CAN DENMARK BE BRANDED AS A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DESTINATION?

A CASE STUDY

PRESENTING THE PERSPECTIVES OF TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS

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1. Abstract

In an age where sustainability is at the top of consumers' minds and the priority in political agendas worldwide (Crotti & Misrahi, 2017), it is important that every kind of tourism business take their position in the discussion and take a stand (Hall, 2019). It is therefore also a prominent issue in tourism and essential that tourism destinations also position themselves in the landscape of discussions within sustainability, hence that the topic of sustainable tourism has to get immediate and substantial attention from all kind tourism stakeholders (Viner & Nicholls, 2006). In addition, trends like eco-travel and 'green' tourism has emerged in tourism during the last three decades (Saarinen, 2006). Sustainability in tourism might be a prominent topic, but several researchers (see Saarinen 2006, 2014; Higgins-Desbiolles 2017; Hall, 2019) point toward aspects of sustainability as being unrealisable as there will always be sides which will counteract it. Furthermore, as sustainability is an undefined term it can create confusion (Saarinen, 2014). The conceptual confusion reflects on the challenges of branding a country as a sustainable tourism destination.

This case study interviews a selected group of stakeholders in Copenhagen to understand their views on using sustainability in the branding of Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination in the future. Thus, this research seeks to illuminate how sustainability can be used in marketing activities, what risks are in connection to enhancing the brand as sustainable and how tourism stakeholders perceive branding Denmark as a sustainable international tourism destination. In addition, it seeks to unfold the views of tourism stakeholders in Denmark on how this might create an advantage for the country to increase awareness of sustainability in the mind of the consumers.

The main findings in this study unpack the stakeholders' perspectives and illuminates how and why Denmark can be branded as a sustainable tourism destination in an international market, and illuminate the necessity to use sustainability in the branding of Denmark as a tourism destination. Sustainability in tourism is, from the perspective of the tourism stakeholders, a current and important topic which tourism stakeholders are generally aware of. In addition, this study finds that the tourism stakeholders believe it important to enhance the brand of Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination. However, this should be done with caution as branding something as sustainable is hard as the concept is complex. Nonetheless, stakeholders see that it should be a topic of focus in the branding of Denmark, executed as storytelling to enhance the brand narrative as sustainable.

Key words: Branding sustainability, destination branding, tourism stakeholders, sustainable tourism, consumer behaviour

2. Preface

The topic of sustainability has, for me, been of growing importance and, through the last two years, has been an important part of my everyday life and the way I consume. Therefore, it was important for me to have this as a topic for my master thesis as it is an area of interest which is not only a popular topic, but also highly important as a consumer and a tourist. My persistent and deep interest in the topic has undoubtedly been my motivation throughout the process of this thesis.

3. Acknowledgments

A thanks goes Eva Thybo for making it possible to work on this thesis in collaboration with VisitDenmark to create the foundation for the research, for granting me access to VisitDenmark's work on the topic and, of course, her positive spirit. Moreover, thanks to both Eva and VisitDenmark for making it possible to do a study with relevance and for giving me an inspiring place to work on my thesis.

Thanks to all the friendly people who took time out of their busy schedules and agreed to do an interview which is the foundation for the analysis in this thesis. Besides providing the basis of the data and the research, your stories and perspectives on the topic have been inspiring. Without you it would not have been possible to understand the tourism stakeholders' perspectives on the topic.

I am thankful for my loving and supportive friends and family who have always only been a phone call away ensuring me that everything would be all right and have helped me overcome the hardest and personal obstacles during the thesis writing.

A genuine thanks to my supervisor Laura James for believing in me and not ever giving me any too specific answers to my questions, but always letting me figure things out by myself, but with enough guidance to be a great supervisor not only for my Master Thesis, but for all the projects I have created at the Tourism Program at Aalborg University.

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4. Introduction

In an age where sustainability is at the top of consumers' minds and a top priority in global political agendas, this is an important topic to consider in tourism as well (Crotti & Misrahi, 2017). Because tourism has dimensions in all aspects of sustainability it is important to acknowledge that tourism is both affecting and contributing to all parts (Timur & Getz, 2008). As sustainable consumption and sustainability in tourism has emerged as a prominent topic, it is important that every kind of tourism business takes on its position in the discussion (Hall, 2019). Hence, it is an issue that has emerged into a mega-trend in tourism and it is therefore essential that tourism destinations also position themselves in the landscape of discussions within sustainability. It can be argued that the topic of sustainable tourism needs immediate and substantial attention from all kinds of tourism stakeholders (Viner & Nicholls, 2006).

In addition, over the last three decades, trends in tourism related to environmental sustainability have emerged as topics like eco-tourism and 'green' tourism (Saarinen, 2014). Thus, sustainability has emerged as a prominent topic in tourism and the wish to achieve sustainability in tourism is desired. Moreover, it is essential for a destination to follow trends to be able to succeed in a competitive global environment (d'Angella & Go, 2009). Since tourism destinations have become increasingly competitive, it is essential for all kinds of tourism stakeholders to have their finger on the pulse in a fast-paced market (Klancnik, 2005). Therefore, enhancing the brand is an ongoing task for destinations to gain attention from consumers. Thus, it is important to comprehend the consumers' demand for sustainability. It is therefore also crucial to permeate sustainability into all dimensions of the brand (Nielsen, 2015). However, even though positioning a tourism destination as sustainable creates an opportunity to differentiate, their brands have not received much attention in literature (Petrevska & Cingoski, 2017). Even though sustainability in tourism might be a prominent topic, several researchers (see Saarinen 2006, 2014; Higgins-Desbiolles 2017; Hall, 2019) point toward aspects of sustainability as being unachievable as there will always be sides which will counteract it. Furthermore, sustainability is a complex concept which, to some extent, creates confusion (Saarinen, 2014). The conceptual confusion reflects on the challenges of branding a place as a sustainable tourism destination in which the perspective of tourism stakeholders in Denmark is one of the main factors.

The main findings in this study unfold the stakeholders' perspectives and illuminate how and why Denmark can be branded as a sustainable tourism destination in an international market. This is the background for understanding the problem and seeking to answer how tourism stakeholders are viewing the possibilities, pros and cons for branding Denmark in this way, and establishing a foundation for the national destination marketing organisation VisitDenmark to continue strategically producing branding activities that enhance these findings.

4.1. Problem formulation

What are the views of the tourism stakeholders in Copenhagen about branding Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination?

4.2. Scope of research

This study elaborates on relevant literature and theories of sustainability which are used in the discussion of sustainable tourism and destination branding. Thus, it presents literature within tourism research and discussions within topics of both sustainable tourism and branding which will be combined to illuminate a holistic approach for how to use sustainability in branding of a whole country as a tourism destination. In addition, the literature review will clarify the coherency in the two concepts and present other cases of destination branding with aspects of sustainability which have been used to combine branding and sustainability.

An overview of different aspects of sustainability in tourism will be presented and then combined with branding theory and literature. By doing so, this study contributes to discussions about branding of tourism destinations as sustainable and, in particular, seeks to contribute to literature by combining sustainability and tourism using branding theory from the perspective of the tourism stakeholders in Denmark. Thus, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in literature within both sustainable tourism and destination branding.

The study draws on a case study of a selected group of Danish tourism stakeholders' and their views on using aspects of sustainability in future branding activities by VisitDenmark to brand the whole country as a sustainable tourism destination. In addition, this research illuminates how to use sustainability to enhance branding of Denmark as a tourist destination. The data was collected through interviews with nine tourism stakeholders in Copenhagen operating on both an international, national and local level. The reason for choosing the specific stakeholders was the size of their operations working in tourism in Denmark.

The interviews conducted present the interviewees' perspectives, reflections and perceptions on how sustainability can be used in branding activities by VisitDenmark. The interviewees were chosen because they are in a current partnership with VisitDenmark, hence engaged in branding Denmark as a tourism destination internationally.

5. Review of Literature

In this section, literature from international tourism research will be presented as relevant theory and reflected on to get a deep, critical and reflective understanding of the concepts in sustainable tourism and branding which will be the foundation for the analysis in this thesis.

5.1. Sustainability in tourism

Tourism is considered a large and global economy affecting and consisting of several industries, hence it can be argued to be the largest industry in the world and at the same time tourism has become more and more beneficial not only economically for a given state, but also in the private sector as well as on a social level (Musaraj, 2012). In the early 1990s, the idea of sustainability was incorporated into tourism development and supported the arising 'green' trends in consumer behaviour in general and also in tourism, hence this trend nursed concepts like eco-tourism and responsible tourism (Saarinen, 2014). Sustainability and sustainable development in tourism have become topics that have gained major focus from all kinds of destination stakeholders in tourism destinations (Hall, 2019). Like many industries have to recognise their responsibility for sustainable development and their effect on the future, the tourism sector also has to recognise its importance in the efforts to avoid further environmental, social and economic degradation (Kilipiris, 2005). Sustainability is recognised as a hot topic and has also accelerated as a political issue all over the world (Crotti & Misrahi, 2017). In addition, it has to be acknowledged that tourism in relation to climate change is bidirectional, meaning that tourism is both a major contributor to, but also impacted by climate change (Viner & Nicholls, 2006). Furthermore, researchers have questioned sustainability in tourism as there are many aspects which are contradicting (e.g. Higgins-Desbiolles, 2017; Saarinen, 2006, 2014; Hall, 2019). Before presenting their positions, it is necessary to look at the basics of the definitions of sustainability and sustainable tourism.

5.1.1. Achieving sustainability in tourism

In 1987, the report *Our Common Future* was publicised by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) where Chairman and Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland, defined sustainable development as:

> "… *development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*"

Since then the phrase has become famous and commonly used when talking about sustainable development (Kilipiris, 2005: 29; Doyduk & Okan, 2017). However, as Higgins-Desbiolles (2017) argues the above quotation emphasises human needs but fails to accommodate whole

ecologies and other species, thus she argues that the statement appears to be ambiguous and this has been problematic ever since the report was published.

Since the report was published, the talk of sustainability came into popular use and, in 2015, the United Nations published the following report named *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which was built from the historic Millennium Development Goals (UNWTOa, n.d.). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) consists of 17 goals with 169 targets of action for people, planet and prosperity which have been adopted by all of the United Nations (UN) member states (UN, n.d.). Compared to its predecessor, the SDGs take a more holistic approach to development and embrace a range of goals to approach the so called 'triple bottom line' or 'the three pillars' in addition to sustainability (Scheyvens, Banks, & Hughes, 2016). The SDGs are approaching (1) environmental sustainability, (2) economic development with a focus on growth and (3) sustainable social development which is concerned with non-material aspects of development (Scheyvens, Banks, & Hughes, 2016).
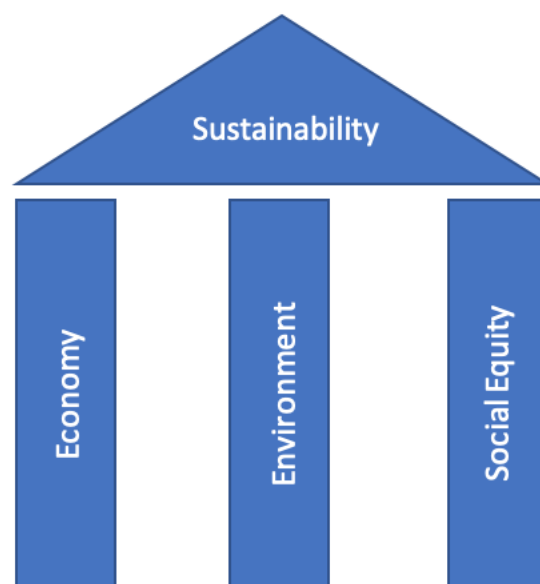
Figure 1: Three pillars of sustainability (Spindler, 2013: 13)

When breaking down the term *sustainability*, it focuses on meeting the needs of the present without compromising future generations' needs and has to be considered in e.g. planning and political decision making, hence meeting both needs for profit (Economy), planet (Environment) and people (Social Equity) (Investopedia, 2019).

Phrased in other words, to thrive for sustainability or for something to be sustainable e.g. a product, a government or an organisation has to take into account and consider both the damage and benefits of their actions, hence make decisions which will not affect the future negatively in

relation to the three pillars in order to achieve a holistic sustainability. However, Higgins-Desbiolles (2017) argues, that the aspect of sustainable growth has become more of a 'sustained growth' which is the opposite of sustainable, hence she is arguing that it is not possible to achieve sustainable tourism per se.

As tourism has dimensions in both economic, ecological and social sustainability (Timur & Getz, 2008) this is compared to how tourism affects many layers of a destination, hence tourism is affecting and contributing to all pillars in the triple bottom line in general and is therefore an important topic to consider when discussing sustainability. This is also an indication of why tourism has a high economic power. In addition, in 2015, tourism was ranked the third highest global category in export earnings, both creating jobs and contributing to economic growth, therefore it has the potential to contribute indirectly in all SDGs (UNWTOb, n.d.). Therefore, it can be argued that tourism has an effect on a various number of different industries which influences a variety of different issues such as mobility, use of resources, human capital etc. Hence, it can also be argued to be one of the most important assets in shaping the world (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). As a result, tourism has the potential to affect all of the 17 SDGs since it is intertwined with a broad variety of issues in both global and local scales, and has the potential to contribute both directly and indirectly to all of the goals set by the UN (UNWTOb, n.d.). McCool, Butler, Buckley, Weaver, & Wheeller (2013) argue that, in current discussions about sustainability and the triple bottom line, politics must also be considered as important an element, since it is within politics that impactful decisions can be made. Political activities can be both a barrier and bring opportunities in sustainable development, therefore politics are important to take into consideration when discussing sustainable development. However, as Higgins-Desbiolles (2017) stress, there has been an increase in the focus on growth in tourism because of corporate and political interests. This has resulted in tourism authorities shelving social well-being, education, inclusion and other non-economic goals. Even though Higgins-Desbiolles (2017) cite WECD's definition of sustainability as indicating a great deal of ambiguity, Saarinen (2006) stated that, even though the concept has come forward as a rather unclear term, it has created a platform for stakeholders in tourism to discuss and reflect on their actions' consequences. Thus, through sustainable development and its increasingly positive impact, trends such as ecotourism and responsible tourism have emerged (Saarinen, 2014).

