



**AALBORG UNIVERSITET**

**Sustainable tourism in Aalborg: A study of tourism businesses' perceptions and sustainable practices and Danish tourists' perceptions and importance of sustainable tourism**

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## **Abstract**

Sustainable tourism affects both social, economic and environmental sustainability. Stakeholders such as businesses and tourists can have different ways of understanding sustainable tourism. This thesis assesses which sustainable practices tourism businesses in Aalborg implement. It also assesses how important sustainable tourism is to Danish tourists. Conclusively, the thesis compares whether the sustainable practices taken by the businesses matches what the tourists consider the most important sustainable practices. The thesis also looks into the perceptions of tourism businesses in Aalborg and Danish tourists. In order to do so, semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with tourism businesses within the area of food and drink, accommodation, attraction, events and the local Destination Management Organisation in Aalborg. In addition, a self-administrative questionnaire was forwarded Danish tourists. Thus, a mix of methods is applied. The data is processed through the interpretivist mindset. The thesis reviews on existing literature on the subject, which will be compared to the findings. The findings of each research method have been assessed to apply the three dimensions of sustainability as the theoretical toolkit in an analysis. Based on the findings, it is evident that the tourism businesses in Aalborg apply both environmentally and socially sustainable practices in order to follow up on the sustainable development. Throughout the research, it became evident that the environmental sustainability is the most frequently applied sustainable dimension by the tourism businesses. The Danish tourists tend to find the environmental sustainability as the most important. The findings reveal a correspondence between the two kinds of stakeholders in relation to the environmental sustainability, yet the Danish tourists do lack an understanding of the social and economic sustainability. The reviewed literature corresponds with the findings in the way that the environmental sustainability is more evident than the two other dimensions of sustainability.

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# INTRODUCTION

Today, the word *sustainability* has become an integrated part of our everyday lives, as we are all encouraged on a daily basis to become more sustainable (Salonen and Åhlberg, 2011: 134-135). But what does it mean to be sustainable? Sustainability is perceived as a “fuzzy” concept to build one clear definition upon, and it is further a rather difficult concept to get an understanding of (Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet, 2015). Yet, The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) constructed the Brundtland report in 1987, and from this report, a general definition of sustainability was shaped:

“Progress that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Millar et al., 2012: 489-490).

Based on the definition of sustainability above, sustainability can concern any entity. This means that it entails both humans and businesses. In fact, Stoughton and Ludema (2012) recognize that sustainability has become an organizational necessity in the corporate world. However, the degree to which companies incorporate sustainable practices vary (Stoughton and Ludema, 2012: 501). Since sustainability concerns any entity, the tourism industry is also included in this way of incorporating sustainable practices. This could be a reaction to the discovery made back in the 1970's, where it was recognised that tourism has a negative impact on the environment. Hall (2010) specify that it was not until the entrance of the 1990's that the tourism industry actively began incorporating environmental changes (Hall, 2010: 132). Gössling (2002) sought to make an overview of the environmental damages the tourism industry contributes with on a global scale:

“(…) tourism contributes to: changes in land cover and land use; energy use; biotic exchange and extinction of wild species; exchange and dispersion of diseases; and changes in the perception and understanding of the environment” (Hall, 2010: 132).

Since the tourism industry is capable of performing several environmental damages according to Gössling (2002) and Hall (2010), it would seem timely that this industry along with any other industry providing similar damage, would take action in changing this damaging behavior. However, are there more to sustainability than environmental damages? Kasim (2006: 3-6) argue that the tourism industry has a responsibility of becoming both environmentally and socially sustainable. Tourism

impacts on sustainability in both environmental, social and economic ways according to Hall et al. (2015), who emphasize that any tourism entity should include all three aspects of sustainability in order to become sustainable (Hall et al. 2015). In continuation of this, since the tourism industry receive their livelihood from the people, who consume their products – the tourist, their demands should match the sustainable practices deemed necessary to be taken on by the tourism industry. Tasci (2017) explains that the process of becoming sustainable can be challenging, and the challenging part of the process is the tourism demands. Any tourism business is obligated to understand what tourists desire of sustainable innovations (Tasci, 2017: 376).

From this point of view, we find it interesting to dive into this dilemma. However, taking on the tourism industry as a whole was considered too broad a field of interest, thus we choose the case of Aalborg. We intend to investigate what tourism businesses of different areas in Aalborg understand of sustainability. Furthermore, we intend to investigate how these businesses implement sustainable practices. We also find it interesting to get a closer look on the demand side of sustainability. Thus, we intend to investigate what Danish tourists understand of sustainable tourism. Moreover, we intend to investigate the degree of importance that sustainable tourism could have according to these tourists. These areas of interest result in this problem formulation:

**How and why do the tourism businesses in Aalborg understand and implement sustainability?  
How do Danish tourists understand sustainable tourism? And how important is it to them?**

By including both the tourism businesses and tourists, we consider this problem formulation as the right setting for this research. As this problem formulation forms the field of research, it functions as the common thread throughout this thesis.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, we look into sustainability in tourism. The purpose of this chapter is to present different debates about the concept of sustainable development and sustainability in tourism, which accounts both tourism businesses and tourists. We also look into other studies with a similar background as ours, thus highlighting what research have been done so far on the perception of sustainability in tourism. The theoretical toolkit in this research is composed in this chapter, which consists of the three dimensions of sustainability. These three dimensions are later then transferred onto tourism businesses' and tourists' perception of sustainability. This is executed with the application of existing literature.

### THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY

In order to obtain a better comprehension of the term of sustainability, this section introduces and explains the notion of sustainability by different academics and experts within the field. This furthermore gives us more knowledge of the term and guides us towards developing our research. The explanation of sustainability, the concept of sustainable development and sustainable tourism will also be defined because all concepts are seen as relevant to this study. We have chosen to structure the definition of sustainability, sustainable development and sustainable tourism in this order, because it provides a better and more chronological understanding of the growth within sustainability.

Since its emergence in the 1960's, due to the concern about the environmental decline in the light of the industrial development, population growth and increased consumption behaviour among other things (Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet, 2015: 3), the concept of sustainability has become very regularly used in the common discourse. It is seen as a fairly abstract and broad concept that is rather difficult to fully understand, and having various "cousins" and derivatives such as social, environmental and economic sustainability, sustainable development and sustainable ecosystems (Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet, 2015: 3; Portney, 2015: 2, 4; Sloan, Legrand and Chen, 2013: 23). It has been discussed that with the rising popularity of sustainability, it can no longer be seen as a niche topic and is highly integrated around the globe in politics, economy and society where examples of responsibility, freedom and culture are among those things, which are relevant component parts

(Jenkins and Schröder 2013, p. 10). In overall, however, a general definition of sustainability is phrased as “the capacity to support, maintain or endure; it can indicate both a goal and a process” (Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet, 2015: 3) and its core concept is stated by Portney (2015) to be:

“(…) a concept that focuses on the condition of Earth’s biophysical environment, particularly with the respect to the use and depletion of natural resources. (...) it is more about finding some sort of steady state so that Earth or some piece of it can support the human population *and* economic growth without ultimately threatening the health of humans, animals, and plants”(Portney 2015: 4)

Here, Portney (2015) emphasizes that sustainability does not mean environmental protection nor conservation and preservation of natural resources but rather that the resources of Earth cannot be used, depleted and damaged indefinitely as the Earth will run out of them, which will result in damaging life on Earth (Portney, 2015: 4). Furthermore, Portney (2015) distinguishes between environmental protection and sustainability by saying that protection entails remediating the environment and preventing its potential threats while sustainability has its attention to more dynamic processes being more holistic in the long term (Portney, 2015: 5).

## THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

During the 1980’s the concept of sustainable development had its breakthrough due to the Brundtland report made during the General Assembly of the United Nations by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987 (WCED, 1987). Since then the concept has been used frequently in various academic studies and governmental reports (Baker, 2006). The international community began concerning for example the serious affects which mass tourism produced. When it comes to tourism, one could say that because the tourism is considered an important industry and contributing to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and for example creates many jobs, it produces impacts on the economic, social and natural environment. Therefore, with the growing attention towards sustainability, the international community began planning actions concerning developing and managing tourism in a more responsible way (Manente, Minghetti and Mingotto, 2014: 3-4).

In the report by WCED, the definition of sustainable development says “(…) the ability to make the development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the



ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (WCED, 1987: 16). Here, it is stated among other things, all individuals should be entitled and have the opportunity to obtain those basic needs required by sustainable development, which as mentioned just above sustainable development fundamentally is all about. The needs of the poor will be given through economic growth in less rich nations and an assurance of fair share of required resources to help and improve the growth. This should be done by including the citizens in the decision-making in the political systems and in the democracy on international basis. (WCED, 1987: 16). Additionally, in order for sustainable development to be successful, the wealthier nations should adopt a lifestyle, which benefit to a more ecological system of the planet such as the use of energy (WCED, 1987: 16). The report mentions that sustainable development is only obtainable if the size of population aligns with growth and such harmony between those two helps the ecosystem and its productive potential (WCED, 1987: 17). Moreover, the Brundtland report, in the section named sustainable development, notifies that:

“Sustainable development is (...) a process of change in which the exploitations of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with the future as well as the present needs.” (WCED, 1987: 17).

Another explanation of sustainable development is put by Baker (2006), who talks about it being about how the human’s relationship is with the natural world. She emphasises that in order to be sustainable, the development needs to have a dynamic approach and that society plays an important role because it is very much about including environmental considerations in the societal changes (Baker, 2006: 7). Furthermore, sustainable development is about being improved and evolved but not about reach a certain static structure and a fixed end goal, as the development is ongoing as society and the world change. In short, Baker describes that “It is better to speak about *promoting*, not achieving, sustainable development.” (Baker, 2006: 8). In order to develop in a sustainable matter, the actors are not solely the governments of the nations but all levels of social organisation – from the international to the level of an individual (Baker, 2006: 9).

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) gives another notion of sustainable development in the global action plan called “Agenda 21” from 1992. In order to engage in sustainable development, five principles are given to be followed for changes to be made. The principles are (Sloan, Willy and Chen, 2013: 20-21):

1. The principle of precaution - such as preventing risks that are considered possible to happen

2. The principle of responsibility - such as adopting social and environmental responsibility for all activities and decisions.
3. The principle of transparency - such as making all information with relevance available to stakeholders
4. The principle of social technological innovation - such as moving forward innovative technology, so it can be a benefit to humankind as well as the planet
5. The principle of responsible citizenship - such as contributing to different tasks on a local, national and/or global level. (Sloan, Willy and Chen, 2013: 20-21)

Another factor that should be considered when wanting to promote sustainable development is an interface between different dimensions of it. The dimensions are called the social, the economic and the ecological (Baker, 2006: 7). The latter will also be referred to as the environmental in this thesis.

## **THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY**

In order to promote sustainability and develop sustainably, the three pillars or dimensions are to many considered important elements, which the tourism sector also should adopt in order to become sustainable. The dimensions of sustainability are emphasised by Ekins (2000: 70) to be interrelated. For all three dimensions to be practised, stakeholders need to be committed in order to ensure a common and holistic approach to sustainability (Sloan et al, 2013: 26) and a suitable balance between them needs to be established in order to guarantee its long-term sustainability (UNTWO.org). This is illustrated in the figure below, where the three dimensions of sustainability are illustrated as being individual elements but collectively they establish the holistic approach to sustainability.

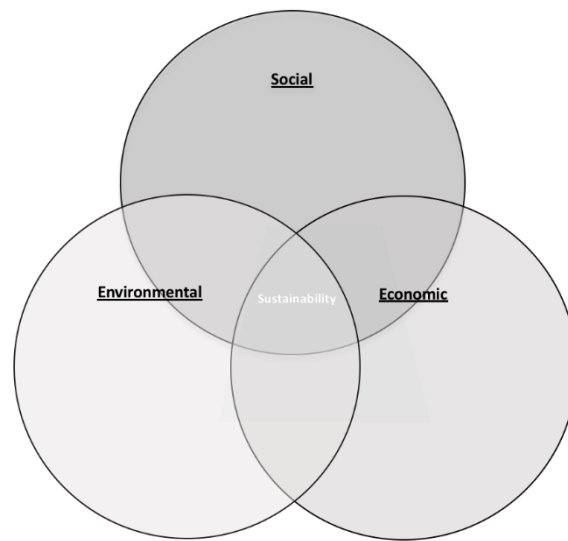


Figure 1: The three dimensions of sustainability

Baker (2006) mentions them as dimensions in relation to sustainable development:

1. The social dimension: includes considerations of values, relationships and institutions and human mores (Baker, 2006: 7; Ekins, 2000: 70).

Elaborating on the social dimension, Baker's statement of the dimension corresponds well to the statement by Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet (2015), who in general also divide sustainability into these three dimensions and give examples of those. Here, the social, includes promoting equality, health and human rights (Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet, 2015: 3). Furthermore, Sloan et al. (2013) explain the social dimension as dealing with an organisation's influence and impact on society in which it operates. Moreover, a company should be committed in dealing with for example public health, human rights, labour rights, community issues, social justice, workplace safety, education, staff training, social and cultural diversity, and involvement of community, stakeholders and the public with regard to sustainable practices (Sloan et al, 2013: 26). With partnerships between stakeholders, such as local government, educational establishments, non-governmental bodies and citizens' groups, they should be able to ease conflict solutions, harmonise plans and take action in improving environment (Sloan et al, 2013: 27). Furthermore Sloan et al. (2013) mention how networks are very important both within and between the service sectors of tourism, such as transport, tour operators, hospitality, travel agents and the leisure sector, because those networks help providing

the sharing of experience, expertise and the establishment of mutual sustainable projects, which are considered beneficial (Sloan et al, 2013: 27).

Hamid and Isa (2017) also describe the three dimensions in relation to sustainable tourism, but named them “pillars of sustainability”. According to them the social pillar deals with the respect of human rights and equality in opportunities for all and also conservation of sociocultural authenticity of a host community and heritage and traditional values and also the contribution of understanding and tolerance between different cultures (Hamid and Isa, 2017: 304).

Ekins (2000) looks at the social dimension of sustainability and argues it to refer to “a society’s ability to maintain, on the one hand, the necessary means of wealth creation to reproduce itself and, on the other, a shared sense of social purpose to foster social integration and cohesion” (Ekins, 2000: 73). It is furthermore argued if the understanding of the social aspect of sustainability is somehow overshadowed by the environmental and economic and that it has been neglected and developed in a smaller degree than the two others. However, it is mentioned how the social concerns are implemented into people’s work on sustainability (Dillard, Dujon and King, 2009, 2).

### **Corporate Social Responsibility**

A concept commonly known in regard to balancing social, economic and environmental necessities in a business is corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR is argued to be a concept where interests of stakeholders such as customers, employees, suppliers, shareholders, communities, and also the planet are put in businesses’ corporate strategies (Sloan et al, 2013: 242).

In relation to tourism, CSR is also a concept taken into consideration since sustainable tourism has been growing the past years. Gulani and Rizwan (2016) talk about the how initiatives have been created in order to address problems and concerns, environmentally and socially. Here, an approach of CSR has been developed and includes these considerations:

- “*Working with the host community* to identify core values and goals for tourism in their community and recognising how the business’s goals align;
- Identifying strategies and initiatives to allow the organisation to *contribute to community development* including buying local products, employing local people, customer educations programs on the region

and community, community well-being initiatives, donating to local charities/organisations, or providing favourable discounts or benefits for local residents;

- Identifying strategies and initiatives to allow the organisations to *contribute to environmental sustainability* including environmental education programs, reducing environmental footprint of the organisation or donating to local environmental initiatives.
- *Accreditation and certification programs* are available to measure and report on environmental and social sustainability.
- *Reporting on corporate social responsibility* to stakeholders, including the community and customers is important in raising the profile of the business and identifying ways to leverage performance achievements.” (Gulani and Rizwan, 2016: xix).

In addition, CSR is highly linked to sustainability, as an organisation or business should contribute to for example health and welfare of society and goals should integrate social and environmental objectives. Moreover, a business is not able to work on a strategy of sustainable management without having ethical and moral values. Furthermore, CSR should comply with applicable laws and international norms of behaviour (Sloan et al, 2013: 243)

2. The economic dimension: the resources, and how they are distributed and allocated (Baker, 2006: 7; Ekins, 2000: 70).

The economic dimension, according to Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet (2015) lays its focus on the sustaining the welfare and resources’ division (Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet, 2015: 3).

The economic sustainability is concerning prosperity at different levels of society and cost effectiveness of economic activities and additionally about profit, which is usable for the insurance of viable and long-term economic operations, which provide socioeconomic benefit to all stakeholders (Hamid and Isa, 2017: 304). Without making profit, a business simply will shut down and stop operating as its primary aim is to make profit. Sloan et al. (2013) emphasise how a business can choose to contribute to environmental sustainability, which could be beneficial to them in the long-run. Example of this is getting technologies that are energy- and water-efficient as it can save them costs. Other examples are the improved relationship with other stakeholders, improved staff morale and motivation and the reputation in the public, which can benefit a business through

sustainable management systems (Sloan et al, 2013: 26). Additionally, Hamid and Isa (2017) mention this dimension as the economic sustainability, which deals with prosperity at different levels of society and cost effectiveness of economic activities and additionally about profit, which is usable for the insurance of viable and long-term economic operations, which provide socioeconomic benefit to all stakeholders (Hamid and Isa, 2017: 304). For example, in a hospitality company, which is supporting sustainable policy, Sloan et al. (2013) mention how it participates in developing the local economy and can help generate economic benefits for local people by having increased local employment opportunities, business linkages and other income-generating opportunities (Sloan et al, 2013: 26).

3. The ecological/environmental dimension: the social and economic dimension are involved and contributes to the ecological and how those affect the environment and the resources given by it (Baker, 2006: 7; Ekins, 2000: 70).

According to Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet (2015), the environmental sustainability is about sustaining nature and its resources for both human and non-human species (Kopnina Shoreman-Ouimet, 2015: 3). This corresponds well to the statement by Hamid and Isa (2017), who explain what they call the environmental sustainability, which is about conserving and managing the resources given by the planet, especially the resources that are not renewable, and getting the optimal use of them and help maintaining ecological processes, natural heritage and biodiversity. (Hamid and Isa, 2017: 304). Overall, the environmental dimension has its focus on “(...) an organisation’s impact on the fauna and the flora that make up the ecosystems in addition to the air we breathe, the water we drink and the land we enjoy.” (Sloan et al, 2013: 25). Sloan et al. (2013) furthermore describe the environmental part as looking at an organisation’s footprints such as how it operates, its facilities and the products. The main objectives are to minimise all practices, that can have negative effects of the planet’s resources today and in future and also to avoid damaging the environment in both the short- and long-term. Moreover, natural diversity should be maintained and promoted (Sloan et al, 2013: 25).

Another way of looking at this dimension, is given by Ekins (2000), who describes, how the human’s way of life does not possess a capacity for continuing indefinitely into the future, which he says sustainability is really about. This way of life is described by Ekins (2000) as complex including values, objectives, institutions and activities with ethical, economic, environmental and social dimensions (Ekins, 2000: 70). The reason for the human way of life does not possess the capacity is,

either that the way of living is contributing to destroy the environmental conditions, which is a necessity, or the environmental effects, which will damage the human health and cause social disruption. The environmental effects given by Ekins (2000) are climate change, toxic pollution, ozone reduction, toxic pollution, depletion and renewable (e.g. fisheries and water) as well as non-renewable resources (e.g. fossil fuels) and extinction of species (Ekins, 2000:70).

Whether these three aspects of sustainability are named pillars or dimensions, the definitions are not distant from each other and share similarities. Even though, the descriptions of the dimensions by Baker (2006) and Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet (2005) relate them to sustainability and sustainable development, which is in a more general level and not focusing on tourism solely, and Hamid and Isa (2017) relate the pillars to sustainable tourism, the difference is not large, as all definitions and interpretations conclusively deals with the same issues and work towards developing and promoting sustainability in society. During this thesis, these concepts within sustainability will be referred to as “dimensions”.

## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

As mentioned previously, the concept of sustainability can be seen as a “buzz word” (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010: 117; Jenkins & Schröder 2013: 9) and also defining “sustainable tourism” is pointed out as a debatable subject (Bowman 2011: 270; Hamid and Isa, 2017: 303). Hamid and Isa (2017) describe how the best accepted definition of sustainable tourism is by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which says that “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.” (Hamid and Isa, 2017: 303; UNEP and UNWTO, 2005: 12). Furthermore, the World Tourism Organization describes sustainable tourism should “(...) maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them” (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005: 11).

Due to the “fuzziness” and it being considered a vague definition, it is considered open to researchers to interpret and shape it, so it addresses the nature of their study (Hamid and Isa 2017: 303). In an article by Butler (1999), several definitions of sustainable tourism are presented. Here, the

Countryside Commission says that sustainable tourism to be regarded as “Tourism which can sustain local economies without damaging the environment on which it depends.” (Butler, 1999: 10). Another quotation is by Bramwell saying how sustainable tourism develops as fast as possible, but at the same time taking current accommodation capacity, local population and the environment into consideration. Furthermore, Bramwell (1996) points out, that sustainable tourism is about respecting the environment and it is about being responsible tourism (Bramwell, 1996)

Furthermore, Hamid and Isa (2017) argue that sustainable tourism also depends on which aspect of development that needs to be addressed, but in order to identify the relevance of sustainable tourism “it must focus on all aspects to ensure the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and the host communities can be fulfilled.” (Hamid and Isa, 2017: 304).

Adding more complexity to the concept is the usage of different terms or names of sustainable tourism, but overall the term per se has emerged from the idea of sustainable development (Weaver, 2006: 9). According to Higgins-Desboilles (2010), there are various ways of saying that such as “ecologically sustainable tourism”, “ecotourism” or “sustainable development in tourism” that all are confused to be synonyms, which can cause inaccuracy, confusion and failure in dealing with the problems and concerns in tourism (Higgins-Desboilles, 2010: 117).

With different forms of alternative tourism, according to Butler (1999), there is an unfortunate automatic assumption that conventional mass tourism cannot be linked to sustainable development and has no relation to it and some green or alternative tourism supporters perceive that supporting those forms will make the problems of mass tourism disappear (Butler, 1999: 12). This perception, however, does have some problems e.g. that all forms of tourism will somehow have impacts on the locations whether it is green or conventional tourism.

Liu (2003) also mentions different forms of “ideal” tourism, namely alternative, appropriate, soft, responsible and low-impact tourism. Here, it is stressed how these forms cannot be seen as fulfilling the promise of being sustainable and change how conventional tourism is carried out (Liu, 2003: 470). Furthermore, tourism, which is considered nature-based, should not be considered automatically sustainable, as they also can be harmful to the environment (Butler, 1999: 12). As many forms of alternative tourism for example ecotourism can be situated in areas considered highly sensitive to human impact that do not have the resilience to deal with frequent use and also do not have the infrastructure to deal with development. Therefore, even small impacts can be seen as serious to the



respective area (Butler, 1999: 13; Liu, 2003: 470). These forms of tourism can be seen as having a rather complementary part in tourism development, globally speaking, and cannot be considered as the primary or general model in tourism development or more generally said “ecotourism or alternative tourism is at best a micro solution to what is essentially a macro problem. (Liu, 2003: 471). In the context of tourism, Butler argues, sustainable development should deal with the key issue of how to make conventional mass tourism developments as sustainable as possible and not making different small-scale forms of tourism, which are environmentally and culturally appropriate (Butler, 1999: 13) and should be seen as supplements when and where appropriate (Liu, 2003: 471).

However, sustainable tourism can be seen as an application of the concept of sustainable development onto the tourism sector, where resources are used and conserved in the matter of maintaining long-term viability (Weaver, 2006: 10). Butler (1999) also states that several writers of tourism seemingly have accepted how sustainable development is considered inherently good and appropriate for tourism, and adopting it into tourism will help solving many negative problems, which are results from the development of tourism (Butler, 1999: 8). Moreover, there has been a confusion about differentiating sustainable development as a concept and application of it on tourism. The confusion is evident when one links the concept with particular forms of tourism like “alternative tourism” where those forms are confused to be synonymous with sustainable development (Butler, 1999: 8-9). Weaver (2006) states that sustainable tourism should minimise the negative impacts and at the same time maximise the positive impacts (Weaver, 2006: 10) and Hamid and Isa say that it should be attainable at all levels from the local to the global scales (Hamid and Isa, 2017: 303).

When it comes to sustainability within the field of tourism, it also can be seen as having different meanings depending on what term is used. One of the terms is “sustainable tourism”, which deals with “tourism which is in a form which can maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time” (Butler, 1999: 11). However, a problem of the concept of sustainable development is, according to Butler (1999), when the word “sustainable”, which in its infinitive form would be “to sustain” and thus mean “to maintain or prolong” (Butler, 1999: 11), is referred to e.g. to tourism. It is noted that the utility and adoption of that is often without further definition and it has been applied to different activities “based on the assumption that it carries with it the ideological and philosophical implications of the concept” (Butler 1999: 11). Butler (1999) mentions then the example of tourism in the place of Niagara Falls as it has been a successful location for centuries and does not show any signs of disappearance (Butler, 1999: 11). This explanation is about semantics and emphasises the

maintenance of tourism within a destination, but it is not what is generally meant when using the term (Butler, 1999, 11-12). Rather the term of sustainable tourism is explained to be developed and maintained tourism within an area, community, environment, in a way where it remains viable and does not affect or alter the environment, human and physical, in a negative direction (Butler, 1999: 12).

Weaver (2006) also mentions that fundamentally sustainable tourism can be regarded as the application of sustainable development but within the tourism sector. Weaver therefore is saying it is very much about how needs today as well in the future are met but in relation to tourism (Weaver, 2006: 10). In addition, that the resources are used wisely by tourism also conserve the resources in order to maintain long-term viability. Therefore, the sustainable tourism is considered being about minimising negative impacts and maximise positive impacts and therefore may be seen as a form of sustainable development (Weaver, 2006: 10):

Another aspect of sustainability in tourism is argued by Zouganeli, Trihas and Antonaki (2012) in which the role of the local community and its local stakeholders play an important role in developing sustainability in tourism. (Zouganeli, Trihas and Antonaki 2012: 741). On one side, the residents' role is fairly important in the decision-making process in regard to planning and implementing tourism policies while on another side, their role is important concerning the creation and formation of a tourism product of a destination and also the visitors' experiences (Zouganeli et al 2012: 742).

### **Summary of sustainable tourism**

Summarising on the concept of sustainable tourism, it can be seen as having various definitions and meanings and thus be a debatable subject. Therefore, it is also seen as a concept, which can be shaped and addressed. Some researchers see sustainable tourism being about generally respecting all aspects and focusing on the needs of visitors, industry, environment and host community, while others see it as an application to sustainable development with focus on the tourism sector. Others question whether or not the concept of sustainable tourism or alternative tourism are fulfilling in terms of being sustainable and promote the environment as it is perceived that all forms of tourism affect the environment and the respective destination in one way or another. Therefore, it is argued if sustainable tourism and other alternative tourism are a small solution to what is a big problem and thus if it would be more beneficial to deal with conventional mass tourism sustainable.

## PERCEPTION OF SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM

One area of debate is what tourism stakeholders think of sustainable tourism. In order to get an overview of what possible attitudes tourism stakeholders might have towards sustainability in tourism, we review on existing literature concerning this exact subject; perception of sustainability in tourism. By clearing out what others have concluded in previous studies, we get a guideline throughout this literature, since tourism stakeholders, meaning tourism businesses and tourists, in previous studies to some extent might have the same perception of sustainability in tourism, as the findings we will find in the research of this thesis.

When an individual or entity form a perception, it is made upon a platform of valuations of products or services that the particular perception is about. The products or services are given a perception based on informational sources. These informational sources can be conversational interaction, newspapers, movies or TV programmes, and they have an influence on an individual or entity's perception of a product or service (Sloan et al., 2013: 227).

### **TOURISM BUSINESSES' PERCEPTION OF SUSTAINABILITY**

When tourism businesses make an effort on planning and managing sustainable tourism, it can be seen as an advantage, as this might help them understand stakeholders' perception of sustainability. In order to achieve successful sustainable outcomes in the tourism industry, it is necessary to understand the stakeholders' perception of sustainability, because the stakeholders define the proper way of managing sustainability that mirror their values and needs (Quintano et al., 2011: 297). The perceptions of tourism businesses found in existing literature are organised after the three dimensions of sustainability.

