2017:24). Due to this complexity, I implement this model. First the different identity types are identified and then they are connected in all directions with the covenanted and actual identities that have a central position. Eventually, the misaligned identities can be arranged through action of a strategy (Balmer 2012). In addition, there is another simplified version of the AC4ID model labelled “Corporate brand becoming” which deals with the future time frame of the CB constellation (Balmer 2012:1081). In spite of this, the version concerning the present situation is considered the most relevant in relation to the research question. Eventually, when dealing with identities in general (including CB identities) it should be regarded that these are constantly in the making, developing and never “perfectly made” (Balmer 2012:1076).

Identity type	Explanation	Approach / Construct
Actual Identity	“What the firm’s identity is indubitably found to be”	Corporate identity
Communicated CB Identity	“What the corporation claims the CB to be”	CB communication
Conceived CB Identity	“What the CB is seen to be”	Corporate images / stakeholder identifications
Covenanted CB Identity	“What the brand promises to be”	CB
Cultural CB Identity	“What the CB culture is found to be”	CB culture
Ideal CB Identity	“What the CB needs to be”	CB strategy (the optimal / strategic positioning for a CB in a determined time-frame)
Desired CB Identity	“What senior managers wish the CB to be”	CB vision

Table 6 AC4ID Test: Identities forming the CB constellation. Source: (Balmer 2012:1077), own reconstruction.

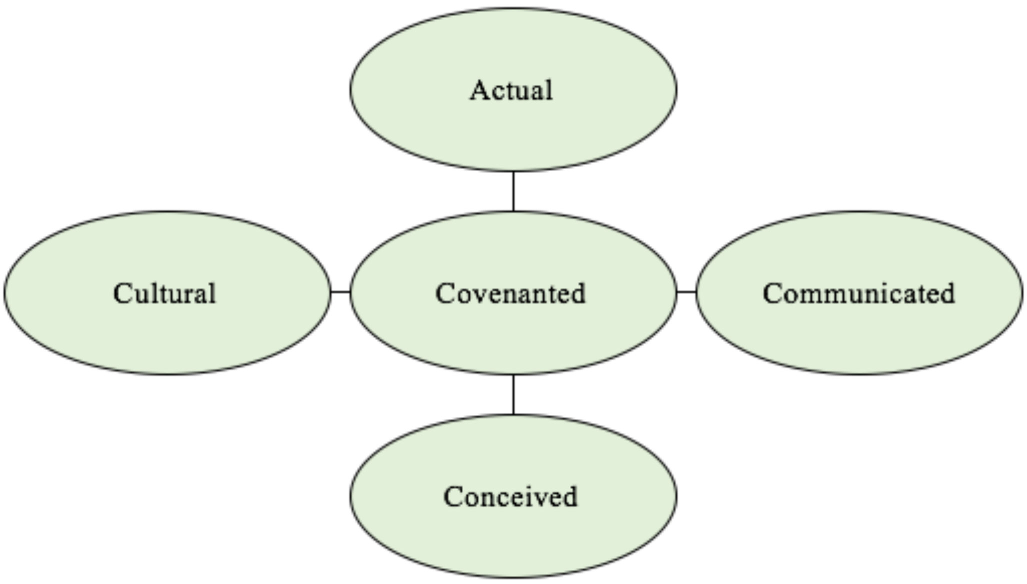

Figure 3 AC4ID version: Corporate brand being. Source: (Balmer 2012:1081), own reconstruction.

Destination Marketing Organisation and stakeholder collaboration

In continuation of the model, it is crucial to understand that the covenanted identity (CB promise) can be co-created by stakeholders (Balmer 2012). Pike (2005) states that DMOs are establishing public-private partnerships. In spite of DMOs having "relatively little control" (Morgan et al. 2002:338), they are involved in collaboration with locals and other stakeholders in order to cope with issues regarding sustainability and development (Harrill 2009). "Perhaps the most distinctive skill of professional marketers is their ability to create, maintain, protect, and enhance brands" (Kotler 2003:418 qtd. in Blichfeldt 2005:389). Blain et al. argue that many DMOs perceive branding as solely constructing logos and taglines, however branding includes many aspects (Blain et al. 2005 in Harrill 2009). Nevertheless, this research examines the communicated brand identity of AO tourism. Destination marketers have to face challenges regarding e.g. limited budgets, and therefore they need to search alternatives by "creating innovative, attention-grabbing advertising on a budget and maximizing the media spend" (Morgan and Pritchard 2000:275). Many DMOs publish blueprints (e.g. tourism strategies) online as a tool to assist all marketing communications of the DMO itself and destination stakeholders (Pike and Page 2014). The idea of communicating a clear message through one voice to the tourists requires a networking-based marketing collaboration (Therkelsen 2007). According to Harrill (2009), the DMOs that are the most successful manage to build partnerships and collaborative networks. Sheehan et al. propose four main strategies for a DMO's favourable result (Sheehan et al. 2007 in Harrill 2009:452):

1. Use a collaborative strategy with strategic stakeholders.
2. Establish this strategy when these stakeholders appear on the board of directors.
3. Assure personal, consistent, frequent and clear communication with the board members.
4. Receive, explain and spread market information to stakeholders.

As these strategies imply, collaboration between the DMO and the stakeholders is key. Destination brands are challenging since they contain various types of stakeholders with diverse identities who have different interests and purposes within the destination (Balmer and Greyser 2006 in Wheeler et al. 2011). Nevertheless, this research examines one specific stakeholder group with a common interest in the field of AO. In spite of the common denominator, they are all different individuals. Buhalis argues that the process of realising the most important values held by the stakeholders may be complex (Buhalis 2000 in Wheeler et al. 2011). However, the stakeholders should have the opportunity to express various views in the brand creation process. Baker (2007) discusses how stakeholders as multiple operators can be supported in order to project one voice. This requires a clear definition of the stakeholders' roles in the brand management process (Baker in Hanna and Rowley 2011). It is argued that stakeholder groups strengthen consistency among members and the chance of collaboration and agreement culminating in projecting a "unified identity" (Sautter and Leisen 1999; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001 in Hanna and Rowley 2011:466). In this context, Hanna and Rowley (2011) conclude that when stakeholders perceive themselves as partners in the brand creation process, they will advocate the branding strategy and carry out the experience of that brand.

Wheeler et al. further emphasize the central role that stakeholders have in relation to brand identity creation: "Identity is the source of the desired image, and control of it would appear to rest quite firmly with the destination stakeholders" (Wheeler et al. 2011:16). According to Cai (2002), brand identity is co-constructed and made more specific by the multiplicity of stakeholders in the sense of offering experiences and presenting what the destination is known for through e.g. place symbols and events. Ooi (2004) suggests that stakeholders may also pursue their own interests in this process. The negotiated processes between different tourism stakeholders interested in having a brand and branding strategy that incorporates their individual needs, are referred to as *politics.* On the other hand, the term *poetics* describes the branding process of creating a unique and appealing brand story to tourists and potential tourists in order to affect their perceptions of the destination in a positive way (Ooi 2004). This is a "duality" of the same story, nevertheless, in this research the *politics* are in focus. However, as Therkelsen (2007) proposes, not all stakeholders may be interested in supporting a destination brand, if they already possess a strong brand. In this case, they could pursue their own strategies. Furthermore, some stakeholders may not be willing to collaborate and they could potentially communicate messages about the destination that are in fact inconsistent with the destination brand (Ooi 2004; Pike 2004, 2005). Then, there may be issues connected with the stakeholders who are represented on the tourism boards, since they may be pursuing their own interests or objectives (Pike 2005). Nevertheless, the branding process should be holistic and explore the organisation or the entity from both a supply and demand side perspective, and not solely take tourists' perceptions into account, however consider other stakeholders' as well (Saraniemi 2010).

Collaboration is key when dealing with place branding as the approach is "a dialogue between stakeholders because brands are built out of the 'raw material' of identity and identity emerges in the conversation between stakeholders and what brings them together" (Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013:82). Seeing that branding is a joint approach, it is considered a process which emphasizes a dialogue between stakeholders (Hatch and Schultz 2008, 2009 in Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013). This is related to the concept of brand co-creation (Hatch and Schultz 2010 in Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013). According to Hanna and Rowley (2011), research should bring more attention to the elements of place brands in order to comprehend "the sub-processes of those components, their 'agents', relationships, and interactions" (Hanna and Rowley 2011:473). They further imply that branding is an interactive and developing process and similarly to the process concerning identity, it does not end. However, it is solely possible if the brand is considered as flexible and open. Flexibility is important in order to accommodate the disordered processes that construct identity with the aim of satisfying the internal and external changes when defining brand identity. They further stress that the branding process should be open so that different interpretations and constructed meanings may be implemented, considered and either strengthened or declined. Thus, the brand should be open to internal and external suggestions from various kinds of stakeholders, which is solely possible if branding is perceived as a process altogether and considers a "relational network brand" (Hanna and Rowley 2011:466). Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) further point out that place brand managers (in this case the DMO) are responsible for facilitating the stakeholders' collective creation of the brand. On this basis, the decision making process is established and stakeholders are dominant influencers: "Place brand managers are, in our approach, called to initiate, facilitate, and stimulate the place brand construction process as this is undertaken by stakeholders" (Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013:82).