5.1.2. The inconvenience of tourism as being bidirectional

When first introduced, the concept of *sustainable tourism* was viewed as a specific form of tourism encompassing elements of social justice and considerations toward environmental impacts (McCool, Butler, Buckley, Weaver, & Wheeller, 2013). However, as Saarinen (2014) argues, the concept has resulted in conceptual confusion as it is hard to define how the limits of growth are set in tourism. Sustainable tourism has, by United Nations World Tourism Organisation (n.d.) (UNWTO & UNEP, 2005), been described as:

"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."

As mentioned in the prior section, tourism is a powerful force that can achieve many important ends and be used to meet developmental imperatives (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). Hence, in the above quotation from UNWTO lies several aspects of many different angles of tourism. This means that tourism can become a tool to influence development in general. In addition, OECD (2018) predicts that tourism in general will be impacted by global changes and face unseen challenges. It has also been argued that tourism has a significant role in influencing the world we live in and that it can be a force of growing importance (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). UNWTO & UNDP (2017) point toward the private tourism stakeholders as key players in the future development of sustainable tourism. In extension of this, Saarinen (2006) argued that sustainable tourism implies tourism has to be economically viable while not endangering or destroying resources that future tourism will be dependent on. This may be a more complex process than is suggested. Drawing on the three pillars of sustainability, examples of this could be disrupting local communities in a tourism destination (social sustainability), pollution in cities due to increased traffic, or ruining rural areas and nature due to too many visitors (environmental sustainability), and developing and managing economic growth (economic sustainability). As Hall (2019) argues, it is important to follow and be aware of the challenges of sustainable tourism by, to some extent, renouncing economic growth within it. In addition, Higgins-Desbiolles (2017) argues that there is a global neoliberal addiction to growth in tourism which has to be managed in order to achieve sustainability which meets all three pillars. As there are various definitions to sustainable tourism in literature which are based on different perspectives, it is important to observe that *sustainability* is a complex term (Saarinen, 2006). This should be taken into consideration when discussing tourism (ibid.).

5.1.3 Limitations in a sustainable in reality

Discussions about sustainable tourism have too often been reduced to purely environmental matters (Saarinen, 2006). In addition, it has been argued that decision makers within the tourism sector must view involvement of communities and local stakeholders as a crucial factor when planning for sustainable tourism strategies that achieve sustainable solutions (Laws, Richins, & Agrusa, 2011). This suggests that the SDGs should, in the matter of tourism, prioritise development strategies that benefit a wide palette of stakeholders in a tourism destination (Scheyvens, Banks, & Hughes, 2016). As Saarinen (2006) argues, there are many aspects and kinds of tourism that can be hard to make sustainable. Hence, to accept that facts such as air travel and long-haul flights cannot be argued as being sustainable because of the large emission of CO2, and that sustainable strategies in sex tourism will be hard to implement as the core of the concept is not socially sustainable (Saarinen, 2014). Furthermore, Higgins-Desbiolles (2017) points out that economic sustainability is

hard, if not impossible to achieve, as there is a fixation on sustained growth. As an add on, looking at consumers' demand in this century, it has become clear that sustainability has to permeate all aspects of development and branding (Nielsen, 2015), hence it must be taken into consideration in tourism management and marketing as well. In addition, UNWTO and United Nations Development Program (2017) point toward the private sector as being the key player in tourism and state (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017, s. 6-7):

"As per the private sector, which is the key player in tourism, it is beginning to recognise that the SDGs offer true business opportunities as sustainable business operations can spur competitiveness and increase profit."

However, as Saarinen (2006) makes clear, there are some gaps and areas which should be considered when discussing whether tourism can be phrased as sustainable. This leads back to Higgins-Desbiolles' (2017) argument that the neoliberal view on growth limits sustainability.

In general, it can be difficult to make tourism truly sustainable if aiming to embrace the social, economic and environmental pillars (Saarinen, 2014). This means that development that benefits the industries and brings economic value to a given organisation does not necessarily benefit a society where sustainable development might bring value as immaterial benefits in the form of education or ownership of a project which, in reference to the social pillar, can be of greater importance. One of the reasons that sustainable development is difficult to achieve in real life is that it can be described as a 'wicket problem' (Pryshlakivsky & Searcy, 2013). Wicket problems are defined as a problem which is a symptom of another problem and that solutions to a wicket problem are considered to be an 'one-shot operation', hence that every attempt on achieving sustainability counts significantly (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Thus, sustainable development and sustainability in tourism can be considered as wicket problems. This supports Saarinen's (2006) argument about the inevitability of various obstacles and gaps to achieving pure sustainable tourism. As wicket problems are highly complex and cannot be isolated as they are part of a whole system (Complexity Labs, 2016), it can be argued that sustainable tourism should be recognised as a wicket problem. In addition, it can be argued that there might be interests for sustained growth that limit the progress of the change that is needed to achieve sustainability (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2017). Hence, Higgins-Desbiolles (2017) argues that tourism is a significant contributor to an unsustainable future due to governments' current growth models and consumerism.

5.2. Destination branding and branding sustainability

To be able to discuss the use of sustainability in destination branding, it is essential to go through concepts in branding and destination branding literature to hereafter combine aspects of sustainable tourism with concepts of destination branding.

Destination branding has, for many destinations, historically been an important focus as it helps create an identity for a destination and, in addition, it is and should be an important part of marketing strategies, no matter the size of a destination (Yousaf, Amin, & Gupta, 2017; Petrevska & Cingoski, 2017). Several researchers stress the importance of branding in development of marketing strategies and the seriousness of recognising tourists' emotional connections to a destination (Yousaf, Amin, & Gupta, 2017). Moreover, it is essential for a destination to succeed in a global environment that the destination as a whole is able to evolve and adapt, and be prepared to break from traditional practices (d'Angella & Go, 2009). As a result of increasing competition between tourism destinations, branding of destinations has become more prominent (Doyduk & Okan, 2017).

When discussing destination branding, it is important to acknowledge that this kind of brand is a complex 'brand-system' as several stakeholders are involved in shaping the brand (Govers, 2011; Yousaf, Amin, & Gupta, 2017). As there are various stakeholders affecting the brand it is therefore difficult for marketers, and/or Destination Marketing Organisations (DMO) who work with destination branding, to control the brand of the destination (Yousaf, Amin, & Gupta, 2017; Kashif, Samsi, & Safiruddin, 2015). Stakeholders who can affect a destination brand include not only tourism businesses working directly with tourists, but also, for example, the government and the society, hence a destination brand reflects both social, economic, technological and cultural issues that tourists are associating with the destination (Yousaf, Amin, & Gupta, 2017; Kashif, Samsi, & Safiruddin, 2015).

In addition, several studies stress the importance of recognising the high pace of a globalised world where places in general have to compete with every other place in the world to gain the attention of consumers, tourists, capital, investment, business etc. (Anholt, 2006). In a rapidly changing world, countries are being measured by consumers on topics such as social safety, health care and education (FutureBrand, 2019). Being aware of such concepts has enabled consumers to be even more aware of tourism destinations' brands (Doyduk & Okan, 2017). In addition, another aspect in the literature is the importance of the political movements at a destination which can affect the way a country's image is perceived (Andersson, 2016). Global trends which rapidly spread over country borders, such as gender politics in which campaigns such as #metoo highlight sexual harassment issues, and news on climate change continue to accelerate and affect how consumers perceive countries (FutureBrand, 2019). Elaborating on this, it is therefore important to recognise a variety of stakeholders' individual brands at a destination and also what the consumer trends are in addition to work strategically with the destination brand. Thus, creating and working strategically with branding of a destination. Both demand and supply side are crucial to keep up with the rapidly changing world and stay competitive as a tourism destination.

5.2.1. Branding sustainability in tourism

Miller & Twining-Ward (2005) argue that tourism should not be treated as a steady state system but should be acknowledged as a system affected by and is prone to the surrounding environment. It can therefore be argued that tourism stakeholders must be following time and trends in both the travel industry and consumer behaviour. Therefore, megatrends are crucial to acknowledge by any organisation (OECD, 2018). A megatrend can be defined as a trend which has an increasing impact on a global market, hence megatrends can push global society and economies in specific directions (OECD, 2018). Megatrends are important to take into consideration in the matter of tourism planning and marketing strategies as they will affect the destination (UNWTOa, n.d.).

The global performance company Nielsen (2015) provides a comprehensive understanding of what consumers watch and buy by collecting big data about consumer behaviour worldwide:

"Sustainability is a worldwide concern that continues to gain momentum… An increasing number of consumers in developed regions consider sustainability actions more of an imperative than a value-add."

Thus, sustainability, as a concept with several underlying topics, can be described as a megatrend. Petrevska & Cingoski (2017) argues that for a destination to position themselves as environmentally sustainable allows the destination to differentiate themselves from others. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018: 12) describes megatrends which concern sustainability and refers to the environment and the impact of climate changes in the context of tourism as:

"... this trend is most related to sustainable tourism growth, which emerged in light of the impact of climate change as a way to lessen the environmental footprint of travellers."

Since the global tourism system, several other industries have become increasingly competitive and sophisticated within development, thus also their branding, it is important for tourism organisations such DMOs and tourism stakeholders to be abreast and have their finger on the pulse in the rapidly changing market (Klancnik, 2005), meaning that they also have to be aware of existing, new and emerging megatrends as it will be affecting the consumer behaviour on a noticeably global scale. It can therefore be argued that external awareness towards a megatrend such as consumers' demand for sustainable solutions must be considered in tourism in general.

As Sheehan, Vargas-Sánchez, Presenza, & Abbate (2016) argue, DMOs have to be able to adapt or develop themselves in the face of radical changes occurring in the external environment. Thus,

DMOs have to comprehend the consumer's demand for sustainable solutions. It is therefore also crucial to permeate *sustainability* into all destination branding activities. Given the increasing attention to, for example, climate tourism and tourism's effect on the climate, it is becoming essential that the topic gets immediate and substantial attention from both tourism researchers and tourism stakeholders (Viner & Nicholls, 2006) to accept that it is a topic which has gained and will continue to gain increasing focus (Hall & Veer, 2016). In addition, academic literature about destination branding, such as Govers (2011), argues that a destination brand as an umbrella of different brand is much harder to control than for corporations with a monolithic brand. A monolithic brand can, in contrast to an umbrella brand, be described as a single all-embracing identity, hence a single brand (Cornelissen, 2011).
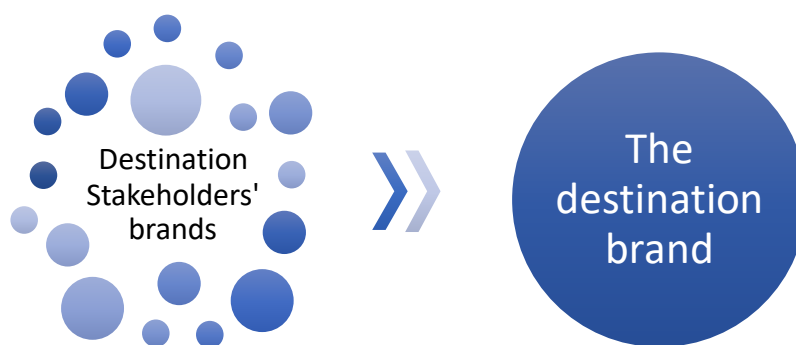
Figure 2: Illustration of the umbrella brand
(illustration inspired from Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010: 226 and Cornelissen, 2011: 67)

Govers (2011) argues that a place brand or destination brand should be considered as an umbrella brand covering different brands under the *umbrella brand*. Meaning, that the concept of *a destination brand* is a kind of constitution of brands at the destination, see figure 2 for an illustration. This leading back to the importance of including a various number of destination stakeholders' brand in the marketing of a destination (Govers, 2011; Yousaf, Amin, & Gupta, 2017).

5.2.2. Enhancing a destination brand

When elaborating and analysing brands, the discussion is often about a product brand or organisation brand, but not in what form destinations or countries can be a brand (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). A brand can be described as anything which can identify products or services. This can be a name, symbol, design or a combination of these which consumers identify with the 'seller' or maker (Tasci & Kozak, 2006). In addition, Kotler & Gertner (2002) underline this by elaborating that

consumers who have created positive associations with brands e.g. *made in Germany, made in Switzerland* or *Colombian Coffee,* since the associations are linked with the consumers' perception of the country's reputation which might be linked with the quality of a product. Consumer demands and trends in tourism are important in the matter of marketing a destination and how tourists mentally categorise destinations (Tasci & Kozak, 2006).

By expanding the concept of *a brand* and going in depth with what a brand consists of, a brand can embrace a connection between a consumer and a product delivering meaningful, emotional and valuable enhancements or identifications between the consumer and the brand (Tasci & Kozak, 2006). A country's brand is therefore a sum of beliefs and impressions people hold from a place (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). However, a *destination brand* is difficult to embrace as being one brand as the tourism sector often consists of many different components (Tasci & Kozak, 2006), thus there are many different industries contributing to consumers' tourism experience (Leiper, Stear, Hing, & Firth, 2008). Being at a destination, a tourist might both encounter experiences within public transportation, hotel staff, food, local supermarkets etc. which in coherency makes the whole experience and contributes to the creation of the tourists' image of the destination. Consumers seek to identify themselves with a brand and different dimensions from the perspective from the are important to take into consideration when working strategically with branding (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010). The essence of a brand is when functions, personality or image, differences and the source is cohesive and consistent (ibid.). The four dimensions are illustrated in figure 3.
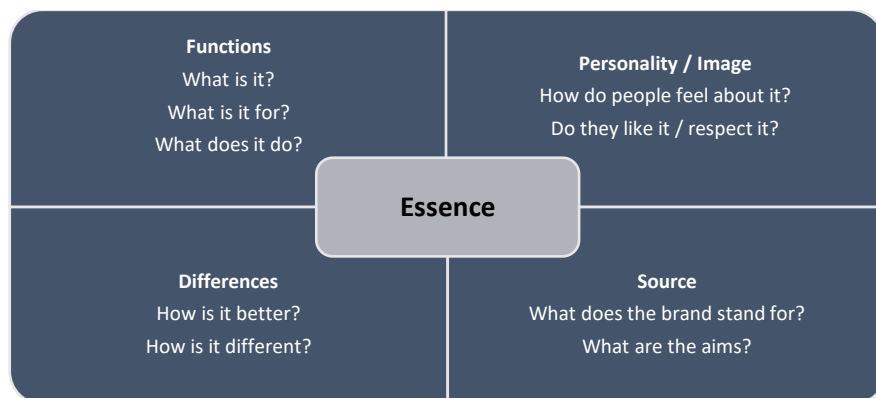
Figure 3: Model of brand dimensions (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010, s. 200)

As discussed in prior sections, to enhance and use sustainability in branding activities at a destination, tourism stakeholders must have and work with sustainable solutions and development within their specific businesses. According to several previous studies, the demand for environmental-friendly products has not yet fully materialised substantially enough and the industries' progress in sustainable tourism beyond tourism-centric and economic criteria has been relatively slow (Saarinen, 2014). However, recent movements, like the 16-year-old girl Greta

Thunberg who is considered a climate activist has become a global phenomenon, are forcing global leaders and media to focus on environmental sustainability (BBC, 2019). The Economist describes the development of Greta's work as 'The Greta Effect' which, for example, has resulted in a high drop in flights in Sweden where Greta started demonstrating (The Economist, 2019). In general, consumers are moving toward a point where they perceive sustainable choices as imperative, hence are expecting brands to help them achieve personal and sustainable choices in their everyday lives (Forbes, 2018).