#### **Social dimension**

The social dimension of sustainability focuses on respecting human rights and equality for all (e.g. Hamid and Isa, 2017: 304). This dimension also concerns an organisation's influence on society, and this means that an organisation, business or company ought to manage different social aspects such as local cooperation and community, diversity, staff training and much more in relation to sustainability (Sloan et al, 2013: 27).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been discussed in many aspects over the years including tourism. As mentioned, CSR takes part in social sustainability, which have actively been incorporated in many hotels in Phuket, Thailand. Henderson (2007) has elaborated an example of CSR incorporation by tourism companies. After the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, many hotels reacted on the tsunami by arranging water delivery and food supplies for those in need. They also distributed clothes and provided accommodation for relief workers. Hotel staff helped with rescues, and they contributed with translation and counselling tasks. Additionally, some hotels also initiated fund raising campaigns (Henderson, 2007: 233-235). We point out that this a sustainable practice and not a perception of social sustainability.

The social dimension of sustainability encompasses many different aspects of sustainable practices. One of the aspects concerns cooperation. As mentioned, this can involve both local cooperation and more wide spread cooperation (Sloan et al., 2013). Since cooperation has such a broad understanding, it can also concern tourism businesses. Sigala (2008) investigated how the travel agency TUI attempts on being more sustainable through for example cooperation with other stakeholders. TUI finds social dialogue and cooperation a part of sustainability. TUI has worked out criteria for their destination excursions wherein it is stated that local cooperation should be supported. As a side note, TUI also prioritises training the staff in order to become environmentally sustainable and aware of natural and cultural assets. The travel agency aims at being a responsible business by among other things being involved in external cooperation with local communities, authorities, tourists and staff (Sigala, 2008: 1591, 1593).

Another way of looking at the social dimension is again through the hotel industry's point of view. The hotel industry includes this dimension in their perception of sustainability by educating the staff on sustainable behavior. An example of that is evident from the work of Quintano, C., Pagliuca, M.M. and Rosciano, M. (2011). In order for tourism stakeholders to have any opinion on the subject of sustainability in tourism, a certain level of knowledge on the matter is necessary, which accounts for both tourism businesses and tourists (Quintano et al., 2011: 303). According to Quintano et al. (2011), there is a need for further education on sustainable tourism within the tourism industry in order to optimise practices on sustainable measures in the hotel industry in Naples. The hotels ranged from 1 till 5 star hotels. The sustainable measures referred to are sustainability programmes, sustainable

behaviour amongst staff and the information distributed to the guests at a hotel. The same goes for the tourists in relation to sustainable behaviour according to Quintano et al. (2011: 303).

Both the hotel industry and the travel industry incorporate staff training. The work of Sigala (2008) does not elaborate much on staff training in the TUI business, yet it is mentioned that it entails sustainable awareness amongst the staff and environmental sustainable conduct in general. Compared to the hotel industry, staff training is also considered important in order to optimise sustainable practices such as sustainable conduct (Quintano et al., 2011).

The social dimension of sustainability is also found to concern the morale and influence of a company, and how this is considered important in companies, as their actions reflect on the society. An example of that is found in the work of Frey and George (2010). The authors found that regional tourism businesses in Cape Town hold on to perceived benefits from responsible tourism; because they consider it an enhancement of the employees' morale and performance, as well as it enhances the company reputation. Additionally, they see responsible tourism as a marketing tool (Frey and George, 2010: 626).

The examples highlighted from existing literature illustrate how the social dimension of sustainability covers different aspects and levels of actions taken in tourism businesses. Serious actions such as helping out a community in need, is a way of showing humanity as a business. Other actions follow a different direction by focusing on the internal conduct in a business through staff training. We infer that sustainable practices include some form of perception, since any practice arise from a desire of making a difference. This is solely an assumption, thus not indicating that this is the only way one can retrieve perceptions.

### **Economic dimension**

The economic dimension concerns the economic growth in the eco-system and the prosperity in a company. Yet, it also concerns the economic viability needed in any business (e.g. Baker, 2006), thus it also concerns tourism businesses.

According to Weaver (2004), researchers within the tourism field have a tendency to leave out economic viability in the perceptions of sustainability. An example of this is how Wildlife

Conservation Society fails to incorporate economic viability in an assessment of ecotourism's impact on biodiversity preservation. Weaver (2004) argues that economic viability is an essential part of sustainable development, thus this should be included in future assessments.

We recognise that this study dates back to 2004; hence, others might possess other findings. Yet, this discovery corresponds well with the fact that we struggle on covering the economic sustainability in relation to tourism businesses.

### **Environmental dimension**

The environmental dimension entails the protection of the natural resources that the Earth provides (e.g. Baker, 2006). In relation to tourism, environmental sustainability focus on the way a company can reduce their environmental impacts, which do not benefit the environment (Sloan et al., 2013: 25)

Reducing environmental impacts is an option some businesses make use of in order to become more sustainable. One way of achieving this is through sustainable certification systems. Jarvis, N., Weeden, C., & Simcock, N. (2010) bring examples of tourism businesses that aim for this. The authors researched the benefits and challenges of sustainable tourism in relation to admitting to a Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS). The research is based on tourism businesses within the hotel industry, visitor attractions and events in the West of England. The tourism businesses have perceived benefits from potentially being part of a Green Tourism Business Scheme, which is a sustainable certification scheme. The reduction of environmental impacts shows a commitment to ecotourism according to the tourism businesses, as well as it was something the businesses felt obligated to rank highest of importance. Examples of practices that reduce the environmental impacts include minimising waste by recycling plastic, glass and metal. Purchasing environmentally friendly goods and services such as local products and recycled materials (Jarvis et al., 2010: 86-90).

As mentioned, businesses can admit to different kinds of sustainable certification schemes in order to become a more sustainable business. These certification systems can amongst other aspects, provide a business with economic growth and an enhanced business through environmental sustainability. An example of this is specified in the work of Jarvis et al. (2010). As mentioned, they researched the benefits and challenges of sustainable tourism in joining the Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS) - a sustainable certification scheme. The target group was tourism businesses within the hotel industry, visitor attractions and events in the West of England. The tourism businesses have perceived

benefits from potentially being part of the GTBS because it provides them with cost savings. They exemplify this with investing in sustainable practices like rainwater harvesting systems that in long term pays off with profit. In addition, water, energy and waste utility costs can be reduced by joining the GTBS. In relation to the competitive advantage, the tourism businesses believe that the GTBS will enhance a business through a marketing point of view. They think the GTBS will give the business something extra to offer, and that would be visual through marketing. They perceive this as a competitive advantage for their business. From the brand and company image point of view, the tourism businesses perceive the GTBS to be an element of attraction, because they think the logo is recognizable with green and white colours. Thus, branding their business with the admittance of the GTBS is considered to bring prosperity to their businesses (Jarvis et al., 2010: 86-90).

In comparison, the travel agency TUI also operate with a certification system in order to follow a sustainable work procedure. TUI has admitted to the certification system called International Standard Organisation (ISO) in order to monitor their sustainable practices. This should optimise the sustainable standards at TUI. (Sigala, 2008: 1593).

The environmental dimension of sustainability is present in the travel industry, as evidence shows that sustainable practices such as reforestation and projects benefiting the environment are applied by businesses concerning travel. This is evident from the work of Pavia, N., Floricic, T. and Cerovic, M. (2015). Pavia et al. (2015) found that TUI Travel PLC is known for a sustainable initiative that is the signing of the 'Sustainable Addendum'. Businesses sign this document, if they wish to encourage socially responsible business conduct. Pavia et al. (2015) also found sustainable initiatives in the Scandinavian tour operator business Solresor. Solresor developed a brand called Eden Lifestyle with a strategy focussed on sustainability and wellbeing. One of the sustainability strategies is the project called Eden Gardens, which function as a funding for reforestation in Malta, Italy and Portugal. This project contributes with sustainable results such as clean air, soil preservation and protecting endangered plants and species. Finally, Pavia et al. (2015) also came across the hotel industry in their research. The hotel chain Carlson Rezidor with Park Plaza Hotels & Resorts evolved the document 'Corporate Social Responsibility Policy'. In this document, activities are developed due to the strategies of TREE (Total Responsibility for Everyone's Environment) and SEASON (Safe Energy and Switch Off Now). The strategies work with waste management, water, heating, electricity, purchasing, learning and development, guest communication and corporate travel. Park Plaza have

received two awards called “Considerate Hotelier Association Award” and “Green Tourism Award” (Pavia et al., 2015: 248-250).

It has become evident that tourism businesses can execute various environmental practices by being admitted to a certification system. Not only can a certification scheme contribute to environmental improvements, it can also enhance economic growth through these improvements.

In the area of food and drink there are also a variety of sustainable practices that restaurants have adopted. The sustainable practices are focussed on protecting the environment, and examples of that are preventing food waste and the restaurants implement composting and recycling programmes, which is evident in the work of Nyheim (2012). Nyheim (2012) investigated the environmentally sustainable practices in the restaurant industry. In the research, two green innovative restaurants were chosen. The restaurants apply waste programmes that initiate recycling and composting. Examples of these initiatives are food waste and using biodegradable items such as napkins, beverage holders and cutlery. They recycle paper, wood, cans, bottles, cardboard, plastic wraps and plastics. The restaurants use local organic products as a way of being more sustainable, as well as they also reduce the energy consumption by changing the lights. The restaurants make use of a system of food waste in terms of writing down which foods are needed for the night in order to structure the use and minimize waste. The restaurants expressed an obstacle of being a big operationalization which is the expectation from customers. If the restaurants want to be more sustainable, they need to serve seasonal food, however, as a big entity, customers have difficulties understanding that not all ingredients are available all year long. This means that sustainable development is not always well received by consumers (Nyheim, 2012: 59-66). However, the work of Nyheim (2012) did not provide us with perceptions but actions, thus we infer that the actions taken in the restaurants arise from perceptions.

### **Why not become sustainable?**

Although studies above prove that tourism businesses engage in sustainable practices, the opposite is also proven. Some tourism businesses also explain why they pull back from adopting sustainable practices, and why they reason it less important.



A reason not to include sustainable practices in the hotel industry is that experience shows that guests express a lack of comfort and quality. This is evident in the work of Sloan et al. (2013). The researchers came across a study that showed that American hoteliers have a tendency to cut out environmentally sustainable initiatives that reduces the cost, because the hoteliers are of the belief that guests are aware of the cost reduction. What is meant is that sustainable initiatives such as towel-reuse or energy efficient technology lowers the expenses in a hotel, thus a stay at a hotel would have to be less expensive. As guests are aware of this, hotels tend not to act on this due to Sloan et al. (2013). The authors also discovered that hoteliers experience a decrease in satisfaction from guests in relation to environmentally sustainable initiatives, as this causes a lower level of comfort and quality. Because of this, hoteliers argue that there are reasons not to act sustainable in the hotel industry (Sloan et al., 2013: 222).

There is a difference between good intentions and actual action. This is present in the tourism industry in relation to actually begin implementing sustainable practices. The work of Frey and George (2010) proves this. They researched the link between attitude and behaviour towards responsible tourism management in regional tourism businesses in Cape Town. The research shows there is a missing link between the intentions the tourism businesses have and the actual actions they take, meaning there is a lack of actions. The tourism businesses do not have a negative attitude towards responsible tourism, but struggle to follow through with implementations that are considered responsible tourism. The tourism business managers perceive responsible tourism as expensive and difficult to implement. They exemplify this perception of responsible tourism with the implementation of waste management systems or employing from the local community (Frey and George, 2010: 625-626).

In the tourism industry, different kinds of certification systems exist in relation to become a sustainable business. However, a membership of a certification system not only comes with benefits, as tourism businesses have perceived challenges of being part of a certification system. Evidence of this is found in the work of Jarvis et al. (2010). As mentioned, the researchers came across tourism businesses within the hotel industry, visitor attractions and events in the West of England, who had a more negative perception of potentially being part of the Green Tourism Business Scheme. The businesses believed that the brand of the GTBS is unrecognizable to people and needs a wider appeal in order to gain any benefits. In addition, the businesses express a lack of coherence between the brand image and the actual experience, which in the case of the GTBS is a dissatisfaction amongst

the businesses. They also expressed a lack of marketing of the GTBS, and see it necessary to spend more resources on promoting the brand of the scheme. Generally, the tourism businesses have perceived challenges of being part of the GTBS. They think it an expensive membership and compare it to the lack of knowledge of the scheme from consumers, thus they need to consider if it is worth going in to (Jarvis et al., 2010: 89-90).

A coherence exists between the findings from the work of Frey and George (2010) and the work of Jarvis et al. (2010). Their findings are similar, as they discovered that some tourism businesses find it expensive to implement sustainable initiatives. This withholds some businesses from implementing sustainable practices.

Sloan et al. (2013) support the work of Quintano et al. (2011). The sustainable practices taken in the hotel industry is also education, but in this case, it is directed at the guests as a way to defend not taking environmental actions. Sloan et al. (2013) studied the hotel industry. In their findings, they discovered that some hotel managers fear for a negative response from the guests concerning environmental actions in hotels. As a solution to this, they suggest educating guests on proper sustainable behavior (Sloan et al., 2013: 222).

## **Summary**

The reviewed literature cover both understandings of sustainability and sustainable practices taken in tourism businesses. Since we struggle finding clear perceptions of each dimension, we included literature on sustainable practices as well. We infer that sustainable actions arise from a desire of starting a new implementation of any kind of sustainable practice. Yet, we cannot be completely sure that the tourism businesses from the literature actually have a certain perception of what sustainability is.

The three dimensions of sustainability are present in tourism businesses on different levels; however, one of the dimensions are more frequently applied. First, the tourism businesses involve hotels, restaurants, travel companies and local tourism informational businesses. Second, the environmental dimension of sustainability plays a bigger role in the sustainable practices taken by the tourism businesses found in the existing literature. This is because we found a bigger amount of literature on this dimension, and the sustainable practices are various. The environmental dimension is applied in

order to implement environmental projects in a tourism business. The implementations vary from reforestation, protecting natural resources, conserving nature, managing waste and energy consumption. The literature also cover certification systems, which often focus on green initiatives as the main priority.

The social sustainability is applied in order to reach out to vulnerable groups of people. It also encompass how community cooperation is essential to a tourism business. Finally, social sustainability in tourism businesses entails staff training on sustainable behaviour, as well as it is visual through a company's morale and reputation through sustainable practices. As mentioned, the economic dimension came with difficulties, as we struggled finding literature on this aspect of sustainability connected to tourism businesses. Yet, we did encounter a discovery that points toward a lack of consideration on economic viability in tourism businesses.

## **TOURISTS' PERCEPTION OF SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM**

There is evidence that shows that tourists consider different aspects of sustainability in relation to tourism. These aspects are categorised from the three dimensions of sustainability; social, economic and environmental (Baker, 2006).

### **Social dimension**

There is some evidence that tourists consider social aspects such as employment and quality of life important in tourism. Tourism can create employment for people in a local community. Additionally, keeping tourism sustainable is a way of securing the quality of life for people in the local community. This is evident from the work of Pulido-Fernández and López-Sánchez (2014). The authors did a study in Costa del Sol, Spain. Their study shows that tourists do care about a sustainable tourism destination and the tourists consider it important to continue the work on making destinations more sustainable. The reason for this is that the tourists see tourism as an employment creator, and sustainable measures can keep the industry growing. The tourists also think of their children, and view sustainability as a way for the children to be able to visit destinations in the future, thus the tourists think sustainability is a good initiative on behalf of destinations in order to protect destinations in the long term. The local community is also taken into consideration, as the tourists consider it a right of the local residents to continue having a high quality of life within the tourist destinations,

which is achieved through sustainable tourism. Finally, the tourists perceive the traditional tourist destinations as threatened by damaging behavior (Pulido-Fernández and López-Sánchez, 2014: 1591).

The life of the people in a community affected by tourism business is of importance to some tourists. They see sustainable tourism as a way of contributing to quality of the local life in a community. This perception have been supported by the work of Dauti (2014). The researcher made a study in Kosovo on tourists of ages 16 and up, and researched their perception of sustainable tourism. Dauti (2014) found that tourists have a positive attitude towards sustainable tourism, as they see it beneficial for the local community as well, and think of sustainable tourism as a way of empowering the life of the local community (Dauti, 2014: 7-8).

Comparing the work of Pulido-Fernández and López-Sánchez (2014) and Dauti (2014), it is evident that some tourists find it important that the local community in a tourist destination is taken into consideration. What is meant by that it that the quality of life for the local community should not be affected by tourism activities in a negative way.

Some tourists consider tourism as an employment creator, which is part of the social dimension of sustainability. A local community can be provided with job opportunities through tourism, which also provides developing opportunities in relation to welfare and infrastructure in a tourist destination. Evidence of this is found in the work of Zhao (2014). The researcher studied tourists' perception of sustainable tourism in Anhui Province, China. It was found that the tourists think tourism can provide labor for a local community in a tourism destination. Not only does tourism provide employment for a local community, but the quality of life is also enriched through tourism due to the findings of Zhao (2014) as the development caused by the tourism industry shapes the infrastructure and welfare in a destination. Examples of that is roads, hotels, restaurants, shopping, entertainment and travel agencies (Zhao, 2014: 57-59).

It is also evident that some tourists find improving that tourism can provide employment, which is an aspect of the social dimension of sustainability. Pulido-Fernández and López-Sánchez (2014) and Zhao (2014) both support this tendency with their research.

Tourists find importance in environmental education and the preservation of local culture in tourist destinations. This is evident from the work of Nicholas and Thapa (2010). The researchers allocated their study in Pitons Management Area (PMA) World Heritage Site. In this study, they found that tourists consider cultural exchange important and value interactions with the local residents, as well as they have respect for the local culture. The tourists consider environmental education important, however, it is not specified in the literature, what environmental education means in this case. In addition, the tourists also consider it important to buy local products and services (Nicholas and Thapa, 2010: 847-850).

In relation to social sustainability, tourists recommend others to travel to green destinations and find value in the usage of local products. Evidence of this is found in the work of Pavia, N., Floricic, T. and Cerovic, M. (2015). The researchers approached tourists with the average age of 55 and under, and they originated primarily from Italy and Germany. The research aimed at knowing what tourists perceive of sustainability in tourist destinations. The tourists perceive the usage of local products as a sustainable practice. Additionally, the tourists would recommend family and friends to go for green initiatives in destinations as they consider this important (Pavia et al., 2015: 254-255).

### **Economic dimension**

The existing literature approached in this review did not reveal any evidence of the economic dimension of sustainability. However, since this dimension concerns the profit and prosperity of a company, there might be a link between the knowledge on this matter on behalf of the tourists, and the level of importance this dimension has on their holiday. Nonetheless, this cannot be proven, thus, this is simply a suggestion of reason.

### **Environmental dimension**

Tourists find it important to protect natural resources and find that nature is threatened by actions taken in the tourism industry. The environmental aspect of sustainability is proven to be of importance to tourists, which is evident from the work of Dauti (2014). The researcher studied tourists in Kosovo of ages 16 and up. The tourists in this study see it necessary to protect the nature and thus have a positive perception of sustainability, as they wish to minimize the damage done to the nature through tourism. The tourists view sustainable tourism as a necessity, because it affects the future of tourism, and sustainable actions have beneficial outcomes for the field of tourism, and see these

actions as possible to achieve. Furthermore, the tourists consider sustainable measures in tourism as a way of optimizing the standard at host institutions, and find it valuable that sustainable tourism can benefit the development in the tourism industry while also protecting the culture and nature in destinations. (Dauti, 2014: 7-8). The work of Dauti (2014) did not present any specific examples of what tourists think sustainable tourism means, or which sustainable practices the tourists think would protect the natural resources.

In relation to the environmental dimension of sustainability, some tourists have strong opinions on the damage done to the environment by the tourism industry. This is evident from the study of Zhao (2014). The researcher found that tourists of all ages in Anhui Province, China think of the tourism industry as a polluting and damaging industry, and thus think that sustainable measures should be put to use. These measures are policies and regulations adopted by tourism planners in order to protect the environment. In addition, green tourism are recommended in order to raise the awareness of natural resources and their importance. The tourists in this study have noticed the change in air and water as well, as they observe damage on plants and animals. Additionally, the tourists consider the tourism industry as having an excessive usage of natural resources and fear for the consequences of this (Zhao, 2014: 57-59).

The work of Dauti (2014) and Zhao (2014) share similar findings, as they both discovered that some tourists think the tourism industry contributes to damaging the environment. Thus, the some tourists find environmentally sustainable practices important in order to protect natural resources and preserve animal species.

It happens that tourists choose a green destination in terms of valuing sustainable practices that benefit the environment. Examples of sustainable practices taken in a tourist destination are replacing resources and sustainable activities. This is evident from the work of Pavia, N., Floricic, T. and Cerovic, M. (2015). The mentioned authors approached tourists their study with the average age of 55 and under, and they originated primarily from Italy and Germany. The tourists provided the authors with positive attitudes towards sustainable initiatives in tourist destinations. The tourists would choose a destination based on their green initiatives, and would participate in sustainable activities, if they are available, as well as they would pay more for those kinds of activities. The tourists would choose socially responsible hotels on their vacation. They consider their conduct in relation to how it

affects the local surroundings, as well as they would behave more responsibly if the tourist destination focuses on sustainable development and environmental preservation. They consider it valuable that they contribute to preserving the nature and sustainable development, by choosing a green destination. The tourists are aware of compensation and replacement of resources used for developing tourism, and consider it important to execute (Pavia et al., 2015: 254-255).

In relation to environmental sustainability, tourists consider it important to conserve nature in attractions that take place in historical settings. An example of this is found in the work of Nicholas and Thapa (2010). They researched tourists' perceptions of the sustainable tourism development in the Pitons Management Area (PMA) World Heritage Site. The tourists were mainly North American and English with an average age of 42 years. The tourists value the nature in the attraction and consider it important to protect and conserve the nature including rare plants and animal species. The reason for this is that the tourists consider natural diversity important. It is more important to them that the natural habitat for plants and animals is protected than recreational circumstances. They support the prohibition of establishing big resorts in PMA as well as they support regulatory environmental standards (Nicholas and Thapa, 2010: 847-850). Yet again, this study did not provide us with any direct indication of perceptions from tourists; hence, we infer that tourists perceive the environment as something that should be protected, since they find it important.

### **Are we as informed as we can be?**

Even though evidence of sustainable tourism being of importance to tourists exists, researchers have also found evidence of the contrary. In studies, it is proven that some tourists yet do not consider sustainable practices in tourist destinations as a factor of importance nor preference.

What is the reason that tourists do not consider sustainable tourism important? Bernini et al. (2015) researched on this issue. They found that tourists in Rimini, Italy do not consider sustainability as an urgent factor of satisfaction on their vacation as opposed to other factors such as the beach, sea and sun. The tourists were of ages 18 and up, and ranged from Italians to all foreigner tourists. This suggests that sustainability is yet not a factor of relevance that mirrors the satisfaction for tourists. Initiatives such as waste separation, public transportation and energy and water savings seem to be of little notice by the tourists, which could indicate that sustainability is still a novel phenomenon for tourists to consider on their vacation. However, the researchers propose a solution to this, which can

be the visibility, which means that tourism businesses that already make sustainable initiatives need to make the initiatives more visible through branding for example (Bernini et al., 2015: 14, 15).

Some tourists are not yet convinced that sustainable tourism is of importance. Instead, some tourists perceive sustainable tourism as a marketing stunt. This is evident in the work of Pulido-Fernández and López-Sánchez (2014). They studied tourists in Costa del Sol, Spain and found that the tourists do not consider sustainable tourism important. The tourists were both domestic and foreigners. The argument by these tourists is that they see sustainability as a marketing concept, which tourism businesses only use to make a sale. Additionally, the tourists do not believe that destinations, which has not acted sustainable, are able to change their ways of acting sustainable. Thus, perceptions of a lack of interest in sustainable tourism exist and those are the arguments (Pulido-Fernández and López-Sánchez, 2014: 1592).

Are some sustainable practices more important than others? Some tourists are of this belief, which is evident from the work of Aydin and Alvarez (2016). They researched TripAdvisor reviews from tourists who had spent a vacation in Cusco, Peru. Aydin and Alvarez (2016) found that tourists in Cusco, Peru yet do not consider sustainable initiatives on their vacation, unless they affect the experiences on the vacation such as the preservation of cultural and historical resources and the quality of the environment. This means that the environment should be protected in order to keep a clean environment, thus keeping the quality. However, actions such as recycling and renewing resources are not in the interest of the tourists (Aydin and Alvarez, 2016: 953-953).

Tourists are of the understanding that it is not important to act sustainable on a vacation, if they are sustainable in their everyday routines. This is supported in the work of Miller, G., Rathouse, K., Scarles, C., Holmes, K. and Tribe, J. (2010), who also proposes reasons for this way of thinking. The researchers studied the perception of people from England with a wide range of ethnicities and vacation frequencies in order to get a public opinion. Miller et al (2010) found that tourists struggle with the understanding of the distinction between sustainability in the everyday life and sustainability in tourism. Miller et al. (2010) express that a better understanding of the role of tourism in sustainable changes is necessary for tourists as well, because tourists should have a better understanding of what it means to be a responsible tourist. The tourists in the study of Miller et al. (2010) were of the persuasion that changing the routines in the everyday life at home would have a bigger effect on the



environment, than changing the behaviour in tourism as well. This could be a result of the lack of understanding according to Miller et al. (2010). The tourists in this study argued that they do not need to change their behaviour on a vacation into more sustainable actions, because they already do so in their everyday life routines, which give them the right to use air transport - just as an example. It is expressed that it is possible to be “green on balance”, and the tourists feel a kind of entitlement towards enjoying themselves on a vacation without taking sustainable actions. In addition to air travel, the tourists consider it more sustainable to travel to Australia for a wine tasting or Nepal for trekking, than traveling to Paris or New York for shopping despite the long air travel to Australia and Nepal. The reason for this is the activities that take place in the different examples of destinations, which are more sustainable in Australia and Nepal according to the tourists. Miller et al. (2010) explain that a misunderstanding of the impacts tourism bring along on the environment causes this perception by the tourists (Miller et al., 2010: 635-636, 642).

## **Summary**

The three dimensions of sustainability are all present in the existing literature concerning tourists' perception of sustainability. However, the social and environmental dimension is of greater importance to tourists due to the approached literature. The social dimension plays an important role to tourists, because they find it relevant that tourism is an employment creator. In addition, the quality of life for the people in a tourist destination is of importance to tourists, and sustainable tourism enhances this quality. Tourists prefer buying and using local products, and they think sustainability can help preserving local culture in tourist destinations. The environmental dimension is present in tourists' perceptions, as they find it important to protect natural resources and nature in historic places. They think of tourism as a damaging factor to the environment, and some would choose a green tourist destination if possible.

What we have derived from the existing literature will follow through in the analysis. This means that the three dimensions of sustainability will function as the theoretical concepts that we apply onto our data derived from interviews and the questionnaire.

## **What does the future look like?**

Sloan et al. (2013) foresee that future generations might not have a choice as to whether they wish to be a sustainable tourist or not. This is because the authors think that the children of today are born

into a world where environmental, economic and social issues are approaching each other in one big circle of coherence. Thus, the authors see it very likely that future generations only have one option of consumption, which is the responsible consumption (Sloan et al., 2013: 226).

Furthermore, Sloan et al. (2013) have completed a number of types of tourists in relation to travelling on sustainable manners. These are the eco tourist, the responsible tourist, activists, and unpredictable and informed tourists (Sloan et al., 2013: 216-220). Hall et al. (2015) disagree with Sloan et al. (2013) on making up different types of sustainable tourists. Hall et al. (2015) are of the persuasion that tourists cannot be put into boxes in relation to traveling on sustainable manners. In their work, the focus on sustainable manners is actively put on environmental sustainable manners. The authors think it possible that tourists intend to cause the smallest environmental damage possible to a destination. However, the authors think it just as likely that tourists with no intention of acting sustainable spend their holiday in an eco-destination or sleep in an eco-lodge. Thus, Hall et al. (2015) argue that any kind of tourist can end up in a destination that provides a more eco-friendly experience, and therefore they see no linkage between the choice of destination in relation to eco-friendly destinations (Hall et al., 2015: 141). Further to this, Hall et al. (2015) think it not possible to draw one single conclusion as to how a sustainable tourist can be described:

*“If one attempted to paint a picture of the average environmentally sustainable tourist based on the literature this person would be middle aged, half highly educated, half not, slightly environmentally concerned, slightly environmentally aware, slightly willing to forgo comfort and adventure seeking, and slightly female”* (Hall et al., 2015: 141).