Destination branding strategy

There is an indispensable link between brand identity and branding strategy as Aaker expresses by stating that brand identity is supposed to be active and focused on future perspectives (Aaker 2004 in Dahlén et al. 2010). Thus, "brand identity should be strategic" (Dahlén et al. 2010:213). Moilanen and Rainisto argue that in order for successful place marketing, the place needs to differ clearly from other competing places and thus "cluster building is one efficient way to establish critical mass and credibility" (2009:26). In addition, each cluster should be perceived as a sub-brand (ibid).

Temporal (2015) argues that it is challenging for brand managers to implement and manage a branding strategy, because different factors influence the ultimate brand image and whether it is in agreement with the desired brand identity. In line with the preceding sections, he points out the importance of all stakeholders' involvement in the process of creating, implementing and managing a branding strategy in order for it to be successful. If this is not the case, intra-brand competition may appear. In Aaker and Joachimsthaler's (2000) opinion it is further essential that the brand identity strategy solely commits to what the entity actually offers. This is in line with Pike, who points out that a brand is not solely a symbol or a name, however "it is a promise to the consumer, so it must stand for something: that is, and it must be valued" (Pike 2008 in Wheeler et al. 2011:15). As a contrast, Um and Crompton claim that tourists select a destination based on their mental constructions (brand image) of it in relation to their needs, which makes the idea of communicating an image that is truthfully representative less significant (Um and Crompton 1990 in Cai 2002). Thus, Cai (2002) suggests that marketing managers are interested in creating strong and positive images for the destination.

Umbrella branding challenges

Temporal argues that brand images are significant by stating that "the only thing that any public sector entity can create that is not capable of being copied, is a powerful brand image" (Temporal 2015:7). When claiming "public sector", it is an umbrella term that includes destinations under the control of governments (Temporal 2015), and thereby the DMO. Temporal further stresses that if the brand images do not correspond with the brand identity that the destination wants to project, perception gaps will occur. In essence, creating a point of differentiation and, as Cai (2002) stresses, a positive image is key for the DMO (Temporal 2015). However, the destination's actual resources and identity should have a central role when creating the strategy (Therkelsen 2007). Therkelsen draws attention to some potential issues connected with umbrella branding initiatives (ibid). An umbrella branding strategy is essentially a "house" brand incorporating different services or products (Dahlén et al. 2010). Therkelsen (2007) claims that the brand may become too heterogeneous and thereby not establishing a common platform for the destination (a non-brand). By pursuing a common denominator that includes all interest groups, the brand may become too broad failing to appeal to any specific target audiences and could represent any place (a destination-anywhere brand). Alternatively, the brand may prioritise selected, typically strong stakeholders' interests resulting in a brand which is not representative of the place (a biased brand). Eventually, she stresses the challenge of representing all stakeholders' interests in a joint branding strategy which establishes synergy for all the parties concerned. Nonetheless, as indicated by Temporal (2015), the success of a branding strategy in the long run depends on the consumers' interpretations of and reactions to the marketing efforts (Therkelsen 2007).

Communicating brand identity

"Brand communications is particularly important as it seeks to impart the key messages of the brand internally and externally and if not carefully constructed can be very inconsistent at times" (Temporal 2015:175). If there is drawn too much attention to communications and inappropriate channels are chosen, it may lead to intra-brand competition. When communicating, it is crucial that the brand's key messages are tailored to the different target audiences. Basically, the brand communication strategy should be able to present both overall master brand messages and sub-positioning messages constructed for various target audiences (Temporal 2015). In this context, Zenker and Braun state that sub-brands could be created through an umbrella branding strategy targeting various specific target groups (2010 in Zenker et al. 2017). Zenker et al. further suggest that creating a place's sub-brand for its residents could portray an image that reflects their demographical differences. To some extent, these notions could be an expansion of the diversity branding suggested by Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) and Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt (2012), since Temporal (2015) proposes both overall messages and messages tailored to different tourists. In this way, it would be possible to implement a branding strategy founded on multiple images that "(…) might enable the creation of more dynamic, heterogeneous and inclusive destination brand" (Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012:14). As a contrast to the notion of diversity branding suggested by Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), Zenker et al. (2017) imply, that if a brand is too complex it may lead to fuzzy place brand communication. At the same time, Zenker et al. acknowledge that too simple brand communication solely targeting external audiences may threaten the community's (e.g. the stakeholders's) support for the place branding efforts. Therefore, they argue that place marketers should construct a manageable degree in order to cope with brand complexity and adjust branding to specific target groups (ibid). In relation to stakeholders, they claim that residents may perceive the place on a higher "stress level" than tourists (2017:24).

In practice, storytelling may be used as a branding tool which can add meaning to people's lives and make sense of the world. In addition, stories may be used in order to communicate the identity (Fog, Budtz, and Yakaboylu 2004). Jensen and Jepsen argue that successful brands create good stories for the purpose of reaching marketing objectives and making a brand more sustainable (Jensen and Jepsen 2006 in Dahlén et al. 2010).

External and internal perspectives

When examining branding of AO tourism, it is important to distinguish between internal and external market orientation (Therkelsen, Halkier, and Jensen 2010). Since this research revolves around tourism, branding is mainly concerned with the external aspect of branding. However, branding a place (in this case special interest tourism within a destination) is not one or the other, and therefore both internal and external issues should be regarded (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005; Hankinson 2007 in Therkelsen et al. 2010). As stressed by Hanna and Rowley (2011) destination brand identity creation depends on both internal and external considerations and changes.

Sub-conclusion and implementation

The presented interconnected ideas and concepts focus on the complex nature of brand identity creation. These are implemented through an overall self-analysis from a supply-side perspective in relation to the more inclusive concept of a multiple brand. More specifically, the following content analysis includes a gap-analysis through the use of a version of the AC4ID model that regards the present brand identity creation. This model is applied to the context of tourism marketing and acknowledges the existence of multiple identities. The challenging branding process requires collaboration between the DMO and the stakeholders in which a dialogue between these stakeholders is facilitated by the DMO. In this context, stakeholder groups strengthen consistency between members which may lead to collaboration and agreement resulting in a unified identity. A destination branding strategy should exhibit a representative brand which is a promise to the tourist, while simultaneously presenting key messages. As a compromise, it may communicate both master brand messages and sub-positioning messages.

Analysis

This self-analysis connected to the supply-side perspective of destination branding is relevant to the research, since it is imperative to examining the various AO identities presented through the AC4ID version, namely the corporate brand being of AO. The covenanted and communicated AO brand identities are managed by the DMO (VT), while the AO stakeholders' identities are presented through the actual AO identity, since they define the existing AO sphere. First, VT is introduced as the DMO of Thy with the aim of gaining insight into its functions and its present branding strategy that positions the AO brand identity. This is relevant, since VT is in control of formulating the brand identity. Next, this specific brand identity of AO is studied as it is constructed and communicated by VT and as it is conceived by the AO stakeholders. Further, the cultural identity is revealed through the focus group analysis. Additional relevant information to the branding process is regarded from both the DMO's and the stakeholders' perspectives in the final section revolved around co-creation. In essence, this chapter is a gap-analysis that looks into the present brand identity creation in order to understand whether a new branding strategy is applicable.

Destination Marketing Organisation

This part of the analysis examines VT's functions in the destination branding of Thy in which the current branding strategy with its positioning of the AO brand identity is presented.

VisitThy – in a complex reality

Seeing that VisitThy is the marketing organisation as well as the management organisation of Thy, it has various functions. For instance, the organisation is responsible for managing both social, political and economic aspects of tourism by bringing local authorities together and making marketing of local products and tourism beyond the region more effective (Lane 2009). In continuation, it is dealing with both the supply and demand side of tourism (Saraniemi 2010). VT is collaborating with partners on local, regional and national levels, such as local stakeholders, Thisted municipality, Danish coastal and nature-based tourism, VisitDenmark and VisitNorthJutland (Riis, exploratory (E) interview, appx. 4). In this context, the destination branding is teaming up with the national branding. The organisation operates as a local branch of the national branding through VisitDenmark and it is further maintained through membership contributions. The current principle of VT is that members are invited to participate, share opinions and ideas: "So it always starts with people coming to us" (Riis, focused (F) interview appx. 4: 32:19). This means, that members are advised to take the initiative in collaborating with the DMO.

VT is not unescorted when branding the destination and as suggested by Balmer (2012), the covenanted identity (CB promise) may be co-created by other stakeholders. Recently, Bakkedal (a Danish butter product brand with origins in Thy) started branding it product's origins in Thy through a visual and emotional marketing campaign that constructs a strong tie to the place and its unique characteristics like the ironic "Fitness centre in Thy" (see appx. 2) as there is no actual centre, solely nature (Riis, E, appx. 4: 23:00). The campaign was created by the local producer in cooperation with VT (ibid). Then, VT is proactively involved in the collaboration with the strong sub-brand of Cold Hawaii and its marketing aspects: "I'm involved in many actions connected with the surfers. Like now for instance, at World Championship, I'm involved (…)" (ibid: 8:20). A surfer is representing surfers in the board of directors and there is no doubt that surfing (through the sub-brand of Cold Hawaii) attracts tourists (ibid):

"There are two who make a bolt for it in the branding. And these are the surfers and the National Park" (ibid: 10:00). "The cultural history is also interesting, so the narrative of the area, but what particularly attracts people to come and visit this area is that you want to come and see what you've heard about (…) it's the surf sphere that pulls people to the coast and then the National Park" (ibid: 9:44).