In most literature about brand theory, to gain attention from consumers, it is essential to communicate the values of a product (Septrup & Fruensgaard, 2010). In general branding theory, enhancing a *brand narrative* is essential for a brand to create a connection to their consumers, because focusing on constructing a narrative around the product is creating a personalised perception of the brand for the consumers, thus the more meaningful the brand becomes (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010). In relation to this discussion, it seems that incorporating sustainability in branding strategies might become fundamental for tourism stakeholders to stay abreast in a competitive market, hence relevant for the consumers. Drawing on literature discussed in the prior section, it is important to consider a wide palette of stakeholders at a destination when working strategically with the branding of a destination. When discussing a destination brand where several stakeholders are presented with their own individual brand which together form the destination brand, a destination brand can be argued as being an umbrella brand as the brand consists of several different brands (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010).

5.2.3. A sustainable destination brand

If wanting a brand to survive in a global tourism market, it is important for a brand to not only keep and maintain the attention from their current consumers, but also work strategically to obtain new ones (Bakic, Hrabrovski-Tomic, Muhi, & Kovacevic, 2010). Meaning that it is important to acknowledge that megatrends have a high impact on current and future consumers, but also the future of consumers and their choice of a product or service. In relation to this, Rachel Botsman (2010) stated in a TED-talk about emerging megatrends in tourism:

"…I believe we're actually in a period where we're waking up from this humongous hangover of emptiness and waste, and we're taking a leap to create a more sustainable system built to serve our innate needs for community and individual identity…"

The above statement indicates that there is an increasing need for the individual consumer to contribute to a sustainable development, this is also in line with research conducted by Nielsen (2015) which indicates that consumers who are conscious about sustainability are making decisions that are in line with their beliefs and values. Hence underpinning the importance for a brand to thrive to make that connection. Furthermore, Botsman (2010) indicates that the demand for

sustainable goods and services is a globally driven trend leading back to and emphasising sustainability. Furthermore, sustainable tourism is arguably a megatrend which is rapidly evolving, affecting several industries and is a widely accepted topic is in the global community. For consumers, brands have a psychological significance in the matter of self-reflection, self-image, security, status, ego and so on (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010), meaning that tapping into megatrends like 'responsible consumption' and incorporating sustainability in marketing activities can be argued as a way to connect the brand with the consumers' self-reflection. In line with this, Nielsen (2015) underpins that it is necessary for any organisation to work strategically towards achieving a sustainable brand as it will increase commitment among consumers. As Grace Farraj, senior vice president at Public Development & Sustainability at Nielsen (2015) describes it:

"Brands that establish a reputation for social responsibility and environmental stewardship among today's youngest consumers have an opportunity to not only grow market share but build loyalty among the power-spending Millennials of tomorrow, too."

This statement s stresses that the consumers of tomorrow are prioritising brands that are committed to positive environmental and social impacts, hence stressing that sustainability is an important issue. The reason for this can lead back to Dahlén, Lange, & Smith's (2010) definition, as values of a brand will be adopted by the consumers if they correspond with the consumer's self-image, thus they can reflect their own values and beliefs in the brand. Furthermore, World Economic Forum states that all data reveals that the environmental strength of a destination is directly related to tourism revenue and that a lack of fostering sustainability, hence also a sustainable brand, will reduce tourism development opportunities (World Economic Forum, 2017).

In branding theory, managing brand equity is an important part of branding in general; brand equity is all components associated with the brand, such as awareness, brand dominance, image and brand prospects, hence the value of the brand in the mind of consumers (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010; Cornelissen, 2011). A brand's equity assets and liability consist of brand protection, description, strength, and future (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010). In addition, working strategically to position a destination as sustainable has to be visible in the brand equity. As Nielsen (2015) argues, it is important that consumers can reflect their own values in the brand equity, meaning that that there is compliance between the brand and their own values. This means it is important to enhance the brand salience, i.e. the relevance the brand has in meeting the consumers' needs (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010). Having a strong brand equity is important to be competitive in the market and is therefore crucial for a brand to manage (ibid). Illustrated below is Dahlén, Lange, & Smith's (2010) model for managing brand equity.
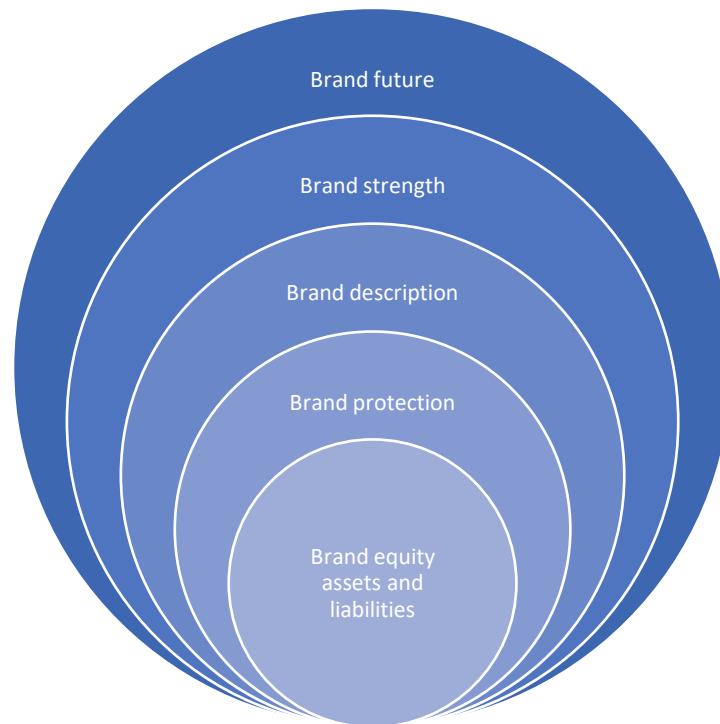
Figure 4: Managing brand equity (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010: 207)

The above model shows that managing a brand equity is about managing the foundational components for the brand equity (ibid.). Expanding the model, brand protection can be described as the brand name or logo, the brand description can be described as brand values, associations and quality, the brand strength is the brand heritage, loyalty and awareness and the brand future is the growth potential and how it adapts (ibid.). In relation to branding. It can therefore be argued that working strategically to enhance a tourism destination as sustainable the brand equity is important as it should be identified by the consumers as sustainable.

However, Saarinen (2014) argues: *"... the need for sustainability in tourism is an outcome of a complex set of processes, systems, aims and scales".* This is referring to the importance of sustainable development, planning and marketing in tourism but also acknowledges that it is a complex issue, as tourism is an economy consisting of several industries with processes, systems, aims and scales. However, as elaborated in the previous section, there are many aspects of sustainable tourism and the three pillars of sustainability are not always equally represented. This leads back to Saarinen's (2006) statement of the concept of 'sustainable tourism' being vague. This creates some challenges in the setting of marketing since, as Saarinen (2006, 2014) argues, that sustainability has not been officially defined and therefore there are no limits to how the term can be used in marketing. Hence, when promoting a destination, the rhetoric of sustainability has no limits to what can be promoted and presented as sustainable. In coherency, Petrevska & Cingoski (2017) also describe the concept of green branding of destinations in addition to environmental sustainability as vague.

5.3. Achieving a sustainable destination brand

As discussed in prior sections, there is a need for tourism destinations to enhance the use of sustainability in marketing strategies and to incorporate sustainability in the brand to meet their consumers' demand, thus creating a sustainable brand.

5.3.1. The complexity of branding sustainability

Elaborating on earlier sections, it is essential to review a wide range of tourism stakeholders at a destination to know whether the destination can be described as sustainable. Miller & Twining-Ward (2005) called for tourism to be reconceptualised as a complex adaptive system requires a comprehensive stakeholder-driven approach. Notwithstanding, as McCool, Butler, Buckley, Weaver, & Wheeller (2013) argue that our world is in a constant state of change and one must always expect surprise. hence that knowledge should be considered tentative and incomplete. Consequently, in the matter of sustainable development, gaining knowledge will always be tentative and conditional. Thus, relating to Dredge's (2016) argument about the need of role of the DMO and their ability to become an agile organisation which can adapt to both destination stakeholders' and tourists' demands. This puts the DMO in a position where, as Sheehan et al. (2016) argue, they have to take a position as a hybrid organisation which acts within both marketing and management of knowledge in order to be of value for the destination stakeholders and prepared for the future of consumer demands. As Nielsen (2015) stresses, to show that one's brand and, in this setting the destination brand, is committed to environmental and social responsibilities has become of major importance for consumers in general; if a brand does not take sustainable commitments seriously, it will likely mean that they lose out in the competition for consumers' attention and commitment.

Elaborating on the different issues discussed by Dredge (2016), Govers (2011), Sheehan et al (2016) and Nielsen (2015), it can therefore be argued that as complex system as a tourist destination consists of many different brands which need to be communicated singularly by the DMO. The tourism stakeholders act as supply-side which are those who carry the brand (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010). Hence, the separate brands are what makes the overall destination brand. However, there are issues connected to how the term of sustainability is used in marketing as there is now a lower bar for when something is sustainable, meaning that something might be economically sustainable, but fail to be socially sustainable (Saarinen, 2006). Tourism stakeholders at the destination is a potential tool for sustainable development within the destination (Saarinen, 2014) and can be argued to have a crucial role in branding a tourist destination as sustainable. Since the ethical element in sustainability is built upon both practice and theory, tourism stakeholders and industries operating in tourism will eventually have to adapt and redirect their positions if they aim to promote their brand as sustainable and meet consumers' demands (Saarinen, 2014). In this

setting, the DMO will be able to brand the destination as being sustainable, but they might also become a managing tourism actor and thereby have the power to set the standards for when something is sustainable.

Some researchers argue that the competitive nature of place branding may lead to 'green- washing' where the brand provides cover for superficial policy changes that do little to enhance the sustainability of cities (Andersson & James, 2018). In addition, as there are no regulations for a tourism destination to declare themselves as being sustainable, enhancing it can create some risks (Petrevska & Cingoski, 2017). Andersson & James (2018) point toward two aspects of places branding themselves as being, in their words, 'green'. In this thesis a 'green place' can be equivalent to a sustainable place, as the two concepts, in terms of environment, accommodate some of the same issues. Elaborating on prior sections and this section, using sustainability in marketing activities can be a challenge since the concept is intangible and abstract. , As the concept has many aspects, it can be argued that for something to be defined as truly sustainable it must live up to the variety of aspects. As Petrevska & Cingoski (2017) argue, there are no regulations by which tourism destinations can self-declare as being green or sustainable. In addition, for a tourism destination to do so, there is a risk of a bad reputation as tourism contributes to unsustainable consumption, such as negative impacts on the environment (Pryshlakivsky & Searcy, 2013).

5.3.2. Reasoning for Denmark as sustainable destination brand

When looking at Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination it is important to look at the country's overall position in sustainable development and standards. Drawing on Andersson & James' (2018) perspectives on the importance of marketing activities' coherency with the development and activities at the destination, it is essential to look at how Denmark as a nation is actually positioned as a sustainable nation and not only how the brand is performing.

The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) is a global metric system ranks countries and provide a gauge in the matter of sustainability on a national scale (Wendling, Emerson, Esty, Levy, & de Sherbinin, 2018). In the EPI report from 2018, Denmark ranks number three, for environmental performance (EPI, 2018). Thus, showing that Denmark is one of the best performing countries in environmental performance on a global scale. However, as Saarinen (2006, 2014) argues, there are many aspects of sustainability and the SDGs are also targeting sustainability within social and economic themes (UN, n.d.). Therefore, in the matter of social progress The Social Progress Imperative (2018) marks Denmark the second best performing on a global scale and highlights that the Danes enjoy a high quality of life.

Both reports indicate that Denmark's high position and ranking on sustainability can be an argument to actively brand Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination. Andersson and James (2018) address that branding a 'green' place can emerge tensions between competitive and

altruistic motives. For a place is branded on being green with the motives of gaining a more competitive, its position can lead to green washing if the place in reality isn't what they brand themselves to be (ibid.). Therefore, it is also important to look at how Denmark as a brand is performing. The FutureBrand Country Index 2018, a report concentrating on the power of a country's brand; how the place is perceived in terms of values system, quality of life, business potential, heritage and culture, tourism, products and service (FutureBrand, 2019). In the FutureBrand Country Index 2018, Denmark is ranked as number seven out of 75 countries worldwide. This position can also reflect how Denmark's brand performs in the matter of tourism. In the beginning of 2019, VisitDenmark made a report on Denmark's brand regarding sustainability for the perspective of tourists (Appendix 1). The data were collected from VisitDenmark's primary market countries: Germany, Norway, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom. This report addresses tourists' perceptions and expectations of sustainable choices when travelling and what it will mean for their travel behaviour and choice of holiday destination. The report maps the different market areas and the tourists' preferences regarding their choices covering topics of price, local goods, environment, high season, and local disturbance in the context of sustainable choices. A general finding was that tourists with an especially good knowledge of Denmark associate the destination with sustainability parameters such as: 'a clean destination' associating the country with no garbage, clean water, 'high quality of life and good living conditions' and 'a sense of security'. However, in the report from VisitDenmark, a majority of the respondents rank parameters such as 'relaxation and recreation' and 'value for money' as most crucial for a holiday, whereas 'green solutions and sustainability' is important but not crucial for the choice of destination.