As a comment on the above, the authors do not consider this description useful for a tourism business, as this target is very unclear and limited in a way. The authors however are of the persuasion that environmentally sustainable tourists can be divided into two kinds of labelling; those who have intentions of being environmentally sustainable and those who have outcomes to prove and are actually active in their behaviour (Hall et al., 2015: 141-142). Juvan and Dolnicar (2017) agree that there is a difference between the intentions tourists possess towards sustainable behaviour and the actual actions taken by the tourists. Due to this, Juvan and Dolnicar (2017) propose solutions that can reduce the environmental impacts tourists bring along with their behavior on holidays. If tourists avoid long distance transportation, they can reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. They can avoid

activities with high-energy consumption such as buying food that is imported. The tourists can also buy eco labelled products and change their behavior towards a more responsible one. This means the tourists can make a bigger effort on recycling and using biodegradable packaging as well as they can avoid boat-tours and walk on their own instead of taking a taxi or similar transportation. Tourists can minimize the number of vacation per year and travel closer to home (Juvan and Dolnicar, 2017: 880-881).

## METHODOLOGY

This chapter serves the purpose of covering what methodological decisions we have made throughout this thesis, as well as why we have chosen to do so. Our methodological considerations take off by explaining the scientific field we apply throughout this research. We go into deep explaining the building stones of this research in relation to design and the choice of research methods. From this, we move on to the ethical considerations made in advance for this research.

## THEORY OF SCIENCE

### INTERPRETIVISM

How do we perceive the social world throughout this research? The answer to this question is through the worldview of the interpretivist. The reason for this is that the interpretivist takes interest in human actions and the differences that lie within these actions. As Bryman (2012) explains it, the interpretivist seeks to understand the meaning behind human behaviour in a social context (Bryman, 2012: 28-29). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) explain that the perspectives of people's lives are also taken into consideration by the interpretivist, which can be exemplified by the relation to the subject of the research. From this, the interpretivist can obtain deeper understandings of the perspective of people's lives by comparing it to other perspectives (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 17, 21-22).

How is interpretivism related to our research? This thesis contains both a qualitative and quantitative research method, thus it is a mix of methods. From this, we have taken on the interpretivist approach of the social world. An elaboration of this will be given later in this section. This thesis intends to understand how different representatives of tourism businesses in Aalborg perceive sustainability, which translated into the interpretivist view is a way of understanding the actions of the tourism businesses. In addition to this, we investigate which sustainable practices the businesses take. This thesis also intends to get an understanding of what Danish tourists perceive as sustainable, as well as how important sustainability is to these tourists, when they go on a vacation. However, our approach of getting an understanding of these two aspects of our research is different, which will now be elaborated. In order to get an understanding of representatives of tourism businesses' perception of sustainability and application of sustainable practices, in depth semi-structured interviews are conducted with ten businesses in Aalborg. The findings resulting from these interviews are

interpretable, thus a correspondence between the research method and the epistemological approach is intact. In order to get an understanding of Danish tourists' perception of sustainability in tourism related activities, and the degree of importance, a questionnaire is distributed. However, the questionnaire contains both closed and open questions (Long, 2007), which enables us to interpret the findings we receive in the open questions, as the respondents are able to express their individual opinions. This means that the questionnaire being the quantitative research method, still corresponds with the epistemological considerations in this thesis.

### **MIXED METHODS RESEARCH**

The application of both qualitative and quantitative research methods within one research is a mix of methods. According to Bryman (2012) different approaches to the application of mixed methods research exists. What is meant is that depending on the research; either the qualitative or the quantitative research method is the dominant one. Of course, both research methods can be equally dominant in a research as well (Bryman, 2012: 628, 631-632). Long (2007) explains that when researching social science, it can be difficult to reach an exact understanding of a particular study, thus the more we research and examine, the better an understanding we get of a respective study. According to Long (2007), triangulation is used to cover the action of doing research and examination times over in order to reach an understanding. When applying triangulation different methods are taken into use, when trying to reach an understanding of a study, which is what other authors also call mixed methods research. The researcher uses more than one method in a study in order to gather more information than it would be possible with just one method (Long, 2007: 15).

In this research, two kinds of research methods are applied in order to gather the needed data. The methods are semi-structured interviews and the questionnaire, and the reason for mixing those exact research methods is as follows. First of all, the combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods is a strategic choice, as the two methods can address different parts of the research questions in the problem formulation. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) explain that it can be beneficial to view the two methods as complementing one another instead of viewing them as two contradicting competitors (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003:15). In order to clarify, the qualitative research method applied in this thesis is the conducted interviews on selected tourism businesses in Aalborg. The quantitative research method is the questionnaire forwarded Danish tourists. Since this is a social science study, we find it relevant to apply the entire 'toolkit' available for us as researchers, which is why we apply both

qualitative and quantitative research methods. In this way, both research questions in our problem formulation – forwarded tourism businesses and tourists – are investigated and answered. This is how the two research methods in this thesis complement each other.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### CASE STUDY

A case study provides a study with a more intensified study of a single case. The research in a case study can concern a single community, school, family, organization, person or event. Bryman (2012) argues that the more common use of a single case is associated with a location as for example a community or an organization. However, according to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) a single case study can bring multiple perspectives to a study, as the research can contain several actors within this one case. Bryman (2012) explains that a case study is directed by a certain case of interest, thus the core focus in a case study is the actual chosen case. The analysis of a case study can invite complexity issues, as a comparison of several actors within the single case can be met with difficulties. Long (2007) speaks that a case study can provide interpretations of the behaviour of the participants included in the study. This means that it is possible to interpret why participant might engage or not in the specific case (Bryman, 2012: 66-68; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 51-52, 76; Long, 2007: 14).

The specific case that this thesis is guided by is the case of Aalborg. The reason for this that our research is centered on the businesses of Aalborg related to tourism. We intend to investigate what sustainable practices tourism businesses apply and why they initiated those practices. In order to investigate this, we apply a qualitative research in form of semi-structured interviews with experts of the field. In section xxx a profile of the interviewees is accessible in order to provide an overview of the different businesses. We have chosen Aalborg as the case of this study because we find it relevant to reveal whether the tourism businesses encountered apply sustainable practices in order to meet the aspects of importance due to Danish tourists. It could also be of other interests such as including sustainability in the company strategy, or as a way of achieving sustainable certification labels. However, these are just a few examples of reasons to become more sustainable. In any case, we attempt to investigate what the reason or reasons are for tourism businesses in Aalborg to incorporate sustainable practices.

## RESEARCH METHODS

For this thesis, the semi-structured interviews are chosen along with a questionnaire as the methodological research tools for collecting data. In this section of the methodology chapter, the features of interviews will be explained and furthermore the reason behind the choice of this method. In the following section, the questionnaire will too be elaborated including the choice of this as well.

### QUESTIONNAIRE

In this thesis, we have chosen to apply a questionnaire as one method of collecting data. The reason for this is that a questionnaire can provide this thesis with a great amount of data. However, a questionnaire can also provide us with knowledge on Danish tourist's perception of sustainable tourism. The questionnaire applied in this thesis provided us with background information on the respondents, as well as it provided us with the opportunity of pointing out tendencies amongst the respondents in relation to how important sustainability is on their vacation. We chose to investigate Danish tourists' perception of sustainable tourism, because we found it important to narrow down our field of research to a specific geographical area. The questionnaire is considered the most beneficial method of approaching Danish tourists, as we are able approach a greater amount as opposed to individual interviews.

#### Design

The questionnaire applied for this thesis contained a short introduction to the purpose of it. The questionnaire is divided into sections of questions; background information, the general perception of sustainability in tourism, sustainability in accommodation, sustainability in eating places and finally sustainability in attractions.

The questionnaire contained various kinds of questions such as closed and open questions, multiple choice questions and likert scales. According to Long (2007) closed questions function with restricted responses for the respondent. An example of a closed question is one with the option of answering yes/no. Open questions allow the respondents to answer as they like using their own words and opinions. As a side note, Long (2007) explains that open questions can be treated as qualitative data, as the researcher can analyse the content of the answers to the open question. A likert scale is a proposed statement in a questionnaire that invites the respondent to indicate to what degree he/she agrees with the statement (Long, 2007: 59, 65).

As mentioned, this quantitative research contains this variety of questions in the questionnaire, because we consider it an advantage to include different angled questions. This is because the questions all provide us with the data we need in order to reach a conclusion on the problem formulation of this thesis. The closed questions in the questionnaire of this thesis provide us with background information on the respondents. The open questions provide us with the respondent's opinion on their sustainable actions in their everyday life versus on their vacation. We also included a section in the questionnaire with open questions on tourists' perception of sustainable tourism. This section was not obligated for the respondents to answer; thus we have fewer feedbacks on these questions as opposed to the other open questions. The multiple-choice question provide us with knowledge on how important sustainable practices taken in accommodation sites, eating places and attractions are to the respondents. Finally, likert scales provide us with an insight of how important sustainability is to the respondents in relation to the different niches of tourism businesses.

### **Distribution and sample**

The questionnaire is designed in the programme called SurveyXact provided by the University of Aalborg. This program gave us the opportunity of distributing the questionnaire via a link. Distributing the questionnaire via a link makes the questionnaire a self-administrative format. Before distributing the questionnaire, we did a test run in order to assess whether the questions are understandable. The questionnaire in this thesis was distributed on a social media platform called Facebook. We made the choice of distributing it on that specific platform, because we apply a questionnaire in order to reach out to Danish tourists. We considered this platform an active site for consumers in general, thus tourists should be accessible as well, as they are the targets of this research. More specifically, we distributed the questionnaire in a group on Facebook in which members share their travel experiences. We chose this group, because the members enjoy traveling, which we saw as an advantage, as they might have an opinion on sustainability on their vacation as well. The group has more than 2.000 members, thus we could approach a big amount of people. This group is useful in our data collection, because its members are tourists who travel anywhere at any time. We wish to approach Danish tourist, and not necessarily tourists who spend their vacation in Aalborg. The questionnaire was distributed to 895 respondents, whereof 95 respondents completed to questionnaire and 43 respondents completed parts of the questionnaire. We apply both the completed and partly



completed responses throughout the analysis of this thesis. Since the questionnaire was written in Danish, we have been obligated to translate the responses in Danish into English.

## **INTERVIEWS**

The purpose of including interviews as a research method in this thesis is that the content of the interviews can provide this thesis with a deeper understanding (Bryman, 2012: 469; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 138-139) of what tourism businesses in Aalborg understand of sustainability, and why they choose to incorporate sustainable practices in their businesses. The interviews enable us as researchers to speak directly with the tourism businesses, thus making the data collected from interviews a more intense investigation.

### **Qualitative interview**

In a qualitative research, the method of interview is a common choice of collecting data. According to Bryman (2012), the flexibility in an interview is what makes this method a popular choice even though the sampling, the transcription and the analysis of findings can be more time-consuming than other methods. However, due to the flexibility, employing interviews can be seen as less disruptive in the sense of private life (Bryman, 2012: 469). For several reasons, the qualitative interview is rather different from the quantitative. One of the factors of the qualitative, is that the researcher seeks to investigate the interviewee's point of view on the topic in question and encourage the interviewee to talk freely. Even though the respondent could seem to wander from the point, to the researcher in a qualitative research, this would still be relevant as it seemingly is important to the interviewee and related to the question given. Furthermore, the researcher seeks to obtain answers, which are detailed and rich through an interview (Bryman, 2012: 470).

### **Semi-structured interview**

Before the researcher start the interviewing process, it should be considered, which way the questions should be asked and what kind of structure the interview should be founded on. In this thesis, semi-structured interviews are chosen as the strategy of data collection. With a semi-structured interview, the researcher has worked on a set of questions, where a certain topic will be investigated and covered. According to Galletta (2013: 38), one considerable asset the semi-structured interview holds, is the structure where the researcher is able to address the topic of interest, and the interviewees have got space to develop and offer meanings. Here, there is space for a great deal of versatility and the questions can be helpful in collecting "multidimensional streams of data" (Galletta, 2013: 38). The

method of semi-structured interviews functions with having open-ended questions but also questions, which are more theoretically driven during the progress (Galletta, 2013: 38). The use of and choice of questions are further elaborated in the section on the interview guide.

### **Expert interview**

Experts of a particular field are chosen for an interview because their knowledge within a certain field is valued more important than the expert as a person. Each selected expert can be integrated in a study as representing a specific group of experts. The interview guide provided for an expert interview should reflect specifically on the field in question. The interviewer should be well prepared for an expert interview, which means collecting knowledge of the field of expertise before beginning the interview (Flick, 2006: 165).

As this thesis seeks to obtain knowledge about how some tourism businesses in Aalborg perceive the concept of sustainability and apply sustainable practices, expert interviews were seen as a good methodological tool, as we saw the opportunity to interact face-to-face with the businesses, since both the businesses and ourselves are located in the same geographical area. Additionally, conducting the interviews face-to-face and with a semi-structured approach can be beneficial in our point of view. This will be explained later on in this section.

Furthermore, the interviewing is solely chosen to be implemented with the local businesses, which are considered the experts in this research. The experts in this thesis are chosen within the field of hospitality, food and service, attractions and the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) in Aalborg. These exact experts were chosen, because the big variety of fields provide us with an understanding of the application and perception of sustainability in many different areas within the tourism industry. In order to prepare for the expert interviews, we did an intense research prior to each interview. By doing so, we gathered useful information the respective expert, which we later then applied in each interview. Preparing for each expert interview, also endowed us to formulate more precise and investigating questions.

### **Interview guide**

The set of questions prepared for an interview are commonly known as an interview guide (Bryman, 2012: 471), which is developed in advance, and includes the open-ended questions in a specific order.

These are formulated on the basis of being able to answer the problem formulation of the research (Given, 2008: 810) The interview guide is a way of having the content summarized (Given, 2008: 2). With this interview guide, the interviewer has a direction of asking questions but at the same time in a fairly free way of conducting the interview and asking the questions, as it is a semi-structured interview. In this sense, the interviewer still has space and allowance to react on the interviewee's answer by asking additional questions, which could help obtaining an even more elaborated answer from the interviewee, and thereby collecting further information and data for the analysis. Thus, this kind of interview is more flexible to both the interviewer and the interviewee, as they can process the questions and answers during the interview more freely (Bryman, 2012: 471; Flick, 2006: 156-157). Moreover, Galletta (2013) states, how the semi-structured interview "allows for reciprocity between the participant and the researcher." (Galletta, 2013: 38-39), which gives space for the researcher to investigate the answers given by the interviewee, and then obtain a further clarification and critical reflection (Galletta, 2013: 38-39).

When it comes to the questions, the open-ended questions have various kinds in a semi-structured interview. Firstly, it is worth mentioning, the open-ended questions allow the interviewee to react selectively, and can therefore orient the research topic (Given, 2008: 583). Furthermore, the interviewee has "the opportunity to choose the terms with which to construct their descriptions and highlight the topics that are meaningful to them." (Given, 2008: 583). With open-ended questions, the researcher does not indicate any kind of presumptions of the answers beforehand (Given, 2008: 583). Concerning the various kinds of open-ended question, one kind can be seen as asking for a more concrete information, while another kind could be looking for more narrative kind of information about the topic in question. A general note for using interviews whether it is semi-structured or of another structure is that the researcher who interviews an interviewee needs to have the ability of understanding, interpreting and responding to the information given by the interviewee whether it is nonverbal or verbal information. In this way, the data are most likely to be more relevant and rich (Given, 2008: 811).

Since we conducted interviews with ten different representatives of tourism businesses in Aalborg, we constructed individual interview guides for each interview. See appendix 2 for the detailed interview guides. However, in order to give the interviewees freedom of speech, we relied heavily on open-ended questions, as these can provide us with answers that are more detailed. The interview

guides functioned as a template in each interview in order to get the answers that we needed for this thesis. The questions we asked each interviewee followed a similar arrangement. We asked each interviewee about their professional position, their perception of sustainability, their sustainable practices within the three dimensions of sustainability, advantages and challenges and finally the future prospects. Hence, these questions represent our interview guides, and assist us in investigating why and how tourism businesses in Aalborg apply sustainable practices.

### **Choice of interviewees**

Furthermore, in relation to the interviewee recruitment, Galletta (2013) suggests questions the interviewer could ask oneself such as “what individuals are most likely to offer response relevant to your research questions?” and “how will you recruit them?” (Galletta, 2013: 46-47). Furthermore, during the procedure of participant recruitment one could also consider how the individuals can be helpful in a research in relation to profession, geographical location and affiliation (Galletta, 2013: 46-47).

In order to obtain relevant data for this thesis, some considerations came to mind concerning the individuals we wanted to interview. Before starting the process of interviewing, we saw the need to ask ourselves; *Who could be relevant to interview in regard to sustainability in Aalborg tourism?* and *What tourism businesses in Aalborg would be interested in being interviewed about sustainability within the tourism field in Aalborg?*. In this research, the respondents we wanted to reach out to were first and foremost chosen in the light of our research and the problem formulation. Thereby, as this thesis investigates perceptions of sustainability within tourism in the city of Aalborg, the interviewees were located within Aalborg municipality. Furthermore, as the method of semi-structured interview was considered to be employed on tourism businesses, their professions were also taken into consideration. Here, we wanted to reach different professions such as the ones within the hotel industry, the food industry, the attraction industry and the event industry.

### **Distribution and sample**

As a way of recruiting the potential interviewees, we chose to contact them via email. Initially, we reached out to many more tourism businesses than with those we ended up conducting interviews. The emails we distributed all contained the same information and request. Go to appendix 1 to see the email distributed to potential interviewees. We contacted tourism businesses in Aalborg that we

considered related to tourism. This means that the tourism businesses in one way or another are in contact with tourists. The businesses concern hospitality, food and service, attractions, events and tourism management. We met with ten different tourism businesses in Aalborg, which will be further elaborated in the interview profile.

### **Ethical considerations**

In order to collect data for our investigation, we applied semi-structured interviews on experts. When speaking of ethical considerations in relation to a social research such as the one done in this thesis, we should consider how we treat the interviewees selected from different tourism businesses in Aalborg. Bryman (2012) explains the importance of consent. We should inform the interviewees of the purpose for including them in the research. If we as researcher present the purpose of our research different from what we end up with, it is understood as deception. Not only does the purpose of the research need to be presented, the expected duration of time should also be clearly expressed to the interviewee. Finally, we are obligated to clarify for the interviewee, how the data derived from the interview will be presented in the thesis (Bryman, 2012: 130, 135, 138, 143; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 66-67, 69).

During the process of interviewing the experts, we made sure to inform each expert of the purpose of this research. This means that we thoroughly explained each expert's role in our research, and what they can contribute with. In addition to this, we accounted for our problem formulation. In the email distributed at first, we also introduced each representative of tourism businesses in Aalborg of the purpose of this research, as well as the expected duration of the interview. In order to get a written consent from each expert, we contacted them via email for permission for using quotes from each individual interview and furthermore if they wished for anonymity. In addition, we informed the experts that if wanted, the final result of this thesis can be forwarded to them. Go to appendix 1 and appendix 4 to read the email inviting experts to an interview and the email concerning consent.

### **Recording and transcription**

Bryman (2012) states that interviews are typically recorded and transcribed. It is experienced an advantage to record interviews, and Long (2007) explains that this is because audio-recording provides the interviewer with the opportunity of paying full attention to the conversation in the interview, without having to focus on writing down key points from the interviewee. Before initiating

any interview, the interviewee should be informed of the recording. Bryman (2012) points out that some interviewees might get distracted from the recording, which can influence the interview. After having completed an interview, it is usually transcribed. However, transcribing can be a time-consuming business, and Bryman (2012) calculates that one hour of recording takes up five to six hours to transcribe (Bryman, 2012: 482-484; Long, 2007: 83; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 132-133).

Since we have conducted several interviews with tourism businesses in Aalborg, we came around the issue of recording and transcribing in our qualitative research method. Every interview has been recorded and later then transcribed. Before every interview, the interviewee was asked for permission to record the conversation. In order to provide an overview of the tourism businesses, which we interviewed, we have constructed the following table:

<b>Tourism business</b>	<b>Occupation of representatives</b>	<b>Appendix</b>
Center for Grøn Omstilling (CGO)/Center for Green Transition (CGT)	Coordinator of Sustainability Festival	Appendix 3.1
Aalborg Kongress og Kultur Center (AKKC)	Head of technology and coordinator of sustainability	Appendix 3.2
WeFeat	Founder	Appendix 3.3
GoBoat	Owner	Appendix 3.4
Aalborg Karneval	Daily leader	Appendix 3.5
Kunsten – Museum of Modern Art	Head of communications	Appendix 3.6

Aalborg Zoo	Marketing manager	Appendix 3.7
VisitAalborg	Head of congresses and conferences	Appendix 3.8
Hotel Aalborg	Hotel manager	Appendix 3.9
Comwell – Hotel Hvide Hus	Hotel manager	Appendix 3.10

### **Interview profiles**

In order to answer the problem formulation in relation to the sustainable practices taken by tourism businesses in Aalborg, we conducted several semi-structured interviews with experts in the field. The interviews cover different areas in the tourism industry in Aalborg such as hotels, foodservice, attractions, events and the local DMO. An overview of the experts encountered in the interviews is clarified with information on their professional background and experience, as well as what each expert can contribute with in this thesis.

#### **CENTER FOR GREEN TRANSITION**

An interview was conducted with the project leader of the Sustainability Festival in Aalborg. With more than six years of experience, this expert provided us with knowledge on the sustainable development in Aalborg as well as sustainable practices initiated by this company. Center for Green Transition (CGT) is part of the municipality in Aalborg, and this area of the municipality works on making Aalborg a greener city.

#### **AALBORG KONGRESS OG KULTUR CENTER**

An interview was conducted with the project coordinator within sustainability and the head of technology at AKKC. This is a place for both business and pleasure, as it is used for having both congresses, but it also hosts events such as concerts, musicals and theatre. The two experts provided

this thesis with knowledge on the sustainable practices taken at AKKC as well as the idea behind the sustainable mindset in the company.

#### WEFEAT

An interview was conducted with the CEO and founder of WeFeat. As an entrepreneur of a completely organic food service, this company provided us with knowledge on the idea behind it, as well as the number of sustainable practices taken within the company.

#### GOBOAT

An interview was conducted with the owner of GoBoat. GoBoat is an attraction that provides self-administrated boat rides on the Limfjord. This expert provided this thesis with knowledge on a sustainable tourist attraction, as well as the initial idea behind the company. In addition, sustainable practices were provided from this interview.

#### AALBORG KARNEVAL

An interview was conducted with the daily manager for the annual event called Aalborg Karneval. This expert provided us with knowledge on the sustainable practices taken at the event, as well as the reason for starting to take these sustainable practices.

#### KUNSTEN

An interview was conducted with the head of communication at Kunsten - Museum of Modern Art. This expert provided this thesis with knowledge on their perception of sustainability within the company, as well as the sustainable practices taken in the company.

#### AALBORG ZOO

An interview was conducted with the person responsible for marketing in Aalborg Zoo with more than seven years of experience. This expert provided this thesis with knowledge on the sustainable mindset and practices within this tourist attraction.

#### VISITAALBORG

An interview was conducted with the head of congresses and conferences at the DMO VisitAalborg. This expert provided us with knowledge on sustainable practices taken within the company, as well



as within the business tourism in Aalborg. The knowledge concerned sustainable practices was targeted at business tourism and not at tourism businesses with contact to tourists.

#### **HOTEL AALBORG**

An interview was conducted with the hotel manager at Hotel Aalborg. This expert provided this thesis with knowledge on the sustainable practices taken in an accommodation in Aalborg. The hotel is undergoing an extension and is becoming a more sustainable hotel in pace with this.

#### **COMWELL - HOTEL HVIDE HUS**

An interview was conducted with the hotel manager at Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus. Expert knowledge from this representative provided us with internal knowledge on the sustainable practices taken within this accommodation. As this is a rather sustainable hotel with a Danish organic label in bronze version, we have been rewarded with a lot of examples of sustainable practices.

#### **THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

One way of approaching an analysis of qualitative data is through themes. According to Bryman (2012) and Ritchie and Lewis (2003) a thematic analysis is mostly applied in qualitative data analysis. Themes are created from a work of framework, which is a type of method for making up an index of themes and subthemes. These themes and subthemes can for example derive from field notes or transcripts. A theme will typically arise from a topic that is repeated over and over again, but above all, a theme should be relevant to the research question and focus of an investigation. Bryman (2012) explain that thematic analysis has an advantage, as a certain level of flexibility come with the use of themes. The authors think it applicable in many different contexts and reasons this with the popularity of the method (Bryman, 2012: 578-581; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 56, 220-221).

We have chosen to structure this thesis with a theme, which is the three dimensions of sustainability. The reason for this is that a structure like this provides us with the opportunity of making a thematic analysis. The structure of the literature review will follow through in the analysis as well. The three dimensions of sustainability are theoretical concepts derived from existing literature. As these sculpt the literature review, they will do the same for the analysis. However, subthemes might occur in the analysis, as a result of the data we have collected from interviews and the questionnaire.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Having cleared out the research methods in this thesis, we assess how a questionnaire and an interview each have advantages and disadvantages. Bryman (2012) also argues that there exist different advantages and disadvantages from applying a self-completion questionnaire and an interview (Bryman, 2012: 233).

### **Advantages of a self-completion questionnaire**

A questionnaire is cheaper in the amount of time spent on distributing, if it is a self-completion questionnaire that can be encountered online. In relation to this thesis, this was part of the reason for choosing to apply a questionnaire. A questionnaire can be distributed all at once to a large number of respondents, whereas an interview can be conducted only one at a time. We considered the advantage of this, as we were able to gather a great amount of data in a short period of time. A questionnaire is also considered more convenient for a respondent; because it can be completed whenever one thinks it convenient in relation to time and speed. An interview is more dependent on time available on behalf of the interviewee, thus the interviewer needs to adapt to the timetable convenient for the interviewee (Bryman, 2012: 233-234). We also saw this as an advantage, and in order to make sure that the respondents would complete the questionnaire, we made sure it was rather fast to complete.

### **Disadvantages of a self-completion questionnaire**

A self-completion questionnaire offers no help if a respondent struggles with understanding and answering a question. This means that it is important to make sure that the questions in a questionnaire are easy to understand in order to avoid withdrawals. In relation to this, we did receive comments from respondents who were unsure of the meaning of some answer options. We argue that since sustainability is a very complex concept, it was expected that some respondents would struggle with this subject. In addition, open questions are often avoided in a great amount in self-completion questionnaires because such questions need elaboration, which would invite the respondent to probe on a question. Because of this, we have a number of partly completed responses. Moreover, it is advisable not to ask too many open questions, because respondents tend not to want to write a whole lot in a questionnaire (Bryman, 2012: 234-235). We also argue that this could be the reason we have partly completed responses from our questionnaire.

Besides the limitations that have been pointed out in relation to the questionnaire, we came across another limiting aspect in relation to the findings. As mentioned, the questionnaire is structured with

different sections. We ask the respondents about sustainability within accommodation, eating places and attractions, yet the options they are provided with carry more aspects of the environmental sustainability than the social and economic sustainability. In relation to existing literature, there is a tendency of researching more on the environmental sustainability rather the two other dimensions. Yet, our findings bear evidence of this structure in the questionnaire.

In continuation of limited findings, we came across another limitation in one of the expert interviews. The interview at VisitAalborg was with the head of congresses and conferences, thus the findings from this particular interview to some degree are characterized by this. This means that the representative from VisitAalborg had broad knowledge on business tourism as opposed to leisure tourism. However, the people behind VisitAalborg deemed the head of congresses and conferences the most applicable participant for the interview. Due to this, it will be evident that the analysis does not carry that many findings from this interview in contrast to the remaining ones.