Consequently, VT is coping with tourism challenges that for instance are occurring in the village Klitmøller caused by the substantial number of tourists during the Summer months: "I got a complaint from a couple from Viborg who thought it was too bad that they drove to Klitmøller and then they couldn't get back because of the many cars (…)" (ibid: 11:57). Hence, VT is dealing with external brand communications such as this word-of-mouth example, which vastly influences the brand meaning (Berry 2000 in Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012). As the example unveils, the DMO has to consider the multiplicity of brand images (both negative and positive) when branding the destination (Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt 2012). VT further has to respect socio-cultural aspects which e.g. in the past concerned the paradigmatic conflict between fishermen and surfers. However, this antipathy has evolved into collaboration and co-existence (Riis, E, appx. 4).

The DMO is not in accord with the idea of a target audience and thus explains that a tourist possesses many identities: “In some situations he is with those who always surround him in a group (…) in another context, he is the father in a family playing with his children, then a granddad leaving for a wellness trip (…) (ibid: 5:08). However, when branding special interest tourism – in particular AO - specific target audiences exist depending on interests e.g. horseback riding, hiking, sport events or surfing (Riis, F, appx. 4). These could be interpreted as Temporal’s (2015) sub-positioning messages constructed for different target audiences.

Destination branding strategy

As introduced, VT is branding Thy through categorised marketing consisting of four branding “pillars” (Figure 4). In the theory, this is referred to as cluster building, where each cluster should be identified as a sub-brand (Moilanen and Rainisto 2009). These sub-brands or ‘pillars’ are: wind energy, Thy National Park, Cold Hawaii and culture / heritage (Riis, E, appx. 4). Wind energy is a pillar that includes business tourism in the sense of international conferences and is dominated by a national test centre for large wind turbines in Østerild launched in 2012 (Osterild VT 2017). According to Riis (ibid), this sphere is increasingly in focus and should be developed in order to attract more business tourism. Next, Thy National Park is a pillar and a sub-brand which is the contemporary symbol of nature. In spite of the fact that it far from covers the entire area of Thy through its 244 square kilometres along the coast line and is labelled “Denmark’s Greatest Wilderness” (Nationalparkthy 2017), it is representing “nature” of Thy (Riis, F, appx. 4). The current project labelled “stepping stones to nature” is making nature more accessible for tourists and creates points of departure (Riis, E, appx. 4: 6:50). Similarly, to the sub-brand of the National Park, the pillar of Cold Hawaii is a sub-brand in which thirty-one surf spots along the coast line of Thy are represented. It is the surfers’ sub-brand, yet according to Riis (Riis, F, appx. 4), it includes other water sports such as sea kayak. The present challenge within this pillar is to spread surfing tourism to avoid overcrowding in Klitmøller. Riis perceives Cold Hawaii as the “active” branding pillar by stating: “This one is the active with surf and waves (…)” (ibid: 15:25). Lastly, the culture / heritage pillar is more “fluffy”, since it overlaps the other pillars in similar fashion as “nature”. The entities of nature and culture may to some extent be comparable to the Keller’s (2003) concept of points-of-parity, since these are to be found in any other destination. The culture / heritage pillar’s focal point is cultural history which is communicated through storytelling in the sense of a narrative of the place. “Nature and cultural history are more likely a part of everything else” (Riis, E, appx. 4: 7:20). The ambiguous essence of the entity "nature" is further expressed through the quotation: "the fourth (pillar) is nature and cultural history" (Riis, F, appx. 4: 15:35). It is evident that "nature" is the foundation for the message that is communicated to the tourist and for that reason it may be debatable whether it can be squeezed into a single pillar.

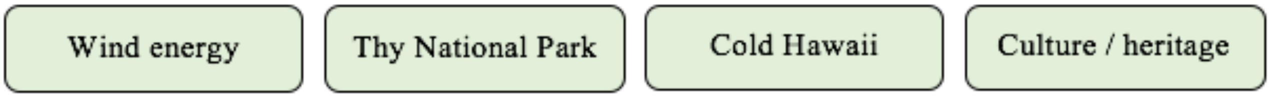

Figure 4 VT's branding strategy: The four pillars. Source: (Riis, E, appx. 4), own reconstruction.

Eventually, since AO activities take place in nature, "(it) means that it falls under these pillars… and is part of the narratives" (Riis, F, appx. 4: 18:48). However, within the branding strategy, AO is positioned in the pillar of Thy National Park as experiences in nature: "(…) outdoor forms part of many, many other things… almost everything (…) If you talk about the National Park, at the same time you inform about the existing opportunities to experience it, if you are active" (ibid: 7:05). Generally seen, the AO sphere that is researched through this thesis (AO excluding surfing) is branded via the pillar of Thy National Park as AO experiences and it forms part of an overall narrative: "Well, first and foremost it becomes a part of the story about the area with its history and what is special about Thy National Park (…) (ibid: 12:00).

VT claims that all branding pillars are marketed equally, however Thy National Park and Cold Hawaii are the most presiding from an external brand image perspective (Riis, E, appx. 4). However, as argued by Cai (2002), VT may be interested in creating strong and positive images for the destination: "(…) but the waves in that way are special. So you could say that in the sense of branding, it sells well" (ibid: 40:42). The waves, represented through Cold Hawaii, can be seen as Keller's (2003) concept of points-of-difference that gives the destination a unique competitive advantage. In fact, VT appears to be collaborating primarily with Cold Hawaii: "the surfers, as an example, who I've stuck most together with (…) we are also very engaged with the surfers in relation to the use of marketing" (Riis, F, appx. 4: 34:23). Considering the destination brand, it may be related to Therkelsen's (2007) concept of a biased brand, since in this case it comes across as that strong stakeholders' interests are prioritised resulting in a brand which is not representative of the place. Nevertheless, she claims that it is challenging to represent all stakeholders' interests in a joint branding strategy that creates synergy for all involved parties (ibid).

Brand identity creation

As implied above, the AO sphere is fuzzy and it may be debatable whether AO is solely positioned within the pillar of Thy National Park as intended through VT's branding strategy. In order to examine how the brand identity of AO is communicated, first the DMO's construction of it should be identified. This section displays the *covenanted* identity presented in Balmer's (2012) model, since it is connected to the promises and relations related to the AO brand identity. VT has a broad understanding of AO tourism and accordingly, it may be associated with events, outdoor activities and even traditional sports played outside such as volleyball, handball, football (Riis, F, appx. 4). Nevertheless, in the context of tourism, AO events and activities that to some extent offer a unique experience in nature are the most salient (ibid). I interpret this notion as a unique experience that fits into the overall narrative of Thy communicated by VT (see the following section). This is an extensive understanding that could include all the AO stakeholders' identities encountered and examined through the research. It may be representing the complexity of the destination's AO identities and potentially draw lines to Ren and Blichfeldt's (2011) and Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt's (2012) concept of a multiple brand that stands for various brand identities. In spite of VT's interpretation of the field of AO, which may lead to strategic diversity branding as stressed by Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), there appears to be a biased perception of the "active" tourist: "If it's one of the very active, he or she might be interested in seeing what the surfers do (…) it can be combined in various ways" (Riis, F, appx. 4: 11:42). In this context, there is a mental construct about the idea of "active", which is connected to the pillar of Cold Hawaii that currently attracts more tourists than the other branding pillars: "Outdoor is what nature… gives us the opportunity to (experience), and in particular at the west coast it is surfing at the moment, but we also have canoeing, sea kayak, which makes progress" (ibid: 5:20). Ultimately, VT seeks to maintain a multiple AO brand representing different identities. Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) argue that acknowledging the diversity and multiplicity within the destination can generate more reliable, broadly appealing and distinguished place brands.

Communicated brand identity

This section presents the *communicated* identity displayed in Balmer's (2012) model, which is what VT communicates to tourists and stakeholders about the AO sphere. The multiplicity-directed approach to VT's branding of AO is essentially diversity branding proposed by Ren and Blichfeldt (2011). It is mainly communicated in a combination with other aspects of the destination. However, as stated previously, VT markets AO special interests such as horseback riding, sports events and cycling (see marketing materials, appx. 3) to specific target audiences, which can be compared to Temporal's (2015) sub-positioning messages constructed for different target audiences. In spite of this segmentation after interest, VT's branding of AO is positioned as a component in the narrative of the place: "It actually forms part of the main narrative (…) about all that is here" (Riis, F, appx. 4: 8:05). Storytelling is applied as a branding tool which according to Fog et al. (2004) may be used in order to communicate the identity(ies). Jensen and Jepsen claim that successful brands construct good stories for the purpose of obtaining marketing objectives and making a brand more sustainable (2006 in Dahlén et al. 2010). VT (Riis, F, appx. 4) stresses that storytelling adds value to the activity in the sense that it also becomes an experience. As an example of the connected narrative, the marketing manager displays a print advertisement labelled "Summer experiences in Thy" that offers a two-day all-inclusive hiking trip including cultural experiences, cultural history and a comprehensive experience of Thy (see appx. 3). In this context, it is relevant to question the marketing manager's personal influence on the communicated brand identity through this quotation: "A person is not solely active, the brain is not just filled with the "body", or? You also have to go out and experience something else" (Riis, F, appx. 4: 11:30). He further questions, why there should not be more focus on cultural history, culture and heritage, since by now AO is branded sufficiently via all marketing materials (ibid). To some extent, the marketing manager's own interests are affecting the branding of AO, and on this account, it may be discussed whether the DMO has little control as stated by Morgan et al. (2002). Hankinson argues that the "leadership by the CEO and the senior management team is likely to have a strong influence on both the direction and the implementation of brand orientation" (2012:977). He further claims that the more the DMO's senior management group contributes to the branding process, the greater is its brand orientation. This is relevant to the research, because (as the following section implies) the AO stakeholders are not particularly involved in the branding of AO tourism.

