

# **The (Co)construction of West Denmark's Destination Identity**

- an analysis of VisitDenmark's "Undiscovered West Denmark" campaign

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
1.1 Aim of project and research questions.....	3
2. Theoretical Framework.....	4
2.1 Destination Branding and Identity Construction.....	4
2.2 Destination Personality, Self-Concept, and Congruence.....	5
3. Research Method.....	6
3.1 Data collection.....	7
3.1.1 Single case study.....	7
3.1.2 Semi-structured interviews.....	7
3.1.3 Market reports.....	7
3.2 Data analysis.....	8
3.2.1 Discourse analysis.....	8
3.2.2 Steinar Kvale's ad hoc meaning interpretation.....	8
4. The U.S Tourist.....	9
5. Undiscovered West Denmark.....	10
5.1 Discourses of undiscovered and authentic.....	10
5.2 Discourses of uniqueness and high-quality.....	12
5.3 Discourses of adventurous, playful and outdoorsy.....	13
6. Discussion.....	14
7. Conclusion.....	16
8. References.....	17

# 1. Introduction

As tourism is becoming one of the largest industries in the world, tourism destinations are increasingly competing with each other by “advertising their distinct charms; trying to carve out a unique niche that might attract the “golden hordes” (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010). To become the chosen one among many, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are utilizing different branding strategies, which contributes in creating an appealing narrative surrounding the destination, a constructed identity, as stated by Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger: “the narrative of the destination is akin to a constructed identity for that destination” (Ibid., 120). Through the use of branding, DMO’s are: “involved in a symbolic transformation of reality, remaking ordinary places, from New York to Iowa, into extraordinary tourist worlds” (Ibid.). Tourism marketing has, as the modern world has too, changed from being mainly traditional print media to being mainly digital media, and more than ever there’s a need for strong and unique online marketing strategies. One of the platforms used by DMO’s to execute these strategies is their official websites. Explicated by Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, tourism websites do not only inform about a destination, it’s attributes and sights, they also represent and mediate through the means of different discursive strategies and narratives, enabling potential tourists to virtually visit the destination, and get an idea of the destinations’ identity before visiting (Ibid.).

Copenhagen is a very popular destination for U.S. tourists, while the rest of Denmark is still rather unknown (VisitDenmark, 2020; Englund, 2022). The interest in Copenhagen has not managed to spread to the rest of Denmark, which also means, that the economic benefits U.S. tourists bring with them, have been limited to the confinements of the capital. Reflecting on this, the question one may be left with is; how do you go about creating more awareness for the rest of Denmark, and motivate U.S. tourists to venture outside the Copenhagen city lines? Dennis Englund, market manager for VisitDenmark US explains how they want U.S. tourists to stay longer, go further, and dig deeper into the culture of West Denmark (Englund, 2022). In the summer 2021 when I started my internship with VisitDenmark U.S., they were in the early stages of constructing a new campaign aiming to address exactly these matters – it was named “Undiscovered West Denmark”.

## 1.1 Aim of project and research questions

The aim of this project is to identify and examine the constructed destination identity and personality of West Denmark promoted in VisitDenmark’s new U.S. targeted campaign “Undiscovered West Denmark and further discuss congruence between the constructed destination identity and personality of West Denmark and U.S. tourists’ values, interests and travel motivations. To help reach this aim two research questions were formulated:

1. How is West Denmark branded in the campaign’s website materials? Which representations, traits, and values are promoted?
2. What characterizes U.S. tourists, what do they value, find interesting and what motivates them to travel to a particular destination?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Destination Branding and Identity Construction

Within our globalized world, traveling has become easier and more common than ever, and destinations are becoming highly substitutable (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). As a result, competitiveness in the tourism industry has increased. In order to stand out, attract new tourists and maintain the loyalty of former visitors, destinations need to differentiate themselves through creating a unique destination brand, which can be defined as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kasapi & Cela, 2017). In the case of tourism, Campelo et al. (2014) highlights how: “a growing number of studies have theorized that destination brand should portray a distinctive and attractive image highlighting a place’s core competences, identity, and culture” (Ibid.). Blain et al. (2005) however underline the complexity of a destination brand, how it is not merely confined to communicating specific competences and goods, it is also: “conveying the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination” (Ibid.). In order to obtain a unique and attractive brand, destinations need to have both a positive destination image and a strong destination identity. Pike explains how one must “consider a brand as representing an identity for the producer and an image for the consumer” (Pike, 2004, p. 74). A more concrete definition of brand identity i.e. destination identity is given by Wheeler et al. (2011): “brand identity relates to how brand owners want the destination to be perceived, encapsulating the features and beneficial attributes, as well as the symbolic, experiential, social, and emotional values [...]an effective brand identity establishes the destination’s character and value proposition, conveys the character in a distinctive way, and delivers emotional power” (Ibid.). One commonly used, and very important, tool in constructing this identity is branding. DMO’s are increasingly adopting branding strategies as a tool to brand their destinations, create awareness and increase the overall tourism influx to the destination (Upadhyya, 2014) and furthermore: “to craft an identity which emphasises the uniqueness of their product” (Ekinici & Branding, 2003). One way of creating and communicating a destinations’ identity is through online branding, more specifically for DMO’s, through their official websites and social media platforms. Websites and digital platforms have become the most important and used destination marketing tools by DMO’s to carry out branding strategies and mediate the construction of a destination’s identity (George & Anandkumar, 2014; Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010). Especially discourses, which can be understood as “different ‘ways of representing a part of the world from a particular perspective” (de Bernardi, 2019), play an important role in constructing tourism destinations online. Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger (2010) have provided theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence of the major concepts related to discourses in the tourism field. Their book show how online representations are integral to tourism and the tourist industry, as they allow interactions between tourists and destinations to take place long before tourists physically go there (Ibid). They explains how tourism websites uses