The analysis conducted by VisitDenmark (2019) and FutureBrand (2019) show that consumers' perceptions and image of Denmark is ranking behind how Denmark actually is performing in being a sustainable country. Hence, it indicates that there is room for improvement and possibilities for boosterism in relation to brand Denmark as a sustainable destination. In addition, if taking Nielsen's (2015) study into account, it is essential for any brand to follow trends, hence there is a need for a brand to appear sustainable to be competitive on the global market. Thus, the same would apply for tourism destinations.

Elaborating on how the brand of Denmark is perceived by the consumers and how Denmark actually performs in the matter of sustainability, there is a coherency which can be viewed as an argument and validation in branding Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination. However, as Andersson and James' (2018) research elaborate in the case of Växjö in Sweden, it is important for a place to stay innovative in the matter of obtaining a position as a green destination. Thus, this observation can be argued when wanting to brand a whole country as sustainable as the case has some parallels. As elaborated from different reports placing Denmark as a sustainable nation and how Denmark's image is perceived, how the brand ranks in the matter of sustainability shows that there is coherency in how the country is actually performing on different parameters within

sustainability, thus meaning that there is a base for branding the country as a sustainable tourism destination. It can therefore be argued that there is a foundation for branding Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination. In 2019, VisitDenmark launched a new brand strategy to enhance and improve the brand of Denmark. The overall theme of the brand narrative is 'The Land of Everyday Wonder' to tell stories of how Denmark has a lot of small everyday wonders for tourists to experience when visiting (VisitDenmark, 2019a). However, when looking at the homepage of the national DMO VisitDenmark at www.visitdenmark.com (VisitDenmark, 2019b), there are no obvious marketing activities like articles or videos where VisitDenmark is using sustainability in promoting Denmark internationally.

6. Methodology

This thesis aims to contribute to the discussion on the role of a national DMO in relation to tourism stakeholders at a destination in addition to the global megatrends about sustainability specifically within tourism and travel behaviour by answering the following question:

What are the views of the tourism stakeholders in Copenhagen about branding Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination?

The problem formulation seeks to understand the tourism stakeholders' perspectives on branding Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination. To answer the problem formulation and consider choices to conduct data as a reflective researcher, a theory of knowledge has been adopted to validate this research as academic work. The chosen methodology is theory and analysis of how the research is conducted, hence the chosen methodology provides a justification for the methods of the research (Carter & Little, 2007).
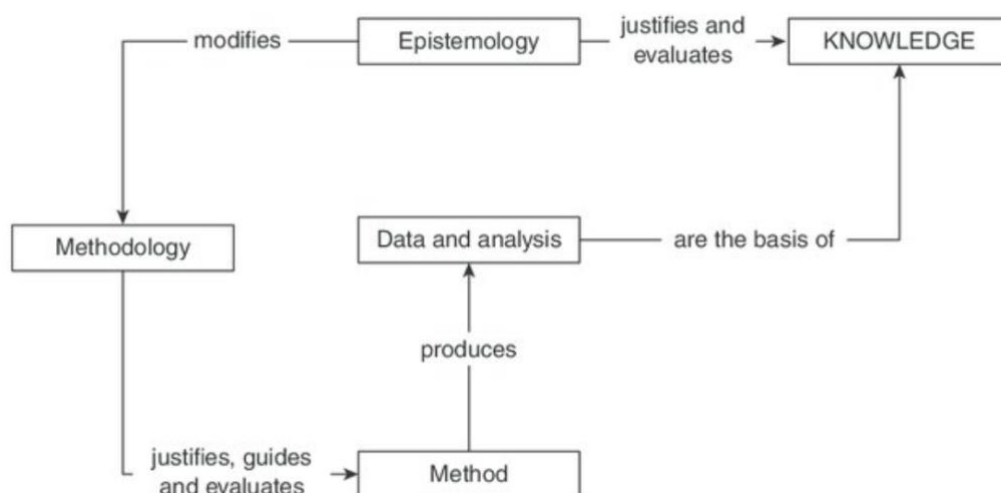
Figure 5: The simple relationship between Epistemology, Methodology and Method (Carter & Little, 2007, s. 1317)

Because this research seeks to understand human perceptions and views of certain topics and as I seek an understanding of a topic that relies on a number of tourism stakeholders at the destination whom have different backgrounds, fields of interest and perceptions of reality. This research is based on a qualitative approach to get different perspectives on the given concepts, thus to use the data to achieve a nuanced analysis.

6.1. Philosophy of science

The ontological considerations are chosen from a viewpoint that social entries should be treated as social constructions (Bryman, 2016). Constructivism has been chosen as the ontological position for this research. Constructivism (also called social constructivism) asserts that human beings are in a constant state of being influenced and are in a constant state of change and continually being revised, reviewed and renewed (Bryman, 2016). In contradiction, objectivism asserts that the social reality is independent from social actors and has an existence which is separate from them, hence that external facts are out of reach and influence by humans (Bryman, 2016). As a researcher adapting the constructivist approach to this study, I accept that the data conducted for this project is knowledge created as a product of the specific relationships and the interaction between me as a researcher and the participants at the time the data is conducted (Carter & Little, 2007). Furthermore, that I as a researcher am a social actor and that my and the research subjects cannot be separated from their knowledge, thus that the knowledge generated is relative to time, context and culture and is value-bound (Dudovskiy, 2019; Carter & Little, 2007; Bryman, 2016). This means that I will be an active creator of research and therefore also entangled and imprinted on it from the beginning to the end (Carter & Little, 2007), hence that the social world is created through interactions. Bryman (2016: 30) describes constructivism as:

"Constructivism essentially incites the researcher to consider the ways in which social reality is an ongoing accomplishment of social actors rather than something external to them and that totally constrains them"

It is essential to accept that ontological assumptions and commitments will affect the way the research is carried out and data is collected and analysed (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, I as a researcher, have to accept that I am also subjective to the research to some extent, as I am also constructing the reality from my own perception, hence I cannot be completely objective. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that the constructivist approach does not perceive the deficiency of objectivism as an issue, hence from the constructivist approach the fact is that all humans are subjective (Bryman, 2016).

In addition, epistemology is chosen to justify the knowledge gathered and conducted to answer the problem formulation (Carter & Little, 2007). In short, epistemology is a theory of knowledge, hence a way to refer to a stance on what can pass as acceptable knowledge (Bryman, 2016). Carter & Little (2007: 1321) describes epistemology as: *"Epistemology influences the relationship between the researcher and the participant"* and *"Epistemology influences the way in which quality of methods is demonstrated".* In addition, the epistemological position of this research is described as interpretivist because qualitative research methods have been chosen to conduct data. To adopt an interpretivist approach, it is stressed that the research is conducted with a commitment to understand the social world through the participants (Bryman, 2016). The

research philosophy of interpretivism involves that I as a researcher interpret the data collected for this project (Dudovskiy, 2019). The interpretivist approach is in contrast to the positivist epistemology and perceives that access to reality is given through socially constructed reality and that humans interpret the world around them (Bryman, 2016), thus the respondents' reality is socially constructed through their individual background and experiences which they have had through life (Dudovskiy, 2019). This means that their professional background might influence their answers in which way they see fit in their position.

6.2. Hermeneutics

In relation to conducting data for this thesis, the hermeneutics are relevant to this research to achieve understanding and knowledge through qualitative methods.

In the understanding of hermeneutics, the researcher gains an understanding of knowledge beyond the specific interview setting and acknowledges that the interpretation of a situation is conditional of history and pre interpretations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008).

In other words, I as a researcher, have to be aware that the interviewees are speaking from various social and historical contexts (Bryman, 2016). This means, that the interviewees might perceive the chosen topic different from one another because of e.g. their professional or personal background.

In addition to this, it is also important to accept that I, as a researcher, have a pre-understanding of the topic in relation to scientific research and literature and that I have been studying tourism on a master level at Aalborg University.

Figure 6: Illustration of the hermeneutic spiral

In hermeneutics, the interpretation of a topic will always be in change. This is what can be illustrated as the hermeneutic spiral (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). In relation to my own knowledge, this means that my interpretation is changing in the progress of my knowledge horizon getting wider as a result of this research continually leading to new understandings and new interpretations of the topic and concepts. See Figure 2 illustration of the hermeneutic spiral.
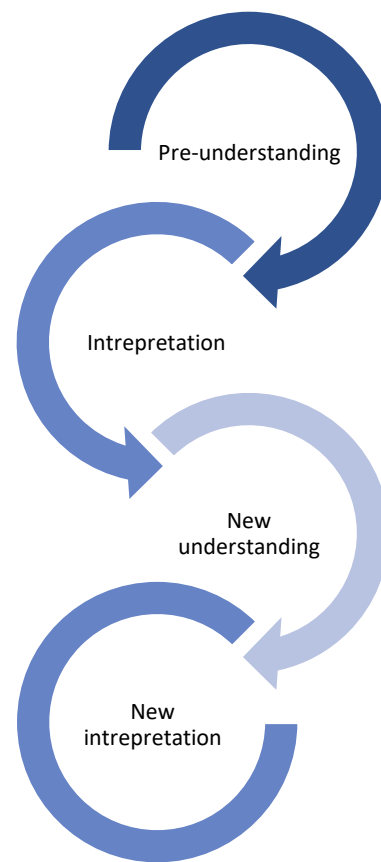
Mona Louisa F. Madsen
Student No.: 20171182

Master in Tourism
Master Thesis

30th of October 2019
Aalborg University

6.3. Research strategy and approach

The epistemological considerations in relation to the research have been key indicators in the considerations of how the strategy for the research have formed and how I, as a researcher, approached the progress in the research (Bryman, 2016). Illustrated in Figure 3 is the approach that was taken; however, modifications have been made during the process of writing the thesis, hence the importance of hermeneutics.

The knowledge has derived by both theory and the conducted data has led to new understandings of the concepts in the thesis, hence led to a new interpretation of those (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008), and it has therefore been necessary to constantly reflect on the chosen literature and reverse to adapt the key concepts to the overall topic and problem formulation. As a result of this it has also been clear that it was not possible to adapt a solely and clear-cut deductive or inductive approach in the research, but are merely thought of as tendencies rather than as a 'hard-and-fast' distinction (Bryman, 2016).
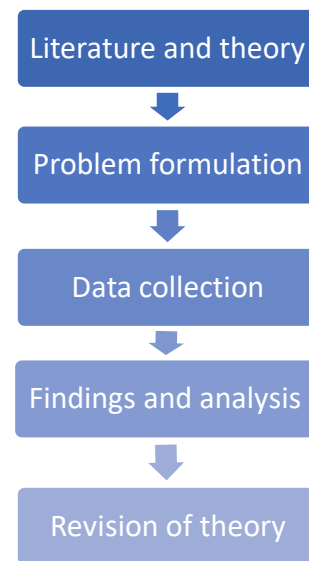
Figure 7: Illustration of research approach

6.4. Applied methods

The chosen methods are described to show how the research has been conducted and how data and analysis are produced (Carter & Little, 2007). It has been decided to use the qualitative method of individual interviews in a case study design as this was an appropriate and practically applicable in relation to the problem formulation. The applied methods are described in the following section.

6.4.1. Case study design

A case study can consist of several different methods of conducting data and can employ both quantitative and qualitative studies to shed light on the chosen case (Bryman, 2016).
What distinguishes a case study is that it usually reveals the features of the specific case (Bryman, 2016), meaning that the research enlightens the unique aspects of the chosen case. In other words, it is a detailed examination of a single case. Even though a case study approach does not seek to directly formally generalise, the collected knowledge can still contribute to and be of value in an academic field (Flyvbjerg, 2006). This study is defined as a case study because it employs the perspective from a specifically chosen group of tourism stakeholders. The analysis is based on the interviews held with the specific stakeholders in which all of them have a relation to the national

DMO VisitDenmark. This research does not seek to examine a trend or general tendencies in a population or culture but does seek to enlighten a selected group of tourism stakeholders' perspectives on sustainability in tourism and how it can be used to brand Denmark as a sustainable destination. However, as Flyvbjerg (2006) argues, a research approached by a case study design can be of value in clarifying the deeper motives of, for example, stakeholders at a destination. As the problem formulation seeks to unfold knowledge with a specific group of stakeholders and the national DMO in Denmark, this will be viewed as a case study which will shed light on and reveal the features of the specific case of using sustainability in the branding of Denmark as a tourist destination. The study can be defined as a case because it concentrates on a defined group of stakeholders for whom locations are limited to operating in Denmark and who all have a partnership with VisitDenmark. The stakeholders are from different industries such as the amusement industry and the accommodation industry, but all are engaged in the marketing activities done by VisitDenmark as they are partners on different levels. Furthermore, the research is conducted in a timeframe of four months, hence the data will reflect the stakeholder's perception of the topics at this specific time which mean that their answers might be different if the research was compiled in the future. In addition, this research will be limited to an in-depth case of the relation between a specific DMO, VisitDenmark, and the stakeholders which operates with them. Therefore, the case cannot contribute general trends between stakeholders and DMOs in other countries. To conduct data for this case, the individual interview method was chosen as the primary data collection, but data from documents and surveys conducted by third parties will also be used in the analysis of data. This also applies to the academic literature presented in the literature review.

6.4.2. Semi-structured, individual interviews

The methodological approach to conduct data was the individual interview with a semi-structured format. An unstructured and spontaneous approach to an interview can contribute to more spontaneous, living and unexpected answers from the interviewees (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). In contradiction, a structured interview will ensure that the interviewees replies can be aggregated, thus easier to code (Bryman, 2016). However, as structured interviews operate with specific questions which are often closed (Bryman, 2016) a disadvantage can be that the interviewee is not motivated to deviate from the interview questions, hence the interview would be strictly within the design of the interview guide. To approach an interview as semi-structured makes the interviews more open, thus opening up the topics discussed during the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Therefore, the semi-structured individual interviews were chosen as it allows both me as a researcher, and the interviewees, flexibility. In addition, the interview guide was designed with open questions to encourage a conversation and to allow the interviewees to share their perceptions and views on the topics (Bryman, 2016). In this sense, a method such as the semi-structured interview is viewed as particularly helpful in the generation of an examination of a case (Bryman, 2016).