On the other hand, surfing stakeholders appear to be more engaged. In addition, surfing seems to be branded differently through the implementation of relatively innovative branding channels such as bloggers. For instance, VT (Riis, F, appx. 4) made alliances with a couple of bloggers who wrote about surfing and the sub-brand of Cold Hawaii. Accordingly, VT (ibid) stresses that AO stakeholders have the opportunity to do so as well.

According to Therkelsen (2007), the DMO's purpose is to communicate a clear message through one voice to the tourists which requires networking-based marketing collaboration. In my opinion, Temporal (2015) constructs an applicable branding strategy that reaches a compromise between communicating one clear image and multiple images through a multiple brand. However, this requires identifying AO key messages that can become the overall master brand messages. In this context, VT appears to have a vision that could benefit the concept of AO and the future communication of its brand identity: "We need to create a message that makes it clear why you should come up here" (Riis, F, appx. 4: 22:00). In this context, Zenker et al.'s notion may be applied: "(…) place brand communication can become fuzzy if the brand is too complex" (2017:24). Thus, VT (F, appx. 4) may be seeking to adopt an overall master brand message as suggested by Temporal (2015) in order to communicate the AO brand identity.

Stakeholders

This part of the analysis presents the stakeholders' identities and studies how the branding strategy together with its positioning of the AO brand identity is conceived by the AO stakeholders. Lastly, the cultural identity is constructed through a collective meaning making within the focus group.

Stakeholders' identities

This section refers to Balmer's (2012) *actual* identity, since it is interpreted as the AO stakeholders' identities. The examined stakeholders' identities are to be identified in this research in order to determine the actual identities that can be perceived as the "core competencies of the corporation" (Wintershied 1994 in Balmer 2012:1077). In this research the corporation is interpreted as the stakeholders' businesses, e.g. activities, events or both, and what type of experience that is offered. This is due to the importance of the foundation of resources managed by the stakeholders on which the branding is built. The AO businesses applied to this research will be introduced briefly and continually throughout the following analysis sections. This section portrays a sample of the AO sphere's diversity through which multiple identities are constructed. Eventually, the actual identity is aligned with the covenanted identity (brand promise) examined previously.

The activities and events available to tourists include cycling, hiking, mountain biking (MTB), horseback riding, canoeing, rappelling, tree climbing, running, orienteering, sailing, walking, segway and yoga. As acknowledged by Wheeler et al. (2011) and Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), there are different stakeholders with multiple identities within a destination. Despite dealing with a segmentation of stakeholders within a specific AO sphere, the identities are even now multiple. Thus, it may be problematic to determine main identity features as suggested by Balmer (2012). The majority of stakeholders (Søvndal, Tvillinggaard, Åkerstrøm, Nymann, M. Mark, Højlund, Ruby, Tilsted, K. Kristensen, P. Kristensen, J. Jensen, H. Jensen and L. Mark, appx. 4) explicitly agree on nature experiences as being fundamental for their identities. Søvndal (appx. 4: 20:00), who is the manager of ThyRace sports events, points out that "it is in fact nature that I have as a connecting link to everything". Next, all stakeholders add attributes to the offered experiences, which differentiate them. The manager of HP Kayak and Leisure (translated), who offers canoeing, describes a unique experience: "The experience of something rugged (…) feeling the weather, the power of nature and they (tourists) are often surprised by the power of a North Sea wave" (Tilsted, appx. 4: 7:07). The offered experiences are coordinated with the characteristics of the businesses' identities. For instance, some mainly target families with children, while others focus on teambuilding or are more related to adventure tourism. As an example of diversity, the sports event Agger Athlon, that combines sports associations, offers family friendly activities (M. Mark, appx. 4), whereas the sports events by ThyRace mainly attract the more adventurous and competitive sports tourist (Søvndal, appx. 4). Some stakeholders are more flexible through customised experiences, such as Åkerstrøm, who offers riding tours in Thy: "For some it is horses and the joy of riding a horse (…) for others it is a nature experience and the storytelling combined with the National Park (…) then it may also be an adventurous gallop for those who can ride" (Åkerstrøm, appx. 4: 12:25). There are various activities and events to be experienced in Thy, however the meanings attached to the experiences are individual and depend on the tourists who experience them, which can be studied through a tourist analysis (Ruzzier and Ruzzier 2009). However, these sections of the self-analysis are dealing with the stakeholders' interests and how they construct AO and make sense of the present AO brand identity. M. Mark (appx. 4) stresses, that constructing a unique AO experience in Thy is key in the context of branding. As an example, he mentions that once a very sports ambitious woman who was participating in a run offered by Agger Athlon in Thy, stated that it was the most amazing trail she had ever run. “She was anticipating to reach a new PR (…) then she saw a roe deer in beautiful nature and forgot all about the time. It was unique. This is the experience that Agger Athlon wants to sell” (ibid: 18:15). The stakeholder indicate that the offered activities and events are much more through the enjoyment of experiencing nature at the same time. As appointed, VT seeks to brand these various identities through a multiple AO brand identity used in a combined narrative about Thy, which is the brand promise or covenanted brand identity. When aligning the covenanted identity with the presented actual identity, they appear to be a pair due to their complex nature mirroring diversity. Despite this alignment, the identities lack more explicit overall master brand messages, as proposed by Temporal (2015). The issue with pursuing a common denominator that includes all stakeholders, is that the brand may become too broad failing to appeal to specific target audiences and could represent any place resulting in a destination-anywhere brand (Therkelsen 2007). This notion is underpinned by Zenker et al. who note that “(…) too much perceived brand complexity could lower the distinctiveness of a place, as the features of said place would seem too similar to other places” (2017:24). VT’s broad understanding and brand promise of AO tourism may cause higher identification among the stakeholders, however the suggested weaknesses are not to be ignored.

Based on this introductory section displaying an extensive identity of various “unique nature experiences” as the fundamental component of the majority of stakeholders’ identities, the questions are: How do they position themselves in VT’s destination branding strategy and how is the AO brand identity perceived?

Stakeholders between branding pillars and brand communications

The previous section introduces the stakeholders’ multiple identities in the destination context and prepares the way for examining how the AO brand identity communicated by VT is perceived. This is the *conceived* identity proposed by Balmer (2012), which are individually or collectively constructed perceptions or images of the AO brand identity. In this context, both data from the individual and group interviews with the stakeholders is analysed and viewed in the context of the broader destination branding strategy. This is due to the fact that not all stakeholders position themselves within the branding pillar of Thy National Park as intended by VT. Thus, various brand meanings are to be found through patterns, which according to Balmer (2012) can be categorised as brand advocates, brand detractors and brand terrorists referring to accepting, adapting or rejecting the

CB. This section is structured according to the stakeholders' positioning within the present branding strategy.

Thy National Park

In M. Mark's opinion, the resource of nature becomes points-of-difference through the Thy National Park sub-brand, as it is special: "To me this is unique and that's where I saw the opportunity to do something in Denmark that was somehow extraordinary" (appx. 4: 11:29). This stakeholder is a brand advocate, since the branding pillar contributes to differentiating his business from others. In the context of globalisation, this notion is essential and the brand identity should contribute to a unique competitive advantage through a brand that captures the destination's culture with reference to the "extraordinary" (Smith 1989 qtd. in Konecnik and Go 2008:177). In continuation of this notion about the brand positioning, Søvndal (appx. 4) wants to present the uniqueness of the National Park explicitly through the dune landscape. He is a brand advocate as well, since he states that ThyRace could be divided into two branches with one centred around sports and nature through the unique landscape and the other branch defining the experience, e.g. teambuilding preferably in nature. In this way, the positioning within the branding strategy is appropriate and in line with the communicated brand identity of special interest tourism.

H. Jensen and J. Jensen (appx. 4), managers of Northwest Orienteering Club (translated) who offer activities and events for mainly families, further support VT's positioning of AO within this branding pillar. Despite that, it is perceived more as a physical place connection: "It's our sports ground" (ibid: 29:36). Through a collaboration with ThyRace, they arrange its orienteering races and other sports events (ibid). Regarding the marketing materials through which the brand identity is communicated, H. Jensen states that "it is a question of what works. It is too stuffed with information. It is not particularly attention grabbing" (ibid: 36:58). Thus, he is most likely a brand detractor proposing a need for clearer branding messages, or possibly, master brand messages and sub-positioning messages, as suggested by Temporal (2015).