## ANALYSIS

In this chapter, we will execute the analysis of the data collected for this research. The data referred to is the conducted interviews with representatives from tourism businesses in Aalborg, which provide us with insights of their perceptions and sustainable practices. The data derived from the questionnaire, which provide us with Danish tourists' perception of sustainable tourism on their vacation and the degree of importance of this. The analysis follows a thematic approach, which is guided by the one applied in the literature review. This means that the three dimensions of sustainability are the guiding themes in this analysis as well.

### TOURISM BUSINESSES IN AALBORG

In this section, the data derived from the interviews with representatives of tourism businesses in Aalborg will be thoroughly analysed applying the three dimensions of sustainability. Each dimension has subthemes that arose from the qualitative data as well as the different kinds of sustainability identified in the reviewed literature, which are used to categorise the practices taken in the tourism businesses. However, the subthemes still correspond with the definition of each dimension found in literature. The chosen subthemes are listed and categorised in the figure 2 under the respective dimension that they are considered belonging to. With this figure, it gives an overview of what will be presented in the following analysis and in which order under each dimension.



Figure 2: *The three dimensions of sustainability with subthemes*

## PERCEPTION OF SUSTAINABILITY

First, we want to find out, how the interviewed tourism businesses in Aalborg perceive sustainability. We aim at doing so by assessing the findings from the interviews. The DMO in Aalborg called VisitAalborg represented by the head of congresses and conferences expressed that sustainability “is more a question of opinion than it is a question of demand” (Appendix 3.8, 76-78). The opinion within VisitAalborg is that they as a company have a responsibility of being sustainable by for example incorporating a CSR (Appendix 3.8, 121-126). In the interview, we asked the representative if sustainability can be challenging to incorporate in a company, and the answer were as follows:

“I am sure it can be. I am actually convinced it can be. It is about investments that you do not have funding for, or it can require a change of attitude that you for example are not ready for. And then it is also demanding on the corporate level, so you need to be adjusted for that” (Appendix 3.8, 140-146).

Attitude is present elsewhere than VisitAalborg, as this is similar to how Aalborg Karneval views sustainability. When we asked the representative for the event, why the group behind it initially wanted to make a more sustainable event, he responded that he thinks it is something that everybody has an interest in becoming (Appendix 3.5, 196-199). Thus, we argue that both VisitAalborg and

Aalborg Karneval by some means think sustainability is something you adjust to, as it is in everybody's interest to become sustainable.

The event place called Aalborg Kongress og Kultur Center (AKKC) has established a definition of sustainability, which is "people, environment and economy" (Appendix 3.2, 243). This definition corresponds to the three dimensions of sustainability already found in literature, thus, AKKC follows a quite general definition of sustainability. In extension to this, the representatives question how sustainability is often limited to the environment:

"(...) is it optimal that we keep just talking about the climate? Isn't it also about poverty, and isn't that also related to climate and inequality? Anything. Security, health. Everything is completely connected, (...) and if you have to be completely logic, then it is about all of us, no matter if it is a developed country or a developing country" (Appendix 3.2, 628-637).

We argue that the statement above from the representative at AKKC can be linked to the reviewed literature, as health and equality are aspects of the social dimension of sustainability (e.g. Baker, 2006). Thus, again AKKC follow quite the same understanding of sustainability as the one many researchers have obtained. The representatives from AKKC also discuss how sustainability is a way of evolving as a company. They explain that "it is also sustainable to adjust" (Appendix 3.2, 314-315). Related to this, later in the interview the representatives state that sustainability is the wrong word to use, as they think sustainability is just another word for development (Appendix 3.2, 520-522). Hence, besides viewing sustainability through the three dimensions, AKKC also see sustainability as a process of change and development. The representative from Kunsten – Museum of Modern Art share a similar understanding sustainability as AKKC, because he also divides sustainability into the three dimensions, and expresses that this is how sustainability functions. He also explains that all three dimensions are interrelated, and that one is not necessarily dependent from the other (Appendix 3.6, 60-79). Furthermore, Center for Green Transition also understands sustainability through the three dimensions of sustainability. The representative explained in the interview that from her perspective, sustainability does not necessarily have to be pinned on all three dimensions in order to be implemented. She exemplifies this with the social and economic dimensions, and says that something can be sustainable without the environmental dimension. CGT attempts at incorporating socio-economic initiatives by for example collaborating with others in the

community beside themselves internally in the municipality. The representative adds to this by saying that they want to include more on the social dimension, as they think sustainability is about taking care of each other and our surroundings (Appendix 3.1, 114-143). Thus, CGT wish to expand their perception of sustainability from not only being about the environment, but onto including the social aspect as well. Since they work with transitioning Aalborg into being a green city, they also work intensively on environmental practices. We argue that AKKC, CGT and Kunsten – Muesum of Modern Art all have similar perceptions of sustainability, because they take basis of the three dimensions of sustainability.

The attraction called GoBoat think of sustainability as something that should be incorporated in every aspect of the business, if decided to work in sustainable manners. At GoBoat, sustainability is connected all the way, as the boats are sustainably produced from recycled materials with electricity driven motors and solar cells installed at the station. They serve organic food and drinks at their kiosk, and generally wish to provide an experience on water that does not emit a lot of fuel (Appendix 3.4, 4-19). The hotel manager at Hotel Aalborg explained with concrete examples how they understand sustainability inside the hotel. They perceive sustainability through being Green Key certified, recycling and food waste management (Appendix 3.9, 10-28). Thus, the hotel manager thinks of sustainability as the way in which it is incorporated in the hotel. We argue that GoBoat and Hotel Aalborg are similar in their perceptions of sustainability because their perceptions lean towards more environmental aspects of sustainability.

The founder of the food place called WeFeat sees sustainability through health. What is meant by this, is that he connects sustainability with health, and does not see the one without the other. In the interview, it is explained as follows:

“Well, it is very well connected in the sense that, if it is not organic, if it is conventional, then it is filled with toxic substances and pesticides. And also, if it is organic, it is also healthier. So, it makes good sense (...)” (Appendix 3.3, 83-87).

Later in the interview, the founder of WeFeat goes on to explaining how health is connected to sustainability by saying that “(...) so it just made good sense that if it should be a healthy concept, then we also have to think of the environment, and we might as well make a difference” (Appendix 3.3, 97-99). Therefore, this is how WeFeat understands sustainability, and this business is also the

only one that connects sustainability with health. Yet, it is expressed how it makes good sense to make a difference. The hotel manager at Comwell – Hotel Hvide Hus explained that they have chosen to pin sustainability on organic foods (Appendix 3.10, 337-342). Yet again, we argue that this is their perception of sustainability, and in this case they made a choice on what exactly to work with in relation to sustainability. We argue that WeFeat and Comwell – Hotel Hvide Hus have some similarities in their perception of sustainability, because they pin it on organic foods.

The marketing manager at Aalborg Zoo explained that nature conservation is connected to sustainability (Appendix 3.7, 20-22). Besides this being evident in literature, this is also the way sustainability is understood inside the Zoo. Yet, this is the only business that connects sustainability to environmental issues concerning nature conservation.

As evident from the findings, more than half of the tourism businesses understand sustainability as a purely environmental issue, yet we also found evidence that some of them also understand sustainability as dealing with all three dimensions. Thus, we argue that there is a pattern amongst the interviewed tourism businesses because they to some extent perceive sustainability in somewhat the same way, as they all involve environmental sustainability. In order to get an overview of the different perceptions, we have constructed a table:

<b>Perceptions of sustainability</b>
Sustainability is understood as concerning both environmental, social and economic aspects.
Sustainability is achieved in a company by transforming into an organic business in relation to food.
Sustainability is mostly an environmental issue.



Sustainability develops a company, and it is just another word for development. A company adjusts in order to become sustainable.

## **SUSTAINABLE IMPLEMENTATIONS IN AALBORG**

The tourism businesses in Aalborg come around all three dimensions of sustainability. The environmental sustainability is seemingly of more importance than the economic sustainability. Within each dimension, main areas are evident in the tourism businesses and seem to be of more importance than others. The findings point towards sustainable practices such as local cooperation, diversity, waste management and energy reduction, as being the main areas of importance. However, this will be elaborated later in the analysis, wherein it will also be made clear that there is a correspondence between their perceptions of sustainability and their actual implementations of sustainable practices.

## **SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SUSTAINABILITY**

The social dimension of sustainability is focused on the human and the community. More specifically, it concerns respecting human rights and equality for all (e.g. Hamid and Isa, 2017: 304). This dimension also concerns an organisation's influence on society, and this means that an organisation, business or company can manage different social aspects such as local cooperation, diversity, staff training and much more in relation to sustainability (Sloan et al, 2013: 27). Furthermore, this is about being committed in the society and local community in which they operate and impact on and promote it in a more sustainable matter. In this section, initiatives related to the social dimension of the tourism businesses in Aalborg will be interpreted.

As promotion and support of the community and society is a general suggestion in the social dimension of sustainability, it can be reasonable to explain that when referring to the local community or just community in this research, it is regarded as the city of Aalborg and near area and its citizens as well. Society is seen as a more general matter in the sense of geographical areas and includes more communities than just the community of Aalborg.

## **Corporate Social Responsibility**

As mentioned previously in the literature review, a way for a business to contribute to the community and its development is by making initiatives, which benefit other local stakeholders such as the local residents. Through CSR initiatives, some of the interviewed tourism businesses of Aalborg give their donation to the local community. However, as CSR concerns addressing potentially social and environmental issues in the community, these initiatives mentioned in this section are not the only CSR related initiatives made by the interviewed tourism businesses in Aalborg but examples. Some of the examples of contributing to some social problems are given by the two interviewed hotels, Hotel Aalborg and Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus, which directly mentioned some of their CSR initiatives. First example is Hotel Aalborg, where the representative emphasises how the hotel is considered as a complete CSR-company, “one can say, we are a 100 percent CSR-company because we are a fund, so we have a more noble purpose than a regular hotel (...) All money stays in the system and goes to welfare for the mariners. (...) So, all our money is used for CSR.” (Appendix 3.9, 329-334, 339-340).

This is also described on the website of the hotel where its main purpose is described as “(...) to provide support to humanitarian and social welfare work - especially for mariners and others in the maritime environment. The hotel's profits go therefore be donated to social welfare work.” (hotelaalborg.dk). Moreover, they do activities with the mariners as well such as visiting and taking them around in the city of Aalborg (Appendix 3.9, 335-338). Another approach is by Comwell – Hotel Hvide Hus, which representative also mentioned CSR initiatives, which for example are about collaborating with the municipality and taking interns into the hotel. However, this is not something they yet has promoted but want to do in future as they want to tell how they can help in the community and because it is a part of their strategy (287-292). One can argue that these two given examples can be seen as social initiatives as they deal with addressing some issues among the local people in the community.

## **Health**

Another aspect of the social dimension is about health, in which a business can be committed in support the promotion of it (e.g. Sloan et al, 2013: 26). Taking different statements from the interviewed businesses into consideration, there are various ways in which they look at health and incorporate it in their business. One way of looking at health is given by the representative of Hotel

Aalborg, whose statement can be argued to be related to health. He mentions how they welcome people in the hotel and one should take care of the people and how that is a part of sustainability. He says:

“We have an interest in people and we also think that it is kind of sustainable because humans are the most important resource we have, and we need to take care of them in a hectic society. (...) We want to create good settings to the guests. So, when they get here, they can recharge”  
(Appendix 3.9, 201-207).

It is stressed how Hotel Aalborg also want to take care of people due to the human in general can be seen as the most important resource. This is argued to be related to health as relaxation is an important element for the human kind to function. By welcoming people and want to make them an area or setting where they can relax and have their refuge away from what they mention to be a hectic working day. Looking at how sustainable development per se is defined, it should meet the basic needs of the human kind. Here, the basic need can be argued to be getting away from the daily busy schedules and get a relaxed break from those.

Looking at suggestions of Wefeat concerning health, the founder gives another approach to what health is, which as mentioned is his way of perceiving sustainability. He mentions “(...) I would also like to make a difference for people around the world (...) I have found the way, where I can make a difference and activate a lot of people to make a difference as well.” (Appendix 3.3, l. 103.110). By saying this, he refers to how he would like to influence people and activate them to be aware of the changes, which they can make both on themselves but also their surroundings. Another quotation by him is:

“(...) in relation to this we do 100 percent organic, but we have also proved we can help a lot of people and this was our mission from the beginning, that we want to help a lot of people every day to get better at any ordinary day. And that is when one gets social intimacy but also that one gets positivity and some good energy into the system

and that is how we make a difference to lots of people by a salad (...)”  
(Appendix 3.3, 306-312).

He desires for people to adopt a healthier lifestyle, which can benefit the planet because for example if choosing organic, it improves and promotes the environment. However, even though he mentions how choosing organic contributes to the environment, it can be argued that this initiative mostly tends to focus on adopting a healthy lifestyle. As stated, when asked why choosing organic “Well, at first, I did not think that I would like to make a difference on the environment, so therefore I would need to make an organic concept. it was more the other way around.” (Appendix 3.3, 115-117). By saying this, it indicates, how Wefeat initially did not think of this as a sustainable initiative in relation to the environment. It can rather be argued to be about how they could help individuals in Aalborg towards adopting a healthy lifestyle and thus be a matter of taking an initiative related to the social dimension. The founder of Wefeat also expressed how the use of 100 % organic foods subsequently lead to getting more awareness of the impacts it does to the environment. This will be further elaborated in the section of the environmental dimension.

As noted, to Wefeat health was to begin with primarily about having a balanced diet and saw the products as a way of helping people obtaining the healthy lifestyle. Hotel Aalborg says they want to help people and their health to prosper when they are offered opportunities to be in relaxed surroundings. Even though, they have mentioned their approach on how they can commit in the theme of health, none of the above mention if they consider this being about the local community, which the social dimension is primarily about. Summarising this, it is suggested how two of the businesses take initiatives, in which they interpret differently how to sustain health. As a result of this, the analysis concerning health did not leave us with an opportunity of discussing this theme, because we have limited findings.

## **Diversity**

One aspect of the social dimension is diversity since the social dimension deals with relationships between people and the ability to have equal opportunities for all and mutual understanding of different cultures and backgrounds (e.g. Baker, 2006). When looking at diversity as an element in the social dimension, it is evident how most of the interviewees seemingly did not think of diversity in

relation to sustainability. Only one of the interviewed businesses had suggestions of how it is related to sustainability, namely Center for Green Transition (CGT)

The big event in Aalborg is the Sustainability Festival founded by CGT, which purpose is to promote green transition in Aalborg and addressing sustainability ([centerforgrønomstilling.dk](http://centerforgrønomstilling.dk)). With the festival, one initiative is to make people, who attends to the festival, aware about how disabled people live. “We very much try this year to (...) show... how one live as a disabled person.” (Appendix 3.1, l. 133-135). This indicates how the Festival want to show a different aspect and show people without disabilities how it is and enlighten them about a different everyday than their own, which thus is a side to diversity as it is about difference. This also can be regarded as a social issue because it seemingly could be understood that many people possess limited knowledge of the being a disabled person. Furthermore, Center for Green Transition (CGT) mentioned, how people should take care of each other and the surroundings as they see it as a part of sustainability in relation to the social dimension because “(...) there has to be something tomorrow and a kind world for every one of us tomorrow, so it is just as much about the human relationships (...)” (Appendix 3.1, 135-139). CGT emphasise how this is primarily targeted the local community by saying “In particular the citizens of Aalborg but the festival actually embraces all, there are also companies and stores and so on (...) we have been really focused on Aalborg so far and the citizens of Aalborg.” (Appendix 3.1, 87-88 + 395-396). It is evident how CGT and the Sustainability Festival have been committed in focusing on the local community as it is made clear several times how it is about local stakeholders and people. This gives evidence of CGT is aware of how the social dimension involves particularly around the local community and how a business operating within this can influence it and help promoting its respective social issues. But it is also noticed how CGT in the future wants to focus on tourists as well and a next step is making a network concerning tourism (Appendix 3.1, 389).

In the following section, marginalised groups will be the subject but also it includes diversity in terms of social and cultural as marginalised groups also can be about diversity within a community.

### **Marginalised groups**

One can argue that helping different social and marginalised groups in the community is a part of the social dimension of sustainability, because an organisation can impact on the community in which it operates and deal with the promotion of for example social justice and involve in the social and

cultural diversity (e.g. Sloan et al, 2013). As a part of sustainable development, it is noted that every individual should be entitled to have opportunities to obtain basic needs as well. In this section, the sustainable initiatives can be about taking care of less fortunate groups within the community and society, who could get use of the support from others for example different businesses and organisations.

When looking at the conducted interviews with the different tourism businesses, three of the representatives of their business have mentioned initiatives related to marginalised groups, which they in one way or another have supported by taking different initiatives. The initiatives in this subtheme can also be argued to be CSR related initiatives, however, the reason for not mentioning this in the subtheme of CSR, is that the interviewees did not directly mention these examples to be CSR initiatives, which those in the CSR section have done. An example of a tourism business, which has worked on promoting opportunities for some people in the community, is Aalborg Zoo. In the interview with the marketing manager, she talked about how the zoo takes in people, who had not found a standpoint yet nor had success in the labour market. She said:

“People, who we have in a working trial period and actually fit in quite good here but did not have any luck other places on the labour market. (...) Then we have (...) permanently employed staff members, who before they came here, more or less did not function anywhere. (...) We have a big focus on being available to everybody and there should be experiences for everyone.”(Appendix 3.7, 252-268).

Furthermore, she gave examples such as making a special offer to a day centre with lonely elderly, who did not have much money. (Appendix 3.7, 270-279). This indicates Aalborg Zoo can give some sort of support to people and are committed in dealing with social inequality. In regard to lonely groups in the local community, Aalborg Karneval wants to “make an initiative to lonely young people, it is something we want to do more because the thing about getting into Kildeparken (...) it is cosy and makes a difference and it is a community, which a lot of young people could use.” (Appendix 3.5, 371-378). Furthermore, the representative from Aalborg Karneval also stated that they do a lot for different institutions for example “(...) we have kids from refugee camps, asylum centres and we cooperate with “Mødrehjælpen”. (Appendix 3.5, 382-385). With this, it is indicated that Aalborg

Karneval takes an initiative that concerns the support and tolerance of both social and cultural diversity since they work with different refugee camps, where many are likely to have different cultural backgrounds and maybe also be socially challenged.

The art Museum of Aalborg, Kunsten, also do projects supporting people, who maybe have difficulties fitting in the community and are socially challenged, because they have made graffiti workshops for young people in the East part of Aalborg, where some of them have challenges fitting in in school. The reason for this is they want to make awareness of it is okay not being academic and literary but instead that being creative. To them creativity is also a nice ability to have, because the kids maybe:

“(…) could need to be confirmed in that they have other abilities in relation to creativity and they can use their energy in other ways. If one is told all the time, that one cannot succeed in anything, then it would be nice to hear from others that it actually is okay to have the competency of being creative” (Appendix 3.6, 240 - 252).

By saying this, Kunsten emphasise that having other competencies than what is expected is acceptable and thus it is indicated how everyone should be a part of the community. Furthermore, it could also be argued to be a way of accepting diversity as it also embraces how people are different and they should be accepted. Another example from Kunsten is a collaboration with Aalborg Children’s Hospital, where patients can borrow some “art drawers” and moreover they make workshops with financially support from the fund of Spar Nord (Appendix 3:6, 253-358). This also indicates how the art museum also support a small group of children, who with their health status, maybe could need the support from others within the community.

In a summary of this subtheme, three different tourism businesses mention how they take initiatives, which can be placed as belonging to marginalised groups since they deal with support smaller groups within the community, which might need the help from others.

### **Staff-training**

In relation to the social dimension of sustainability, a company can consider a thing such as staff-training (e.g. Sloan et al, 2013). The hotel called Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus in Aalborg make use of staff-training in order to optimise their use of organic foods:

“(…) we started by sending  
all of our deputy managers and kitchen chefs, (…), on a food coordination  
education at the school for hotels and restaurants in Copenhagen. They are very  
skilled on ecology and food waste - best school in Denmark. They spent ten days  
at that school, where they were trained in how to exploit ingredients, because  
when you change to organic products, it becomes more expensive to purchase  
(…)” (Appendix 3.10, 26-33).

Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus in Aalborg has done more staff-training than that because the hotel also invested in further education for additional staff in order to educate the staff in what sustainability means in general and for this hotel. The representative encountered in the interview explained the following:

“I can mention as well, in the name of sustainability,  
that we sent all of our restaurant chefs, head waiters, receptionists and  
meeting signers on 3,5 days of education in order to introduce them to  
sustainability. (...) we have introduced all of these people to ‘why do we do  
all of this?’ ‘what do we want to achieve from this?’ what kind of story do we  
want to tell?’, that is very basic information on sustainability” (Appendix  
3.10, 83-92).

In regard to training the staff and teach them about how they can help improving the environment, it can be argued to be beneficial not only to the business per se but also the environment because training and learning make awareness of how the environment and the society can be improved sustainably and how they can make initiatives, which are sustainable. Furthermore, the staff in a respective business can use this learned information and knowledge to pass on to the consumers and tourists but also one's private circle of acquaintances. By doing so, it can help promote the society, the local community and environment as sustainable development demands a common effort in order to



succeed, which can be seen in the principle of transparency where information about sustainable development should be available to stakeholders, which include the individual to the society as all play an important role in including environmental considerations in the societal changes (e.g. Baker, 2006:7). One of the interviewed businesses, who said it is for the better good to start with teaching and making awareness internally before moving on to the externally, is AKKC, whose representatives said, “It is best to begin internally, where one creates a common strength, which one then can pass outwardly” (Appendix 3.2, 360-362). This statement entails how AKKC sees the way of making the community and society aware of how one can make initiatives on improving the societal changes and the environment. They furthermore gave the example of waste sorting, where many of the employees had the perception of it did not matter and because of that they were sent to the waste disposal site to see with their own eyes, how it benefits society and the environment (Appendix 3.2: 372-375). With this kind of initiative, the representatives of AKKC indicated how they work towards making awareness of why initiatives such as waste management are help promoting the environment.

As mentioned in the literature review, in order to develop in a sustainable matter, every level of society can be considered actors (e.g. Baker, 2006: 9). Aalborg Zoo too, does some sort of staff training as they want to learn how the zoo can install and use certain techniques and machines, which are better for the environment. In terms of doing so, they have sent engineers and blacksmiths to a conference for zoos in which they had topics concerning how they could make the technical instalments smarter and more sustainable such as water treatment (Appendix 3.7, 291- 306). Moreover, this can be put in relation to the principle of social technological innovation as they try to move forward with a smarter and more innovative technology, which benefit the humankind and the planet in general (Sloan et al, 2013: 20-21). However, since this conference was held in the Bahamas (Appendix 3.7: 299), one could question how this initiative can be seen as sustainable due to the transportation is more damaging to the environment than beneficial.

Conclusively, in relation to staff-training, this can be seen as a part of the social dimension within sustainable development as it helps making awareness to both the staff within a tourism business but also externally in the local community and society as they with their knowledge obtained at work can provide others with knowledge on how they individually and in a common effort can take sustainable initiatives, which promote the society and environment and hence their own needs and health since it can be at risk if initiatives and changes will not be made.

### **Local cooperation within Aalborg**

When it comes to the social dimension of sustainability, it is also mentioned in the existing literature, how partnerships and networking can make potential sustainable initiatives and help improving the environment. Local corporation can be seen as relevant as it can help supporting and accentuating the possibilities of sustainable practices within the local community and in this case Aalborg, in which they operate and furthermore also help the businesses per se. In regard to the interviewed tourism businesses, local corporation is regarded as a very frequent theme as all businesses mention their collaboration with others, which some are within the local community, some outside and also some between one another. However, it can be discussed if all of the presented collaborations are considered related to sustainability. In the following part, we interpret on the suggestions given by them in the interviews concerning how they, the businesses, make use of local corporation and how they can work together on different initiatives, which promotes sustainability.

When looking at an example given by Aalborg Zoo, it is mentioned how they work with other tourist attractions and culture institutions within the area of Aalborg such as Lille Vildmose. Here, they have done arrangements in the Easter with the purpose of enlightening about existing nature within the area (Appendix 3.7: 79-84). This kind of collaboration between Aalborg Zoo and other nature-based tourist attractions can not only be about supporting each other within the local community but also be about environmental reason as they both are nature-based tourist attractions. Therefore, it can be seen as belonging to both the social and the environmental dimension. The marketing manager furthermore stated, how they want to communicate how the nature of the region should be cared for (Appendix 3.7, 59-65). However, at the same time, it seems like the zoo would like to be better at using it within their marketing, but they might think that sustainable initiatives can be received with a rather uninteresting response by the consumers (Appendix 3.7, 198-199).

GoBoat has also done some collaboration with a local tourism related business, namely Aalborg Street Food as they want to arrange an activity with the boats (Appendix 3.4, 258-263). And apart from that they also are about to begin a collaboration with Aalborg Tours, where tourists can go bicycling in the city and afterwards go to the dock of Goboat and continue sailing. The purpose of this, is mentioned to be the need for getting tourists to their respective businesses and because Aalborg Tours can be seen as a new tourist business. According to the representative from GoBoat, this is a way for

them to help the new business in getting tourists attracted and interested in buying their product. This done by making a package, which is a good way for them to use each other as they as mentioned above can complement each other and then help each other in promote and selling each other's products. This can also be argued to benefit tourist and make it more manageable, as they offer both activities in one product, which can make it easier to buy. In relation to the social dimension, this is an initiative, where both businesses make networks and involves in each other and thus contribute to each business. Since both companies have products that are considered less polluting and more sustainable, this can be seen as a common social initiative since they make use of each of other, who both do initiatives, which supports the environment. However, it can also be discussed if this collaboration is more for the sake of making each other more visible to potential consumers and tourists in Aalborg.

Another business, which also has made several local collaborations is Kunsten. In the interview with Kunsten it is emphasised how it collaborates with other culture institutions of Aalborg such as the Utzon Centre, Skråen and Fokus Folkeoplysning because they can complement each other in terms of competencies. (Appendix 3.6, 85 + 191-196). However, this collaboration including Kunsten, does not directly indicate whether it is established for promoting the environment or the local community. Therefore, it can be a discussed what the purpose of this collaboration is about since it is not mentioned that it is an initiative that is made in order to help promoting the environment nor the local community.

When it comes to local collaboration, the Destination Management Organisation, VisitAalborg, works among other things towards promoting the collaboration between tourism related businesses within Aalborg. The zoo collaborates with VisitAalborg towards helping each other and as mentioned other culture institutions within the municipality of Aalborg, where they make different packages including experiences, accommodation in order for them to make tourists stay within the area of Aalborg and the Northern Jutland. In relation to collaboration with VisitAalborg, Hotel Aalborg mentioned:

“VisitAalborg is the pivotal point among accommodations and the conference places and (...) Visit Aalborg is good at making a common direction and make a hotel strategy to the city (...) and now

they have made this initiative with sustainability and keep check on how it really looks like to the hotels” (Appendix 3.9, 82-92).

Mentioning this, Hotel Aalborg makes us aware of how they work together with VisitAalborg and, among other things, that sustainability in future plans should be more integrated and adopted into the different hotels in the city. Moreover, the quote shows an indication of satisfaction with the collaboration with the DMO, since they say how VisitAalborg is good at making the common direction. Another collaboration is between Centre for Green Transition and VisitAalborg. Here, VisitAalborg mentions how they during a recent meeting should begin to support each other more (Appendix 3.8, 110-114). Thus saying, that they make benefit from each other. This is related to taking sustainable initiatives and make Aalborg a more “green” city, which therefore can be considered to be practices that will belong to the environmental dimension. In addition to this, the representative of VisitAalborg stated that they do not collaborate that much with other local businesses in relation to taking sustainable initiatives (Appendix 3.8, 106-114) but as they are the DMO of Aalborg, they do collaborate with the local businesses in a more general matter, which is something that they have done since the beginning and is natural to them (Appendix 3.8, 188.189).