During the interviews, the interviewees were continually asked for clarifying of different statements. This technique was used to minimise misunderstandings and make the interviews easier to analyse, making the perpetrations and validation of the interviewees' statements clearer during the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Furthermore, in response to Kvale's & Brinkmann's (2008) recommendations for clarifying, the interviewees were continually asked to elaborate on statements if they, for example, used a metaphor or reference to explain their viewpoint.

In addition, Bryman (2016) argues that using a semi-structured format in interviews allows the researcher to keep an open mind in the contouring of the chosen topics, thus new concepts and theories can emerge out of the conducted data. By choosing a semi-structured interview format it was therefore also possible to adapt the interview guide during the interview and omit questions irrelevant to the conversation.

In the interviews, the goal was to unfold the interviewees' perspectives on how to brand Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination in general. To be able to get a deeper understanding of their perspectives on the topic, they were also asked about their views on sustainable tourism in general and what they perceived as sustainable solutions. The use of semi-structured interviews was a way to direct the conversation and keep on track while still being able to pick up on examples or arguments the specific interviewee had on sustainability.

6.4.3. Interviewees

The chosen interviewees are selected from a purposive sample. The interviewees were strategically chosen because they are relevant to the case (Bryman, 2016). As the problem formulation seeks to identify certain perceptions of the branding activities within the concept of sustainability in perspective of VisitDenmark's work as a national DMO, only tourism stakeholders who, to some extent were, familiar or involved with the work VisitDenmark carries out, have been chosen. Adapting a purposive sampling method, the participants were chosen because they have relevance to answering the problem formulation (Bryman, 2016). The interviewees were specifically chosen by the requirement that they would operate directly with tourism, hence that their business relies on tourists and by that would have knowledge of the work VisitDenmark does in relation to branding and marketing activities of Denmark. It was chosen to limit the scope of the research to some of the biggest tourism stakeholders in Denmark. Furthermore, the stakeholders were chosen because they would be expected to be working with sustainability, to some extent, or have a perspective on it, as this was necessary to answer the problem formulation. However, it would be possible to extend the research to all stakeholders in Denmark as VisitDenmark are in contact with several other stakeholders spread around the country. This was also considered, but it was renounced since there are several stakeholders located in the capital area of Denmark, both those operating across the country (e.g. hotel chains) and important stakeholders only operating in the capital, such as the attractions. These were chosen because they rank high in most visited attractions in Denmark. All stakeholders that were operating strategically within tourism in a way

were most of the visitors are tourists and which's economic turnover are dependent of tourists was identified and categorized. Hereafter, 20 stakeholders were chosen and contacted: 11 replied and 9 interviews were scheduled and conducted. The interviews were held in person or over the phone. Due to GDPR it is only participants' names and titles that are presented in the thesis. All interviewees have agreed to sharing of their information to this extent. After nine interviews were conducted, the answers and perspectives of the interviewees began follow a broad pattern, such saturation made it possible to identify themes.

The tourism stakeholders interviewed are listed below (figure 8) with the name of company, name of interviewee and their respective titles, and what type of tourism stakeholders they represent.

BC Hospitality Group	Morten Jensen	Marketing Manager	Hotels
Scandic Hotels	Daniel Kirchhoff	Communications Manager	Hotels
Danhostel	Ole Andersen	CEO	Hostels
Radisson Hotels	Ann Pettersson	Area Marketing Manager	Hotels
Absalon Hotel	Karen Nedergaard	Owner & CEO	Hotel
Brøchner Hotels	Maja Whitta Andersen	Head of Marketing and Communications	Hotels
Tivoli	Dorthe Weinkouff Barsøe	Vice President, Brand & Communications	Attraction
Den Blå Planet	Tony Jørgensen	Sales and Marketing Manager	Attraction
Copenhagen ZOO	Marie Visted	Communications Manager	Attraction

Figure 8: Overview of interviewees

6.4.4. Design of interview guide

As it was chosen to use semi-structured interviews, an interview guide was designed, but with the intention to be used as a guideline to keep the interview within the topic, hence making it possible to have the freedom to deviate from the pre-made questions and possibly leave some out. The full interview guide can be seen in appendix 2.

The interview guide was designed with an overview of topics to be covered and suggestions of questions in relation to the topics (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). The topics were firstly to cover the

interviewees' overall perspectives on sustainable tourism in relation to their own companies, how they used their sustainable initiatives in marketing activities and, lastly, in relation to sustainability in the branding of Denmark. The second part of the interview guide was designed to get in-depth knowledge on their perspectives on marketing activities about Denmark as a sustainable destination and how they saw sustainability as a part of the branding. The last part of the interview guide was meant to get more facets on their perspectives in relation to branding Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination. All questions in the interview guide were designed to fit within the topics to contribute to the collection of knowledge and enhance a good flow in the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). The interview guide was used to unfold how the chosen stakeholders perceive sustainability in tourism and how they work with sustainable development and in their branding strategies towards tourists. This was used to lead the conversation towards how the specific stakeholders view the marketing activities done by VisitDenmark in relation to branding Denmark as a sustainable destination, hence illuminating their opinions towards the branding of Denmark as a sustainable destination in relation to their own activities. Furthermore, the interview guide was designed to shed light on how the stakeholders perceive their own position in the branding of the whole country as a sustainable tourist destination. The complete interview guide can be found in appendix 2.

6.5. Data collection

All interviews were audiotaped with permission from the interviewees. Hereafter all recordings were listened to and transcribed. During and after all the interviews, notes were taken to be able to reflect on thoughts and impressions from the specific interview sessions. All interviews were transcribed and coded in relation to identify different key topics which were related to the problem formulation or were repeated in more than one interview. It is acknowledged that when transcribing the interviews, the spoken word becomes fixed in written words, thus linguistic nuances might be lost (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). However, as it was not the purpose to analyse the interviewees' behaviour, body language or gesture, the interviews have been transcribed as detailed notes. However, when words were stressed by the interviewee it has been marked with bold in the interview transcription.

All interviews were conducted in Danish as this was the first language of the interviewees and to avoid any misunderstandings during the interview. Thus, all quotes used in the thesis were translated into English. Quotes can be seen in their original form in Danish in the transcribes of the interviews which can be found in appendix 3.

6.6. Data analysis

All interviews transcriptions of the interviews were used to code the data to find similarities and localise themes in the interviews. Thus, the conducted data were treated as potential indicators of new themes and were constantly compared to one another (Bryman, 2016). As Bryman (2016) argues: *"Coding in qualitative data analysis tends to be in a constant state of potential revision and fluidity."*

In the interview transcripts, the coding can be seen as high lighting with different colours to indicate topics or concepts. The colours were used to define different themes in the interviews.

Red marking was when the interviewee was talking about Denmark as a country. Orange was when the interviewee talked about consumers and consumer demands. Grey was used when they talked about politics. Light blue was used when they talked about sustainability as a responsibility. Dark blue was when

Figure 9: Illustration of data coding

they emphasised social perspectives in sustainability. Yellow was used to mark when they talked about sustainability as an expectation from the world around. Purple was used when they talked about certifications. Dark green when they talked about communication and marketing of sustainability whereas light green marked when they specifically talked about storytelling or narratives in relation to marketing. Every time an interviewee talked about VisitDenmark it was marked with a light pink and when they talked about sustainability in general it was marked with pink. The picture is from a transcription to illustrate how the highlighting was used in figure 9.

Before the interviews were conducted, a brainstorm was made of what different themes within the interview guide would lead to. This was followed by notes during the interviews to afterwards determine which of the themes were standing out and thereby be in the consideration for the analysis. The themes were made clear in a final readthrough of the interviewees and highlighted in colours. Hereafter the phrases from the different interviews were sorted into the selected themes to be able to use in the analysis.

6.7. Legal and ethical concerns

As the interviews contain subjects and quotes from the interviewees in a setting where the interviewees speak on behalf of their specific company, it was made clear to all participants that the interviews were recorded and transcribed after the meeting. As imposed by the General Data
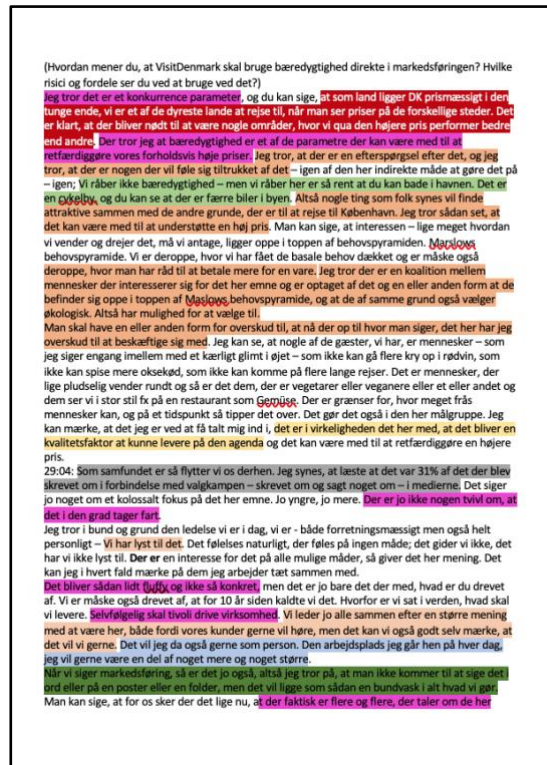
Protection Regulation (GDPR) all cases where personal information is collected or used, such as interviews, consent has to be given by the persons involved (Justitsministeriet, 2017). The consent has to be given with a clear confirmation from the person whose information is going to be collected involving a voluntary, specific, informed and explicit statement of intent from the data subject, thereby accepting that personal data about her/him will be processed (Justitsministeriet, 2017). All interviewees were made aware of the use of the research, thus also that the thesis would be published and made public, no interviewees objected to this, but were given the possibility to read the final thesis. The interviewees were informed of the use of the interview, hence also recording and transcription of the interview in the email invitation to the interview and again before the recording of the interview where they would have to give their consent. Furthermore, all interviewees were informed that the thesis would be public and that their statements and quotes would be used in the analysis of the case and that they, during the interview, would have the possibility to ask for disclosure on specific parts and statements if the conversation evolved and they by any time regretted what they said. It was stressed that they by any time could ask for disclosure. It was also stressed that this thesis and what it entails both in conduction of data and final analysis are solely independent work, which was without any strategic or biased agenda, but that the thesis would become accessible to VisitDenmark and that they on behalf of their organisation would get the same possibilities. No interviewees have objected to their data being presented in the thesis, nor quotes or statements being used in the thesis.

Furthermore, as imposed by Justitsministeriet, 2017, all data have to be stored responsible and they have therefore been stored on safe devices such as password protected computer and mobile phone, USB-stick and on safe databases such as OneDrive and Word365. When the thesis is submitted and graded, all recordings of interviews will be deleted, as due to GDPR, when the period of storing personal data is no longer than absolutely necessary (Justitsministeriet, 2017).

7. Analysis

This section will provide an in-depth analysis of the conducted data by compiling the results based on interviews with the selected group of tourism stakeholders in Denmark. The analysis is divided into themes compiled from the interview data and draws on theory presented in the literature review. Firstly, it will be elaborated how sustainability in tourism can be used as an asset in branding, and how there are challenges combined with it as well. Secondly, this will be unfolded in how branding Denmark as a sustainable destination can become a competitive brand advantage as a tourism destination. Lastly, this will be used to go into detail on how to use sustainability in the branding of Denmark.

7.1. Sustainability in tourism as a case for branding

Sustainability as a topic has increased and is marked as an important discussion on a global scale (Crotti & Misrahi, 2017). As argued by Nielsen (2015), sustainability has become one of the most discussed and important topics in the world and is continually gaining momentum, which also has to be considered in branding. Thus, as Viner & Nicholls (2006) argue, it is inevitable that most tourism stakeholders at destinations will take this into account as well. Among Danish tourism stakeholders there is an understanding that the increasing focus on sustainability has an effect in relation to focus on development and branding as Sales and Marketing Manager at Copenhagen ZOO, Marie Jacobsen stated when asked about sustainability in general; *"Things have been moving rapidly the last year, and it is what is 'in' right now."* When stating this, she is arguing that the discussion and debate about sustainability never have been more prominent and popular than now, thus both in the tourism sector and in a global scale across other sectors. She is also referring to the topic as being popular and as one of the topics which has a high focus.

In another interview with Vice President at Tivoli, Dorthe Barsøe, when asked about sustainability in tourism stated; *"There are no doubt that this is a topic the tourism sector is concerned about at the moment."* In this statement she is indicating that sustainability is a popular topic in the tourism sector in Denmark right now, hence it being a topic which is important when discussing tourism development between the various tourism stakeholders. When asked about sustainability in tourism all interviewees indicated that it was a topic of high importance and prominent for in the tourism sector in Denmark. This is in line with UNWTO & UNDP's (2017) indicating that the private stakeholders in tourism would begin to recognise sustainability as being a prominent topic. In relation to this, Saarinen (2006) argued that sustainability in tourism would become a prominent and active topic which created a platform for tourism stakeholders to reflect on the way they operate. However, the interviewees statements indicate that even though sustainability has been a discussed topic in literature for several years, it is a topic which recently have gained momentum and a debated topic in the tourism sector in Denmark. In addition, when

asked about how sustainability is a topic which has gained momentum Marketing Manager at BC Hospitality Group Morten Jensen stated;

"I strongly believe that in my time, we will experience the wildest evolution on this. I am absolutely sure that NOW is the time. Not tomorrow, not next year, but it won't stop. I don't think it will stop, and neither should it".

In this statement, Morten is referring to sustainability as a topic which continues to evolve, gain momentum, and that the pace is high for this as a topic. He emphasises that it is time for them, as a business, to tap into the discussion as it is prominent now. In times where sustainability is discussed widely by both politicians and consumers and that it is stressed that sustainability has to be a part of all aspects of both development and branding (Nielsen, 2015), it is important for tourism stakeholders to be abreast to keep up with an increasingly competitive market (Klancnik, 2005). All interviewees stressed the importance of considering and operating strategically with sustainability within their respective businesses. In an interview with Communications Manager Daniel Kirchhoff from Scandic hotels, he stated; *"I don't believe there is a topic which has more focus than sustainability, sustainable travel and sustainable tourism"*. His statement is in coherency with all the interviewees thoughts on sustainability in tourism is an important and current topic.