When it comes to a place branding framework, Moilanen and Rainisto (2009) claim that one of the key factors is paying attention to own resources. This factor is relevant in a branding context, since branding is founded on the resources, and if issues appear, they may affect the branding. Despite M. Mark's (appx. 4) advocacy, from his perspective, a fundamental and collaborative challenge between him and The Danish Nature Agency (TDNA) is affecting his perception of this branding pillar. TDNA is an institution under the Danish Ministry of the Environment and is in charge of protecting the natural environment (Naturstyrelsen 2017). In his opinion, there is an opposition to e.g. building permanent MTB trails: “If we could have a permanent trail that mountain bikers could use in the National Park, then it would protect nature more than saying that mountain bikers are not welcome (…). They are here anyway and go criss-cross everywhere” (M. Mark, appx. 4: 23:46). Consequently, it is a struggle to “create outdoor” in Thy because of the many nature regulations (ibid: 25:34). He further states, that AO stakeholders are not well represented in the National Park management (ibid). In addition, Ladywalk in Agger, Thy (L. Mark, appx. 4), which is a national and annual walking event for women, acknowledge the difficulties in getting some trails approved by TDNA. L. Mark (ibid) would also appreciate more outdoor facilities in the National Park such as outdoor training apparatuses. These are examples of a complex reality that may affect the construction of a branding strategy, since the destination’s actual resources and identity should be central to this process (Therkelsen 2007). K. Kristensen and P. Kristensen (appx. 4) state in agreement that there should be a focus on quality through the resources on which the activities and events are founded. They are managers of Thy National Park Marathon and Duathlon (translated) which is a cooperation offering various running distances in the National Park, in which tourists also participate (ibid). Since the “product” needs to be based on quality, collaboration with Thy National Park is inevitable. Nonetheless, there appears to be a lack of assistance as “the only thing they chip in with is that we are allowed to use the name (Thy National Park)” (P. Kristensen, appx. 4: 19:30).

On the other hand, Ruby (appx. 4), who is the manager of Northwest Safari (translated), claims to collaborate harmoniously with the Thy National Park management. Northwest Safari is a mobile outdoor organisation offering different outdoor experiences e.g. cycling, canoeing, teambuilding, courses to mainly the municipality and other businesses. However, tourists are also welcome (ibid). Similarly to H. Jensen and J. Jensen (appx. 4), Ruby (appx. 4) interprets the positioning as a physical place connection: “Although we are not it (Thy National Park), we are a part of it. It’s our action area” (ibid: 48:09). As regards VT’s branding of AO, he argues that its visual identity could be improved since the materials do not differentiate the AO events and activities from other destinations. It is important to recognise the destination on the basis of the materials, and in this context quality is key (Ruby, appx. 4). He may be requesting a focus on points-of-difference by Keller (2003) through the marketing materials. K. Kristensen (appx. 4) further acknowledges the stakeholders’ own responsibilities in delivering quality based content that is shared with VT. In continuation, a number of stakeholders (M. Mark; Åkerstrøm; Tvillinggaard; L. Mark appx. 4) claim that VT's website is bewildering as a branding channel for AO tourism. Thus, Åkerstrøm (appx. 4) is not a VTM and is exclusively found through individual branding channels. In spite of this, she is a brand advocate through her positioning within Thy National Park caused by her physical place connection. However, she states that the branding could be more extensive as she perceives it to be centred around the branding pillar of Cold Hawaii (ibid). Similarly, Tvillinggaard (appx. 4), which is a Bed and breakfast offering accommodation for tourists, tourists with horses and riding tours in the National Park, is content with the positioning within this branding pillar.

In a branding limbo

Some stakeholders (K. Kristensen; P. Kristensen; Nymann; L. Mark, appx. 4) find themselves in a branding limbo as regards the positioning within the present branding strategy. These stakeholders may according to Balmer's (2012) theory be categorised as brand terrorists, since their identities cannot be adjusted to VT's present branding strategy. In this case, Zenker et al.'s (2017) theory regarding a place brand requiring more complexity for residents than a destination brand can provide, can be applied. Both the place brand and the destination brand are combined entities of the overall place brand (ibid). "Residents play a central role in the branding process, and their identification with their place of living can be regarded as both an aim and facilitator of place branding" (ibid: 17). This is relevant, since the stakeholders are simultaneously residents, who in this section do not align themselves with the DMO's branding strategy. The managers (P. Kristensen and K. Kristensen, appx. 4) of Thy National Park Marathon and Duathlon recognise their positioning within the branding pillar of the National Park, however its perceived external image is a concern which is also shared by M. Mark (appx. 4): "One tourist would associate the National Park with tranquil nature experiences and hiking trips. When it's outdoor, then you think running, cycling and water sports and so on. So it belongs to both pillars" (K. Kristensen, appx. 4: 18:47). When stating "both pillars", an AO pillar and a Thy National Park pillar are meant (ibid). Thus, the managers cannot identify themselves in the branding strategy: "I don't think it fits spot on any of the available four pillars, so therefore it becomes an appendix to one of the four pillars. The National Park in this case" (P. Kristensen, appx. 4: 20:54). Their desired branding strategy should therefore incorporate a separate branding pillar interpreted "as an outdoor activity" (K. Kristensen and P. Kristensen, appx. 4: 20:07). P. Kristensen further claims that more AO stakeholders could be included in a such branding pillar: "I think we are placed in a joint pillar with Ladywalk and ThyRace and all the others, as an outdoor activity" (ibid: 20:22). These stakeholders desire a more visible AO branding in a branding strategy (P. Kristensen and K. Kristensen, appx. 4). Similarly to P. Kristensen and K. Kristensen, Nymann's argument contests the positioning within Thy National Park, yet "it's fine with having these groups, but it could also give some limitations" (Nymann, appx. 4: 19:15). Nymann (appx. 4) is managing a historic cycling race called "a spring day in Thy" (translated) which then later included running and duathlon with cycling as a focal point (ibid: 3:49). He is not a VTM and the events mainly target a sports segment of participants between 30-50 years old (ibid). He further agrees with the perceived external image of "quiet" nature experiences that the National Park may contribute to, which does not match his identity of portraying an active lifestyle (ibid). As regards the current branding strategy he expresses that "you could be caught in a box division (…) I think (a pillar) with outdoor activities should be considered instead" (ibid: 20:22).

As a contrast to suggesting a separate AO branding pillar, the stakeholder (L. Mark, appx. 4) connected to Ladywalk in Agger is situated in a limbo between the existing pillars of Thy National Park and Cold Hawaii. "Well, it's both Cold Hawaii and the National Park (…) Cold Hawaii is associated with fresh air, enjoying nature, enjoying everything and this is the same for the National Park" (Sørensen and L. Mark, appx. 4: 33:25). This quotation displays a different perception of the "lifestyle" associations connected to the branding pillars. Further, Cold Hawaii is a physical place connection similarly to the ones associated with Thy National Park: "You see, we are a part of Cold Hawaii. Some think it's only Klitmøller and perhaps it has spread out to Vorupør, but it is actually the entire coast (…)" (L. Mark, appx. 4: 34:18). Caused by the event's location in Agger, at the coast line in Thy, it is perceived to be connected to both branding pillars (ibid). Nevertheless, this notion is in opposition to VT's branding strategy that solely links water sports to the branding pillar of Cold Hawaii. In spite of the fact that Agger is among the thirty-one surf spots along the coast line (Cold Hawaii VT 2017b), Ladywalk (L. Mark, appx. 4) is not a water sport activity. This example underlines the complexity of destination branding and the "blurred lines" of the AO sphere within the present branding strategy. As suggested by Buhalis (2000), the process of realising the values held by the relevant stakeholders can be complex as well (in Wheeler et al. 2011). In this case, the brand identity is conceived bilaterally which constructs multiple identities of "who we are" (Kapferer 1998:71 qtd. In Konecnik and Go 2008:179). Thus, this stakeholder's desired image within the market place (Pike 2004) is a combination of sub-brands. In Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt's (2012) opinion, multiple images or identities play a part in mirroring various representations more accurately in a destination context. In addition, it paves the way for an alternative sub-brand meaning of Cold Hawaii. Should it be interpreted as solely an activity, a place connection or both?

Cold Hawaii

With the above question, the branding pillar of Cold Hawaii is entered. The stakeholders have various perceptions of this branding pillar. According to Søvndal (appx. 4) everything is very focused on the sub-brand of Cold Hawaii and surfing, and branding should be spread out more. "The Cold Hawaii wave is good, but it has also become the narrative of the young and the beautiful which further attracts celebrities. That is not a problem, but where tall trees tower high a long shadow appears, if you're not careful" (Ruby, appx. 4: 44:27). These understandings portray Cold Hawaii as an influential sub-brand in Thy. In this context, Gartner's (1993) theory founded on states and cities' brand images may be applicable seeing that a smaller entity (in this case the Cold Hawaii sub-brand) with a strong image may overpower the large entity's (in this case Thy with the other sub-brands) brand image. Ruby (ibid) stresses, that a destination's combined narrative is important, and thus one sub-brand should not engulf all other elements of the destination. This notion and concern of the Cold Hawaii sub-brand expanding into other fields is shared by other stakeholders (M. Mark; Itchner; Højlund, appx. 4). "I like Cold Hawaii, but it has reached a point now where everyone has to have it (the brand) (…) then it is too much" (Itchner, appx. 4: 29:44). However, many stakeholders experience the benefits of the sub-brand's success. "A professionally managed country brand attracts companies, investments, talented people, residents and visitors" (Moilanen and Rainisto 2009:28). By citing Moilanen and Rainisto's (2009) statement related to a strong country brand, I argue that this is similarly applicable to the strong sub-brand of Cold Hawaii which attracts tourists. A number of stakeholders experience an increase in tourism such as Tvillinggaard in Thy which "is mainly because of our location close to Cold Hawaii, I think" (Tvillinggaard, appx. 4: 10:54). In addition, L. Mark and Sørensen's (appx. 4) perceptions of the sub-brand are positive and advocate its expansion by e.g. supporting the application of Cold Hawaii flags in Agger in order to attract more tourists. The stakeholders' various perceptions of the sub-brands in the branding strategy is relevant to this research, since their brand meanings may affect the stakeholders' identities and the branding priorities. This will be substantiated in this section. As stressed by Zenker et al. (2017), inhabitants (the stakeholders) mostly perceive the place on a higher stress level than e.g. tourists, and thus this discussion cannot be disregarded.