discourses to: “write and tell stories that position their nations as destinations and their users as tourists”, they further state how website’s texts: “play a major role in the construction and consumption of tourism locales” (Ibid.). Vuković Vojnović (2020) have, in their study of the use of discourses on tourism websites, described how there are some “key strategic markers that are expected in promotional tourism campaigns” (Ibid.), these commonly include the elements of: “authenticity, cultural and social identity of a destination, novelty experience, and elements of play or adventure, as well as mythical or magical elements” (Ibid.).

## 2.2 Destination Personality, Self-Concept, and Congruence

According to Aaker (1997) consumers often imbue brands with human-like personality traits. Kim & Lehto (2013) further explain: just as people are described in terms of their perceived personalities, brands can also be described in terms of perceived human characteristics, known as brand personality” (Ibid.). As stated by Ekinici & Hosany (2006), brand personality can also be attributed to destinations: “tourism destinations are rich in terms of symbolic values and personality traits” (Ibid.). They express how it is a very effective branding tool used by DMO’s to build strong and unique destination identities, that can differentiate themselves from others, creating competitive advantage (Ibid.). Examples of distinctive brand personalities could for instance be how Paris is considered to be romantic and sophisticated, while South Africa is described as rugged and tough (Kim & Lehto, 2013). The most common instrument in measuring brand personality is Aaker’s (1997) Brand Personality Scale, which consists of five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Even though a strong destination personality can result in an increase in visitors interest in the destination and a more positive attitude towards it (Kim & Lehto, 2013), the personality of a destination is not the only aspect that influences tourist’s choices. Bekk et al. (2016) have explained how: “not only the personality of a destination, but also the personality of the tourists themselves influences their attitudes and travel behavior” (Ibid.) In a marketing context, self-concept can be understood as the way a consumer thinks and feels about themselves, their self-described values (Yang et al., 2020). Self-concept is intertwined with the concept of self-congruity, which explains the correlation between the symbolic value of products and consumer motivation and buying choices: “consumers view their preferred products as an extension of themselves, and therefore their purchasing behavior is motivated by the symbolic value of the product” (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). These concepts are also applicable in the world of tourism, as tourist decisions and visit intentions often are based on whether or not a destination’s identity and image fits well with the lifestyle and desires of potential tourists. The concept of self-congruity could be translated into: “the outcome of a process of matching a tourist’s self-concept to their image of the destination” (Murphy et al., 2007). Murphy et al. explain: “the greater the match between the image a tourist has of a destination, and their self-concept, the more likely it is that the tourist will have a favorable attitude toward that destination resulting in a visit” (Ibid.). In a study aiming to create a theoretical framework for the concept of destination personality and self-concept, Yang et al. (2020), discuss previous studies on the field. Their findings indicated that tourists often will have higher intentions to visit a destination if the destination personality

is congruent with their own personality: “better congruence between self-concept and perceived destination personality may lead to higher probability for the destination to be revisited and recommended” (Ibid.).

In bringing this chapter to a close, it's important to acknowledge that unlike most product brands, a destination brand cannot be manufactured in the same way. Destinations are already established “products”, defined by their culture, identity, history, citizens, environments, and values, thus, the branding strategies carried out by DMOs are only one part of a whole. Likewise, the perceived image tourists have of a destination can be influenced and changed by many factors. One single organization cannot control the overall image of a destination, as other influences e.g. political, societal or crisis situations have strong impact as well (Kasapi & Cela, 2017). A destinations personality can be conveyed through branding strategies, however DMO's cannot control how tourists will perceived them: “consumers may interpret the destination's communicated messages through the prism of their own perceptions and thus may respond differently to a brand message than was intended” (Kim & Lehto, 2013).