One tourism business, AKKC, mentioned being a member of “NBE” (Appendix 3.2, 536-539) or “Netværk for Bæredygtige Erhverv, meaning Network for Sustainable Business Development. This is about “(...) strengthen the participating companies’ competitiveness through targeted efforts towards environmental sustainability.” (centerforgrønomstilling.dk). The NBE North Denmark deals with collaboration between different local businesses, municipalities of the North Jutland, a local energy company, Aalborg University and other companies. Through the collaboration they work towards promoting the sustainable work (centerforgrønomstilling.dk). That means that AKKC collaborates with different local stakeholders and engage in the social dimension and take sustainable initiatives. An example of this, which is found on the website of Centre for Green Transition, can be waste in one company can be utilised by another (centerforgrønomstilling.dk).

In terms of delivery of goods some of the tourism businesses mentioned how they make use of local suppliers and prefer so while others prefer having the delivery done by the same supplier, which is not necessarily from the local community. The zoo has an arrangement with a local apple plantation instead of getting apples imported from a foreign country and they also have a local supplier of

branches to the animals. And the marketing manager herself goes to the local egg supplier and picks them up instead of having them delivered as it is most beneficial to them and the environment (Appendix 3.7, 342-346). Taking this into consideration and this statement saying:

“(…) the awareness of organics and, well,  
sustainability and this thing about local goods and the use of the local area  
in relation to shopping and purchase products, which are not imported by ships  
(…)” (Appendix 3.7, 315-319),

it can be suggested how the Aalborg Zoo purchase goods from local suppliers mostly because it benefits the environment. Still, a reason could also be supporting the local businesses and therefore community but that is accordingly not the primary reason. This would correspond well to Aalborg Zoo mostly being about being committed to and practising the environmental dimension of sustainability as it is a nature-based tourist attraction, which takes initiatives towards conserving nature and its animals. Another business that would prefer goods from local suppliers is Comwell but a thing more important to them is that they come from the same place. The representative said “(…) it is important to us that we can get the goods from one place and they are here, when we need them.” (Appendix 3.10, 162-163). Furthermore, it is mentioned that it is not local, but it would be preferred to be Danish and if not possible then at least from within Europe (Appendix 3.10). As the hotel therefore do not have local suppliers but get their goods from other places in Denmark or Europe, it is stressed that they do not make use and support the local community in relation to this and thus do not, in the terms of local collaboration, deal with making sustainable social initiatives that benefit local community. Therefore, they would be considered to practice the environmental dimension more as they want to support the promotion of the environment. The same goes with the food place, Wefeat, whose founder directly said, when asked if they make use of local suppliers,

“No, (…) We have chosen to get a supplier, which is  
named Hørkram because they are able to deliver organics. What is great about  
them is that they off course can provide us more or less everything we’d like  
instead of going to 15 different farmers(…) but what is nice about them is  
that they as far as possible use local growers.”(Appendix 3.3, 233-242)

From this statement, it is evident how Wefeat does not make use of local collaboration with suppliers. Even though, it is mentioned how the supplier make use of local growers as far as possible, he afterwards mentioned that this means Danish meat or from Jutland and that root vegetables and meat are produced in Denmark (Appendix 3.3, 243-245). This could indicate that there is a misunderstanding of what “local” indicates, since he mentions Denmark and Jutland and refer those two to be local. Analysing on this statement, Wefeat thus, do not make use of any local suppliers, because it does not meet what they find most beneficial and convenient to their business and therefore does not take sustainable initiatives promoting the local community. Opposed to this, Aalborg Karneval stated, they make use of local collaboration, which is considered important to them, even though it is not necessarily cheaper, as it is expressed in this quotation:

“When we talk about collaborators and suppliers, we use as many local means as possible. We could choose to rent a music stage, fence og toilets in Germany, it is considerably cheaper, but it just does not support North Jutland at all. We are active in supporting the local and often pay a little bit more for doing so.” (Appendix 3.5, 94-99).

With this, it is evident how Aalborg Karneval is engaged taking initiatives, which supports local businesses and wish to make an effort in promoting and improving the local collaboration, even though it can be on their behalf financially. With this, it also helps creating local relationships between the local businesses and this can be beneficial to the community as it creates opportunities for the respective businesses. Therefore, it is evident, that they are engaged in practicing social initiatives.

Looking at this theme of the social dimension, most of the interviewed tourism businesses do collaborations within the local community. However, the purposes of those collaborations can be questioned since it is not all the businesses that express why they collaborate with other stakeholders. There are found evidence suggesting that some of the collaborations are founded on the basis of being more than solely supporting the social sustainability but also for example the environmental. Some, however, also indicate that they are created mainly for supporting either the local community or the environment. Additionally, some of them prefer having local suppliers, because it promotes Aalborg and Northern Jutland. Others find it more convenient to get their goods from other suppliers not necessarily from the local community, which can be seen as practicing the environmental more than the social dimension as the goods are organic but not from Aalborg.

## **Summary**

Conclusively, the social dimension is evident in all of the interviewed tourism businesses in one way or another. Derived from the interviews, it was evident that a recurring theme was local corporation, in which some of the businesses consider having local suppliers and collaborations as important to their own business as well to the local community. Two businesses had suppliers outside community but still saw it as important to get organic goods, which then mean, it could belong more to the environmental than the social dimension. In regard to supporting the local community of Aalborg, the businesses have different social initiatives, which can help promoting it. The same goes with health, where allegedly two businesses mentioned it but with different ways of implementing it, just four businesses mention the themes of diversity and marginalised groups. Furthermore, three businesses mention how the staff-training can help making awareness towards what can be promoted in relation to sustainability and hence how they can promote the environment and the community and society.

An example of another approach to the social dimension was given by the representative from CGT. She mentions that they want to give the social aspect more space during the Sustainability Festival and not solely focus on the “green” part most likely meaning the environmental dimension. Here, it is suggested how the CGT wants to include the social dimension more and enlighten people about how the social initiatives also can be seen as sustainable (Appendix 3.1, 134-143) due to it contributes to the local community. Moreover, this suggestion gives the ideas about how social sustainability should be of more equal importance to the environmental sustainability.

## **ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF SUSTAINABILITY**

The economic dimension of sustainability concerns amongst other elements the profit a company earns. However, the profit can amongst other aspects be earned from sustainable practices according to Sloan et al. (2013). Making the decision of incorporating a sustainable solution in a company, can save the use of resources. On the other hand, sustainable practices can also be expensive to incorporate (Sloan et al., 2013: 26). Both advantages and challenges will be exemplified in this section. By challenges we mean costs that a business might have in relation to environmental or social sustainable

practise, and by advantages we mean any economic benefit or profit that a business might gain from environmental or social sustainable practices.

Tourism businesses in Aalborg make use of the economic dimension of sustainability in relation to profit and economic challenges. Several statements mentioned by the representatives from the tourism businesses reveal evidence of this. However, compared to the literature review made upon tourism businesses in general, we find that the businesses in Aalborg make much more an effort in communicating their economic advantages and challenges than the ones pointed out in literature. An example of an environmental sustainable practice that can result in economic savings is a rainwater-harvesting system (Jarvis et al., 2010: 86-90). Regardless, the tourism businesses in Aalborg find it important to consider the economic sustainability before making any final decision on implementing sustainable practices. One can say that the economic sustainability is the first step in any progress of implementing new initiatives in a business.

### **Cost benefit**

This way of discovering economic sustainability has become apparent in Aalborg Zoo. The marketing manager met in Aalborg Zoo explained that “You can actually have such a big focus on sustainability and cut down on resources that it actually results in very big savings, and that is at first important” (Appendix 3.7, 135-138). From this example, we argue that implementing sustainable practices in a business can be benefitting in financial aspects as well as environmental and social aspects, thus this statement by the representative from the zoo supports the economic dimension of sustainability. In addition, Hotel Aalborg is of the same perception that sustainable practices can be financially beneficial, as the hotel manager explained that “well, I think that there is some economy attached to it, because we should be able to save money on the running of this hotel by being more focused on it (sustainability)” (Appendix 3.9, 63-66). Thus, not only does the hotel manager wish to incorporate sustainable practices in the hotel, he also considers it an economic advantage, as these practices should save more financially. The sustainable practices referred to are elaborated in the section on the environmental dimension of sustainability. Center for Green Transition (CGT) support this, as the representative met in the interview explained that economic profit is often a result of social or environmental sustainable practices (Appendix 3.1, 143-146).



Economic sustainability can also concern viable and long-term economic operations, such as developing on a local economy by increasing employment opportunities (Hamid and Isa, 2017: 304; Sloan et al., 2013: 26). This became the case when Center for Green Transition (CGT) could prove that their Sustainability Festival created three new jobs:

“(…) one job is worth approximately one million, as they say, so we have already created job worth three million in North Jutland, which is more hardcore way of proving that we have gained some economic profit and something green, because they are green jobs” (Appendix 3.1, 298-302).

We argue that this is economically sustainable, as a sustainable initiative such as the Sustainability Festival can create employment and secure economic viability in Aalborg. Another example of this was found in the interview with Aalborg Karneval. The daily leader explained that this event needs economic security in order to keep going each year:

“Well, planning a cultural event so that we actually earn money on, that is only happening at two to three cultural institutions in Aalborg – Musikkens Hus, Utzon and Aalborg Karneval. So, for us it is all about getting enough capital that we can withstand a rainy day, or if something should go wrong such as a bridge collapsing or what do I know. Something that makes people disappear and the police shuts down the event. This we should be able to survive, and we can do so, as it looks right now” (Appendix 3.5, 115-123).

The statement above carries evidence of economic viability, as this is decisive for Aalborg Karneval to keep running this annual event. Moreover, the daily leader continues by saying that “(…) so the economic sustainability is important to us, and the initiatives that we make, needs to be supported by a potential income” (Appendix 3.5, 125-128). Thus, we argue that this is yet another example of economic sustainability. In order for Aalborg Karneval to exist, economic security is necessary. We also argue that this is present in any business, as economic viability is the breeding ground in order for a business to survive. This is supported by actions taken in Kunsten – Museum of Modern Art, as the head of communications mentioned that:

“then there is the economic sustainability. In my case at least, we look at whether something is economically sustainable or not when we start up a new initiative. If we have a club for example,

then we must earn money on it – I mean our audience club. We look at cost benefit, how much income we will gain and how many expenses we will have, if we execute it” (Appendix 3.6, 41-48).

Aalborg Karneval and Kunsten – Museum of Modern Art complement each other, as they both need economic security before they start running a new initiative. However, as mentioned economic security does not only concern these two tourism businesses, but any business in general needs economic security.

### **Economic challenges**

As mentioned it can be financially expensive to implement sustainable solutions in a business, and an example on this is present in Aalborg Kongress og Kultur Center (AKKC). One of the representatives explained that “a lot of stuff can also be connected to a bigger economy (...). If we talk LED light installations for example, then you can say we are placed in an old house, so you would have to optimise the energy, and that costs a lot of money” (Appendix 3.2, 57-62). This statement indicates that AKKC might have intentions on implementing sustainable solutions in the house such as energy reduction, however as it is explained in the interview, it can be expensive to optimise. Moreover, AKKC is not the only tourism business in Aalborg that finds it challenging to implement sustainable practices in the running of their business. The founder of WeFeat runs a completely organic eating-place, and he explained how economy plays a big role, as organic foods are more expensive than conventional foods:

“Because ecology is just expensive. We pay five times as much for an organic avocado as for a conventional avocado. So in order for us – we want to make sure that people can pay for a meal in here in their everyday lives, and that it should not be something that you have save up for (...), so in that way it makes sense to use the same supplier all the way around” (Appendix 3.3, 268-275).

We interpret from this statement from the founder of WeFeat that he needs to be practical in the way that keeping the same supplier for all WeFeat shops is economic. In addition, as it is expressed, organic food is more expensive to purchase, thus in order for WeFeat to offer payable meals, financial benefits need to be found elsewhere. This is done by getting the same supplier for all shops, and in this way get a discount (Appendix 3.3, 264-268). This is an example of economic sustainability, because WeFeat needs to be able to offer meals at reasonable prices, and in order to do so, the supplier

should deliver organic ingredients at prices that matches the meal prices. Otherwise, this is not a good business for WeFeat. This also corresponds with a discovery made in the department of Aalborg Municipality called Center for Green Transition (CGT). The coordinator for Aalborg Sustainability Festival explained in the interview that “companies does not go into anything new kindly hearted – we always have to use the economic aspect to convince them to join anything new as for example the Network for Sustainable Business Development” (Appendix 3.1, 312-315). This indicates that economic sustainability plays an important role in any business, and in order for any sustainable initiative to take form, economic viability should be secured.

We set up a frame within the economic dimension of sustainability that separates this dimension into two ways of managing economic sustainability. On one hand, we have the economic advantages that a business might gain from sustainable practices. On the other hand, we have the economic challenges that a business might stumble upon, when considering implementing sustainable practices. As mentioned, the tourism businesses in Aalborg find it important to consider the economic aspect of new initiative before implementing it. This is in relation to economic security and viability. However, some of the tourism businesses also directly stated that sustainable practices could make profit.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION OF SUSTAINABILITY**

The environmental dimension of sustainability concerns the management and conservation of natural resources (e.g. Hamid and Isa, 2017: 304). The environmental dimension can also concern an organisation's actions, facilities and products that impacts on the environment and the natural resources. This dimension focuses on the future, as the actions we take today affect the future (Sloan et al., 2013: 25). This dimension is evident throughout the tourism businesses in Aalborg interviewed for this thesis. The findings from the interviews indicate that environmentally sustainable practices are very frequently applied, thus we interpret that this dimension is of great importance to the interviewed tourism businesses in Aalborg.

### **Waste management**

One of the biggest themes in the environmental dimension is waste, which is also mentioned in the literature (e.g. Hamid and Isa, 2017; Sloan et al., 2013). Waste management has proven very important to the tourism businesses in Aalborg. It is mentioned in nearly each conducted interview,

and the way of managing waste in each business take different approaches, which will be elaborated in this section. Aalborg is a city with a waste arrangement, which means that every citizen has a responsible for acting responsible and sort waste (Aalborg Kommune, 2016). However, the interviewed tourism businesses take waste management to another level and make an even bigger effort in sorting waste by for example recycling and using biodegradable materials.

As mentioned, in one of the interviews, waste management was on the topic. The hotel manager at Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus in Aalborg explained their way of waste management:

“As part of our sustainable practices, a common solution on waste management is coming. That is right now in principle we can sort, and we also do so. We have a room in the basement, where we sort metal, plastic, etc. (...). We are also refood certified, which means that our food scraps are forwarded and reused for oil” (Appendix 3.10, 65-73).

Not only does the hotel make a big effort in sorting waste. In the short future, they also plan on including a common waste management for the Comwell Group, which we argue takes waste management to the next level of incorporating environmentally sustainable practices in a business. However, Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus is not the only hotel in Aalborg that has an extended focus on waste management. The hotel manager from Hotel Aalborg mentioned in the interview that food waste is of particular importance and interest in the organisation of this hotel. On this matter, the representative explained that “(...) we also take food waste into consideration, because we want to minimise the waste of food, as we would rather not throw it out, but rather eat it” (Appendix 3.9, 26-28). In addition to this, later in the interview with the hotel manager from Hotel Aalborg, he spoke about the issue of food waste once again. The representative from the hotel accounted for sustainable environmental practices that the hotel might apply in the long term in relation to food waste:

“A sign labelled ‘Stop food waste’ might be put up in the hotel café, or else we would put up a sign labelled ‘We are soon closing the café, so do not expect refilling on all shelves, but if you need anything, contact the staff’ - practices like these are what we are able to do in order to minimise the waste, and communicate that we have a green profile” (Appendix 3.9, 152-158).

Not only do the statements above indicate a desire to become more sustainable by preventing food waste, but the hotel manager also expressed a marketing point of view. We argue that this is indicated, because actively labelling about food waste as a way of preventing it, is also a way to market food waste. Thus, the hotel has chosen a subjective opinion on food waste and wish to communicate this by putting out signs for their guests. Finally, the hotel manager from Hotel Aalborg communicated their practices on waste separation by saying that “(...) we also separate our waste, but we have been doing this the whole time. But it will be even more important, because of our expansion, and therefore we produce more waste, so it makes sense to spend more time on this” (Appendix 3.9, 185-189). The issue of food waste and waste sorting in general appears to be of great importance due to the statements made by the hotel manager of Hotel Aalborg. Evidence points towards the fact that the sustainable practices taken in relation to waste are environmental sustainable practices. This is also consistent with the literature presented in the literature review on the environmental dimension of sustainability. Due to this, we argue that it is evident from the interview with the hotel manager from Hotel Aalborg that the environment is highly considered, and this hotel attempts to protect it by for one thing managing their waste in the best way possible.

The annual event called Aalborg Karneval also sort waste during and after the big event. The daily leader from the group of organisers accounted for the different initiatives taken by the people behind the event. The participants often bring along prams in the parade as a way of carrying around liquor, as well as they decorate the prams. Not only do the participants bring along prams, it could also be a waggon or something homemade:

“This year we have actually implemented a three-year project with Reno\_nord, where we are managing waste in the whole area, when you hit Kildeparken (...), here there are big containers (...), and those who clean up, sort it in the way that we only have to sort waste once. Some extern people also show up, and they take all the stuff they think they can reuse as for example prams. It is a circular process, as those who pick up the prams sell them to the same people the year after again”  
(Appendix 3.5, 151-160).

We argue that Aalborg Karneval manage waste by sorting it the best way possible, but also by recycling. In continuation of the quote above, the daily leader from Aalborg Karneval explained the difference they can do for the city after having the parade by collecting prams:

“We have launched our cemetery of prams, where people hand over their prams. And if we can gather even 200, then we can actually make a big difference. So, this is part of that animation, we are trying to get people to do” (Appendix 3.5, 174-178).

From the interview conducted with the daily leader of Aalborg Karneval, we argue that it is evident that the people behind the event care for the environment. This is because such a big event as this one that produces big amounts of waste, should consider how to manage that. The people behind Aalborg Karneval clearly take waste management very seriously, thus we argue that the reason for this is to protect the environment. Another argument lies in the necessity that Aalborg Karneval actually clean up after the event, since the event gathers about 72 tonnes of waste on the main road in Aalborg (Appendix 3.5, 144). Hence, tourism businesses might have different reasons for managing waste, and in the case of Aalborg Karneval, it is that such a big event with more than 70.000 (Appendix 3.5, 19) participants having a party, needs to take waste management to another level.

The department of Aalborg Municipality called Center for Green Transition (CGT) created a new campaign for the city, as a way of telling the world that Aalborg is a green city. The campaign is uploaded as a video available for anyone. As mentioned, one of the initiatives that make Aalborg a green city according to CGT is the waste management arranged in the city. The city has renewed all trash cans, and labelled them with a green label called ‘Make us all greener’ (Appendix 3.1, 547-550):

“So ‘make us all greener’ is an attempt of starting over, and now we are visual on all the new trash cans. (...), it is also possible now to sort waste, and you can sort the deposit from bottles, so that the homeless have easier access to it. So, the thing about indicating that it makes us all greener, as for example waste management, that is what this campaign is about (Appendix 3.1, 558-568).

As the municipality in Aalborg speaks for the city, we argue that the replacement of trashcans makes a good example for people in the city, thus tourists are encouraged to sort waste while visiting as well. We also argue that the slogan called ‘make us all greener’ is a way of marketing sustainable behaviour. Yet, one could also argue that CGT is obligated to manage waste, as it is their core focus. A statement from one of the representatives from AKKC, who expressed that there exist some kind

of expectation that businesses sort waste, supplements the case of CGT. The event place AKKC also engage in sorting waste, and the representatives met in the interview, mentioned this as one of the sustainable practices taken within the business:

“(...) now we can mention a specific example such as waste management. We think this is extremely important and actually quite an easy initiative to practice, and something everybody expect that you do (...)” (Appendix 3.2, 367-370).

As evident by now tourism businesses in Aalborg find that waste management is of great importance. The businesses engage actively in waste sorting, which protect the nature. However, we also argue that this statement by AKKC is similar to the case of CGT, because the two businesses share some kind of obligation to manage waste and feel the expectation that there is no choice of doing otherwise. This sustainable practice is present in Aalborg, and from this, we assume that some of the tourism businesses in Aalborg are environmentally aware that waste can damage the nature and wish to protect it by sorting waste. The tourism businesses apply waste management in different ways by for example promoting it by setting up signs that encourage people to act sustainable by for example sorting waste or preventing food waste. Yet, it can also be an act of obligation, since Aalborg should be a clean city due to Center for Green Transition (CGT), and businesses are expected to act responsible.

Another way of protecting the environment through the way we do business and our everyday routines, is by recycling instead applying new materials, resources, etc. whenever needed (e.g. Hamid and Isa, 2017; Sloan et al., 2013). This is exemplified with the way the eating place called WeFeat incorporates recycling in their business. The founder explained that “All our plastic is recycled plastic” (Appendix 3.3, 133-134). This statement is supplemented with an addition to recycling at WeFeat as the founder said that “But conversely, you can say that we use as much recycling materials as possible, and then more down the road” (Appendix 3.3, 138-140). We argue that this decision on making an effort in incorporating recycling their business is an environmentally sustainable practice. It is an active way of protecting the environment by reusing materials instead of creating a bigger consumption. Another tourism business in Aalborg that has incorporated recycling into their routines is Aalborg Kongress og Kultur Center (AKKC). The representatives met in the interview explained how they recycle in order for others to get use of materials AKKC would otherwise throw out:

“We have done a lot within recycling, where we have a big consumption of table cloths. They are made from materials that we can only use once, but we have deemed them useful for more than that.

So, when we are done using them, we make a spread of them on Facebook, and the citizens can come here and pick up the tablecloths. And it has been a huge success! It is really something people have taken to their hearts, and the table cloths are in great demand” (Appendix 3.2, 128-136).

The statement above indicates that this tourism business has gotten a sense of what the citizen care about. We argue this because AKKC explained that they experience a great demand for recycled materials, and that this has been welcomed open minded. Thus, not only does this business recycle, they also encourage others to do the same through social media platforms with success. This is not the only way AKKC recycle, as the place also recycle in order for other institutions to draw benefit from recycled materials, as one of the representatives from AKKC explained that:

“we have some big banners that we hang in front of Vesterbro. We deliver these to Aalborg Produktionsskole, who then sew the banners into different purposes. We have gotten bean bag chairs from this, and also small bags for goodie bags that we use for cultural events” (Appendix 3.2, 141-146)

Evidently, AKKC desire to recycle what can be recycled. We argue that their way of recycling not only benefit their own business, it also benefits local people in Aalborg and local institutions. We assess that this is a sustainable practice taken within AKKC that also benefits the environment, because the materials used for recycling are not directly disposed of the place, but repurposed. The tourism businesses in Aalborg are very active in relation to recycling, and the local art museum Kunsten - Museum of Modern Art attempt to recycle within the museum by reusing art in their workshop and gift shop. The head of communication explained that “one of the employees gather all kinds of stuff that is left over from our exhibitions, and then she uses it in the workshop for children” (Appendix 3.6, 314-316) and “we have some old posters that cannot be sold, and these are cut up into logs that we sell in the shop” (Appendix 3.6, 329-332). However, just like AKKC, Kunsten also recycle outside the museum, as it is expressed that “we also have an arrangement with Råt og Godt, and they can come and pick stuff from exhibitions when we are done with them. It can be walls or wood that we do not use anymore” (Appendix 3.6 316-320). Kunsten takes many different initiatives in recycling both internally and externally. Just like Aalborg Karneval, Kunsten sells used materials,



thus there are some similarities in the way some tourism businesses recycle. One could argue that recycling involves many entities, hence not only does tourism businesses recycle in order to protect the environment. We also argue that there is a social component to this, as the recycling done by tourism businesses in Aalborg also benefit citizens, costumers and other companies of institutions.

As it is evident from the interviews, not all tourism businesses in Aalborg incorporate recycling in their business. However, those who do make a lot of effort in recycling and use it both internally and externally. We argue that these are sustainable practices that are taken in order to protect the environment. However, we do wonder why recycling is not a bigger part of all tourism businesses in Aalborg met in interviews, as it is not a sustainable practice that take up financial resources. Thus, not only does recycling benefit the environment, it also benefits financial aspects in a business. The findings also prove that some of the businesses sell used materials, thus gaining profit. The degree to which tourism businesses in Aalborg recycle is different, and their actions are also different. One the one hand, every little bit helps, and the businesses do take action in making a difference for the environment. As evidenced, not all tourism businesses met in interviews recycle, thus on some level, one could argue that more can be done on the matter. Another aspect to recycling is how the tourism businesses encourage others to recycle, as for example mentioned in the interviews with Hotel Aalborg (Appendix 3.9, 151-152) and AKKC. We argue that the businesses can make a good example for others by recycling, thus encouraging other to do so, could be a bigger part of the businesses' recycling strategy. Hence, we also argue that some kind of social component is added to recycling, as some of the businesses see this as a joint effort, and recycling can benefit a whole community.

The environmental dimension of sustainability can also concern the application of biodegradable materials, which take part in managing waste (e.g. Hamid and Isa, 2017; Sloan et al., 2013). An example of this is found in the interview with the hotel manager of Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus, as it was expressed that "Then we have these food cans in the kitchen, where we use degradable green bags, so we dumb all food scraps in these" (Appendix 3.10, 74-76). In addition, the food place called WeFeat in Aalborg make use of biodegradable materials, as the founder explained that "Then we use a lot of to-go materials and packaging, which is called Bagasse that is a natural material" (Appendix 3.3, 131-133). These two tourism businesses made a choice in using biodegradable materials, and we argue that this is a way of protecting the environment. The tourism businesses might just as well use non-degradable materials, which do not perish. Yet, they have chosen to make an effort on this area

as well. We argue that WeFeat makes a bit of a bigger effort than Comwell, because the place has changed all to-go materials into biodegradable materials. This argument is supported by a statement of the owner of GoBoat, who says that “(...) for example our coffee cups are made on ecological and decomposable cardboard and is therefore a degradable material” (Appendix 3.4, 61-62).

Just like WeFeat, GoBoat has chosen to use biodegradable materials. According to how the owner of GoBoat earlier in the analysis mentioned how sustainability is understood as something that a tourism business should incorporate in every aspect possible (Appendix 3.4, 4-19), we argue that using biodegradable materials is a way of completing this. It is evident that not all tourism businesses in Aalborg apply biodegradable materials. However, this does not change the fact that evidence still point towards a clear positive opinion of waste management in general. We find that the majority of the businesses consider waste management and all of its aspects very important, and the businesses make a great effort in doing so. This is both in relation to sorting waste, but also in relation to recycling and using biodegradable materials. Thus, waste management has many aspects, which we also became clear off, when assessing the findings of the interviews. Waste management also have a social component attached to it, as some of businesses encourage people, other businesses and institutions to act responsible. They share reused materials and help each other in making a difference; hence, some kind of community support is evident. There is also an expectation added to waste management, as it is expressed that sorting waste is kind of a given in Aalborg.

### **Energy reduction**

Since the environmental dimension of sustainability functions as a way of protecting the natural resources one way of doing so is by reducing the energy consumption (e.g. Hamid and Isa, 2017; Sloan et al., 2013). Here is an example from a tourism business in Aalborg. Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus in Aalborg intends to reduce the use of energy in the hotel. The hotel manager from the hotel explained the plans for energy reduction in the conducted interview:

“Then we are working on energy and stuff like that, but we have an old house, so it is a little bit more difficult. We are optimising, but it is still quite a difficult handling. But the whole group has a goal of reducing the energy consumption with two percent annually” (Appendix 3.10, 60-65).

In the statement above, we get an indication that the hotel manager acknowledges that optimising their energy consumption can be a challenge. This is due to the hotel being an old building, thus optimisations are going to be difficult to implement, and however, the hotel manager is ready to take action. Moreover, this is also going to be part of the hotel strategy, hence we argue that this hotel actually makes a big effort in attempting to be environmentally sustainable, even though it will be challenging. In addition to the plans Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus is making on energy reduction, the hotel also expects their suppliers to follow up on the hotels example by deliver products that support energy reduction (Appendix 3.10, 282-288). The intentions expressed by the hotel manager are supplemented by the food place WeFeat, as this place has built up a business on making food that does not require much preparing. The founder of WeFeat explained, how the food place reduces energy in food preparations by saying that “(...) it is 100% organic food, and it is unprepared food most of it. We have some meet that of course is prepared, but that is also it. So, we do not use that much energy on preparing food” (Appendix 3.3, 124-127). This way of reducing the consumption of energy is different from any other way so far, as they literally quit preparing some kinds of food, and uses it raw instead. Yet, we argue that both WeFeat and Comwell – Hotel Hvide Hus make big efforts in reducing their energy consumption as they either quit using energy sources for some part of their business or incorporate a business strategy in order to reduce energy consumption.