Tilsted (appx. 4) claims, that the sub-brands of Thy National Park and Cold Hawaii respectively attract different tourism segments. E.g. Thy National Park attracts bus tourists, average families with children approximately in the same way as the Tivoli Gardens, “but what really attracts people is surfing” (ibid: 14:41). Tilsted is a brand advocate in the sense that he positions his sea kayak business within the sub-brand of Cold Hawaii as the covenanted and communicated identities by VT suggest. Tilsted’s quotation may to some extend be aligned with the marketing manager’s mental construct of the meaning of “active”, since he perceives Cold Hawaii as a sub-brand that pulls the more committed sports tourists (ibid). In spite of this alignment between the DMO’s branding of AO and Tilsted’s identity, Tilsted questions his representation in the branding strategy, since he notices the absence of the Limfjord, which is critical to his identity (ibid). This notion is further underpinned by Søvndal (appx. 4) and Ruby (appx. 4). This indicates that a geographical area in Thy that is connected to some stakeholders’ identities is not represented in the branding strategy. In spite of this, Tilsted (appx. 4) claims that his identity is cut out for branding in a broader context of the west coast than the regional branding (ibid). Thus, he can simultaneously be perceived as a brand detractor.

In the context of how the sub-brand of Cold Hawaii is perceived, the following two stakeholders (Itchner; Højlund appx. 4) express a place connection as an alternative to the more activity-based perception through the branding strategy. Seeing that both stakeholders are residents in Klitmøller, which according to VT is the “capital of Cold Hawaii” (Cold Hawaii VT 2017b), two contradicting branding reactions are displayed. Itchner (appx. 4) is the manager of Vahine Therapy offering mindfulness, and both in- and outdoor yoga. Despite being the co-manager of the Cold Hawaii surf camp, she does not wish to expand the sub-brand of Cold Hawaii into other fields as addressed previously (ibid). As a stakeholder representing AO yoga, she thus constructs her unconnected positioning with the aim of protecting the sub-brand’s expansion (ibid). Nonetheless, her branding is founded on primarily word-of-mouth and on the established Cold Hawaii surf camp. Consequently, the branding is to some extent linked to the sub-brand, but she recognises the branding focus on Cold Hawaii and desires more attention on Thy National Park (ibid). “It’s also our duty to spread the (branding) focus to the three other (branding pillars), because without these other pillars, Cold Hawaii disappears” (ibid: 40:15). According to Itchner (ibid), this sub-brand has reached its limits, which in her case triggers protection of the sub-brand. On the other hand, Højlund (appx. 4) is branding mountain biking as Cold Hawaii MTB & bike rental (translated). He (ibid) rents bikes in Klitmøller and offers MTB tours in the National Park. As a result, his branding and logo (Figure 5) are clearly rejecting VT's positioning of AO within the branding pillar of Thy National Park and in this context, he becomes a brand terrorist when applying Balmer's (2012) terminology. However, neither Itchner (appx. 4) nor Højlund (appx. 4) are VTMs and thus depend on their own branding channels. In spite of the fact that Højlund (appx. 4) implements the sub-brand in his individual branding strategy, he acknowledges and expresses a concern regarding the sub-brand's expansion into other fields. However, his perception of Cold Hawaii is the place connection and simultaneously he recognises the reasoned positioning within the sub-brand of Thy National Park. Nevertheless, he refuses this positioning because of the internal collaboration challenges within the Thy National Park pillar as indicated by M. Mark (appx. 4), and states that the National Park management exhibits disinterest in the sphere of MTB development.

Figure 5 Cold Hawaii MTB & bike rental's logo. Source: (Højlund, appx. 4), with permission.

Eventually, he addresses an absence of AO visibility in the destination branding: "Maybe it's because it's not branded well, you could say (…) there is the PBA Wold Cup in windsurfing as an example that obviously is branded in the news and so on, but I don't get the impression that Thy should be active outdoor" (Højlund, appx. 4: 35:33).

When summarising the stakeholders' statements throughout this section, it becomes clear that for instance the various internal collaborative and resource-based challenges with the National Park management and VT's extensive diversity branding and positioning of the AO sphere, precipitate a less visible AO brand identity. The relatively concealed brand identity is further indicated through the inconsistencies in the stakeholders' positioning within the current branding strategy. As suggested by Zenker et al. (2017), when a brand is overly complex, its communication may become fuzzy as well. In my opinion, this theory is emphasized through the conceived identity based on the stakeholders' reality constructions related to the branding of AO. Furthermore, Zenker et al. (2017) recommend that constructing a place's sub-brand for its inhabitants could include an image that mirrors their demographical differences. However, the conceived identity findings show that not all stakeholders' identities are represented through the branding pillar of Thy National Park due to its debatable perceived image.

Focus group analysis

I perceive this section as an in-depth discussion of the contents implied through the individual and group interviews. It further refers to Ooi's (2004) concept 'politics', which is stakeholders' negotiated processes in relation to the brand and branding strategy that contains their individual interests. Simultaneously, the participants touch upon 'poetics' when discussing the branding process of constructing a unique and attractive brand story to tourists (Ooi 2004). Through this analysis it is possible to examine how the stakeholders collectively make sense of the topic and construct meanings (Bryman 2004 in Redmond and Curtis 2009). Thus, as argued by Punch (2005), group interaction is a central aspect of this data collecting method generating its attention through the four stakeholders who are VTMs. The absence of non-VTM stakeholders may to some extent construct biased meanings, however all stakeholders were invited to participate. As these stakeholders can be regarded as constituents of a CB community in the sense of AO branding, the *cultural* identity represents the participants' collective feeling such as values, opinions and assumptions associated with the CB of AO tourism (Balmer 2012). Applied to the context of this research, the stakeholders symbolise the "front line" of the AO CB presented to tourists (ibid:1079). In this frame of reference, the participants agree on the importance of conveying each other's messages in connection with word-of-mouth communication: "We need to prime each other to communicating each other's activities (…)" (Ruby, Focus group interview (F), appx. 4: 30:40). This notion requires rethinking AO in Thy from separate identity constructions to a unified identity concept, as acknowledged by Hanna and Rowley (2011). Thus, a common interest and commitment are the foundations of establishing a unified AO identity. This is expressed through the interview, as the participants consent to the idea of "presenting a united front" (M. Mark, F, appx. 4: 20:48). M. Mark further stresses the necessity of a joint message in order for the stakeholders to clearly express who they are when Thy is mentioned (ibid). The participants agree that constructing a united front would be beneficial to the branding process (P. Kristensen; M.

Mark; Ruby; Søvndal, F, appx. 4). This requires a collectively constructed message(s), in other words, defining the brand identity: "(…) we first need to agree on what we want to communicate… You have to start with identifying the values (…) branding is about being on top of what you want to communicate" (Ruby, F, appx. 4: 1:18:12). Saraniemi (2010) suggests that value creation is fundamental when dealing with branding and as argued by Ruzzier and Chernatony (2013) values may generate action and interaction between stakeholders and further build the foundation of differentiation. In this context, stakeholders' importance in the brand identity creation is stressed through this quotation: "Personality of a place brand closely relates to the personality of people who constitute and live the brand" (Ruzzier and Chernatony 2013:47). M. Mark (F, appx. 4) points out that branding should reflect what the resources offer, which is in line with Pike's (2008) notion of a brand promise that stands for something that exists (in Wheeler et al. 2011).

Gathering the stakeholders, further means sharing relevant knowledge. For instance, M. Mark (F, appx. 4) is disappointed in TDNA's many regulations preventing the establishment of more MTB trails. Søvndal (F, appx. 4) on the other hand points out that recently a number of changes have been made and that TDNA is now accommodating e.g. MTB subjects. Thus, interaction may contribute to new knowledge and the participants may affect each other's perceptions. Interaction may lead to agreements as this example related to brand identity creation: "It should be branded more professionally like Cold Hawaii, but we cannot all be Cold Hawaii" (P. Kristensen, F, appx. 4). "What do you mean?" (Søvndal, F, appx. 4). "Well I think it is great if we could get that active Thy, active holiday in Thy" (P. Kristensen, F, appx. 4). "Yes" (Søvndal, F, appx. 4: 8:55). Simultaneously, it can generate disagreements as when Ruby (F, appx. 4) argues that nowadays the search function is essential on a website. However, M. Mark (F, appx. 4) disagrees and states that this is not how it works in his world. Eventually, Søvndal states: "If you don't know that it is Agger Athlon that you are searching for then it's difficult" (F, appx. 4: 39:58). These are examples of how the participants collectively construct meanings.