Most of the interviewees argued sustainable projects within the organisation as 'proper behaviour' and considered sustainability in tourism as a trend too large to be ignored both in terms of development, but also in terms of using it in marketing activities. In an interview with CEO at Absalon Hotel, Karen Nedergaard, stated;

"… you have to keep up with the evolution otherwise I don't think you will survive. It's the fittest that can do it. I think this is the case with sustainability - if you do not participate and you do not behave properly, you will not survive."

By stating this, Karen is first and foremost concluding that having a sustainable business is preeminent and the importance of working with sustainability is evolving to such a scale that if you, as a tourism company, do not operate and take decisions within sustainability, your company will not follow the movements in the market. Thus, she argues that if not doing so, the company will not be able to be competitive and survive as other companies will be overtaking. Furthermore, she also compares the emerging trend as an evolution in the matter of driving a tourism business and if not following the revolution, she is referring to the business not being able to be profitable. This perspective is in coherency with what the global performance company Nielsen stated in a rapport in 2015, showing that an increasing number of consumers consider sustainable brands as not only providing add-on value, but as an imperative aspect of their choices of consumption. However, as

Saarinen (2014) argues, the term 'sustainability' has not officially been defined, hence there are no restrictions or limitations in how to use it in branding. This was an issue, several of the interviewees mentioned which will be elaborated in following section.

7.1.1. Sustainable tourism as a complex concept

Starting with the description by UNWTO (n.d.) on sustainable tourism as being; *"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".* Higgins-Desbiolles (2017) argued this as being emaciated to thrive for in perspective of the world we live in, thus it would not be possible to achieve sustainability. In addition, in the interview with Head of Communications Maja from Brøncher hotels, she stated;

> *"We are a society which is built on production and consumption and all our systems are based on growth. If we changed our economic system and our way to produce it could become more sustainable, but the way our economic system is right now it is not based on sustainability which is why it is utopia to be able to achieve it."*

By stating this, Maja refers to the world economy which focused on growth in a way which is not sustainable. In her perspective, this is related to a view on the society as not being able to achieve complete sustainability if the not the way compunction and production is reconsidered. Thus, in this statement Maja is defining sustainability in relation to growth and that production with the intention of growth is unsustainable.

In the other interviews, sustainability was several defined in relation to CO_2 emissions and environmental issues related to transportation. This was emphasised by most of the interviewees and when asked, Daniel from Scandic Hotels argued; *"We are still living in a world where we have to transport our self by flying for different reasons."* By stating this, Daniel is emphasising that in this current age people are still transporting themselves by flight, hence also indicating this as an unsustainable way of travel, as flying is known to emit a large amount of CO_2. CO_2 emission were an issue which most of the interviewees related with unsustainable travel. In relation to this Maja from Brøncher Hotels stated;

> *" …there are no doubts that tourism generates consumption, because it is based on CO_2 and a lot of other stuff which is not good for the climate, so it is a two-sided concept."*

Maja is referring to sustainable tourism as being a concept which has two sides to sustainable travel, and in this statement, she refers to sustainability in relation to CO_2 emissions. Thus this statement is in line with the inconvenience of tourism as being bidirectional as stated by Viner & Nicholls (2006), which is as Saarinen (2014) describes as one of the necessities for tourists to travel,

and one of the concepts which eradicate the possibility for tourism to be completely sustainable as it is also a negative contributor to climate change. Maja argues that the aspect of tourists consuming in the matter buying products, using transportation and other unsustainable aspects. However, as emphasised by Viner & Nicholls (2006), tourism is bidirectional as consumption also enhances a destination's economy which benefit the locals by boosting their economy. However, as argued by Saarinen (2014) tourism will always be unsustainable to some extend because of some aspects of traveling. Aspects like flying for any reason can't be considered as sustainable tourism because of the large emission of CO_2 which is linked with flying as several of the interviewees also mentioned when asked about the aspects of sustainability.

An aspect of this, which is as also emphasised in literature, is that sustainability is complex to use in marketing and branding activities, as it is an undefined concept because, as Saarinen (2014) argued, there is no official definition for when something is sustainable, which can be argued to reflect on the complexity in using it in branding. This is, as argued by Petrevska & Cingoski (2017) an issue in relation to branding a destination as e.g. being green, as there are no limitations to using the concept in branding. This is in line with Petrevska & Cingoski (2017) who described the concept of green branding in addition to environmental sustainability as vague, it seemed that several of the interviewees also had trouble when defining the concept. However, when breaking the concept down to the three pillars in sustainability (see Figure 1) it was clearer, but they acknowledged that terms of sustainability tourism operate bidirectional, and the interviewees also mentioned aspects of tourism which was of positive character, e.g. social benefits to a community because of the economic outcome of tourism at a destination. In addition, there are discussions in literature where several researchers (e.g. Higgins-Desbiolles, 2017; Hall, 2019; Saarinen, 2014) point toward different aspects of sustainability and the importance of acknowledging that aspect. All interviewees saw challenges, but also opportunities in the branding, and to be able to resolve the different aspects of sustainability in tourism from the perspectives of the interviewees, the next section will elaborate on this.

7.1.2. Various facets of sustainability in tourism

There are three pillars in sustainability: social, economic, and environmental sustainability (Scheyvens, Banks, & Hughes, 2016). In most of the interviews with the stakeholders, all pillars were mentioned in relation to the stakeholders' own operations, but also when talking about enhancing the brand of Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination. However, social and environmental sustainability had the most focus, whereas economic sustainability was almost not mentioned. A reason for the interviewees not to explicitly emphasise the economic pillar, might be because all of them are running a commercial business, making the economic sustainability an obvious part of running a tourism business. Thus, the reason for the stakeholders to consider sustainable solutions might be because of them seeing an economic long-haul benefit. As they specifically emphasised on social and environmental sustainability and the relation to branding, these will be amplified below.

Social sustainability

Topics within social sustainability seemed to be an important aspect of sustainability which several of the interviewees were focusing on and were phrasing it as 'having to live up to a responsibility in society'. In relation to their own operations, all interviewees from hotels were especially focused on taking in people who would have a hard time getting a job somewhere else. Several of the interviewees mentioned that they have the possibility to hire people with no educational background for types of jobs like being a maid, cleaning or working in the kitchen and in general manual labour jobs, as these jobs didn't necessarily need an education. Another aspect which many stakeholders underlined was their possibilities for hiring people with disabilities or immigrants, which they argued, might have a hard time finding a job. In addition, most stakeholders also explained it as being a part of their responsibility in society, and when asked about this Daniel from Scandic Hotels explained it;

"I see inclusion as an extremely important part of the work we do in terms of sustainability, because it is social sustainability to make sure we contribute to a society that is balanced. Phrased cynically, we can give people who might are a financial burden to society and are a cost the national economy in terms of transfer income a way to enter the labour market."

In this statement Daniel refers to their role in society as hiring people without jobs, and in his opinion, in that way contribute to sustainability by offering people without a job to be able to get an income owned by themselves instead of maybe being receiving transfer money from the government. When he mentions inclusion, he refers to hiring people which for some reason have a hard time getting hired other places. In coherency with this, Karen from Absalon Hotel states; *"… we are a very inclusive industry because we for example have a lot of foreigners hired".* Her statement is in line with Daniel from Scandic Hotels and argue that hiring foreigners is being an inclusive company as being willing to take in people with a different background than Danish. Furthermore, in their arguments, they indicate that a tourism business like theirs contribute to solve social issues by e.g. hiring immigrants. Thus, he is arguing that reducing social exclusion through job creation is an important theme in social sustainability. As several of the interviewees argued, a way to contribute to social sustainability in tourism would be by hiring people with no educational background, as Morten from BC Hospitality Group states about tourism stakeholders; *"… Everybody need waiters, chefs and cleaning staff and all kinds of practical blue-collar jobs."* In accordance to this statement, it is presented as a way to take care of people in their way of running a business. In this statement, Morten is referring to more educational opportunities as a theme within social sustainability. In relation to this, Ole from Danhostel stated when asked about how they operated

with social sustainability within the SDGs; *"… we can provide education at our company, which allows people without any education to get one. So, there are many different things we can tap into."* By stating this, Ole argues that even though there are a varieties of sustainability which is possible for a tourism business to work strategically with, he is specifically emphasizing education as a theme. In literature, Higgins-Desbiolles (2006) and UNWTO & UNDP (2017) argued that tourism can become a significant actor in shaping the world, meaning that tourism develops into being a sector of growing importance in terms of social sustainability. The examples the interviewees give in relation to social sustainability could be examples on how tourism can affect the sounding world. However, this might be a romanticised aspect of this topic as one of the interviewees pointed out especially that the hotels have a hard time finding labour forces to do manual work types and pointed out that providing education was as much a necessity to get enough people, which can be argued to be an incentive to e.g. offer educations to people. This might indicate that if they had the possibilities to hire people who already had an education in the respective job types, this would maybe not be an issue, they were concerned about.

Environmental sustainability

All interviewees were concerned about environmentally sustainable development in their respective companies. In most of the interviews, when asked about sustainability in general, several of the interviewees referred to climate change which was often used as examples on sustainability. Furthermore, all stakeholders worked directly with initiatives in environmental sustainability, and in the interviews this topic was the one mentioned and referred to most times. In an interview with Ann from Radisson Hotels, where asked about sustainability in relation to trends in tourism, she stated;

> *"There is a huge focus in the environment and sustainability and that we have to take care of the earth and the climate. I definitely believe that it's going to have a big impact on where you choose to travel to."*

In this statement, Ann refers to that consumers will probably be considering environmentally considerate destinations for the destinations they choose to visit. Moreover, Ann is indicating that especially the focus on environmental issues when talking sustainability is prominent in the minds of the consumers, and that this will be an important element in the consumers' decision making.

Even though all pillars of sustainability were represented in the interviews, environmental issues were mentioned most times. During the interviews, CO2 emission and environmental issues were prominent and was a topic all of the tourism stakeholders were concerned about. Several times, when talking about sustainability, the interviewees were led back to giving examples of environmental sustainability, hence several interviewees interpreted 'sustainability' in relation to environmental damage to nature. Therefore, it is a topic within sustainability which is notable in the

general discussion for the interviewees. A few examples on how the interviewees work with environmental initiatives of different character are Brøcnher Hotels which is coating their hotels room with a new technology, so they do not have to clean with chemicals, Tivoli which is recycling all their plastic cups to reduce the use of disposable plastic, BC Hospitality Group which did not serve any foods with tiger shrimps because of animal welfare, Radisson Hotels which has lowered the water pressure in baths in hotel rooms to save water, and Copenhagen ZOO which has decided not to use disposable plastic anymore. In coherency with their own initiatives, all of the interviewees' statements on environmental sustainability in Denmark as a country were in concurrence with one another.

In relation to environmental sustainability in branding and it being a current and important trend when asked about this Daniel from Scandic Hotels stated:

"If we take the mega-mega, mega-trends, mega-discourses that are currently on a global scale, I can't imagine anything bigger right now than climate and change and what we as a global people are responsible for… "

He is referring to the general global changes and what people are responsible for, but he emphasises climate in his description. As elaborated in the literature review, sustainability can be described as a megatrend which continues to gain momentum and it is a subject which is widely discussed on a global level (Crotti & Misrahi, 2017). In coherency, Daniel from Scandic Hotels stress the volume of sustainability as a megatrend but highlight environmental issues.

As mentioned in the literature review, tourism is in general impacted by global changes (OECD, 2018). Thus, it is affected by movements and increasing attention towards climate change and industries causing negative impacts on the climate like the airline industry which activists like Greta Thunberg portray as major culprits in a global media landscape (The Economist, 2019). As it is argued in The Economist (2019) the effect of Greta Thunberg's work as a climate activist indeed impacts tourism in terms of disrupting the consumption on travel by flight which is an example of how tourism stakeholders are impacted. In addition, in the interview with Morten from BC Hospitality Group, he specifically mentioned Greta Thunberg in the interview and stated; *"… things will become normal for us and it will be a pressure from below and then we will all become Greta."* In this metaphor, Morten refers to that both consumers and corporate organisations will increasingly become more conscious of climate change, hence operate towards solutions. When stating that *"… it will be a pressure from below…"* he refers to the demand from the consumers and especially the next generations as Greta Thunberg belongs to the future generation of consumers which he considers as being highly aware of how humans are affecting the climate. In coherency, Daniel from Scandic Hotels stresses; *"Climate will get even more focus and if you are not involved and up to date on sustainable tourism and sustainability you are done!"* By stating this, Daniel is stressing that climate is a topic that has gained momentum and that if you, as a tourism stakeholder, have not

taken notice of the eminence of climate and sustainable tourism this will be a detriment in your success.

Elaborating on the different aspects of sustainability, the interviewees are aware of the different aspects and were in particular referring to the social and environmental pillar. Both of which was emphasised as current topics in sustainable tourism, hence also in branding.

7.2. Sustainability as a competitive brand advantage

When talking about using sustainability in branding, several of the interviewees pointed out that working strategically on branding Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination could become a competitive advantage on an international market. When asked about how Denmark could use sustainability to be different from other destinations, Daniel from Scandic Hotels argued;

"Of course, we are a leading country when it comes to climate-friendly transport such as Copenhagen as a 'biking city'. I think this is something we should focus on and I believe it may well be a competitive parameter for us."

By stating this, Daniel refers to the people of Denmark, and in particular in the capital Copenhagen as preferring biking rather than driving a car, hence indicating this as being a sustainable way of transportation. Furthermore, he also argues that this, as a cultural aspect, could give Denmark a competitive advantage in relation to enhancing a sustainable destination brand. In this quote Daniel is referring to environmental sustainability and specifically transportation as an asset in branding. In addition to this, when asked about the competitive advantages in using sustainability in branding, Dorthe from Tivoli stated;

"I believe that this is a parameter where we are competitive, especially because Denmark is one of the most expensive countries to visit. Meaning, that there have to be areas where we because of the high price outperform others."