One topic recurred during some of the interviews, which is the implementation of solar cells. Hotel Aalborg is undergoing an extension, and as a part of this, the hotel manager explained that “we are getting solar cells in order to contribute to our own consumption, so that is sustainable” (Appendix 3.9, 184-185). In addition, GoBoat has implemented solar cells, because the boats run partly on solar energy (Appendix 3.4, 10-11), and the owner said that “at our station we set up solar cells” (Appendix 3.4, 119-120). We argue that choosing to implement solar cells indicates that these tourism businesses attempt to reduce the energy consumption. This is also a sustainable practice with the purpose of protecting the environment, which supports the environmental dimension of sustainability. Yet, we also consider the possibility that this is could be of economic reasons, since solar cells can save businesses from financial costs as well. However, the two businesses did not mention any economic aspects of using solar cells.

Some of the tourism businesses in Aalborg keep energy consumption in mind. Evidence from the interviews with representatives from tourism businesses in Aalborg show that some of the them make

an effort in reducing the use of energy. We find these sustainable practices a way of protecting the environment and its natural resources, and as a wish for leaving it in good condition. Thus, a great part of the tourism businesses makes an effort in reducing their energy consumption. The actions they take in order to become more sustainable by reducing the energy consumption are different. The tourism businesses mentioned in this section are also very different as they concern food, accommodation, attractions and arts. We argue that this could be the reason why some of the sustainable practices in relation to energy reduction are different. Yet, evidence also point towards some similarity, as some of the interviewed tourism businesses in Aalborg implement solar cells.

### **Certification systems**

Another way of protecting the environment is through different kinds of certification systems or schemes. A certification scheme can have different agendas and goals; however, they are made in order to act more environmentally sustainable as a company (e.g. Hamid and Isa, 2017; Sloan et al., 2013). Some of the tourism businesses in Aalborg apply certification schemes or systems as a way of benchmarking their business. We found that this is quite an important aspect of running a sustainable business due to the different explanations and reasons for using these. In order to create an overview of the different certifications, we have set up a table of examples of certification schemes applied in Aalborg.

<b>Tourism business</b>	<b>Certification system</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Aalborg Zoo	DNV GL	This is an environmental certification, which entails protecting natural resources, waste management, nature conservation and much more (aalborgzoo.dk)

Comwell – Hotel Hvide Hus	Green Key	Point system whereof 30% of the criteria must be achieved in order to receive the Green Key. The specific criteria for hotels can be found on <a href="http://greenkey.dk">greenkey.dk</a> .
Hotel Aalborg	Green Key	Hotel Aalborg expressed a wish for achieving the Green Key, thus the same criteria go for this hotel.
VisitAalborg	Global Destination Sustainability Index	Index that measures a business' performances in a destinations air quality, the use of renewable energy sources, public transport and waste management ( <a href="http://gds-index.com">gds-index.com</a> )
Center for Green Transition (CGT)	Aalborg Commitments	This a commitment that businesses in Aalborg commit to in order to follow a common local understanding of sustainability.
Aalborg Kongress og Kultur Center (AKKC)	International Standard Organisation (ISO)	This is a standard that ensures that a product or service is safe, reliable and of good quality. It can also be a tool for reducing costs by minimising waste.

We found that having some kind of certification scheme or system to follow is considered highly helpful amongst some of the tourism businesses in Aalborg. Certification schemes can be applied both as a benchmark and as a marketing tool, besides the environmental practices they entail.

Going into assessing which tourism businesses in Aalborg make use of certification schemes, and the purpose of doing so, we exemplify. Aalborg Zoo got an environmental certification, and the marketing manager from the Zoo met in the conducted interview explained, what this certification entails:

“Well we are environmentally certified, and we were actually the first zoo in the world to be so in 1999, so we are pretty proud of that. The thing about being environmentally certified also means that we have to get recertified annually (...). Everything had to be up to beat in relation to setting goals for the year to come, provide documentation for those goals achieved in the current year, but also the goals that were not achieved. This means that we keep a big focus on resource consumption, and everything that can be done. Anything from waste management - the proper trash cans that are produced from the correct materials, and the ozone system for the polar bears in relation to being more sustainable or less demanding in resources” (Appendix 3.7, 111-125).

The statement of the marketing manager from Aalborg Zoo proves that they consider how they treat the environment by being environmentally certified. Yet, the marketing manager did not go into deep in elaborating what the environmental certification entails or what it is called. We found that it is called DNV GL. It is an environmental certification, which entails protecting natural resources, waste management, nature conservation, etc. ([aalborgzoo.dk/groen-zoo-miljoe.aspx](http://aalborgzoo.dk/groen-zoo-miljoe.aspx)).

The two hotels in Aalborg encountered in the interviews are also environmentally certified, and they share a common interest in having the same certification. The specific certification in question is the Green Key that is typically given in the hospitality industry. The hotel manager from Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus in Aalborg explained what the Green Key entails:

“And then we have also been given the Green Key. And that is about... it is an arrangement of points, you can say, if you get a certain amount of points, you can be given the Green Key. It is a lot about water consumption in the showers and the toilets, etc.” (Appendix 3.10, 76-80).

In addition, Hotel Aalborg are expecting to be given the Green Key (Appendix 3.9, 14-16). The hotel manager from Hotel Aalborg explained one of the reasons for getting a Green Key certification. According to the hotel manager, the Green Key adds a new filter in search criteria, when potential guests are searching for environmentally friendly hotels in Aalborg:

“If you as a guest want to make a difference, you get the opportunity of putting on that filter, and then you can say, that you will be able to see the ones that are Green Key certified” (Appendix 3.9, 107-110).

We argue that part of the reason Hotel Aalborg is getting the Green Key certification, is from a marketing point of view. What we mean is that we find indications that point towards using the Green Key as a marketing tool specifically on Online Travel Agencies. We argue that the reason both hotels prefer the Green Key also could be because they are then entitled to fulfil a number of sustainable actions. You can say they are held responsible for being sustainable through the Green Key.

The local DMO in Aalborg take part in being a tourism business with a certification system. The head of congresses and conferences at VisitAalborg explained how the DMO took part in establishing the Global Destination Sustainability Index, as a way of labelling sustainable business tourism businesses:

“So back then, a Scandinavian management concerning this index was established, where we were, I think about 26 cities that joined in on this. We started by going through each city A to Z in order to assess ‘how sustainable the hotels are’, ‘where is the infrastructure’ and ‘how does the city deliver’ and carbon dioxide emission. (...). So, we have been a member of this index for a few years, and two year ago it became international” (Appendix 3.8, 32-42).

The representative from VisitAalborg did not go into deep explaining what the index entails; however, we found evidence that point towards both environmental and social sustainable practices. Businesses rewarded this index should assess their environmental performances by measuring the destinations air quality, the use of renewable energy sources, public transport and waste management ([gds-index.com](https://gds-index.com)). However, we argue that VisitAalborg takes environmentally sustainable practices, as this index contains certain performances that should be executed by each member such as environmentally

sustainable practices. Yet again, we argue that VisitAalborg is held responsible for actually coming through with sustainable practices. The representative from VisitAalborg explained that this Index provides the DMO with a benchmark in the tourism field. Additionally, it was directly mentioned in the interview that this Index can be used as a marketing tool (Appendix 3.8, 84-88).

The department of Aalborg Municipality called Center for Green Transition (CGT) is part of a commitment that entails a sustainable behaviour for any business that is committed. The project leader from CGT met in the interview explained the specific purpose of Aalborg Commitments:

“We are very much seen as a green city, and that is also part of what we work on with VisitAalborg (...). Aalborg Charter was developed in 1994 and in 2004, Aalborg Commitments was developed, and commitments... it is self-evident. Well, some cities are committed to something. There are different steps for what to do in relation to sustainability and other initiatives. 700 cities in Europe have signed this, and it is called Aalborg Commitments, because it was founded in Aalborg, and as I said it has to do with sustainable initiatives” (Appendix 3.1, 473-485).

The statement above from the project leader of CGT represents a kind of environmental commitment that entails acting more sustainable as a company. Yet, the representative did not inform us of the detailed purpose of Aalborg Commitments. Consequently, we found that Aalborg Commitments is a product of the Aalborg Charter, which includes a variety of schemes and movements that any member should follow ([www.sustainablecities.eu](http://www.sustainablecities.eu)). We argue that this is a way of acting environmentally sustainable as the purpose of being committed is to become more sustainable as a company. Yet we also found a parallel to the social dimension of sustainability, as the official website for Aalborg Commitments explain that it entails businesses, who commits in order to follow a common local understanding of sustainability ([www.sustainablecities.eu](http://www.sustainablecities.eu)). We argue that some sort of community-based frame is identifiable in the Aalborg Commitments This is because sharing a common local understanding of sustainability, indicates a joint effort in being sustainable, which supports the social dimension.

In the interview with Aalborg Kongres og Kultur Center (AKKC) we talked about the certification system that the place has achieved. The coordinator of sustainability at AKKC explained that the



place has achieved the International Standard Organisation certification (ISO), and outlined what this entails:

“(…), but it is our mark for what we have been going through - a very intense process. (...) it should secure that we have a focus that is called sustainability. We prove what we do, but we also continue to set up new goals, (...). Because we have to keep evolving, and this means that we have to search and outline, what to look for next. This is related to so many things, and that is where our ISO system function as a guiding system - it helps us keeping our focus on sustainability in the everyday life in this house” (Appendix 3.2, 84-97).

The representatives from AKKC go into explaining what it means to be rewarded the ISO system. The head of technology explained that “(...) it is a standard that deals with sustainable events and all the circumstances that you should be aware of” (Appendix 3.2, 41-42). Moreover, the coordinator of sustainability supplement by saying that “It is about communication. Politics. Goals. It concerns so many things, and that is also why it is so difficult to explain” (Appendix 3.2, 48-50). In continuation of this, it is explained how a choice was made, when having to choose what kind of certification system to go with at AKKC, as “You could easily have chosen a Green Key certification, which is well-known in the hotel world, but we made this choice, because we think it will carry out more quality” (Appendix 3.2, 234-236). We recognise this argument, as AKKC is an event place and not accommodation. They also point out that “Well we are the only one in Denmark, who has this ISO or has gone this way” (Appendix 3.2, 399-400). Evidence proves that a lot of thoughts have been given the decision of choosing the ISO system in AKKC. The representatives from AKKC did not go any deeper into what the ISO system provide them of tools. Yet, we found that the ISO system ensures that a product or service is safe, reliable and of good quality. It can also be a tool for reducing costs by minimising waste. The ISO system can function as a global benchmarking tool for environmental management ([www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)). We argue that AKKC work with all three dimensions of sustainability through this ISO system, though without specifying exactly how each dimension function in the ISO system. Yet, we still argue that this is a sustainable practice, as this certification system works as a guiding system in order to create environmentally sustainable events in AKKC. We argue that AKKC use the ISO as a benchmark for their sustainable actions.

Some of the tourism businesses in Aalborg have been rewarded some kind of certification in relation to sustainability, and more precisely in relation to environmental sustainability. Each certification system is different and serve for different purposes. We find evidence from the interviews that proves that some of the tourism businesses in Aalborg choose to become environmentally certified in order to become more sustainable as a company. However, we also argue that these certifications can function as a marketing tool, as for example Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus shows their Danish organic label in the entrance of the hotel, as well as they make it visual on their website in order to make it clear that this is a sustainable hotel ([www.comwellaalborg.dk](http://www.comwellaalborg.dk)). This is not the only tourism business that use a certification scheme as a marketing tool, as VisitAalborg and Hotel Aalborg does the same due to our interpretation. Hotel Aalborg want to be Green Key certified in order amongst other things to attracts tourists, who demands environmentally friendly hotels. We also argue that AKKC use their certification the ISO system as a marketing tool, as they make it visual on their website as well in order to be sure that visitors know this is a sustainable place ([akkc.dk](http://akkc.dk)). We argue that these certification systems are quite important to the businesses that apply them, as they for example serve as a benchmark. In addition, because being a certified business entails that you have to ensure that you follow the requirements for the specific certification. This means that these businesses are also up to date with environmentally sustainable practices and regulations. Yet, we also found a pattern amongst the tourism businesses in Aalborg with a certification. None of the representatives from interviews succeeded in explaining in details what exactly their specific certification entails. We assess that this could be because such explanation is comprehensive, and take up a long time in an interview. We also consider the possibility that the representatives simply do not know, what their specific certification means. In any case, we found it necessary to do an extended research on each certification in order to get a deeper explanation of what they entail.

## **Ecology**

Choosing organic solutions in some way or another, is one way of acting environmentally sustainable as a company (e.g. Hamid and Isa, 2017; Sloan et al., 2013). In relation to this, we found that organic food in particular is very important to some of the tourism businesses in Aalborg. The degree of how much each business do in order to become more organic varies. An example of this is present in Aalborg Zoo:

“For example, for Shrovetide we have a tradition on inviting parents with their dressed-up children, and there is candy. This time we offered organic made bars with fruits and nuts instead of candy”  
(Appendix 3.7, 48-52).

We argue that the statement above shows evidence of an active choice of exchanging non-organic products with organic products. This could be a way of making a difference for the environment, as organically grown products are more environmentally friendly. Yet, the representative from the Zoo did not go any deeper into explaining why they made this exact choice. We wonder if there is any connection between consumer demands and their decision on going organic. Since organic food has grown into a trend and become very important to consumers especially in Denmark (Knaad-Hansen, 2017), we consider the possibility of this affecting the Zoo’s decision on changing previous traditions. However, the Zoo is not the only tourism business in Aalborg that focus on ecology. Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus in Aalborg also focuses intensely on ecology, and the hotel manager explained why the hotel aimed for the Danish organic label in bronze version:

“(…), so the whole Comwell group started working on getting the Danish organic label in bronze version (…). But, well this means that everything we shop is 30 percent organic as a minimum. Right now, we shop 50 percent organically, and this means that all of our beer is organic, and we serve primarily organic juices for lunch. (…), much of our wine is classified as biodynamic or organic. So, we have actually converted - we made a clean cut. All of our tea and coffee is organic”  
(Appendix 3.10, 45-57).

The statement from the hotel manager of Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus shows evidence of the environmental dimension of sustainability, as an organic conversion - as the hotel manager put it - is an active choice of eliminating all non-organic options in the food area. We argue that organic food and drinks are of great importance in this hotel, which is why the hotel worked on getting the Danish organic label in bronze version. However, the hotel manager explained that organics is not important in every aspect, and says that “Well, sustainability is more important than organics, so it is not as if you can have an organic lemon from China, we would import that, because then we would rather import a conventional one from Germany. In this case we think of sustainability before organics (…)” (Appendix 3.10, 144-148). Thus, evidence shows that organics does not come at any price within this hotel, and in some cases, sustainability is valued higher than organic options. In the statement above

such a thing as transport is considered an important factor in order not to contribute to more carbon dioxide emission as necessary. This means that in some instances even an organic certified hotel chooses non-organic solutions, as another way of protecting the environment. Yet, the hotel manager explains what sustainability means within their hotel by saying that “But sustainability is many things, we have just chosen to look at sustainability through organics. So, this is where we stand right now, and then if more arise in the future, then we just add to this” (Appendix 3.10, 337-341). Even though the hotel has quite a big focus on organic food, they want to expand it even more. We argue that this hotel is open for changes and does not do anything half-hearted. Comwell is actually the only hotel so far that implements both waste management, energy reduction, certification and organic food.

In the conducted interviews, we also met with the hotel manager of Hotel Aalborg. In relation to organic foods, the hotel manager mentioned that “Then there are also some who focus on foods and organics. In relation to this we have few products that are organic” (Appendix 3.9, 65-67). In contrast to Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus, Hotel Aalborg takes minimal sustainable practices in relation to providing organic food options in the hotel restaurant. The two hotels in Aalborg have taken different approaches concerning organic food options. Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus has converted into being an organic hotel in relation to foods, and as a step in doing so, the hotel gained the Danish organic label in bronze version. Whereas Hotel Aalborg has chosen to direct their environmentally sustainable practices in other directions than organic food, as evidenced in the statement by the hotel manager. The hotel manager from Hotel Aalborg explained that choosing to go organic in relation to food would be a big economic investment that require financial capabilities. From this, we interpret that Hotel Aalborg has chosen to install their financial capabilities elsewhere than in organic food. The contrast between the two hotels proves that there exist different prioritisations in how to deal with environmental sustainability concerning for example ecology.

The founder of the food place WeFeat explained their vision on sustainability in the interview, and one of the most important aspects of sustainability within WeFeat is ecology. This was expressed in relation to organic foods:

“Well it is very well connected in the sense that, if it is not organic, if it is conventional, then it is filled with toxic substances and pesticides. And also, if it is organic, it is also healthier. So, it makes good sense (...), so if it is organic, we make everything 100% organic. And as it is organic, there are

also many good things in relation to us making a big difference for the environment” (Appendix 3.3, 83-90).

This statement by the founder of WeFeat is argued to be an environmentally sustainable practice. This is because, choosing to serve meals made from completely organic foods in order to protect the environment, is according to literature an environmental way of acting sustainable. Another statement from the founder of WeFeat supports this, when he said “But organic food and ingredients in itself is a big factor. After half a year, we saved one and a half million litres of ground water from pesticides, and now we passed four million litres. So already in that sense we have made a big difference” (Appendix 3.3, 127-131). Not only do we argue that there is evidence of environmental sustainability, the founder provides evidence himself as well. Moreover, when asked in the interview, if organic food has become more important to the people buying their meals, the founder of WeFeat answered that “It becomes more and more, and that is also what I experience. I think we were part of starting this wave here in Aalborg and show other people that it is possible to run an organic food place. And that is also what we want - get in front and be the first movers” (Appendix 3.3, 217-221). We argue that the founder of WeFeat also has a desire of inspiring people into making a difference through this kind of business. WeFeat want to inspire people to purchase organic meals or even affect people into starting their own business with an environmentally sustainable basis, because the founder wants to make a difference in protecting the environment by running an ecological business. Another aspect to this example is what the founder understands of consumer demands. As stated, he thinks organic food becomes more important to costumers, which also corresponds with the discovery made by OrganicDenmark, who says that organic food has become a trend amongst consumers (Kaad-Hansen, 2017). This makes us wonder if WeFeat is an organic food place because they want to be sustainable, or if it is because they want to keep up with this trend. It could also be a mixture of both.

Ecology and organic food in particular is in consideration amongst some of the tourism businesses in Aalborg, however the degree of how much each business prioritize organic solutions vary. The bigger part of the tourism businesses which have taken any kind of sustainable practice towards organic choices, have not chosen to focus that intensely on organic foods other than setting out few options such as Aalborg Zoo. On the other, Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus has actively chosen to transform the hotel into a sustainable organisation where organics are highly focussed. In fact, it is focussed to such a degree that the hotel has achieved the Danish organic label in bronze version. Thus, ecology has

gotten different degrees of attention. In addition, WeFeat is highly active in being an organic place, as this is their core purpose. We recognize that WeFeat is a food place and Comwell has a hotel restaurant, thus if any tourism business would focus on organic foods, these are somewhat obvious.

The findings in this section point towards a rather big importance amongst some of the tourism businesses in Aalborg. However, in some of the interviews ecology was only briefly mentioned, thus the importance does vary. The section is named ecology, but the majority of the issues discussed in the interviews in relation ecology is about organic food. In some cases, such as the one of Comwell – Hotel Hvide Hus, we are sure that choosing organic food is in order to be environmentally sustainable. However, the case of WeFeat point in two directions. On one hand, they want to avoid conventional ingredients due to pesticides, which they think have a negative impact on the environment. We have argued that this is environmental, but on the other hand, they are aware that consumers find organic food important. Consequently, is WeFeat a reaction to this? From this, we interpret that the incorporation of organic food can have different purposes. We also do not think it a coincidence that the food place and a hotel restaurant in particular focus on organic food. We argue that if a business in such settings wish to become sustainable, it would seem fitting that they start out by becoming organic.

### **Nature conservation**

Protecting the nature and the wildlife that lives in it is one way of being environmentally sustainable (e.g. Hamid and Isa, 2017; Sloan et al., 2013). The tourism businesses in Aalborg are not that active in conserving nature. In fact, it is only Aalborg Zoo, which focuses intensely on nature conservation.

The marketing manager explained why nature conservation is of particular importance within their business, as it was expressed that “Well, we are a zoo, so overall you can say that we work with nature conservation, and that corresponds quite well with sustainability” (Appendix 3.7, 20-22). From this we understand the even the Zoo itself think it is a given that they work with nature conservation. An example of how they do so come up later in the interview, when she mentioned that “sustainable production of foods... uhm... we have as big a focus on phasing out palm oil as possible. But it is difficult, because it exists in many products, so in some instances it is a little difficult to replace” (Appendix 3.7, 25-30). The decision on attempting to avoid using palm oil in the zoo is connected to a specific animal species, which will be further elaborated. However, the Zoo attempts on protecting natural resources such as palm trees, which is environmentally sustainable.

On the website of Aalborg Zoo, it is also explained that nature conservation has to do with knowledge and understanding of the animals they keep in the zoo, and their natural surroundings ([aalborgzoo.dk](http://aalborgzoo.dk)). The representative from Aalborg Zoo goes on to explaining that “It is also important that we as a company that work with nature, animals and nature conservation, have a big focus on maintaining everything, and that is also about resource consumption, and that is about sustainability” (Appendix 3.7, 138-142). We also find it almost, as if it is a given-on behalf of the zoo that they make nature conservation a part of their company mission. This statement also reveals how the Zoo perceives sustainability, because the representative finishes off by saying that this is sustainability. Hence, sustainability due to Aalborg Zoo concerns nature conservation and resource consumption. The marketing manager gives an example of protecting orangutans from Borneo, where from palm oil is usually harvested (World Wildlife Fund):

“And then we can also include our orangutans, which origin from the area, and which are extremely threatened because of the palm oil industry (...). We have a cooperation with Red Orangutangen, and we have two annually events with them, where we focus on, what you can do in order to help rescue the orangutan, and what you can do to avoid palm oil” (Appendix 3.7, 36-42).

The statement above shows evidence of actions taken in order to prevent extinction of for example orangutans. We argue that Aalborg Zoo makes big efforts in order to conserve natural settings for threatened animals. Additionally, we argue that Aalborg Zoo also uses these mentioned events in order to encourage their visitors to act more responsible in relation to nature conservation. What we interpret that the zoo encourages is the visitors’ behaviour outside the zoo. Their suggestion is to avoid using palm oil, as this endangers animals such as orangutans. Thus, we assess that Aalborg Zoo attempts to affect the visitors by having these events on nature conservation. The marketing manager supplemented on this aspect by saying that “And this year we made a presentation on stage that is called ‘the journey’, and this is about the conservation of threatened animal species in the world, and we have received good feedback on this, which is extremely good” (Appendix 3.7, 183-187). Not only does Aalborg Zoo act environmentally sustainable by conserving nature, they also make an effort in changing visitors’ behaviour in relation to nature conservation.

However, of all the conducted interviews, as mentioned Aalborg Zoo is the only tourism business in Aalborg that works intensively on conserving the nature and animal species. This could be because not all tourism businesses encountered in interviews work with nature or animals. We argue that Aalborg Zoo in some way is obligated to work with nature conservation, as this is an attraction with animals. Just like organic food in a food place, it is a given that a zoo first of all desires to preserve nature as a way of being sustainable.

### **Emission reduction**

One way of sustaining nature and avoid damaging it is by reducing the CO<sub>2</sub> emission. As an organisation and a tourism business, one can take action and help on preventing the damage of climate and nature (e.g. Hamid and Isa, 2017; Sloan et al., 2013). During the different interviews with the tourism businesses some of the representatives mentioned actions which reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> emission, and thereby contributing to promote the environmental dimension and sustainable development. The different aspects within emission reduction that occurred in the interviews were mainly the reduction on using fuel and minimising air travel. Emission reduction is important to some of the tourism businesses in Aalborg and the degree of their efforts also vary.

When interviewing the representative of Aalborg Zoo, it was explained that the zoo has some trains going on diesel oil and further explains about diesel oil that “(...) it pollutes less. It emits actually quite less substances and thereby pollute less all in all. So, it has taken quite a lot of work to get this diesel oil home to us. So, that is in keeping with sustainability.” (Appendix 3.7, 53-59). By saying that it has taken a lot of work to bring a certain fuel to the Zoo, it is indicated that the Zoo is willing to contribute to and promote the sustainable development even though it might take more of the business’ resources. This is because it could be considered easier to purchase and use another fuel that emits more CO<sub>2</sub>. In addition to this, the representative from the zoo explained, how they attempt to encourage the people in Aalborg to spend their vacation in the city instead of travelling half way across the earth:

“For example, here in the General Prayer Day holiday we are holding an event about what you remember off stuff from the Limfjord, such as clams, and what you can find of creepy-crawlies. So instead of always thinking ‘well, we have to go somewhere exotic, and we actually have to go by air travel to get to that nature’, well then you actually have a whole lot of exotic nature right here in our own nature. So that is in a high degree also sustainability” (Appendix 3.7, 65-72).



Not only does the zoo make an effort in reducing the level of CO<sub>2</sub> emission inside the attraction, they also attempt to affect their guests - the tourists - to stay at home during their holiday and explore the nature and culture we have in Aalborg. And in order not to have double standards, the Zoo also make an effort not to use unnecessary air travel with for example the feed they need for the animals. The representative from Aalborg Zoo mentioned that “there is a big focus on how we can get stuff closer to where we are, which we would rather do instead of driving or flying long distances” (Appendix 3.7, 146-148). As with nature preservation, Aalborg Zoo make an effort in changing their visitors’ behaviour outside the Zoo in order to become more responsible. Thus, the Zoo is environmentally sustainable in relation to reducing emission of CO<sub>2</sub>; they also encourage tourists into doing the same thing. However, we argue that there is a contrast in what the Zoo does in order to reduce emissions, since they also fly out staff to the Bahamas for extensive training in becoming sustainable (Appendix 3.7, 299).

Another business interviewed, which has chosen to use less CO<sub>2</sub> emitting implements is Aalborg Karneval. It is explained by the representative, how they have actively chosen to pay a certain amount in order to zero in the “CO<sub>2</sub> calculation”, when choosing materials for their printed matters. Furthermore, it was explained how they have replaced fuel driven machines with electricity driven machines, as they have put cables into the ground where the big party of the carnival is held every year in order to “(...) run on electricity from the city instead so we do not emit 2000 litres of diesel.” (Appendix 3.5, 214-215). However, it is also said that “(...) it is also a balance with the economy (...)” (Appendix 3.5, 203-219), thus indicating that Aalborg Karneval still has the economy to think of when it comes to running a business. One can argue that the distribution of the expenses is important for a business to function and run, but as Aalborg Karneval has chosen to make these initiatives of using and investing in resources, they can therefore also be seen as contributing to the reduction the CO<sub>2</sub> emission purposefully as it is a decision made with that in mind. Another business, which also think about the fuel, is GoBoat. Here, GoBoat is created with “this consideration of sustainability because we do should not use a lot of fuel in order to get a good experience on water.” (Appendix 3.4, 5-7). Goboat like Aalborg Karneval has chosen to use electricity as their energy source as it does not pollute the same way and therefore “(...) we use a German manufacturer to the electric motor and they are working on making bigger electric motors to the boat industry.” (Appendix 3.4, 114-116). In addition, in the interview with Hotel Aalborg, it was noted, how some guests sometimes request the

option of having a charger for their electricity driven cars (Appendix 3.9, 229-230) and therefore chargers will be installed during the renovation of the hotel. Thus, one can argue that Hotel Aalborg and Goboat as well both have considered taking initiatives and having products, which operate towards avoid damaging more on the environment. Looking at the different examples of tourism businesses, which have less polluting energy resources, it is evident that the main energy resource is electricity, which also within the businesses is the replacement to other fuels. The other hotel in Aalborg that took part in an interview is Comwell - Hotel Hvide Hus, and the hotel manager explained how they make it a rule not to import food from distances further away from Denmark or if necessary, Europe. It is a matter of principle and it is now an integrated part of the hotel politics. We argue that this sustainable practice is also a way of reducing the CO<sub>2</sub> emission, and it is taken in order to protect the environment and the species that are affected by for example CO<sub>2</sub> emission:

“(…) we make it a rule of thumb that we of course want it to be Danish, if that is not possible, then European. Some things are not possible to import from those places, and that is why we have a clear opinion on not serving tiger prawns or tuna as long as they are threatened. We are very simplistic that way. And it has actually not been that difficult to implement, if you just have a better alternative for the guests. (...) and in principal we do not serve freshly squeezed orange juice, if we can avoid it” (Appendix 3.10, 169-178).