As implied by Ruzzier and Chernatony (2013), the interaction between the participants leads to the necessity of brand differentiation. M. Mark (F, appx. 4) suggests that the active holiday in Thy should be branded differently in order to differentiate it from e.g. the competitors in Silkeborg. Ruby (F, appx. 4) compares differentiation to a layer cake by stating that the base layer are the existing values and then there is a beacon on the cake that is Cold Hawaii. He stresses that a differentiated narrative should be created which goes with the already existing branding layers (ibid). Thus, there is an interest in differentiating and creating the brand identity by considering both internal as well as external aspects and changes in relation to the destination (Hanna and Rowley 2011). The participants (Ruby; M. Mark; Søvndal; P. Kristensen, F, appx. 4) are interested in differentiating the activities they offer in Denmark's Greatest Wilderness through their own narrative. In this context, M. Mark (F, appx. 4) finds Bakkedal's marketing campaign inspiring stating that it displays the destination's uniqueness and the outdoor opportunities. However, a narrative can be created in many ways as displayed:

"There's a reason why I write on our website that we are an organisation with outdoor people who wear pants with large pockets. It constructs an image in people's minds. Now they know who we are: a nature guide with large pockets on his pants" (Ruby, F, appx. 4: 1:19:40).

The quotation displays an example of how this stakeholder communicates his identity through the branding tool of storytelling (Fog et al. 2004). Similarly, it is suggested that the brand identity of AO could be communicated through a collectively constructed narrative about the joint and unique nature experiences (M. Mark, F. appx. 4). In this context, the ideal identity could be displayed through the branding tool of a digital platform that functions as an umbrella unifying the stakeholders' identities (Søvndal, F, appx. 4). This branding strategy could communicate both master brand messages and sub-positioning messages created for different target audiences as claimed by Temporal (2015). Through the branding tools of a channel and storytelling, it is proposed that the brand identity could become more visible as explicitly desired by M. Mark (F, appx. 4) and Højlund (appx. 4). Eventually, this branding process calls for an overall potential plan such as "a structure about what it is we do", which should be managed or organised by someone in control (Ruby, F, appx. 4: 19:35).

Consequently, it may be argued that the participants suggest a "redefinition" of the brand identity constructed by VT which should contain a unified identity reconstructing the current diversity branding in collaboration with an AO "organisation". This implies that a gap is identified between the diversity branding by VT and how the participants would prefer their identities to be communicated, founded on this cultural identity analysis. The participants stress the necessity of implementing umbrella branding in order to brand AO identities. In other words, the proposed overall message is the "house" brand and the stakeholders' identities and offered experiences are the various incorporated services or products, when applying the theory of an umbrella branding strategy by

Dahlén et al. (2010). As an example of actual umbrella branding, VisitNorthJutland can be mentioned as the umbrella brand for the various tourism destinations in Northern Jutland (VisitNorthJutland 2017). Nevertheless, implementing storytelling as a branding tool corresponds to VT's communicated identity. Despite this, the participants desire a construction of their own joint brand narrative in the context of umbrella branding which is in agreement with Temporal's (2015) overall brand messages combined with sub-positioning messages. In line with the cultural identity findings, Zenker and Braun claim that sub-brands constructed through an umbrella place brand should be directed at various specific target audiences (2010 in Zenker et al. 2017), in this case the AO segment.

Collaboration

This final part of the analysis combines the DMO's and the stakeholders' perspectives on the brand identity creation process with an emphasis on co-creation.

Co-creating the brand identity

In order to create a more visible AO brand identity, and projecting a unified identity as suggested by Hanna and Rowley (2011), collaboration between the stakeholders and the DMO is crucial. Hanna and Rowley (2011) claim, that one of the main aspects that differentiate destination branding from conventional branding is the central role that multiple stakeholders play in the branding process. As opposed to VT's (Riis, F, appx. 4) principle regarding members being advised to initiating collaboration, Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) argue that place brand managers should be the ones initiating, facilitating and encouraging the destination brand creation process. This notion is further supported by Saraniemi (2010) who claims that it is advantageous for managers to encourage and involve all stakeholders in the process, since they add value from their perspectives. In this context and in line with Hanna and Rowley (2011), it may be argued that VT should be a more open and flexible DMO - particularly in the collaborative process with AO stakeholders. The quotation by Riis below underpins this notion:

"What should be improved… I think it's the first time that I've seen them together, as you were here. That four operators are gathered at the same table…"
Interviewer: "collaboration?"
"Yes, if such a forum could be gathered where they could define themselves, because as it is now, they are coming up with individual events" (Riis, F, appx. 4: 20:50).

Similarly, K. Kristensen describes branding of AO in Thy as "(…) very independent. Each activity is branding itself (…)" (appx. 4: 13:57), which is further implied by Åkerstrøm (appx. 4). Unexpectedly, this research's focus group interview allowed the AO stakeholders in Thy to collectively share opinions and ideas about the subject for the first time. Harrill (2009) mentions that the most successful DMOs manage to establish partnerships and collaborative networks. In reality, the process of building partnerships and networks may not be uncomplicated. Since VT (Riis, F, appx. 4) is a membership organisation, it is required that the AO stakeholders are VTMs in order to e.g. collaborate in the destination branding of AO and e.g. become representatives in the board of directors. On this basis, I argue that VT could be the AO "organisation", suggested by Ruby in the focus group analysis, facilitating the AO brand identity creation process through an AO network.

Each stakeholder's individual stance on growth in the context of tourism should be respected. As indicated by Åkerstrøm (appx. 4), tourism may in her opinion become a dilemma if more tourists "invade" nature threatening a change in the destination brand image. Not all AO stakeholders are eager to grow their businesses and on this account, VT (Riis, F, appx. 4) constructs the principle regarding members taking the initiative in collaboration. VT (ibid) further mentions that as an organisation it has been more reluctant because of a past experience in which it was too enterprising, according to the concerning stakeholders, and consequently was held responsible. Next, stakeholders may not be interested in collaborating with VT as they have the opportunity to brand themselves individually through other channels: "(…) many also have other platforms than what can be called tourism" (ibid:27:22). This is relevant, since not all stakeholders are VTMs nor are interested in tourism growth, and may prefer pursuing own interests through alternative branding channels. Additionally, stakeholders may be interested in other audiences than tourists and market their business through institutions, associations or clubs through various channels (Riis, F, appx. 4). However, I suggest that these "audiences" can also be considered tourists in case the members of the associations or clubs decide to spend more than twenty-four hours at the destination through e.g. a weekend trip. As Balmer and Greyser (2006 in Wheeler et al. 2011) claim, destination brands are challenging and contain different types of stakeholders with various interests and purposes. This is applicable to the branding of Thy in relation to e.g. the strong images created by the sub-brand of Cold Hawaii and as proposed by Temporal (2015), including all stakeholders in the branding process.

Despite these challenges and complex circumstances and in order for VT to create a favourable result regarding branding of AO tourism and follow the four main strategies proposed by Sheehan et al. (2007 in Harrill 2009), collaboration is required. Furthermore, one of the strategies suggests having an AO stakeholder represented in the board of directors. VT is aware of the lack of collaboration and wishes it to emerge in order to collectively making the existing activities more visible, and thus support these (Riis, F, appx. 4). As an example, one AO stakeholder was present and involved in marketing activities at fairs together with VT. Thus, Riis (ibid) as the marketing manager, invites more stakeholders to actively engage in the branding processes. Sautter and Leisen (1999) and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) stress that stakeholder groups strengthen consistency among members and the chance of collaboration and agreement resulting in projecting a "unified identity" (in Hanna and Rowley 2011:466). This is clearly displayed through the focus group in which the participants agree on collectively constructing a message that unifies AO in Thy. This is further implied through the individual interviews as for instance: "In a branding context it would be a great idea to do something joint, but it requires that someone comes in and gathers the powers (…) it would have a great effect to unite it" (K. Kristensen, appx. 4: 25:13). In this interview both K. Kristensen and P. Kristensen (appx. 4) wishes for VT to initiate more collaboration in order to establish an AO network. Tilsted (appx. 4) supports this notion and advises VT to be more encouraging in relation to AO collaboration.

The majority of the stakeholders, both VTMs and non-VTMs (Åkerstrøm; Søvndal; M. Mark; P. Kristensen; K. Kristensen, Højlund, Ruby and Nymann, appx. 4), consent to the concept of collaboration and disclose its insufficiency. Søvndal (appx. 4) states that there was an interest in establishing a network, but it seems to have halted in the past. Presently, Northwest Orienteering Club (H. Jensen and J. Jensen, appx. 4) solely collaborates with ThyRace. Identically, Åkerstrøm (appx. 4) primarily collaborates with Tvillinggaard in relation to horseback riding. These few partnerships appear to be reality-patterns rather than perceiving AO as an entity. Åkerstrøm recommends collaboration on the basis of this notion: "I think people perceive themselves as individuals in the sense that we are competing for the same costumers… So we don't see us as a unity (…)" (Åkerstrøm, appx. 4: 53:55). This quotation is in line with VT's perception of the stakeholders' non-existing collaboration. Thus, M. Mark (appx. 4) stresses that constructing an AO network could build a stronger foundation for the stakeholders. According to Ruzzier and Ruzzier (2009), stakeholders are key features when creating the brand identity and their complex connections affect the identity creation process. This notion is indicated through the focus group analysis, since there is a collective interest in redefining the AO brand identity and thereby reconstructing the current branding strategy.