### **3. Research Method**

This study is exploratory, as it is: “investigating a problem that has not been studied or thoroughly investigated in the past” (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018) i.e. VisitDenmark's new campaign “Undiscovered West Denmark”. It seeks to explore and discuss the complex subject with the aim of gaining more knowledge about a current phenomenon (Ibid.). It will moreover take a constructivist approach, as it is conducted almost exclusively through qualitative research methods, where reality is interpreted through a sense making process (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). As I have been deeply involved in the analysis and interpretation of the collected empirical data, this study also take a subjectivist epistemological position, in accordance with the constructivist approach (Ibid.). In line with the constructivist research approach and the use of qualitative methods, the hermeneutic spiral have been implemented, where the researcher is a part of the research process (Butler, 1998) to reach a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. It supports how subjective interpretations can be used to gain in-depth knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), through revisiting data and theory consistently. As the aim of this study is to examine and discuss how a DMO has constructed a destination's identity and personality through textual data, observation and interpretation of social constructs took place, which emphasize the usefulness of this research approach. As stated by Butler (1998): “social action and situations can also be understood and read as texts; hence, hermeneutic philosophy and theory may be employed in the social sciences to examine, describe and understand social phenomena”. These approaches are based on the believe that there is multiple nature of reality, no one or absolute truth can be found. The interpretations in this research should thus be perceived as one of several truths, based on the researchers own meaning making of reality, where her own beliefs and background have an influence on the research findings (Bryman, 2015; Goulding, 1999).

## 3.1 Data collection

### 3.1.1 *Single case study*

This project draws on a single case study of the DMO VisitDenmark, more specifically their new U.S. targeted campaign “Undiscovered West Denmark”. The prime role of the US department of VisitDenmark is to promote and communicate Denmark to U.S. tourists. A case study approach was considered appropriate for this research as it wish to: “fulfill case/place-specific purposes in terms of a study’s stated objectives or research questions, which are directly related to a site, organization, or locality under scrutiny” (Mills et al., 2010). Bryman (2016) describes how case studies are particularly relevant when it comes to exploring and gaining an in-depth knowledge on a specific real-world case, as this campaign arguably is. The campaign launched in November 2021, with the goal of getting more U.S. tourists to visit WD. Secondary data was collected from textual materials located on VisitDenmark’s official website created specifically for the “Undiscovered West Denmark” campaign, as well as from four website articles that launched on KLM’s website (KLM Passport, n.d.-c, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-d), who were partnering in campaign. The KLM articles are written by VisitDenmark, and thus, like the landing page, they are an expression of how WD is being branded by VisitDenmark. The websites were selected since they all give insights into how VisitDenmark are constructing a destination identity and personality for WD as a tourist destination for U.S. tourists. VisitDenmark’s landing page for the campaign is located on their Travel Trade page, but it is also the site consumers are being redirected to, when searching for West Denmark on the main consumer site. The chosen sections examined were the front page (VisitDenmark, n.d.-e), as well as as the four subsections “The active & outdoor wonders of West Denmark” (VisitDenmark, n.d.-a), “The foodie wonders of West Denmark” (VisitDenmark, n.d.-c), “The family wonders of West Denmark” (VisitDenmark, n.d.-b), “The wonders of West Denmark” (VisitDenmark, n.d.-d).

### 3.1.2 *Semi-structured interviews*

In order to gain more in-depth knowledge on the U.S. tourists and on the branding of WD primary data was collected through the conduct of two semi-structured interviews with experts in the field. The market manager for VisitDenmark’s US market Dennis Englund, and the marketing manager for VisitDenmark’s US market, Helena Rudolph were interviewed. Qualitative interviews were chosen as a method, as you can gain a lot of information from relatively few participant, and further get personal and expert-knowledge on a subject. The interviews were performed based on Kvale’s 7 stages for conducting interviews (Kvale, 2007). Both interviews were conducted in English through Microsoft Teams, and recorded with the knowledge and accept of both interviewees. The recordings will be deleted, once the project is handed in. The transcribed interviews can be found in the appendixes.

### 3.1.3 *Market reports*

To provide key factors and statistics about U.S. tourists in Denmark, and further to characterize U.S. tourists, their interests, values and motivations, VisitDenmark’s US

market report from 2020 (VisitDenmark, 2020) two reports from Expedia Group about U.S. tourists and travel trends for 2022 (Expedia Group, 2017, 2021) and one report from NIT (New Insights for Tourism) (NIT & Sonntag, 2020) was examined. To clarify, The NIT report “insights on the US tourism market for the Nordic destinations” is based on available data from 50 different reports, from the eight Nordic destinations. The overall data gathered from the market reports will be examined in order to present the most relevant knowledge gained from it in the chapter “the U.S. tourist”, to be further used in the Discussion chapter.