When stating this, Dorthe is specifically giving an example on why having a sustainable brand will be a competitive advantage for Denmark. She is referring to that being experienced as a sustainable nation will be a positive position to achieve, and that it will be a seal of quality. To elaborate on her statement, she is arguing that in relation to enhancing the brand of being a sustainable tourism destination might create value for the consumer in relation to her perspective of Denmark being a more expensive travel destination than others. This is leading back to Kotler & Gertner (2002) who stress that consumers create positive associations with brands which have a good reputation. In addition, Nielsen (2015) argue that 66% of global consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable goods. In cohesion, Petrevska & Cingoski (2017: 207) argue that

"…environmentally-conscious and adequately informed tourists are more willing to pay than others". In addition to this, it can be argued that enhancing sustainability in the branding of Denmark might become a parameter of which consumers to a higher degree will consider visiting Denmark despite high prices.

In the research done by VisitDenmark (Appendix 1, 2019) it is shown that in the minds of tourists, the price was prioritised first, but that sustainability was of high importance in deciding on a destination to visit, and that consumers are much aware of sustainability.

In another interview, when asked about the competitive advantage of using sustainability in branding, Daniel from Scandic Hotels pointed towards that sustainability should get more attention in national marketing activities, as he stated; *"… it is something we should focus more on as it can become a competitive parameter for us."* In this statement, and in line with Dorthe's statement, Daniel refers to that it is a parameter which will be a competitive advantage for Denmark as a tourist destination, and he stresses that it is something which should be boosted in the branding of the country.

However, there are challenges in using the position of Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination in marketing activities, which most of the stakeholders also mentioned in the interviews. Maja from Brøchner Hotels argues;

> *"What I believe will be one of VisitDenmark's biggest dilemmas, is that we can be*
> *sustainable enough as a nation, but we will never get around that the tourism industry*
> *is one of the biggest CO2 culprits ever found for airplanes and transporting people so far*
> *across borders and everything else."*

By stating this, Maja mentions one of the risks by branding Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination, because, as Saarinen (2014) and Higgins-Desbiolles (2017) also stress, tourism in the matter of transportation cannot be argued as sustainable. An example of this might be that traveling to Denmark by flight can be argued to be a contradictory fact to a potential sustainable brand. Thus, even though there are many aspects which are sustainable, traveling to Denmark will in any way contribute to non-sustainable activities such as flying. No matter how it is presented, flying will still be an unsustainable way of traveling (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2017). However, Maja does not dismiss that it is necessary to do it, but accommodates the issues which are combined with it. When asked about the risks associated with using sustainability in the branding of Denmark, several of the interviewees mentioned that if there aren't compliance between what is communicated about the brand and what the tourist will experience, it could damage a potential sustainable brand. In the interview with Maja from Copenhagen ZOO, she stated; *"There don't have to be much trash in a city, for example in Copenhagen, before people think that it is a dirty place. It is really just about one bad experience."* She is arguing that there is a potential risk if there, in marketing activities, is communicated something which appears different in reality and the tourist's experience is different

than their expectations. In cohesion, when asked about the potential risks of branding Denmark as a sustainable destination, Tony from Den Blå Planet stated; *"You shouldn't communicate about anything that of which you are not able to turn around and be a target for what you are doing."* In this statement Tony is arguing that it is necessary that how Denmark is presented is in cohesion with what the experience of Denmark actually is, and that what is being communicated is reflecting the truth. However, most of the interviewees identified potential tensions and contradictory facts that could damage a sustainable tourism destination brand.

7.2.1. The challenges in branding a destination as sustainable

There are challenges in relation to branding Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination, some of which has been elaborated in prior section. However, there is also the complexity in the concept of sustainability which can generate confusion when operating with the concept in branding. This will be emphasised and elaborated in the following section.

As amplified by Saarinen (2006, 2014), sustainability is a concept which is hard to operate within because there exist no exact definitions for when something is sustainable. When asked about enhancing Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination, all stakeholders indicated that this aspect could generate some challenges and emphasised it with quotes like: *"Sustainability is a crazy fluffy term which has many sub elements"*, stated Marketing Manager at Den Blå Planet, Tony Jørgensen. *"It is still a very loose topic. The whole world is gathering in terms of how to confront and embrace this topic"* stated Dorthe from Tivoli. *"There are no doubt, in my opinion, that this is one of the most difficult terms at all to work within because it is such a fluffy term."* stated Maja from Brøchner Hotels. Furthermore, Daniel from Scandic Hotels argued: *"It can be an ingrained word hence it becomes abstract and fuzzy and that means there are many things which can be described as sustainable"*. These statements indicate that there are difficulties combined with using sustainability in branding as the interviewees are arguing there are no fixed description to the concept and that it has many facets in general.

When asking the interviewees how they worked with sustainability in their own marketing activities all of them answered in cohesion that they were not actively making branding campaigns focusing on sustainability as a general theme in their marketing. Very few of them had used some initiatives of sustainable character in storytelling on social media and two had specific cases of spinning a story of inclusion in their respective companies to the news. However, most of them emphasised that sustainability was an important part of their company's identity, but mentioned the complexity as a challenge in branding. In relation to the challenges about the concept being hard to define in general, this is in line with the discussion in literature. In addition to the prior section, it is hard to define tourism as being sustainable in general, as Saarinen (2014) emphasised. There will always be aspects of tourism which cannot achieve a position as being sustainable. Furthermore, there is, as Andersson & James (2018) illuminate in their study of Växjö in Sweden, a risk for a

tourism destination to use phrases and words which in the end can be described as green washing as elaborated in the literature review. Several of the interviewees emphasised that there are risks associated with using sustainability in their own marketing activities, e.g. green washing. This is in particular noted in the interview with Dorthe from Tivoli, who stated; *"I am terrified for green washing because it is super dangerous for one's image."* When phrasing it this way, Dorthe underlines the perpetual risk of being accused for green washing which is something, she argues is damaging for the image, hence also the brand. In coherency, in the interview with Marie from Copenhagen ZOO, she commented on the risks on using sustainability actively in branding and stated; *"The risks are straightforward. If you do not do what you say, you get chopped off!".* She is also referring to the risk that if they are using sustainability in marketing activities and it does not match with the reality and the surrounding world, there are discrepancies what you say and way you do it will harm the brand. All interviewees emphasised this as a perpetual risk when wanting to brand something as sustainable, both in the matter of their own companies, but also in the matter of branding Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination. Drawing on branding theory and figure 4 from Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, (2010) in the literature review, it is important for a consumer to associate the values with the brand in all dimensions as this will have an effect on the brand equity. All interviewees saw several potentials in branding Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination. This will be elaborated in the following section.

7.2.2. The basis of branding Denmark as sustainable

Even though all interviewees emphasised different challenges in branding Denmark as a sustainable destination, all of them mentioned strengths about the way Denmark as a state worked with sustainability, which they saw as important values and assets in branding the country as a sustainable tourism destination. Drawing on rapports from EPI (2018) and the Social Progress Imperative (2018), Denmark can, on a general level, be argued as being a sustainable nation measured on both environmental and social sustainability in comparison with other countries, as it is a country which has a high rank. Therefore, it can be argued that there is a basis for branding Denmark as sustainable. In addition, all stakeholders had a similar view on how they experienced Denmark were positioned as operating as a sustainable nation. In the interview with Maja from Brøchner Hotels, when asked about her view on Denmark as a destination, she stated;

> *"There is no doubt that Denmark at the moment has two overall advantages; One is the gastronomic scene and second is sustainability. It is just the way we do everything, and we have always been a leading country in relation to green initiatives like e.g. wind energy."*

By stating this Maja refers to Denmark being a country which is pioneering in green energy produced by windmills and development of Greentech. Here she appraises Denmark as an environmentally

sustainable nation and that this is an advantage in branding of the country, hence in this statement she interprets sustainability in terms of environmental initiatives. In addition to Maja's statement, Ann from Radisson Hotels stated;

"I believe that Denmark has got what it takes - both in how to recycle, but also in issues as energy, the infrastructure and food waste and in general how to decrease food waste and actually recycling food too."

In this statement Ann mentions another aspect when asked about what Denmark in particular has to differentiate from, from other destinations on sustainability, she emphasises that in Denmark environmental issues are taken seriously. She underlines that there is a focus on decreasing food waste, sustainable infrastructure, and energy which she describes as being a parameter on which Denmark can differentiate and she is referring to sustainability with an environmental focus. Furthermore, from her perspective, these aspects are possibilities for Denmark to be branded as a sustainable country as there are sustainable actions taken in the matter of environmental issues. Ann's statement aligns with several of the other interviewees' perspectives on Denmark as a country where you in general care about the environment. A general pattern the interviewees show when talking about sustainability in general, and which is also present in their view on branding Denmark, is that they tend to highlight environmental sustainability and focus on energy, transportation, and food waste. Social sustainability was especially emphasised in the interviews with the hotels, in which all of them mentioned social sustainability focusing on the Danish welfare system, possibility to offer people an education, and inclusion as a key points of where Denmark also can differentiate from other tourism destinations. When asked to elaborate on sustainability, Daniel from Scandic Hotels stated;

"I believe Denmark has something notably unique. I believe it. We are often seen as a country which is first mover and we have a sustainable society. This is not only about climate, but that Denmark as a society is harmonious; we experience no pronounced poverty, and people have rights. This is in my opinion a sustainable society. I find that the society we have created in Denmark gets people to perceive us as a country which has 'figured it out.'"

In this statement, Daniel is arguing that Denmark has a uniqueness in the matter of social sustainability, and he is arguing that the social dimension of sustainability in Denmark is something that stands out; hence, this is an aspect of sustainability where other countries look to Denmark in a positive way. He mentions the social aspect as something unique for Denmark whereas climate might be something other countries are also working on.

Another notable pattern in the interviews was that the word 'hygiene' was used several times by the interviewees to describe on which scale Denmark is sustainable. All stakeholders using the word 'hygiene' about sustainable solutions explained it as sustainability being of such an importance in how things work in Denmark that it had become as important as cleanliness or taht it can be explained as expected to such a degree that it is a natural part of running a business. In the interview with Dorthe from Tivoli, she phrased it as: *"I believe that this will become a factor of hygiene because some guests will demand that you have this information about it."* In this statement Dorthe is adding to the aspect that running a sustainable business is a consumer demand, hence it will become expected. She underlines it as a matter of hygiene, meaning that making sustainable choices for their business can be compared having toilets which are clean.

The interviewees' perspectives on Denmark as sustainable, reflect what the FutureBrand rapport from 2019 shows about consumers having an image of Denmark as being a sustainable nation, which is in cohesion with how the interviewees view Denmark as a nation. However, all interviewees saw possibilities in boosting the brand of Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination, but were all persistent that the brand had to reflect the reality of Denmark. This will be elaborated in following section.

7.3. Enhancing sustainability in the branding of Denmark

As elaborated in earlier sections, all interviewees identify specific risks associated with using sustainability directly in marketing activities when branding Denmark. As indicated in prior sections, there is also a coherent view between the interviewees who argue that it is inevitable to use sustainability in marketing activities when branding Denmark internationally. When asked to elaborate on why, several of the interviewees argued that it would be a necessity to be competitive as a tourism destination in a global market. In accordance, all interviewees mentioned examples on how Denmark is a pioneer in different aspects of sustainable development, hence argued that there is a solid foundation for enhancing the brand of Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination in branding activities. When asked to emphasise on why Denmark should be branded as a sustainable tourism destination, Morten from BC Hospitality Group stated; *"We [Denmark] have a sovereign position as a sustainable and green country which would be stupid not to use."* In this statement Morten underlines the perspective on Denmark as being a front runner on a variety of different sustainable solutions in general, and stress that there is a foundation and reasoning for branding Denmark in this way which he sees as short-sighted if not used in branding. Like several of the interviewees, he highlights green initiatives, and point out environmental sustainability. In coherency with Mortens statement, when asked the same, Ann from Radisson Hotels explained; *"If Denmark could be promoted as a sustainable country or destination, it will have a clear impact and we strengthen the brand as a nation which is focusing on it [sustainability]."* Phrasing it this way,

Ann is arguing that enhancing the brand of Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination would strengthen the brand in general, and not only as a tourism destination.

When asked about their view on how Denmark is branded as a sustainable tourism destination now, none of the interviewees were displeased with the intensity so far. However, most of them believed it would be necessary to boost the focus on sustainability and increase it even more in time. In addition, one of the interviewees couldn't recall that sustainability had ever been a topic which they have had any focus at all in any of the marketing activities when branding Denmark as a tourism destination internationally. This interviewee stressed that sustainability should get more focus in the branding activities in the future. When asked about how much sustainability should be boosted in marketing activities about Denmark, Ann from Radisson Hotel stated; *"I believe we could do more, but I think we have covered a lot already by telling about houses and buildings which have been built of recycled material."* By stating it this way, Ann refers to the way Denmark previously has been presented. In the interview, she emphasised stories which indirectly might indicate that Denmark is a sustainable tourism destination. However, she also underlines that she believes the focus on sustainability should be increased. Moreover, as elaborated in earlier sections, there are challenges because branding something as sustainable is difficult and as Saarinen (2006, 2014) argued there are several aspects of sustainability, which the interviewees describe as the concept being complex and fuzzy. Thereby, they have addressed that there are challenges which have to be considered when wanting to brand Denmark as a tourism destination which is sustainable, or at least some challenges to brand it as a sustainable in a holistic way where all pillars of sustainability are represented.

7.3.1. How to brand Denmark as a sustainable destination

Drawing on the views of the interviewees on the possibilities for branding Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination, it can be argued that there is a foundation to enhance this from the perspective of the stakeholders. As elaborated in earlier sections, the tourism stakeholders which were interviewed, especially emphasised environmental sustainability and social sustainability as aspects which were suitable to use in branding of the country. As Govers (2011) argued, a destination brand should be perceived as an umbrella brand, hence the tourism stakeholders in Denmark are contributing to the overall brand of Denmark. Therefore, it can be argued that it is important to incorporate de destination stakeholders' brands when wanting to enhance the overall destination brand, as the individual brands constitutes the overall brand of Denmark as a tourism destination.