Looking back at the other sustainable practices taken within Comwell – Hotel Hvide Hus it is not surprising that the hotel also makes an effort in reducing the emission of CO<sub>2</sub>. Similar to Aalborg Zoo, the hotel does so by minimising the number of imported products outside Denmark. Aalborg Zoo and Comwell – Hotel Hvide Hus share this decision on preventing air travel if possible.

Looking at the statements given, the tourism businesses seemingly spend more on resources to use that kind of sustainable practices even though one often would associate a business to be entirely about making good profit and therefore not spend more than necessary. As seen in the highlighted statements in this section, these tourism businesses in Aalborg consider taking some kind of sustainable actions as they emphasise how they can make a positive footprint, when it comes to the energy sources and emit less CO<sub>2</sub> and also make it profitable to them. Thus, we interpret that this is considered important to some of the tourism businesses in Aalborg. We found that half of the businesses make an effort in relation to this aspect of the environmental dimension of sustainability.

Conclusively, the environmental dimension of sustainability has proven to be of great importance to the interviewed tourism businesses in Aalborg. The analysis of the findings from the interviews related to the environmental dimension is structured with different sub-themes identified in the findings and reviewed literature. The sub-themes are; waste management, energy reduction, certification systems, ecology, nature conservation and emission reduction. From the sub-themes we were able to identify the main sustainable practices, which are waste management, certification systems and energy reduction. The majority of the interviewed tourism businesses in Aalborg applies waste management. In fact, eight of the tourism businesses make use of some sort of waste management. This varies from extensive sorting of waste, recycling and using biodegradable materials. A little more than half of the tourism businesses also frequently apply energy reduction. As mentioned, the actions taken in order to reduce energy consumption vary from business to business. Solely solar cells are the only recurring aspect of this sub-theme. Finally, certification systems are also frequently applied by the tourism businesses. Again, a little more than half of the businesses are rewarded some kind of certification. We say some kind, because each business has its own certification, except from Hotel Aalborg, which hope to be rewarded the Green Key just as Comwell – Hotel Hvide Hus. In order to clarify, the other sub-these are also important to most of the tourism businesses in Aalborg, yet the three outlined ones are the one of greatest importance and applied by the most businesses. The sub-theme on ecology is for example not applied by that many tourism businesses from the interviews. Nonetheless, WeFeat and Comwell – Hotel Hvide Hus focus intensely on organic food and run their businesses on being organic. Thus, some sub-themes might be less frequently applied, but those who do, might work more deeply on this issue. Another example of this is nature conservation. The only tourism business that work intensely on preserving nature and animals is Aalborg Zoo. Our findings also correspond well with the ones of the reviewed literature. In the section on tourism businesses, it was also evident that the environmental sustainability is more evident in this literature as opposed to the two other dimensions. The literature we reviewed entails some of the themes we identified in our findings from interviews.

### **COMPARISON OF THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY**

Having completed the analysis of the findings from interviews with representatives from tourism businesses in Aalborg, we have assessed, which of the three dimensions of sustainability plays a bigger role within their business and thus can be argued to be of more importance than the other. As

mentioned, we organised the analysis after the three dimensions in which different sub-themes exist. From this we have concluded on each dimension in order to find out which aspects of the three dimensions are most frequently applied in the represented tourism businesses in Aalborg.

Looking at the concluding remarks from each dimension, we interpret that the environmental dimension of sustainability is seemingly the most important sustainability to the tourism businesses in Aalborg. This is based on the different sustainable practices implemented in each interviewed business. The environmental dimension is frequently represented in the same businesses through waste management, certification systems and energy consumption. Yet, in the interpretation of findings, we came across environmentally sustainable practices that might have a social component attached to them as well. What is meant by this is that such a thing as recycling can be seen as a joint effort that everybody in a community is responsible for, thus not only is it environmental to protect the environment, it is also a socially sustainable practice, because it involves a whole community.

We argue that this dimension plays a bigger role in the tourism businesses in Aalborg, because different themes from this dimension recurred in the interviews to a much higher degree than the social and economic dimension of sustainability. The social dimension is frequently represented in the tourism businesses through local cooperation, health and diversity. However, some of these initiatives of the local corporation and health can be discussed if they should be considered belonging to the environmental dimension instead of social depending on the reason for collaborating. The economic dimension is present, yet we were not presented with that much findings within this dimension as the other two. Additionally, not all interviewed tourism businesses mentioned any sort of economic advantage or challenge. However, we argue that the economic dimension might not be mentioned to such a high degree as the two others, because economic viability and security can be considered as a given for any business to continue. Compared to their perception of sustainability, we see an accordance between their perceptions and practices in relation to the environmental sustainability. Each tourism business in some way understand sustainability from the environmental point of view, and as evidenced from the findings, all businesses take environmentally sustainable practices. Some of the businesses perceive sustainability from all three dimensions, yet that corresponds well with the fact that we have found evidence of practices within all three dimensions of sustainability. Since they also see sustainability as something they are responsible for

implementing and as a way of developing a business, it also corresponds well with the fact that the tourism businesses in Aalborg are to some degree are sustainable.

## TOURISTS AND SUSTAINABILITY

In this section, we will apply the data collected from the questionnaire in order to analyse the perceptions and opinions of tourists in relation to sustainable tourism. In this analysis as well, we will apply the three dimensions of sustainability as the guiding theoretical tools.

Since we have assessed what tourism businesses in Aalborg understand of sustainability and which sustainable practices they apply, we find it relevant to look at the tourists as well. We are going to assess what Danish tourists understand of sustainable tourism and then we go into assessing how important sustainable tourism is to them. In this way, we are able to deem if there is a correspondence between what the tourism businesses incorporate of sustainable practices in contrasts to what is important to Danish tourists.

### TOURIST PROFILE

In the distributed questionnaire, a number of questions were asked to begin with, which amongst other things concerned the background of the respondents. The reason for doing so, was to apply this data of background onto our analysis in order to point out tendencies within different demographic segments. In addition to the chosen nationality, which is Danish, we will apply segments based on age, regional areas and gender. These will also be compared and crossed. Before going into the analysis of our collected data about the Danish tourists' perceptions and importance of sustainability, the data concerning the respondents' background will be given in a brief overview including graphs to visualise it.

First question asked was about gender. Here, it is evident how females are prevalent with 85 % while males are 15 %. Even though, the questionnaire was completed in Danish and therefore targeted Danish respondents, a question about nationality was also asked. Here, 98 % of the respondents opted for *Danish* and the remaining 2 % opted for *Other* and commented Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Norway. In relation to age, the grouping is this:

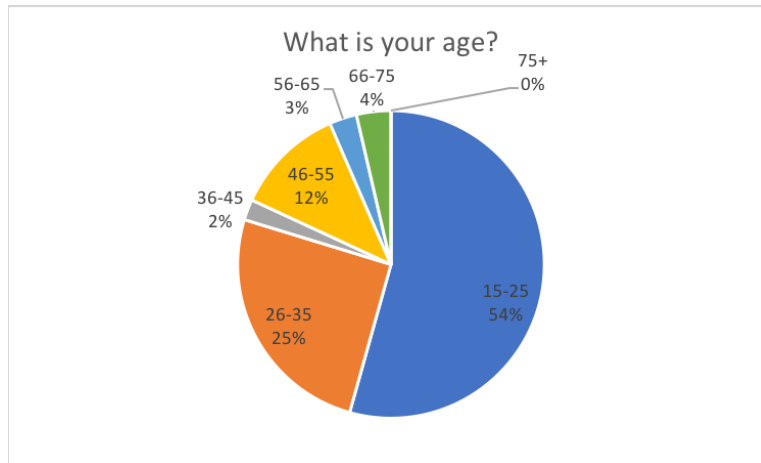


Figure 3: *What is your age*

Furthermore, we wanted to know which regional area the respondents are resided in and what their occupation are. The outcomes are:

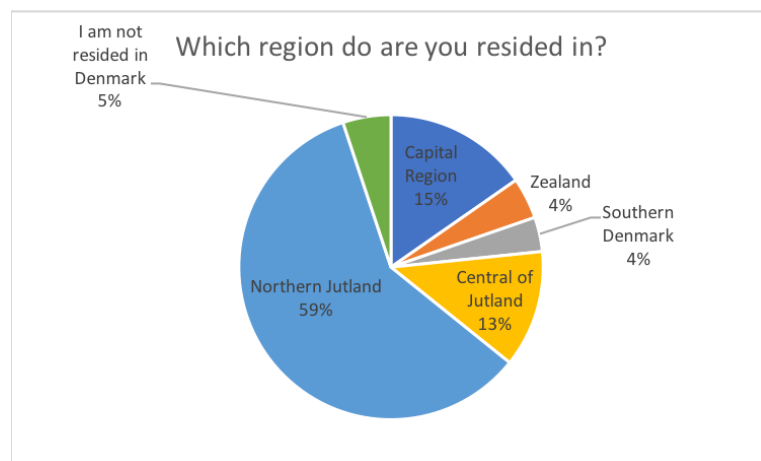


Figure 4: *Which region are you resided in?*

In figure XX, 5 % of the respondents have answered *I am not resided in Denmark* and written respectively England, Guatemala, Spain, Malaysia, Sweden and Australia. Since none of these countries were chosen as nationality as well, the respondents to this can be considered as Danes living abroad. And since the respondents with other nationality have not answered they are resided in another country, it is therefore evident that all respondents have a relation to Denmark. This result is, however, also most likely due to the questionnaire was constructed in Danish.

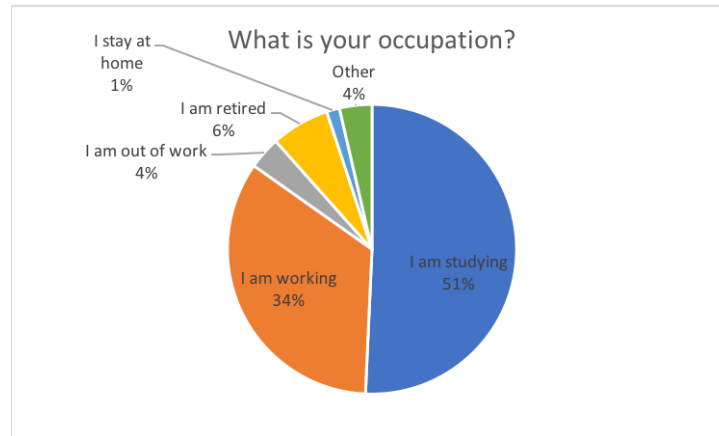


Figure 5: *What is your occupation?*

## PERCEPTION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

This section aims at reaching an understanding of how tourists perceive sustainable tourism. In order to assess how tourists, understand sustainable tourism, we proposed different questions in the questionnaire that will guide us towards assessing this. As mentioned, we apply the three dimensions of sustainability as guiding theoretical tools.

In relation to perception, we included a specific section in the questionnaire on tourists' perception of sustainable tourism. The findings are thus derived from these questions in the questionnaire. The structure of this section in the analysis is guided by the structure of the questionnaire. Thus, first, we assess tourists understanding of being sustainable on a vacation, and then we assess what tourists understand of sustainable tourism businesses.

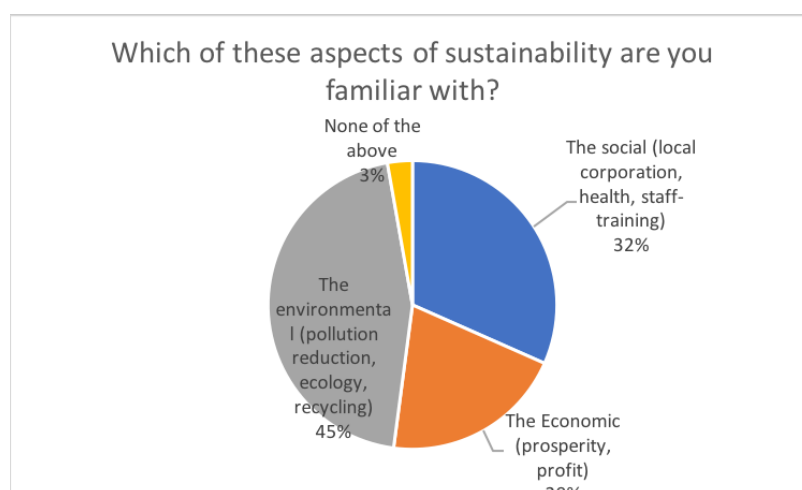


Figure 6: *Which of the following aspects of sustainability are you familiar with?*

We asked the respondents, which of the three dimensions of sustainability they are familiar with, and as it is evident from figure x, the environmental dimension is the most familiar aspect of sustainability due to the respondents. We set up examples of what each dimension entails, thus we cannot be sure if this has affected the result. Yet, 45% of the respondents are familiar with the environmental dimension of sustainability, which is also what we expected. Throughout the analysis of the respondents' perception of sustainable tourism, we also see a clear correspondence between this result and what the respondents describe as being sustainable tourism. This is in relation to both sustainable tourists and sustainable tourism businesses.

### **Sustainable tourists**

One of the questions in the mentioned section in the questionnaire *What do you understand of being sustainable on your vacation?* resulted in different ways of perceiving this. We found that 40% of the respondents think of transportation, when considering how to be sustainable as a tourist. Findings from the questionnaire support this assessment. One of the respondents replied:

“Thinking how to travel environment friendly - e.g. in manners of transportation: train vs flight, public transportation vs taxi etc. (...)” (Appendix 6).

The answer above is a perception, which we argue to be environmental, because the respondent thinks of being sustainable on a vacation as something that is executed through environmentally sustainable measures such as transportation. In this case, transportation would be environmentally friendly in order to be sustainable according to the respondent (Appendix). We get the sense that transportation is the first concrete thing the respondents think of, when we asked them how tourists can be sustainable. A respondent replied, “That airplanes, airports, tourist busses etc take measures to be environmentally friendly” (Appendix). We most defiantly find an accordance amongst this group of respondents, who perceive environmental transportation as a way for tourists to be sustainable. Their answers are quite similar; “It could be not using public transport instead of taxi or renting a car. Or it could also be choosing destinations that does not require that much fuel for airplane travel” (Appendix 6). We also argue that this group of respondents perceive airplanes as the most damaging source of transportation, while public transportation is considered better for the environment. The findings reveal more evidence of this, yet we chose to point out these examples of perceptions. We argue that the respondents have a tendency of perceiving sustainable transport as a way of being sustainable as



a tourist, since 40% of them indicated so. However, as a contrast to this tendency, we found an example of one respondent who does not think it is sustainable to go on a vacation and backs this up by replying that “(...) usually we go by car or airplane – not good for the environment (...)” (Appendix 6). One could argue that this respondent might lack information of how it is possible to transport one-self in more sustainable manners than others. Yet, we are not insinuating that transportation in general is sustainable, we solely point out that some kinds of transportation methods are more sustainable.

We found that 33% of the respondents consider their ways of consumption, when we asked them how tourists can be sustainable. Many of the respondents expressed that they attempt on behaving the same way as they do at home when they are on a vacation. One of the respondents replied that “I try to do pretty much what I do at home, i.e. not littering or wasting too many resources like plastic bags” (Appendix). We argue that this is a way of limiting the consumption pattern, as the respondent mentioned plastic bags as an example of reducing the consumption. We also argue that plastic consumption is an issue that comes to mind for some of the respondents. One respondent replied that “(...) Thinking of how I use plastic and try to avoid it (...)” (Appendix). In relation to consumption, the findings also point towards an awareness of waste management. One respondent replied that “Not letting food go to waste (...) (Appendix) is a way for tourists to be sustainable. We argue that this group of respondents try avoid over-consumption; “I think about remembering not to throw litter on the street (...). But also, that I do not purchase more than necessary, so that I can avoid not throwing out unopened food” (Appendix 6). Since consumption was a topic that recurred in the findings, we interpret that the respondents have gotten the sense that consumption damages the environment. We argue this partly because as one author discovered that tourists consider how they conduct themselves in relation to how it affects the local surroundings (Pavia et al. (2015: 254-255). Our findings also revealed that this group of respondents consider energy consumption, and they expressed how they attempt on reducing that on vacations. In addition to this, Juvan and Dolnicar (2017) suggest that tourists can lower their consumption on energy as a way of being more responsible. In matters of consumption, we have assessed that this group of respondents perceive limitation of consumption as a way of being sustainable on a vacation. We infer that the respondents relate consumption to environmental sustainability. This is because the group of respondents agreed on minimizing consumption, as if it is damaging.

40 % of the respondents connect the nature and environment with what tourists can do to be sustainable. We found evidence of this in the findings from the questionnaire. This group of respondents came with statements such as “think of the environment”, “take the environment into account” and “respect the nature” (Appendix 6). This is how they think one can be sustainable on a vacation. Yet, we argue that these perceptions are quite general and broad, as no further elaborations were connected to them. However, what we get from this is that this group of respondents connect sustainability to the environment and nature. However, we cannot be sure that the respondents find it sustainable to be aware of the environment because they wish to protect the nature, natural resources and species, or if it is with something else in mind. Yet, we did find few concrete examples of how this group of respondents think tourists can be sustainable. An example of this is environmentally friendly accommodation, as expressed by two respondents (Appendix 6). Since 40% of the respondents perceive environmental issues as ways of being sustainable as tourist, we argue that words such as ‘nature’ and ‘environment’ are what this group of respondents connect to sustainability.

So far, the respondents from the questionnaire have a tendency of perceiving sustainable tourism as an environmental issue. In relation to social and economic sustainability, only one respondent included all three dimensions of sustainability in the perception of how tourist can be sustainable. *“I assume that it is part of the neoliberal discourse that the individual, through private consumption and “democracy at the cashier”, is being held responsible for global development in the fields of economy, environment and social conditions”* (Appendix). The statement above indicates that the respondent thinks each individual have a responsibility of behaving responsible, which is executed from both the economic, environmental and social dimension of sustainability. Yet, no further elaboration was included in this statement, thus we do not know how the respondent envision the three dimensions of sustainability. However, we argue that the reason why solely one respondent think of all three dimensions of sustainability could be that sustainability is a complex concept (Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet, 2015), thus going further than the environmental aspect of sustainability might still be unfamiliar to some people. This is only an assumption, yet due to our findings, evidence do point towards a tendency of perceiving sustainable tourism as an environmental issue.

Only 10% of the respondents were out of words and did not know what they perceive as sustainable on a vacation (Appendix), instead of guessing. We take from this that the issue of being sustainable

as a tourist is still unfamiliar or difficult to put into words for some people. As mentioned earlier, it could also be because sustainability is such a complex concept to get an understanding of (Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet, 2015), thus connecting it to tourism is even more difficult. In the reviewed literature, we also found that some tourists do not consider being sustainable on their vacation. The reasons for this are different, and Pulido-Fernández and López-Sánchez (2014) discovered that some tourists perceive it impossible for tourism businesses to change their way of running a business into a more sustainable one (Pulido-Fernández and López-Sánchez, 2014: 1592). We found a similar expression of this in the findings from the questionnaire. Again, 6% of the respondents did not find it possible for tourists to be sustainable. One respondent explained that “Vacations with almost no CO2 mark, which is impossible” (Appendix 6).

We definitely see a pattern arising from the perceptions explained in the questionnaire. The respondents think tourists can be sustainable through environmental sustainability. This is evident from the findings, as we found three main areas of perceptions that point towards environmental sustainability. 40% of the respondents mentioned environmentally friendly transportation, 40% mentioned the nature or the environment in their perceptions, and finally 33% mentioned consumption. We argue that these three main areas are all environmental, which also corresponds well with the result pointed out first in this part of the analysis. Namely, that 45% of the respondents are familiar with the environmental sustainability.

### **Sustainable tourism businesses**

The last question in the mentioned section in the questionnaire *How do you think tourism businesses can be sustainable?* also turned out with different perceptions of what this could be.

34% of the respondents think tourism businesses can be sustainable through environmental sustainability.

This group of respondents think tourism businesses can be sustainable by taking sustainable actions. Most of them do not specify what they mean by sustainable actions. An example of this is from one respondent, who replied, “Choosing the most sustainable products in every part of the hotels” (Appendix 6). There are more examples of similar responses. However, one respondent exemplified environmental sustainability by replying that “Recycling, solar cells” (Appendix 6) are ways for tourism businesses to be sustainable. It is environmentally sustainable, because recycling and

implementation of solar cells are environmentally sustainable practices a tourism business can incorporate. Another concrete example came from a respondent, who stated that “By taking sustainable choices. Hotels could have a badge if they are CO2 neutral or such” (Appendix 6). We argue that the respondent is referring to an environmental certification that businesses can be rewarded. In continuation of this, a respondent replied that “like there exist Fairtrade logos for whole wheat, recycling etc, then hotels, rental cars, planes etc. could have a logo that shows they think of the environment (...)” (Appendix). We infer that this respondent also considers certifications a sustainable practice, however, it does not seem like the respondent knows exactly what it entails other than that logos can signify something sustainable. Yet, we argue that this is environmentally sustainable because the example directly indicates so. Another aspect of being environmentally sustainable according this group of respondents is transportation. One respondent replied, “Maybe let tourists travel in larger groups, so that way it "only" requires 1 bus instead of 2?” (Appendix 6). From this we interpret that the respondent perceive sustainable tourism businesses as can be environmentally sustainable, since lowering the use of transportation is environmentally sustainable. So far, the concrete examples are environmentally sustainable practices, thus we argue that the respondents yet again have a tendency of understanding sustainable tourism as an environmental issue.

24% of the respondents think tourism businesses can be sustainable by lowering their consumption. One of the respondents replied, “Making sure the lights turn off when guests are not in their room. Reducing food waste. Researching on more sustainable cleaning companies for towels and sheets. Using eco-friendly soaps and cleaning remedies” (Appendix 6). This respondent gave concrete examples on how tourism businesses can be sustainable. We argue that the examples are about consumption, and how the businesses can change their consumption into being more sustainable, because it entails a reduction of consumption that affects the environment. It is environmental, because the examples concern energy reduction, food waste and choosing more sustainable cleaning detergents. Another respondent, who replied, “Stop food waste and save energy. Use organic products” (Appendix 6), have the same way of perceiving how tourism businesses can be sustainable. The findings bear evidence of more examples of reducing the consumption in tourism businesses. Yet we see a pattern in this group of respondents, because they consider food waste and energy reduction, to name a few, as ways for tourism businesses to become sustainable. We argue that this group of

respondents relate consumption to environmental sustainability, because their responses indicate that the consumption reduction will benefit the environment.

Some respondents think sustainable tourism businesses have a responsibility to be sustainable. This is expressed, as one respondent replied, “if the company itself is responsible and is economically social and environmentally sustainable and does not impose responsibility on its customers” (Appendix 6). We argue that this statement refers to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), because this corporate strategy entails both environmental, economic and social responsibilities for a company to incorporate (Sloan et al, 2013: 242). We cannot be sure that this is what the respondent perceives of sustainable tourism businesses, yet literature have similar explanations of CSR as this respondent. Another respondent replied:

“By making the tourists aware of how the environment is important to paying attention to, and that you should behave responsible towards it. Fx plastic on the beach that the tourists bring along, because otherwise it ends up in the ocean and harms the animals” (Appendix 6).

We argue that this respondent also thinks tourism businesses have a responsibility for informing tourists about proper behaviour. Thus, these two respondents perceive sustainable tourism businesses as ones, which take on a responsibility of being sustainable. In continuation of this example, “if the company itself is responsible and is economically social and environmentally sustainable and does not impose responsibility on its customers” (Appendix 6). This is the only respondent, who mentioned the three dimensions of sustainability in relation to how tourism businesses can be sustainable. Since only one respondent mentioned all three dimensions of sustainability in relation to this question, we argue that there is a disagreement between this question and the one from figure x. The figure shows that 32% of the respondents are familiar with the social sustainability, and 20% of the respondents are familiar with the economic sustainability. Due to this, we also do wonder why no more than one respondent think of more than environmental issues, since the respondents previously indicated that they are familiar with the other two dimensions. On the other hand, it could be because the respondents find it difficult to relate the three dimensions onto tourism businesses. However, this is solely a speculation.

10% of the respondents does not think it is possible for tourism businesses to be sustainable. One of them responded that “No, not completely. Even though there can be many upsides by increased tourism, I am of the belief that the tourism industry never can be – and of nature isn’t – sustainable” (Appendix 6). This example is quite similar to what Pulido-Fernández and López-Sánchez (2014) discovered. Their work shows that some tourists perceive it impossible for tourism businesses to change their way of running a business into a more sustainable one (Pulido-Fernández and López-Sánchez, 2014:1592). More examples from respondents indicate that they do not think it is possible for tourism businesses to be sustainable. Yet, this is a small group of the respondents, thus we see no pattern of this. However, this is worth mentioning, as it is very opposing most of the respondents. Besides not believing that tourism businesses can be sustainable, 13% of the respondents did not know what to respond on the issue (Appendix 6).

One respondent took on a different approach, as he or she replied, “There's eco-tourism, right? I think it's really up to the consumer demand” (Appendix 6). This is the only example, where consumer demands is considered. The other responses in some way or another refers to the environment, however this response questions whether tourism businesses should act on sustainability because of consumer demands. Previously in the analysis, we discussed whether sustainability is a trend according to tourists. Tasci (2017) researched consumer demands in relation to sustainability and tourism businesses and discovered that there is a demand for sustainable services. Yet, there is room for improvement, thus businesses need to understand consumer values in order intensify the consumer demand (Tasci, 2017: 380-387). From this, we argue that the respondent is not off with this perception, as evidence points towards an agreement on the importance of consumer demands. Yet, our findings do not prove any tendency of this, since only one respondent consider following consumer demands as the way tourism businesses can be sustainable.

Conclusively, the findings revealed a pattern, which is a tendency of perceiving how tourism businesses can be sustainable as an environmental issue. We found two main areas in the findings, which both relate to the environmental sustainability. 34% of the respondents think sustainable tourism businesses is connected to environmental aspects, and 24% of the respondents think tourism businesses can be sustainable by reducing their consumption. Since these main areas are environmental sustainable and the findings mostly point out examples of environmental sustainability, we argue that this corresponds well with figure x. Here is it evident that the dimension

of sustainability with most familiarity is the environmental one. As mentioned, 45% of the respondents are familiar with this. We argue that there is an accordance between the findings of the questionnaire compared to one of the findings from the interview with Center for Green Transition (CGT). This is because CGT attempts on making Aalborg a greener city (Appendix 3.1, 547-550), and we find evidence that the respondents from the questionnaire mainly perceive sustainability as an environmental issue. From this, a group of respondents consider waste sorting a way for tourists and tourism businesses to be sustainable. One third of the respondents consider their conduct on vacations, which has been exemplified with waste sorting. Thus, it would seem like the message CGT tries to send out in Aalborg will be well received, as at least one third of these respondents would act on it.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Having assessed tourists' perceptions of sustainable tourism, this section will be focusing on the importance of sustainability when the tourists are on vacation. In the questionnaire, the questions are divided into the three dimensions of sustainability wherein different initiatives are mentioned in some way or another. Then, questions about how important different sustainable initiatives within respectively accommodation, eating places and attractions are asked.

To begin with in this part of the analysis, it can be relevant to look at the most chosen answer to the question *Which of the following aspects of sustainability are you familiar with?* In Figure 6, one can see that the most popular choice is the environmental with 45 %, while the social has 32 % and the economic has only 20 %.