## 3.2 Data analysis

### 3.2.1 *Discourse analysis*

Discourse analysis is a qualitative method used for analyzing textual data, to understand the deeper and hidden meanings of a text, beyond specific words and sentences: “in utilizing a discourse analysis, a more nuanced reading of textual data will develop” (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010). Discourses can be defined as “socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of) reality developed in specific social contexts, and in ways which are appropriate to the interests of social actors in these contexts” (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010). As this analysis wish to investigate how VisitDenmark has constructed and portrayed WD’s destination identity and personality though website materials, it was considered highly applicable: “the discourse of tourism makes an especially valid source for the analysis of identity construction of both destinations and those whom they attempt to attract” (Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005). Discourse analysis on websites has also been conducted by tourism researcher to a large degree, e.g. (Krisjanous, 2016; Nekic, 2015; Pennington-Gray et al., 2011; Poonia & Chauhan, 2015; Sukma, 2021; Vuković Vojnović, 2020). Discourses can be studied from a range of methodological perspectives, the most narrow of them being a linguistic/textual view which will be the strategy employed in this analysis. When conducting a discourse analysis, real life, both social and cultural, context play an important role, as the textual data is not viewed as neutral elements of communication (Prichard & Morgan, 2000). The researcher will draw on Pritchard & Morgan’s (2000) strategy for discourse analysis, where data is coded inductively to identify commonalities, followed by a categorization based on key discursive themes and patters of emphasis (Ibid.). This resulted in seven representational discursive themes, which were later grouped into three major categories.

### 3.2.2 *Steinar Kvale’s ad hoc meaning interpretation*

In order to gain relevant knowledge from the two semi-structured interviews, Steinar Kvale’s meaning interpretation approach presented in his book “Doing Interviews” (Kvale, 2007) is applied. As described by Kvale: “The interpretation of the meaning of interview texts goes beyond a structuring of the manifest meanings of what is said to deeper and more critical interpretations of the text [...] the interpreter goes beyond what is directly said to work out structures and relations of meaning not immediately apparent in a text” (Kvale, 2011, p. 8). The interviews were analyzed with the intent of highlighting the most relevant quotes and words stated, and locate the themes behind them, also with a strong focus on the context they are in, which means reading between the lines. The findings will be used



in the analysis chapters, “The U.S. Tourist” and “Undiscovered West Denmark”, as well as in the discussion chapter.

## 4. The U.S Tourist

USA is with its 329 million people, the third most populated country in the world (NIT & Sonntag, 2020). In the last decade, there has been a solid growth of outbound travel from US to Europe, since 2021 the numbers have almost doubled (NIT & Sonntag, 2020). Each year Americans take “100 million international trips in total, 19 million lead to Europe” (Ibid). This makes Europe the second most visited destination after Mexico, while the “the Nordics together account for 11% of all US trips to Europe” (Ibid.). Denmark have seen a major increase of U.S. tourists in the last decade (VisitDenmark, 2020), and they are now the biggest overseas tourists group in Denmark and the fourth biggest of all markets traveling to Denmark (Ibid.). For the 11<sup>th</sup> year in a row, Denmark has seen an increase in bed-nights from American tourists. Since 2008, there has been a yearly average increase of 8,3 percent. VisitDenmark’s report also reveal that the target group are mostly Americans who travels as couples, either partners or friends or a group of friends, which Helena also point out in the interview: “they’re usually couples or friends” (Rudolph, 2022). Big city destinations are most popular, and Americans will often stay at a Hotel or Airbnb. Their income and education level are medium to high: “The people who who travel to the, the U.S. segment who travel to Europe first of all, are people who are already fairly well-off, fairly educated” (Ibid.).

Copenhagen is the most popular destination for U.S. tourists, with 734.485 bed-nights in 2019, an increase of 6,5 percent from 2018 (VisitDenmark, 2020) The coast and nature areas of Denmark has seen a 7,7 percent increase from 2018 to 2019. Looking at WD combined, the area had 87.400 American bed-nights in 2019. The Aarhus region was the second most popular destination for American tourists in 2019, following Copenhagen (Ibid.). From 2018 to 2019 the region saw an increase of American bed-nights of 17,8 percent. Despite a small growing interest in other areas of Denmark, there is still not much awareness about WD. According to the NIT report, it is still a challenge to attract U.S. tourists to other places than Copenhagen (NIT & Sonntag, 2020). Helena touched upon this in the interview, and described how one of the main goals of the “Undiscovered West Denmark” campaign was “trying to make them [Americans] aware of the fact that Denmark is not just Copenhagen”, while Dennis explained how: “the trick is to have them stay longer and see, uh, other parts of Denmark” (Englund, 2022).