All stakeholders mentioned one or several cases which could be used in enhancing the destination brand as sustainable. In the interview with Morten from BC Hospitality Group, he emphasised on this view and argued;

"There are a lot of small parts which in cohesion make Denmark an easy country to promote as green and in terms on inclusion and in relation to people who are on the edge of the labour market – so in reality sustainability is at the entire palette"

In this statement Morten argues that there are a lot of small stories and initiatives which are making it easy to brand Denmark as a sustainable destination. As it was mainly social and environmental sustainability, which was exemplified most in the interviews, it could be stories about how tourism stakeholders are working on decreasing unemployment or how some stakeholders have stopped using disposable plastic. As previously mentioned, all the stakeholders are working with different aspects of sustainability within their respective corporations, hence there are a variety of small stories about sustainability in Danish tourism businesses. These could be examples of the small parts which in Morten's perspective makes Denmark easy to promote as sustainable as these are initiatives which are happening in reality, and that it therefore would create cohesion with the real world and the brand if this was enhanced in the brand. In line with this, when asked about how to execute sustainability in marketing activities to enhance the brand, Daniel from Scandic Hotels argued that it was of high importance to use sustainability in the marketing activities, as he explained;

"It is about making sustainability a central part of relevant communication and not just a 'read more here' section at the bottom of some website or somewhere where customers do not see it and you have to make sure it does not become a 'nice-to-have' but make sure it is integrated into everything communicated."

When stating this, Daniel argues that when wanting to brand something as sustainable, it is not enough to just to have a section on the homepage with information, but it has to be evident in all branding activities. Hence, he is emphasising that sustainability should be incorporated in all aspects of communication in general. In cohesion with Daniel's argument, Marie from Copenhagen ZOO stated; *"I believe that it is a topic [sustainability] which should be incorporated into the branding in a natural way as something which is self-evident."* She is also underpinning that sustainability should be incorporated in all branding activities in a natural way, thus it should be a topic which is inducing all branding activities. A way this might be accomplished in practice would be to communicate sustainability in all marketing activities. Furthermore, drawing on branding theory to be working strategically with enhancing a brand in a specific way, it can be argued that the quintessential meaning of the brand has to be associated with the desired values (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010). Meaning, that in addition to brand Denmark as a sustainable destination, it should be clear how Denmark is sustainable and what it does (functions), how are peoples' cognitive and affective disposition to it (image), what does the country stand for and what are the aims (source), and how is it, as a tourism destination, distinctive from other destinations (differences). This should

be prominent in all the dimensions of the brand for the consumers to identify the brand essence with sustainability. Thus, leading back to Dahlén, Lange, & Smith's (2010: 200) model of the brand dimensions illustrated in figure 3 in the literature review. Elaborating on branding theory in connection with the view of the interviewees, it can be argued that enhancing the destination brand as sustainable can be attained through storytelling which will elaborated in following section.

7.3.2. The brand narrative is sustainability

As presented in the literature review, it is essential to work on enhancing a brand narrative to create any form of connection to the consumers (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010). Furthermore, as presented in Forbes (2018), consumers are expecting brands to help them make sustainable choices in their everyday lives. However, as the rapport from VisitDenmark (2019) clarifies, sustainability is not first priority when choosing a travel destination, nonetheless it is an important aspect when deciding on where to travel to. All of the interviewees had similar approaches on how to enhance a sustainable destination brand and that sustainability should have an essential role in the marketing activities, executed as storytelling. When asked to emphasise, Morten from BC Hospitality Group stated; *"I believe that is has to have a central element in the storytelling."* By stating this, Morten argues that sustainability should be a central part of the brand narrative about Denmark. A way this could be embraced would be to induce perspectives on sustainability in e.g. articles and videos about Denmark as a tourism destination. In addition to Mortens argument, when asked to emphasise, Karen from Absalon Hotel stated; *"I believe that the story of who we are should be more clear, how our lives are, but like a story in the story."* In her statement, Karen is arguing that a way of enhancing the narrative of Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination could be to make a clear focus on the social and cultural aspects of sustainability in Denmark. When Karen phrases it as 'a story in the story', she refers to sustainability as a topic which is inducing the current brand narrative, however she is also stressing that it should be a part of the current story, and not a story which should be dominant. In cohesion, when asked about how to enhance the brand narrative as sustainable, Morten from BC Hospitality Group exemplified his view in relation to VisitDenmark's brand strategy on The Land of Everyday Wonder, he stated;

> *"It is about integrating the agenda of sustainability as a natural add-on story. You will not only get the Land of Everyday Wonder, you will also get a healthy, green, climate-friendly version of it, meaning that when you are a tourist visiting you actually leave less of a climate-footprint, hence a you don't leave a footprint in your children's room."*

By phrasing it this way, Morten argues how offering people to travel to a destination where sustainability is a high-priority agenda, and where sustainable solutions become a specific way to enhance the brand narrative as an add-on story about environmental sustainability on the already existing brand narrative, 'The Land of Everyday Wonder'. Furthermore, he stresses the strength in

the story of a sustainable brand as underlining the importance of and wish for consumers to take care of the planet for the benefit of their children, hence also future generations. All of the interviewees indicated that boosting sustainability in the narrative of Denmark as an important part of the future marketing strategies of branding Denmark internationally. When asked about how to improve the brand narrative about Denmark as a sustainable destination, Ole from Danhostel stated;

"I would really like for VisitDenmark to not only brand Denmark as a place with a lot of good experiences, but also a place where people are together, you meet other people, becomes smarter – well, really get to know and meet other people in general."

In his statement, Ole is stressing that the social aspects in Danish culture should be more notable in VisitDenmark's work when branding Denmark, hence that a part of the brand narrative should enhance social experiences. Most of the interviewees talked about sustainability as an ingrained part of the already existing brand narrative.

As discussed in the literature review from different articles within tourism research and which has also been illuminated in the analysis; Denmark has a lot of values in relation to sustainability which can be used in marketing activities. From the perspectives of the stakeholders, there is a solid foundation boosting the narrative in the matters of sustainability. However, as elaborated in prior sections, there are risks associated with using the specific term in the branding. When asked to elaborate on how to use storytelling in the branding, Tony from Den Blå Planet argued that using the narratives of the stakeholders as examples in the narrative of Denmark would be a way to elude the risks, he stated;

"We [the tourism stakeholders] should be examples, cases, specific images in people's heads of this somewhat fluffier agenda. I really think we can bring it down to earth. I think that is more specific."

By stating this, he proposes that specific cases of sustainability being used in the general marketing activities to create specific stories, and also indicating that these stories are a way of simplifying sustainability, since the concept in itself is intangible. A specific case he mentioned in the interview, was to enhance stories on how e.g. architecture and so on is sustainable in Denmark, and the cases could be tourism attractions. When stating this, he is implying that when using storytelling to showcase Denmark as a sustainable destination might be a way to integrate it in the branding in an indirect way. Furthermore, he argues that this way, the consumers will get to construct an image easier since sustainability will be presented in a simpler way. This is in line with what Dahlén, Lange, & Smith (2010) argue about constructing a narrative around the brand for the

consumers to be able to construct a personalised perception of the brand, thus a better understanding. When asked about how to enhance storytelling in the branding of Denmark, Marie from Copenhagen ZOO also saw a possibility in constructing a sustainable narrative and stated; *"It should be about giving some examples on what is done in different places in a nice way of course so people would want to listen to it."* When stating this, she refers to the different initiatives which are carried out by the tourism stakeholders, and using these stories in marketing activities to brand Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination. A story like this could be that some tourism attractions banned disposable plastic.

In addition, there are specific values which are repeatedly mentioned by the interviewees which is supported by data from EPI (2018), FutureBrand (2019) and The Social Progress Imperative (2018), hence again supports that there is coherency in the perspective of Denmark operating as a sustainable country, and thereby are ranking high on subjects such as social standards, way of living, and green innovation which can directly be used in the branding of Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination. Because of this, it is essential to communicate values of a product to gain the attention from future consumers (Septrup & Fruensgaard, 2010), which in this case can be described as the values of Denmark and the Danish culture to gain attention from future tourists.

When asked on their views of storytelling as a way to enhance sustainability, all the interviewees argued that creating a narrative of Denmark as a place where you can vacation in a sustainable way would be beneficial for the tourism in Denmark. In addition, Daniel from Scandic Hotels explained it this way; *"Imagine if we could just say; Denmark is so sustainable that when you are here your footprint will be smaller than if you were somewhere else."* When phrasing it this way, Daniel indicates that there is a potential in branding Denmark as a sustainable destination, and as discussed in both the literature review and in the analysis, to have a sustainable brand, hence for Denmark to have a brand as a sustainable tourism destination will be beneficial and also be a competitive force. In relation to this, Daniel also argued; *"…of course Denmark should be a place where you can vacation with good conscience."* In his statements, Daniel stresses that visitors should consider their choice of traveling to Denmark as a sustainable choice. Moreover, he underlines that there is strength in Denmark having a brand narrative which convinces the consumers that choosing Denmark as their next destination to go to, could be a place they visit with a good conscience.

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8. Conclusion

Drawing on the literature review, it can be concluded that the global landscape of tourism is rapidly developing in addition to technology, consumer behaviour and trends as the global market becomes increasingly competitive and more complex (Klancnik, 2005). This means that tourism stakeholders, both DMOs and other businesses in tourism must stay updated and follow the development to be able adapt to a rapid changing market and the demand of the consumers to stay competitive. In general, the global markets are affected by trends which is also affecting consumer behaviour, hence also the markets affecting tourism movements. Sustainability is a topic which has gotten increasing attention from all sides and has become a crucial topic which all stakeholders must consider in both management and marketing of their brands because it is essential if wanting to maintain commitment from consumers (Nielsen, 2015). Thus, it can be concluded that sustainability has become a megatrend as it is of high importance on a global scale (Crotti & Misrahi, 2017).

As tourism destinations increasingly have become more competitive it is important to work strategically with destination branding (Doyduk & Okan, 2017). In addition, looking at both literature about sustainability in tourism and destination branding in tourism it can be concluded that future consumers will demand sustainable solutions also when travelling.

Both literature and this study illuminate this specific topic as being current and important in relation to both tourism development, but also in terms of branding in tourism. Thus, it is definitive that there is a coherency between what is actually done in terms of sustainable initiatives at the destination and what is branded. Because there are no limits in how the concept of sustainability can be used in marketing there are also risks associated with the concept. One of the most prominent risks from the perspective of the interviewed tourism stakeholders is green washing which for them is a reason to handle the concept with caution in branding activities.

The main findings in this study show that tourism stakeholders in Denmark are aware of sustainability as an important topic and trend which is emerging and increasing in size; hence they consider sustainability in tourism as a megatrend. Especially environmental and social sustainability were emphasised when talking about sustainability in general. Nonetheless, from their perspective sustainability is a highly prominent topic which have not been discussed in tourism in Denmark more than it is now. Not only is it a topic which is globally discussed, but the interviewed tourism stakeholders also view sustainability as an important part of development in Danish tourism. In addition, from their perspective it is important that sustainability should be considered and induced in the branding of Denmark as a tourism destination as this will improve the competitiveness of Denmark as a tourism destination. However, they do acknowledge the challenge in branding something as sustainable as it is a complex topic with several different aspects.

All interviewees are mentioned risks and challenges in branding which could damage a potential sustainable brand. One of the most emphasised issues addressed was green washing and

the risk to be accused of not living up to what is communicated. They stress that the challenges in branding something as sustainable must thoroughly considered when wanting to use it actively in marketing activities. However, at the same time it is stressed that there is a necessity to brand Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination as it is believed to be a strong way to position Denmark as a choice of destination and be competitive. Moreover, they are expecting VisitDenmark to enhance sustainability in branding strategies to brand Denmark.

Denmark is a country which is ranking high in several rapports about how consumers perceive the country as sustainable and how it actually performs in the matter of sustainability which is both in environmental, economic and social sustainability. Furthermore, the interviewees emphasised that Denmark is a county with values which are sustainable. The way Denmark as a country is functioning and the way the tourism stakeholders operate and strategically work with sustainability was argued as foundation for branding the destination as sustainable. However, a perspective which was emphasised was the importance of coherency between the branding activities and how reality actually is.

From the view of the interviewed stakeholders it is expected that VisitDenmark as the national DMO will enhance the brand of Denmark as a sustainable tourism destination to be able to meet the consumers' demand. They see storytelling and enhancement of brand narrative as sustainable as an important and strategic way to embrace this issue, hence that it is an urgent matter to. It can be concluded that the tourism stakeholders in Copenhagen consider the topic of branding Denmark as sustainable is urgent. Thus, that sustainability should be executed by enhancing the brand narrative of the country to be able to stay competitive as a destination in a global market.

9. Reflections

During and after the research which became this master thesis a lot of reflections were made. These are written in this section to illuminate the thoughts and decisions which have been made.

As it has been emphasised in the thesis *sustainability* can be described as a rather complex concept and phrase and have also resulted in some challenges especially with writing the literature review. I have myself become more clearer in the different aspects of sustainability and I have become more critical in using the word. In addition, it became clear that there was not much in literature in relation to using sustainability in branding, especially with the specific focus on sustainability as a holistic concept but more with a focus on environmental sustainability. This turned out to be an obstacle in structuring the literature review, but also an indication for the literature review to illuminate this particular gab by firstly review and elaborate literature within sustainability and then combine it with branding theory and literature. Despite the knowledge this research contributes with in topics within branding of destinations using sustainability it still has some limitations. This study only concentrates on tourism stakeholders in Denmark; hence it is not possible to generalise from the research. However, it is possible to make assumptions and reflections which might be accountable in other, similar destination. Future studies could take a wider perspective and include all tourism stakeholders in Denmark as VisitDenmark in general work with branding of the whole country. However, most of the interviewed hotels are chain businesses which operates in several parts of the country and it was decided to be a valid argument for choosing their perspectives in relation to the whole country. For future research a suggestion would be to expand the research to all tourism stakeholders at a destination. In addition, it might be helpful to make a single study on all hotels and one with tourism attractions are chosen and interviews conducted within these lines. This will give an outcome which are specific and concise in the data in relation to their hotels versus attractions. As only one destination was chosen for this research it limits the generalisability of the findings in relation to other destinations. However, the study still has some findings which can be used in comparison with similar destinations. Furthermore, as sustainability is a general topic which is of high importance globally there are issues and findings in the study which can become of use in other destinations for destinations notwithstanding of size or location.

This study incorporates the tourism stakeholders view on the national DMO in a discussion on branding of a whole country as a destination to provide this study to integrate tourism politics and tourism development of the destination would have provided the study with a more holistic foundation, however in most destinations this would be a large study which would require more resources.

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11. Overview of appendices

11.1. Appendix 1: VisitDenmark's rapport on tourism and sustainability

11.2. Appendix 2: Interview guide for tourism stakeholders

11.3. Appendix 3: Transcripts of interviews