As there currently is little collaboration between the AO stakeholders and the DMO, it may according to Hankinson's (2012) theory, be proposed that VT has a strong influence on the present AO branding direction and implementation. In the context of the AC4ID version related to the present CB situation, Balmer (2012) proposes that it is key to understand that the covenanted identity can be co-created by stakeholders. Consequently, this brand promise should be constructed in collaboration between the DMO and the AO stakeholders. Clearly, VT is realising the opportunities that may occur through collaboration: "(…) But if you don't see it as a single event, then I think it could be strengthened through a gathering at a table where they create a collective hat for the experiences that are offered by the different operators" (Riis, F, appx. 4: 21:20).

The term "collective hat" to some extent refers to Temporal's (2015) concept of overall master brand messages, the "unified identity" proposed by Hanna and Rowley (2011) and the overall concept of umbrella branding. The purpose of Ooi's concept 'poetics' is to influence the tourists' perceptions of the destination in a positive direction (Ooi 2004) and as proposed by Balmer (2012), this brand promise should be co-created by stakeholders. At the present time there is no such clearly communicated brand identity other than the fact that the AO sphere is a relatively broad entity communicated through diversity branding to specific target audiences and in combination with other components of the destination brand through a combined narrative. By citing Riis (F, appx. 4) above, the notion of the choice of words "they create" in preference to "we create" contributes to the absence of collaboration between the DMO and the AO stakeholders. Nevertheless, as argued by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), the DMO is responsible for taking the first step and thus encouraging and facilitating the brand creation process. Temporal (2015) further underlines the importance of all stakeholders' involvement when constructing, implementing and managing a successful branding strategy. On the presented theoretical foundation, I recommend the DMO to initiate the co-creation of the AO brand identity together with the committed AO stakeholders in order to include more stakeholders in the destination branding strategy.

As stressed by Hanna and Rowley (2011), both internal and external factors and changes should be considered when creating a destination brand identity. In the process of co-creating an AO brand identity, it is relevant to combine this supply-side destination branding perspective with an external demand-side perspective as claimed by Konecnik and Go (2008), Ruzzier and Ruzzier (2009) and Saraniemi (2010). The demand-side perspective was presented in the introductory chapters through general characteristics of contemporary outdoor tourism trends. As acknowledged by many of the stakeholders (appx. 4 and F, appx. 4), the current tourism trends should not be disregarded. To reiterate a few, Stipanovic et al. (2016) state that the supply-side of the outdoor sphere is one of the fastest growing varieties of tourism founded on the demand for active nature-based visits. Then, it has become more common for families consisting of more generations to go on holiday together (OECD 2016). Eventually, in Denmark, outdoor recreation is characterised by visits of shorter duration, and tourists tend to travel shorter distances to undisturbed and unspoilt places (Gentin and Jensen 2007 in Andkjær and Arvidsen 2015). When applying Konecnik and Go's (2008) theory, the current tourism trends should be considered as a part of a supplementary tourist analysis perspective in this self-analysis. Further, a competitor analysis with an emphasis on differentiating the brand from its competitors such as the outdoor destination of Silkeborg could be regarded. "The clear differentiation of the place from those of competing places is crucial for success" (Moilanen and Rainisto 2009:26). Nonetheless, this thesis presented a supply-side destination branding perspective on the present brand identity of AO tourism in Thy. For a more holistic self-analysis, additional stakeholders should be included rather than focusing on a specific group of stakeholders. In this thesis exclusively a sample of tourism trends have been implemented as an external perspective due to the limited number of pages and the focus on a self-analysis throughout this research, however further research could be centred around the tourist and/or the competitor analyses.

Conclusion

Prior to concluding the thesis findings, it is crucial to reflect on my personal influence as a researcher due to the social constructivist approach introduced in the methodological chapter. Evidently, this thesis is founded on subjectivity which is consistent throughout the research for instance due to the use of qualitative methods and my knowledge and prior understandings that eventually affect the interpretations in the analysis. Consequently, this research rejects objectivity through the subjective findings that cannot be generalised, and therefore another researcher could most likely obtain different findings than those presented. Furthermore, as a researcher I co-create the findings together with the informants, meaning that interaction is indispensable.

The complexity of destination branding is displayed in the thesis through numerous internal and external aspects that are compelled to be considered when creating an AO brand identity. The thesis presents VT's and AO stakeholders' perspectives on the present branding of an AO identity through a self-analysis in a destination branding context. VT is branding the destination through a cluster building strategy containing four sub-brands or branding 'pillars' which are: wind energy, Thy National Park, Cold Hawaii and culture / heritage. In the branding strategy, the AO identity researched in this thesis (AO excluding surfing) is positioned within the branding pillar of Thy National Park as nature experiences. Based on an external brand image perspective, VT claims that the two presiding branding pillars are Thy National Park and Cold Hawaii. Despite VT's contended equal branding of the sub-brands, more attention is paid to the Cold Hawaii sub-brand through collaboration and marketing efforts due to its strong image that attracts tourists to Thy.

The applied theories emphasize the significance of creating a branding strategy in collaboration with all destination stakeholders, however a collaboration between the AO stakeholders and the DMO is limited, and therefore the AO brand identity is exclusively constructed and controlled by VT. The brand identity is created as a multiple AO brand intended to represent the various identities, which is in agreement with Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) and Nicolaisen and Blichfeldt's (2012) theories. However, its diversity branding is communicated through a variety of sub-positioning messages and as a component of Thy's overall brand narrative, created by the implementation of storytelling, indicating an extensive branding of the AO sphere. Zenker et al. (2017) argue that brand communication may create confusing messages in case the brand is too complex.

Clearly, the stakeholders' multiple identities mirror an extensive identity portraying a variety of "unique nature experiences" as a common denominator for the majority of the stakeholders. The fuzziness of the AO sphere within the present branding strategy generates inconsistent positioning by the AO stakeholders. The Cold Hawaii sub-brand appears to affect the AO stakeholders' identities caused by its strong image, which according to Gartner (1993) may overpower Thy and the remaining sub-brands' images. This is reflected in the stakeholders' conceived identity discussions related to this specific sub-brand, and for instance, through a stakeholder's application of the Cold Hawaii sub-brand in his AO branding of mountain biking and so rejecting VT's positioning of the AO brand identity. Similarly, a significant number of the stakeholder's positioning is found in "a branding limbo" due to their identities trapped between the Cold Hawaii and the Thy National Park sub-brands. At the same time, the branding strategy's positioning of the AO brand identity in the branding pillar of Thy National Park generates a relevant discussion of internal collaborative challenges with the National Park management and resource-based obstacles. Thus, as stressed by Therkelsen (2007), the destination's actual resources and identity should be the heart of the branding process. VT's diversity branding and positioning of the AO identity gives rise to a less visible AO brand identity causing a relatively concealed brand identity based on the inconsistencies in the stakeholders' positioning. A significant number of stakeholders are not represented in the present brand identity constructed by VT. Founded on the stakeholders' reality constructions of the branding of AO, I argue that the brand identity is too complex which is reflected in its brand communication.

This notion is acknowledged through a focus group interaction which gave four stakeholders the opportunity to share knowledge and ideas related to the subject for the first time. The participants suggested redefining the present brand identity in the sense that it should present a unified AO identity through an AO umbrella branding strategy created in collaboration with a responsible organisation in control. Thus, a gap is identified between VT's present diversity branding and the stakeholders' collective identity constructions suggesting absence of overall master brand messages containing the multiple AO identities. The participants consent to the notion and collectively seek presenting "a united front". Consequently, they desire a creation of a joint AO brand identity in the context of umbrella branding as implied by Temporal (2015).

In spite of a number of stakeholders caught "in a branding limbo" partially desiring an additional destination branding pillar, this research does not imply constructing a new branding strategy.

However, it may be argued on the foundation of the individual, group and focus group interviews that it lacks a visible and unified AO brand identity.

By unconventionally applying Balmer’s (2012) corporate brand being version of an AC4ID model adopted from organisational identity theory, it has been more feasible to identify the different identity constructions and gaps between the DMO’s constructed and communicated brand identity, and the stakeholders’ actual identity and multiple identity perceptions. Some stakeholders express a need for more collaboration with VT. The inadequate collaboration between VT and the AO stakeholders proposes that VT is strongly affecting the present AO branding direction and process. The current branding situation is in contrast to the theories emphasizing all stakeholders’ involvement in the brand identity creation. Thus, in the context of destination branding and building a successful branding strategy, co-creation is key. In addition, Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) argue that the DMO should initiate, facilitate and encourage the brand creation process. Both VT and a number of AO stakeholders express an interest in creating an AO brand identity.

On this empirical and theoretical foundation, I recommend VT to take the first step in the co-creation of the AO brand identity together with the committed AO stakeholders which ultimately would include more stakeholders in the destination branding strategy and make the AO sphere more visible in Thy. Clearly, a different approach to branding AO is suggested through umbrella branding and some stakeholders further realise the lack of points-of-difference in the present branding of AO. In the context of tourism, Zenker et al. (2017) claim that tourists favour simple place brand communication. Next, external aspects, such as the outdoor tourism trends, should be regarded when creating the AO brand identity. Eventually, the theory, the stakeholders and the DMO consent to the notion of establishing an AO network which as suggested through the focus group analysis could be a digital platform as a branding channel for the AO identity. This would further give the stakeholders an accessible method to sharing knowledge and interacting with each other. In fact, this thesis has practical consequences given the focus on the AO identity contributing to a potential start-up of a unified AO brand identity in collaboration with VT, that could include more stakeholders’ identities and differentiate it in the market place.

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List of appendices

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