The Expedia Group report showcased that “visiting family” vacations is the most popular vacations for Americans at 55 percent, “relaxing” vacations followed at 52 percent, and “sight-seeing” vacations at 45 percent. The most popular vacation booked online for North Americans were “family play” (Expedia Group, 2017). The need for more relaxing vacations is also supported by the most recent report from Expedia, their 2022 travel trends report, which revealed that more than a third, exactly 36 percent of U.S. travelers are searching for a sense of contentment and mental wellbeing on their next vacation (Expedia Group, 2021). Looking more specifically on U.S. tourists traveling to Europe, the

NIT revealed U.S. tourists top interests when visiting Europe, that came to the following conclusion: “First of all classic sightseeing etc., but more and more like to immerse deeper into the life at the destination. Curiosity and genuine interest in the culture and nature seems to be a big driver of why to visit Europe. There seems to be a good time to mix the main sights with interesting experiences off the beaten track” (NIT & Sonntag, 2020). In particular for Northern European destinations, the report revealed that U.S. tourists are very interested in guided tours, fine dining, heritage and national parks and activities that combine nature and culture, city and country with a genuine interest to immerse into local lifestyle and food (Ibid.). In the interview, Helena also mentions several times, that the U.S. tourists who travels to Denmark are quite sophisticated, while they highlights how U.S. tourists: “look for quality experiences” (Englund, 2022); “[they] value the level of high quality” (Rudolph, 2022). The report from VisitDenmark showed that U.S. tourists are looking for local and unique experiences, local atmosphere and Danish culture. All in all, they want to have a more authentic experience of Denmark, understanding the culture and meeting locals, more so, than checking of a list of top ten tourists attractions (VisitDenmark, 2020). This is also supported in the interview with Helena, as she describes how when U.S. tourists cross the Atlantic, it’s because they want to see something different, that these travelers are sophisticated travelers that wishes to “get to know the culture and understand the culture [...] the people who visit us are avid travelers, so they’ve already they’ve done a lot of research as to what kind of country it is” (Ibid.). Two of the words often used to describe Denmark as a destination is “hygge” and “life-quality”. American tourists perceive Denmark as being strong in design, gastronomy, architecture and with an interesting history.

## 5. Undiscovered West Denmark

### 5.1 Discourses of undiscovered and authentic

One significant pattern that emerged from the analysis of the campaign was the strong emphasis on “undiscovered”. That word is the only word used to describe WD in the name of the campaign, and thus it is considered to be a well-thought out key-word chosen by VisitDenmark in constructing WD’s identity, which was also highlighted by Helena in the interview: “we use the word undiscovered. that is the key” (Rudolph, 2022). Discourses surrounding these concepts were identified through sentences such as: “*West Denmark is one of Europe’s lesser visited places - and you could discover it on a trip via Amsterdam*”, “*one of Scandinavia’s undiscovered regions*”, “*a little off the tourist map*”, “*hidden treasures lie buried in the dunes*”, “*somewhere to the west of Copenhagen lies an unexplored area called West Denmark*”. With these linguistic choices, VisitDenmark position WD as a destination in complete contrast to what most U.S. tourists undoubtedly think of, when they think of Denmark, which is the buzzing and well-visited capital Copenhagen. According to Vuković Vojnović (2020): “specific semiotic codes and symbols attract certain tourists to precise places for a particular experience. One of the powerful semiotic operators within the tourism sector is the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity”. These semiotic codes can be found in how WD is being promoted as a

destination where few have been before, where tourists can come to get away from the crowds, and uncover the “hidden treasures”. VisitDenmark is drawing notions to the concept of authenticity, as a destination that is unexplored and undiscovered often symbolizes these values, it will most likely be more true to its origins, more genuine, as it has not been changed by tourist demands to the same extent as more touristy and “discovered” destinations. This was touched upon by Helena as well, as she explained how WD is being promoted: “this is not mainstream [...] This is the undiscovered, mysterious part, which in the word undiscovered is also authentic. This is not touristy.” (Rudolph, 2022). These descriptions may yield positive associations and attract tourists to the destination, as several studies have revealed how tourists pursue destinations that are unique, genuine and authentic (e.g. de Bernardi, 2019; Feighery, 2006; Sukma, 2021).

The language used in the materials also create a discourse that is positioning WD as an intriguing place, with mysterious attractions and unexpected stories: “*Denmark is known as the Land of Everyday Wonder, and you’ll find out why on a visit to West Denmark*”, “*walk around a circular bridge that leads nowhere*”, “*Denmark is also the land of the trolls, and if you’re looking for something a bit offbeat, following the troll trail to find them*”, “*discover [...] rainbows you can walk in*”, “*Don’t miss the lighthouse Rubjerg Knude [...] it was on the edge of a cliff, under threat of erosion until a couple of years ago when it was moved inland by rollerskate*”. These quotes pique curiosity and interest in the destination, as tourists must visit in order to “*find out why*” it is the Land of Everyday Wonder, and uncover the meanings behind the attractions. By using this language, VisitDenmark are trying to create a narrative around WD, prescribing the destination with authentic and mysterious features. These persuasive discursive elements are also described as some of the key strategic markers (Vuković Vojnović, 2020) to be expected in promotional tourist campaigns: “one last group of important markers which are characteristic of the language of tourism are elements that denote magic, myth, mystery or fantasy. Intriguing and unusual stories that lie behind some tourist attractions are there to create a veil of mystery and leave the rest to the visitors’ imagination”. The slogan “*Undiscovered West Denmark*”, creates this discourse of magic, mystery and of *luring tourists to discover the unknown*.