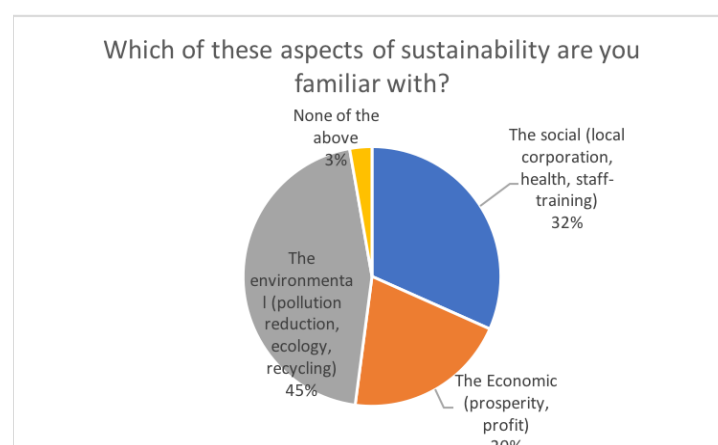


Figure 6: *Which of these aspects of sustainability are you familiar with?*

Comparing this with the open-ended question, *What do you do in your everyday life, which you would consider as sustainable?* the awareness of the environmental dimension is significantly more evident than the social and the economic. Among the answers, the most frequent mentioned initiative is the theme waste management, since it is calculated that more than half, 58,4 % of the comments, had it included. Energy and water reduction (37,1 %), purchase of organic food (36 %) and recycling (19,1 %). Moreover, other environmental themes are use of public transportation (14,5 %), biodegradable materials and less use of plastic (7, 8 %) and avoiding food waste (20,2). One example of this is saying “Eat organic, sort waste, use biodegradable products such as bags. I do the laundry with Ecoegg, I do not use sponges or cloths in plastic” (Appendix 6). Here in this comment, the examples are in relation to promotion of the environment, which are common in the responses in general. It gives the impression that conserving and protecting nature and its resources are matters, which are highly important to the respondents in their everyday life and therefore also more in focus. In the literature review it is mentioned, how the environmental dimension is of greater importance to the tourists. The tourists find it important to protect natural resources and minimise the damages on the nature (Dauti, 2014). This is a correlation to the aforementioned findings, which give an indication of the awareness of the environmental dimension of sustainability and that the respondents might be less informed in regard to the social and the economic dimensions. Or, it could simply be understood as the tourist consider the environmental issues as a more important and urgent issue.

In addition to this, the respondents give the impression that nature conservation is highly important when being a tourist and on vacation in the figure 7 *Which of the following sustainable initiatives are most important to you in an attraction on your holiday?* With 32 % *Respect for reserved nature* is the most rated, which could point to nature is the primary concern and that the tourism should care for nature.



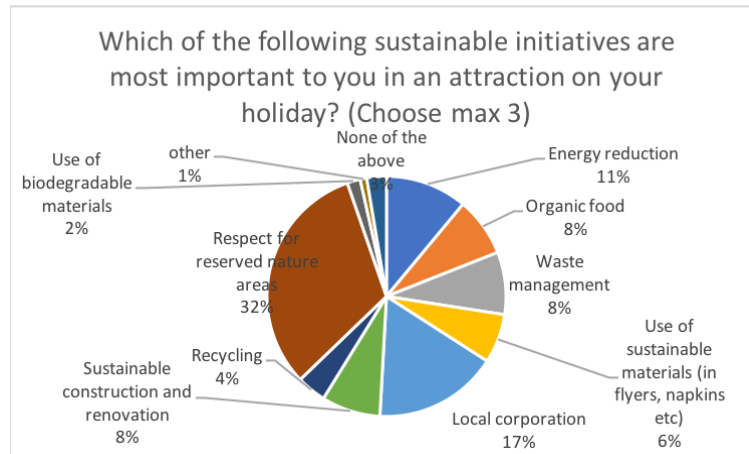


Figure 7: Which of the following sustainable initiatives are most important to you in an attraction on your holiday?

Furthermore, some of the respondents commented their choice with “conservation of nature and cultural sites” (Appendix 6) This can for example be compared with the study of Nicholas and Thapa (2015), who state how tourists value the nature within an attraction find it important to conserve nature and animals rather than making recreational facilities. In the question, it is understood as they rather want the reserved natural sites to be protected and conserved than having an attraction. Hence, in this case it can be said that the environment is put before the needs of a tourist.

Only few respondents have written any initiatives, which are assessed to belong to the social dimension of sustainability. Only one initiative can be considered belonging to the social dimension, namely purchase of local products, but since the reason for doing so is not mentioned, it can therefore be difficult to argue whether this initiative is taken due to environmental or social reasons or both. Less than 7 % of the comments mention purchase of local products and only one respondent gave the impression that it is for social reasons by saying “(...) support the local (...)” (Appendix 6). Another respondent mentions, how she or he works with primarily social sustainability at work, which therefore can be an argument for doing it for social reasons such as supporting local community. Looking at the implied studies in the literature review, one can say this somehow corresponds to founded arguments (e.g. Dillard et al, 2009), where it is mentioned that the social dimension can have the tendency to be eclipsed by the two other dimensions. In this case, the environmental is too dominant as mentioned previously because it is only 7 % of the respondents, who have mentioned any initiatives that can be categorised as social. When they were asked the question *Which of the following social aspects are most important to you, when you go on a vacation?* (Figure 8), and therefore had options to choose between, the second most rated with 23 %, was *Tourism creates*

*employment in a local community*. In relation to the completion of this this question, one could say that the formulation was rather badly worded<sup>1</sup>. But since the question prior to this, use the term of sustainability, the respondents might have put this in relation to sustainability as well. Furthermore, since the completion of this question, the most rated option, *Safety*, is in this research no longer considered as a sustainable initiative per se and therefore, it is not analysed.

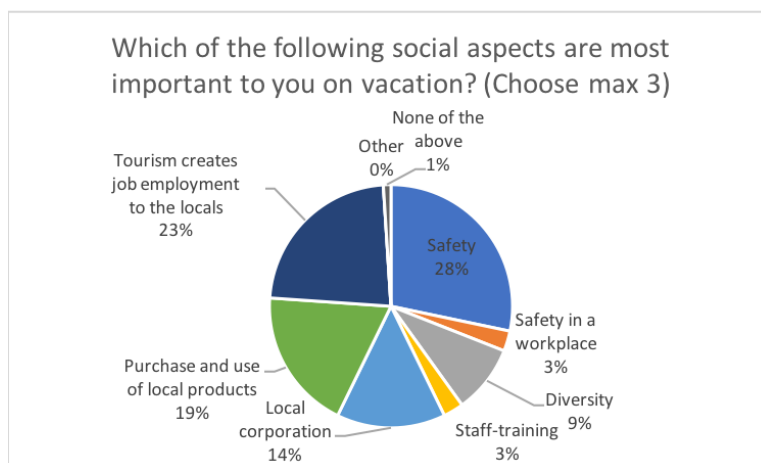


Figure 8: Which of the following social aspects are most important to you on vacation?

With the outcome of *Tourism creates job employment to the locals* it can be conformed to some reviewed literature. One example is where tourists think the well-being of the local people as important and sustainable tourism as a way of empowering their lives (e.g. Dauti, 2014). Furthermore, in response to studies in the literature review, creating more job opportunities and labor within a community, one can argue that it provides welfare (e.g. Zhao, 2014).

In the figure 9 of *Which of the following sustainable initiatives are most important to you in a eating place on your holiday?* the option *Local ingredients* is the most scored with 32 % and *Employees from the local community* is the third most with 15 %. In between is *Organic food* with 17 %.

<sup>1</sup> In figure 8, the question and the options given can be considered related to social aspects, and in relation to sustainability. People could have interpreted the questions differently to what expected.

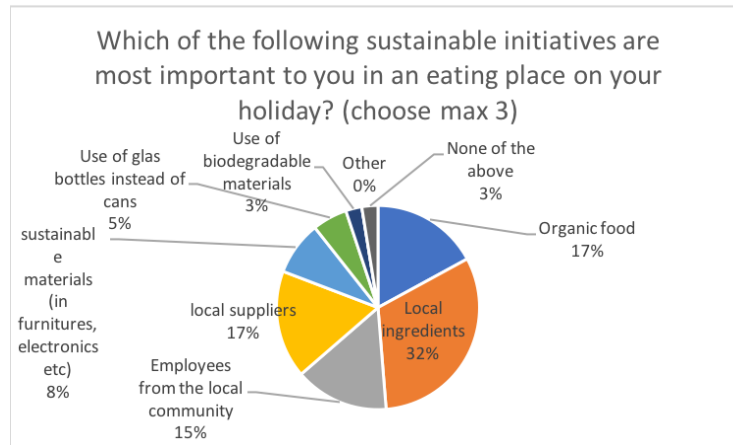


Figure 9. Which of the following initiatives are most important to you in an eating place on your holiday?

These options can be analysed to be supporting the social community as well, since the local ingredients and employees are considered supporting the local community and stakeholders. However, since the reason for choosing these options are not mentioned, they could as well be for environmental reasons or for the tourists' personal experience. If it is for the social reasons it can be seen as a good correspondence to some of the applied literature (e.g. Pulido-Fernandez and López-Sánchez, 2014) in which it is mentioned, how tourists consider that employment can be created by tourism and the local residents should continue having a high quality of life, which one can argue that employment and supporting local businesses can help maintaining.

In the findings in literature review, it is presented how tourists are of the believe that they do not have to think about taking sustainable practices on their vacation as they already are doing so in their everyday lives and therefore somehow are considered entitled to not being sustainable when they are on a vacation (Miller et al, 2010). Here, there is a correspondence to our findings in the questionnaire since the question *Is your attitude towards sustainability the same during your holiday as in your everyday life?* (Figure 10) has a minimal difference.

Just over half of the respondents replied mostly yes (53 %), while the rest answered no (47 %). 22 respondents gave further explanation, where for their example "When you are on a vacation, your overconsumption is excused" or "the principles are still there but one easily becomes careless because "now we are on vacation, so it does not matter, it is okay"" (Appendix 6). These two examples give a good idea of how the respondents overall have replied, where the first indicates how tourists and their overconsumption are excused, while the second indicates how tourists might still be aware of

one should be sustainable when on vacation but often they forget because it is a break from the everyday lives and the routines, in which the individual can do sustainable initiatives.

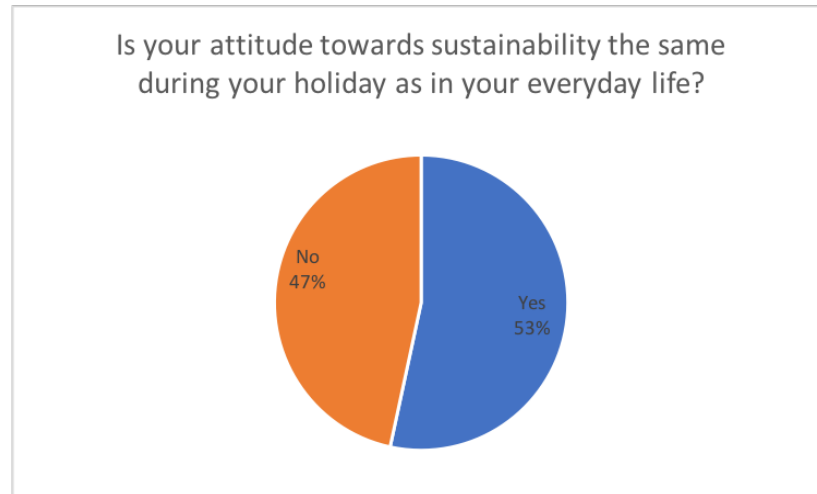


Figure 10: *Is your attitude towards sustainability the same during your holiday as in your everyday life?*

However, some of the respondents mentioned how they do try to act as in their everyday life but often it can be rather difficult because they are not in their usual surroundings and therefore do not know how they can act as usual. For example, one respondent has replied “I strive for a behaviour, which is the same in my everyday life as well on my vacation” (Appendix 6). Furthermore, a respondent explains that it can be an issue due to be a student and not having much money and therefore turns to the cheapest but the least sustainable choice. Another respondent says about vacation “(...) one is on uncommon ground without 100 % control of food and heritage. However, nature conservation is in focus” (Appendix 6). This response is an example of how most of the respondents arguably think because they have written comments in relation to this. They are aware of one should consider doing sustainable practices on the vacation but most of them think it is rather difficult, however, some do take it into consideration and if they are aware of what they can act and how they can act sustainably, then they do it. One respondent has replied “(...) no matter what, I do not shop more on my vacation and if it is a hot place, my shower does not take many minutes and you do not put on the heat. Air condition neither is not used that much, also because it is extremely expensive and not necessary during the day, when you are not inside” (Appendix 6). Here, it is emphasised how the respondent does not overconsume and think of how the person could do something different to the environment. However, since the respondent mentions how air condition is expensive, one could question whether the reason for saving air condition is of personal economic reasons or for environmental.

Another reason for not acting sustainably than the feeling of unawareness of the destination could be argued to be economic reasons. In *Which of the following economic aspects are most important to you when you go on a holiday?* (Figure 11)<sup>2</sup> In relation to the completion of this this question, one could say that the formulation was rather badly worded. But it can be argued that the respondents might have put this in relation to sustainability, since a previous question gave the impression that the aspects is in relation to sustainability. To this question it is also commented by some of the respondents that they do not understand it and do not see the reason for mentioning economy in relation to sustainability. During the whole questionnaire in the open question, it is solely one comment, which can be put in relation to the economic dimension. This comment says, “economic development in the local community” (Appendix 6). In Figure 11 61 % of the respondents replied *Value for money for you as a tourist*.

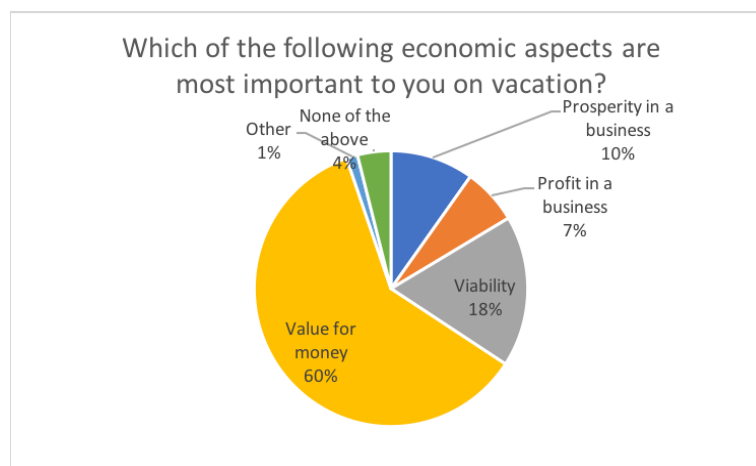


Figure 11: *Which of the following economic aspects are most important to you on vacation?*

Comparing this to the responses in the latter question, there were comments such as “(...) it depends on the options and if it pays of (Appendix 6). Another reply is (...) but I would like to be sustainable if I had the money” (Appendix 6). These examples correspond to the choice of value for money since they would like to take the sustainable initiatives onto their holiday if it does not mean they do have to pay extra for it. In *To what degree are you willing to pay extra to go on a holiday in a more*

<sup>2</sup> In figure 11, the question and the options given can be considered related to economic aspects, and not in relation to sustainability. People could have interpreted the questions differently to what expected.

*sustainable matter?* the option *To some degree* had 45 %, which is the highest percentage, while the second most chosen is *To a small degree* with 32 % (Figure 12).

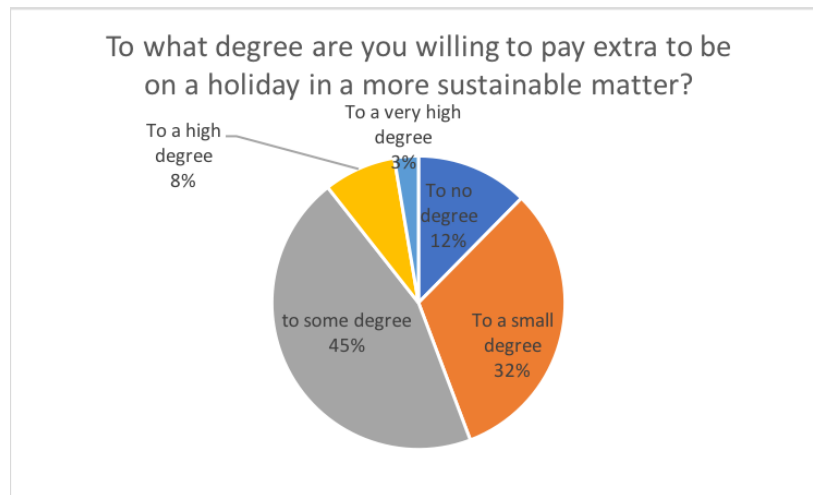


Figure 12: *To what degree are you willing to pay extra to be on a holiday in a more sustainable matter?*

Arguably, this indicates how the respondents of this research are not completely indifferent to sustainability and still would consider paying for a product, which is sustainable. However, since the most chosen options in this question are the lower part or in the middle of the scale, it is still not something, which can be assessed to be of most importance to them on their vacation unless they feel they get value for money. This is supported by the choices in the questions saying *If an accommodation/eating place/attraction advertises its sustainable practices, are you more tempted to choose it rather than others?* (Figure 13, 14, 15)

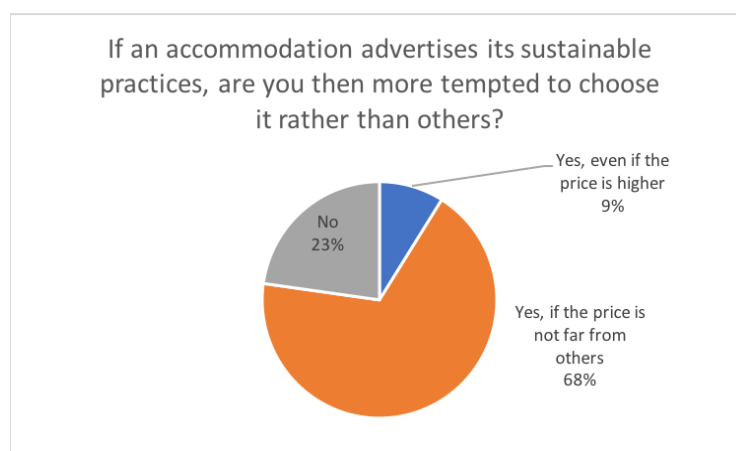


Figure 13: *If an accommodation advertises its sustainable practices, are you then more tempted to choose it rather than others?*

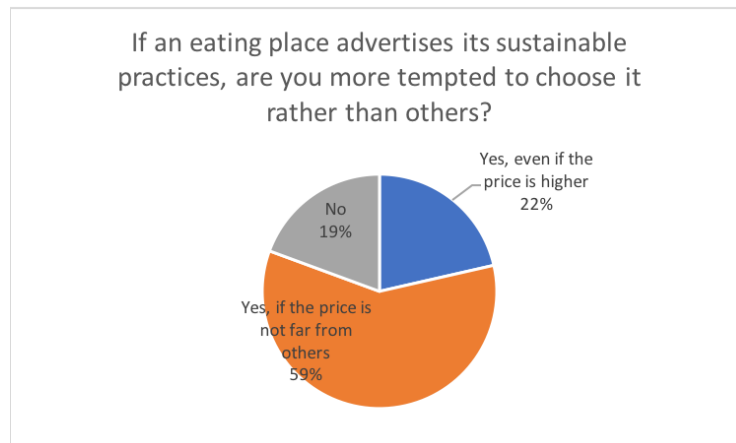


Figure 14: *If an eating place advertises its sustainable practices, are you then more tempted to choose it rather than others?*

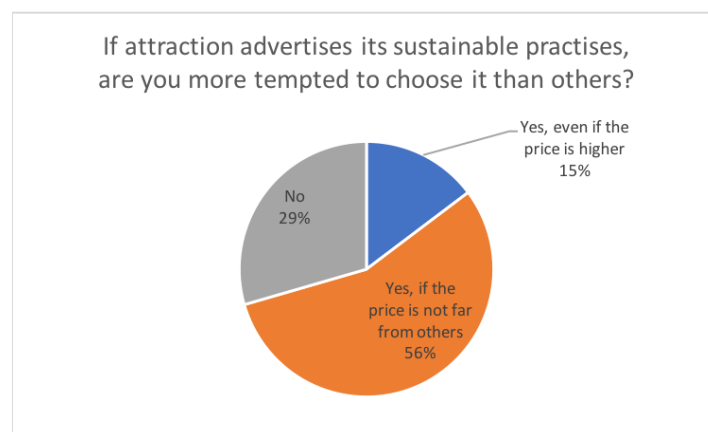


Figure 15: *If an attraction advertises its sustainable practices, are you then more tempted to choose it rather than others?*

The option *Yes, if the price is not far from others* has approx. the same percentage in all three questions (accommodation 68 %, eating place 58 %, attraction 56 %). Assessing these numbers, one can see that the respondents again would choose the sustainable practises, if they do not have further expenses. Therefore, based on these numbers, in average the respondents of this research can be assessed to have value for money as the most important part of their vacation, but would support sustainable practices if it did not depend of their economy. comparing the

However, there is a smaller percentage of the respondents, who have replied *Yes, even if the price is higher* to the aforementioned question. Furthermore, a smaller number of the respondents have replied

*To a high degree (8 %) or To a very high degree (3 %)* on the question of willingness to pay extra for a holiday in a more sustainable matter.

Another choice of the economic aspects, which has 18 %, is *economic safety in a company*. This can also be related to the social dimension of sustainability as it can be assessed to be related to the tourists find it important to secure a company within a destination and therefore also its employees, which most likely are resided in the local community.

Looking at the literature review and the derived data for this research, it is not possible to compare it with existing research since we had difficulties finding studies which concerned this economic issue of sustainability in relation to the tourists.

In the questionnaire, some of the respondents also replied how they in general do no care for sustainability. Some of the responses imply that they both in their everyday life as well on their vacation never think about it. In correspondence to the studies used in the literature, it is found how there is a lack of interest in sustainability from the perspective of the tourists (e.g. Bernini et al, 2015) and how other factors are of more importance and that sustainability does not contribute to satisfaction on their holiday (e.g. Bernini et al, 2015). In relation to this research, it corresponds to how some of the tourists feel as they mention how they consider their vacation as a break from the routines at home and therefore do not consider taking the sustainable practices along to their holiday destination. One comment says “to be honest, I do not think about it” (Appendix 6) and another says “I do not care about sustainability” (Appendix 6). These two comments are thought as in relation to sustainability in general including at home, while comments such as “It is not something I think about it on my vacation” (Appendix 6) and “When being on vacation, it is about relaxing, not saving the world” (Appendix 6) is concerned with the indifference to sustainability in the vacation. These might suggest how the respondents as tourists do not want to think about sustainability but instead their factor of satisfaction is of greater importance.

Looking at elaborating responses of the question saying *Which of the following sustainable initiatives are most important to you in an accommodation on your holiday?* (Appendix 6) 8 of 8 comments say that it has never been thought of before in relation to accommodation. This can be suggested to cause lack of visibility of the sustainable initiatives. Only one comment to *If an*



*accommodation advertises its sustainable practices, are you then more tempted to choose it rather than others?* indicates “Maybe I will do it in future but so far, I never gave it a thought” (Appendix 6). This could point to, how some tourists might would consider choosing a tourism business with sustainable initiatives above another without such initiatives.

Summarising on the importance of sustainability in the eyes of the Danish tourists, the awareness and importance of the environmental dimension is seemingly higher than the social and economic dimensions in the derived data from the questionnaire. This is based on the most frequent answers given such as waste management and recycling, which are considered as sustainable initiatives in the environmental dimension, while there is a smaller amount of responses, which can be related to the social. Yet, an important social practice is employment creativity, which could be with the reason of maintaining and secure a good well-being for the local residents within the community. Furthermore, the respondent gives the impression that they in their everyday life do sustainable practices supporting the environment but in general, when they go on vacation, they see themselves as excused to act sustainably because they do so at home. However, it is indicated how the Danish tourists are concerned about preserving nature on their vacation. Some also state that they would like to take the sustainable practices with them, but it can be difficult because the uncommon culture and destination makes it difficult to know how to do so. In relation to the economic dimension, a more important element to the tourists are value for money. However, if the sustainable choices offer the same as the choices considered not sustainable, then they would support the sustainable. Few of the respondents implied how they would act sustainably even if it means it costs more, while others mentioned how they in general do not care about sustainability and do not see it as important in their everyday routines nor in their vacation.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis the purpose has been to investigate how some tourism stakeholders, namely businesses and tourists, understand sustainability and furthermore how they take sustainable initiatives. In order to carry out the investigation and, a problem formulation was established as a way of structuring the investigation. The problem formulation was as followed:

**How and why do the tourism businesses in Aalborg understand and implement sustainability?  
How do Danish tourists understand sustainable tourism? And how important is it to them?**

In order to answer the problem formulation, this thesis has applied two research methods; semi-structured expert interviews and a questionnaire. The interviews were conducted on ten tourism businesses in Aalborg, which represent areas of food and drink, accommodation, attractions, events and the local Destination Management Organisation. The questionnaire was distributed to Danish tourists. This mix of methods resulted in various findings. In order to reach a conclusion from these findings, we applied the interpretivist approach, thus the findings have been through a construed process.

We found that all the respective tourism businesses perceive sustainability as an environmental matter. Some of the businesses understand sustainability not only from an environmental point of view, but also as a social and economic matter. They furthermore think that a business has the responsibility for becoming sustainable as sustainability is inherent in developing a business. Like the tourism businesses, the Danish tourists perceive sustainability as an environmental matter. We found that these tourists used words such as ‘nature’ and ‘environment’ frequently in their perception of sustainable tourism. From this, we have argued that the tourism businesses in Aalborg and the Danish tourists both connect the environment to their perceptions of sustainability and sustainable tourism.

The findings showed that the tourism businesses in Aalborg implement practices that are mostly related to the environmental sustainability. The main areas of environmental sustainability within the businesses are waste management, energy reduction and certification systems. This does not imply that the social and economic sustainability are excluded in their practices. We found that local corporation is the most evident social sustainable practice, yet we argue that the purpose for

collaborating might be of environmental reasons in some cases. In relation to the economic sustainability, we also found evidence that some of the businesses incorporate this in their practices. However, we have argued that any business would implement this sustainability, as economic viability is essential in order for a business.

According to the Danish tourists, sustainability does not come at any price. We found that they would choose sustainable options on their vacation if it is the same price as non-sustainable options. But if they were to pay extra for the sustainable options on their vacation, they would deselect those, since they are of the belief that they are excused to act sustainably on their vacation. However, if they were to take any sustainable practices, these would be related to the environmental sustainability. Compared to the practices taken by the tourism businesses in Aalborg, the two stakeholders to some degree prioritise in the same way. Meaning both businesses and tourists have a preference for environmentally sustainable practices. More specifically, the Danish tourists value nature conservation to the most important aspect of the environmental sustainability. Comparing this to the businesses, it is waste management that is the most evident aspect of this sustainability. Furthermore, it is assessed that both stakeholders find economy more important than potential sustainable practices if they do not consider getting value for money. As regards the social sustainability, the Danish tourists find it most important that tourism can create employment. As to the tourism businesses in Aalborg, they did not mention this in relation to social sustainability, instead it has been mentioned that new employment creates profit in the tourism industry.

There is an accordance between the reviewed literature in this research and the findings from interviews with the tourism businesses in Aalborg, as the environmental sustainability seems to be of more evidence than the two other dimensions of sustainability. This is the same case with tourists; the environmental sustainability is as aforementioned of bigger importance. For future research, we can review on additional literature, as sustainability is such a broad concept, and even when related to tourism, the investigation can be extended. An example of this could be transportation, as our findings from the questionnaire revealed that transportation is something that tourists recognise as an issue within sustainable tourism. One can also consider isolating one of the three dimensions of sustainability, as each dimension provides various aspects for an extended research. Another approach, can also be investigating on different tourist segments in order to explore differences and similarities of the perceptions and importance of sustainable tourism.

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