As previously mentioned, authenticity plays a central role in constructing WD’s destination identity. Vuković Vojnović (2020), believes that language that entails and connotes to adjectives such as original, real, true and authentic, are used by tourism websites to create a powerful image of the destination. The data reveal how VisitDenmark are creating a discourse of authenticity through language highlighting the destination’s history, traditions, culture and food. The websites include sentences such as “*Scandinavia’s oldest town has its roots going back beyond the Vikings*”; “*did you know that Legos come from Denmark?*”; “*Denmark’s oldest national park*”; “*at historic Gram Castle you can uncover the traditional Danish cake table experience*”; “*There’s a tradition in the south*”; “*a big part of the gastronomy scene in Denmark revolves around local and organic ingredients*”. The language used by VisitDenmark, is presenting WD as a destination that is locally rooted and centered around traditions.

## 5.2 Discourses of uniqueness and high-quality

The language used by VisitDenmark in the campaign emphasizes WD as a place with a lot of high-quality and unique experiences and products. Helena and Dennis both emphasized how: “we are a country with a lot of quality” (Rudolph, 2022); “we believe we have so much quality in other parts of Denmark (Englund, 2022). A construction from the campaign materials: *“add the extra to the ordinary”* encapsulates very well the overall identity VisitDenmark is trying to construct for WD, and how it is linked to the overall brand of Denmark i.e. “The Land of Everyday Wonder”. One does not need to see the Eiffel tower to experience wonder: “the Land of Everyday Wonder is a brilliant positioning for us, because it's not the Eiffel tower, but it's all the small things that make the whole [...] we don't have these major uh landmarks, we have a really long story and a really strong culture and a really popular way of uh doing things” (Rudolph, 2022), also supported by Dennis: “you experience what we call our everyday wonders, which is part of our everyday life. So whether that's swimming in the harbor or just living in outdoor cafes or-- you know, having time to enjoy life and to, uh, wind down. Um, and you experience that and you become part of that when you visit Denmark” (Englund, 2022). This element is one of the main discourses running through the “Undiscovered West Denmark” campaign, however there's added a stronger focus on uniqueness and exclusivity. A notable way, VisitDenmark have employed discourses of uniqueness is the representation of one of Denmark's personality traits – happiness: *“Herring is also a delicacy [in West Denmark] - packed with vitamin D, it might be one of the reasons why Denmark is one of the happiest countries in the world”*. The language is used to communicate to potential tourists, that *one of the reasons* behind Danes' happiness may also be found in WD. This can drive tourists to visit, as they too want experience more happiness. Dennis talks about how U.S. tourists buy into the Danish lifestyle: “These people would have seen that we always come top 3 of the happiest peop-- happiest nations in the world and, uh, and, uh, they, they buy into the things that we are about [...] they want to experience our lifestyle.” (Englund, 2022).

The analysis revealed that descriptive sentences and descriptive verbs surrounding especially food were used to create the discourses of high-quality and uniqueness: *“international beer brand Carlsberg”*; *“Danish bakeries are world-renowned”*; *“special cake table”*; *“Denmark has a strong international record in fine dining”*; *“one of the best restaurants in the world”*. The words used such as *special*, *world-renowned*, *gourmet*, *international* and *record* put across a strong sense of exclusivity, marking WD as a place with such unique high-quality products, that it has reached interest outside of Denmark. The language used exemplifies yet another of Vuković Vojnović's (2020) strategic markers expected in promotional tourist campaigns: *“another distinctive quality found in the language of tourism is the idea of novelty, which has been known as one of the basic drivers of tourist movement [...] Destination descriptions in promotional brochures or multimedia aim to portray the image of something that is unique, strange, and extraordinary. This heightens the curiosity level of tourists prior to their arrival and raises their expectation”* (Ibid.). VisitDenmark are positioning WD, as a destination that offers many prominent gastro experiences, especially the strong connection between fine dining and West Denmark is promoted: *“Svinkløv Badehotel is one of Denmark's most renowned*

*foodie destinations [...] home to Kenneth Hansen, winner of the Bocuse d'Or in 2019*"; *"if you're ready to splurge, visit Michelin-starred restaurant Domestic, Hærværk or Frederikshøj in Aarhus*"; *"Aarhus is a particular hotspot for Michelin-starred dining in West Denmark, with three top restaurants to choose from"*. VisitDenmark have most likely promoted this aspect, as this is one of Denmark's, and WD's strong assets, which was also highlighted several times in the interviews e.g.: *"we do have an edge there [...] being kickass at gastro"* (Rudolph, 2022) and *"what are the experiences that, uh, you can have in western Denmark that would appeal to Americans. Um, and it's obviously a lot about gastronomy"* (Englund, 2022). That Denmark is strong in the gastro department is something that U.S. tourist may already be familiar with, as the world's best restaurant noma, is quite famous in the U.S. too. VisitDenmark is building on this knowledge, and trying to communicate, that WD also possesses these gourmet experiences, positioning WD with a glamorous and upper-class identity.

### 5.3 Discourses of adventurous, playful and outdoorsy

This final major discourses found through the analysis of the campaign is exemplified through language that portray WD as having an adventurous, outdoorsy, and playful identity. The first element of adventurous can be seen communicated through several different activities: *"Silkeborg, the mountain bike capital of Denmark"*; *"a kind of playground for MTB"*; *"Denmark's first national park [...] is the setting for adventure"*; *"Denmark does have their own versions of wildlife wonders to look for – including seal, eagle and wolf and whale safaris"*; *"Older kids will be up for the challenge of bridge walking at almost 200 feet above the ocean"*. The language in the campaign also created a discourse that promote WD's beauty and wild nature through landscape and nature descriptions. Traits and words that were promoted the most were *long, wide, empty, soft or white* sandy beaches or dunes, and *wild, windy, high or brisk* waves or winds as well as clear, *cold or blue* seas and waves. These key-words are constructing WD as a place that has a wild and windy scenery that appears a bit rough and untamed. This type of language was also used by Dennis and Helena in describing WD's identity: *"We have nature right outside the door and all sorts types of nature"* (Rudolph, 2022); *"there's something about the, uh, western seaside, for instance, that you only get there"* (Englund, 2022). This discourse is closely related to the next discourse, outdoorsy, as most of the adventurous activities in WD take place outdoors, as also emphasized in the campaign *"there's plenty to see on an outdoor adventure"*. VisitDenmark uses language to build an understanding of the Danish concept "friluftsliv": *"it's an expression of our love for getting active in Danish nature"*; *"friluftsliv-list: awesome activities you can do in the fresh air, embracing nature and the outdoorsy"*. And further promote some of the more unfamiliar activities to be had in WD: *"walk in a danish desert"*; *"surf at Cold Hawaii, the country's most developed surf spot"*. VisitDenmark's implementation of these type of discourses is strategically smart, as it highlights some of the destinations best features while also communicating some of it's cultural values. In order to construct an attractive destination identity for WD VisitDenmark have used language to achieve specific effects i.e. creating an intriguing narrative, where tourists are persuaded to come be adventurous themselves through the activities WD offer. According to Vuković Vojnović (2020) these discourses are also one of the distinctive elements used

in the language of tourism: *“the elements of play, adventure and total relaxation are extremely important in tourism. This dimension is often presented through various forms of animations and activities, which provide tourists with the opportunity to actively participate in the events or entertainment”*(Ibid.). The dimension of play is also promoted through the campaign materials, e.g. Ribe Viking Center is highlighted as a place that is “fun for all the family”, and further WD is presented as a place where you can find: “museum-mecca for LEGO enthusiast” and “world-beating playdates”.

## 6. Discussion

The analysis revealed how WD’s destination identity was described with personality attributes such as happy, simple, local, authentic, informal, which fit well with Aaker’s dimension “sincerity”, that is represented by destination attributes such as domestic, down-to-earth, honest, cheerful, sincere and real as well as traits such as small-town and friendly (Aaker, 1997), which all were elements found in the campaign materials. The U.S. Tourist analysis showed that they like to immerse deep into the life at a destination, the local lifestyle, atmosphere and culture as also revealed in Expedia’s 2022 travel trends report, that showed how U.S. tourists desire to fully experience a destinations culture and go where the locals go. Furthermore, the analysis revealed how U.S. tourists want to have authentic, real and different experiences, go of the beaten path as also supported in Expedia’s report, which states that U.S. tourists are: seeking out off-the-beaten-track experiences and destinations (23 percent)” (Expedia Group, 2021) which aligns well with the constructed destination image of WD portrayed in the campaign materials. This finding is a fitting example of self-congruity, how VisitDenmark’s branding process of WD’s destination identity aligns well with U.S. tourists interests and values, and further supports how traveling to WD could strengthen visitors self-concept. As previously explained consumers tend to prefer brands, in this case destinations, that can adhere to how they see or would like to see themselves, they want to satisfy and enhance their self-consistency and self-esteem through this, projecting the destination’s personality traits onto themselves in order to achieve an ideal personality and image (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). Through the constructed destination identity, VisitDenmark are giving U.S. tourist the possibility to “go to different places and see something other people don’t” (Rudolph, 2022), and have “a more authentic experience of Denmark” (VisitDenmark, 2020), which in turn help create an identity for the tourists as being someone who, themselves, is authentic, real, as emphasized by Helena in the interview, where she describes how WD can be a contributor in tourist’s identity construction: “That’s the part where you can go home and say, I went somewhere where people don’t usually go, where I got, you know-- where the happiest people in the world live, and it was very calm [...] We need to be able to identify with them, you know, go on Instagram and say that, they’re creating their own brand based on where they go” (Rudolph, 2022). The aspect of using Instagram was also represented in the campaign materials, where the infinity bridge in Aarhus was narrated as: “it’s definitely one for instagram”. The destination is hence, through Instagram, used as a medium for promoting self-image.

WD's destination values and personality traits were discussed subject in the interviews as well as both Helena and Dennis described the congruence between them and U.S. tourists own values. Helena expressed how she believed U.S. tourist could mirror themselves in the Danish way of life: "I think the people who choose these types of destinations are people who [...] value the level of high quality (Rudolph, 2022). She too described Denmark's general life style, related to the everyday wonders brand, that communicate how tourists should find wonders in "everyday" situations and be inspired from the Danes lifestyle: its "this like way of life, which is very attractive to Americans [...] It is the way it is, because of our eh of our values. So that's definitely one thing that attracts them [...] they are very aware of the fact that we have hygge, that we are the happiest people and of course, they're curious as to what lies behind this" (Ibid.). This way of branding WD supports the notion of how consumers tend to prefer products or brands that can adhere to how they see or would like to see themselves (Yang et al., 2020). It also allures tourists to visit due to how: "you become part of it when you visit Denmark [...] it is the way we've organized ourselves in everything we do and you get that experience when you visit" (Englund, 2022). Murphy et al. (2007) explain how "travel and tourism marketers need to focus on and confirm more of what the customer would like to see in and of themselves and their lifestyles, rather than on the tangible properties of the product or service being promoted", which is something VisitDenmark are aware of: "they want to have a more authentic experience of Denmark, understanding the culture and meeting locals, more so, than checking of a list of top ten tourists attractions (VisitDenmark, 2020); "they want to understand and they want to experience our lifestyle" (Englund, 2022). Expedia's report revealed that more than a third, exactly 36 percent of U.S. travelers are searching for a sense of contentment and mental wellbeing on their next vacation (Expedia Group, 2021) and further how "travel in 2022 will be about quality, not quantity, with travelers embracing the simple pleasures" (Ibid.). WD's identity, attributes and values thus seem to correlate well with U.S. tourists values and travel motivations.

The discourses employed and the values promoted in the construction of WD's identity also connects well to Aaker's personality dimension of "sophistication", that is characterized by attributes such as upper-class and personality traits such as glamorous, romantic, and good-looking (Aaker, 1997). U.S. tourists are also particularly interested in quality: "[they] value the level of high quality" (Rudolph, 2022). These values and personalities thus seems to match well: "the U.S. segment who travel to Europe first of all, are people who are already fairly well-off" (Ibid.) and "they look for quality experiences and they understand that they can get that in Denmark (Englund, 2022). This congruence may very likely have a positive outcome in term of U.S. tourists choosing WD as: "tourists often will have higher intentions to visit a destination if the destination personality is congruent with their own personality" (Yang et al., 2020). The discourse analysis further revealed that WD's constructed identity entailed personality attributes such as extraordinary, mysterious, unique, novel, exclusive, adventurous, wild and outdoorsy, which connects well with Aaker's dimensions of "excitement" and "ruggedness". Excitement is represented by destination attributes such as daring, imaginative, spirited, and personality traits such as unique, exciting, and contemporary, while Ruggedness is represented through the attributes: outdoorsy and tough, and the traits: western and rugged (Aaker, 1997). There

seems to be a congruence between the projected identity and personality of WD and U.S. tourists values and motivations for traveling, as: “In particular for Northern European destinations, the report revealed that U.S. tourists are very interested in [...] heritage and national parks and activities that combine nature and culture, city and country with a genuine interest to immerse into local lifestyle and food (Ibid.). All areas that have been highly promoted in the campaign for WD.

## 7. Conclusion

From the examination of VisitDenmark’s new U.S. targeted campaign “Undiscovered West Denmark” it can be argued that VisitDenmark has constructed an identity for WD, that portrays it as a unique, real, high-quality, authentic, mysterious, outdoorsy and adventurous destination. It further revealed how WD’s destination identity was described with personality attributes such as happy, simple, unknown, glamorous, balanced and casual. VisitDenmark especially uses language discourses surrounding uniqueness and authenticity to highlight the destination’s history, traditions, culture, and particularly positioning WD as a destination that offers many prominent gastro experiences. There was a strong focus of portraying West Denmark as a real, and down-to-earth destination, a bit secluded, with a lot of local experiences. Traits such as wild, rough and beautiful were also personified through the promotion of especially nature experiences. The language used by VisitDenmark in the campaign emphasizes WD as a place with a lot of high-quality experiences and products, promoting personality traits such as extra-ordinary and luxurious. It can be argued that several congruencies exist between the constructed destination identity and personality of West Denmark and U.S. tourists’ values, interests and travel motivations. This may also be supported based on the fact, that the campaign so far has performed very well: “in terms of, sort of, the marketing performance and what we wanted with the communication, that seemed to have worked quite well” (Englund, 2022); “overall, its, its performed really well. it has generated bookings, which is great (Rudolph, 2022).



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