



EDUCATIONAL TOURISM AS A RESOURCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

A study case on Aalborg, Denmark

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Abstract

Background: Sustainability is one of the main concerns that affects all working industries around the world and that impacted the current principles and instruments of carrying out the businesses (Ali & Frew, 2014). In an attempt to have an understanding of how it can be applied to the destination development of Aalborg, a focus has been put over the implementation of public-private partnership between the local universities and the local Municipality.

With this idea in mind, the concept of international educational tourism has been introduced, and thoroughly explained during Literature Review, alongside the concepts of Sustainable Destination Development and Public-Private Partnerships. As a methodological tool, the Grounded Theory has been chosen due to its open approach, possibility of constructing the reality through investigation of the qualitative and quantitative data collected.

Objective: This master thesis aims to explore the impact of international educational tourism over the sustainable destination development of Aalborg, while carefully analyzing the possibilities of building a sustainable public-private partnership between Aalborg University and Aalborg Kommune.

Result: The results have been distributed between both international students living in Aalborg and official representatives from the university and the Municipality. For the data analysis, the Coding method and the Constant Comparative Analysis were used, in order to assess and monitor the construction of hypothesis. The results concluded three possible theories for sustainable advantage: professional job market within the Green Energy environment, study trips as tourism awareness, and the attraction of more tourist (particularly acquaintances of the international students living here already).

Discussion: The discussion has highlighted the generation of a solid theory that can answer the problem formulation. Thus, support from the local Municipality for the international students in Aalborg, in their search for job opportunities within the Engineering industries, has the potential to represent still a constant sustainable resource for Aalborg.

Conclusion: A public-private partnership between Aalborg University and Aalborg Kommune can generate the workforce needed within the Engineering field and support the international students in Denmark.

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1. Introduction

Starting in 2015, the United Nations General Assembly has adopted the agenda for 2030, focusing on Sustainable Development, which has led to the creation and implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (World Tourism Organization , 2022)



Figure 1. Representation of the Sustainable Development Goals, retrieved from WTO, 2022

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aims to set a global framework for combating poverty, inequality, and injustice among all classes and races of people; alongside achieving their primary goal: fighting the effects of climate change on our planet (World Tourism Organization , 2022)

The tourism industry is also included in the agenda, with a particular focus on sustainable tourism initiatives, and can potentially impact all 17 goals, either directly or through affiliate projects. However, it has mainly targeted goals 8, 12, and 14 (World Tourism Organization , 2022). Considering that in the 2000s, the idea of partnerships within the tourism sector rapidly increased (World Tourism Organization , 2015) these partnerships were directly linked to SDG 17, which focuses on “partnerships for the goals.”

This link is particularly relevant due to the cross-sectional nature of tourism within both public and private sectors, which tends to connect stakeholders from different markets, focusing on their differences between visions, skills, and goals, and shifting their efforts toward the improvement of destinations and their market competitiveness (World Tourism Organization , 2015)

The World Tourism Organization refers to these types of partnerships as PPPs and has been a focus of their publications since the 1990s, with a remarkable awareness starting in the 2000s.

Their main goal was to prove how beneficial PPPs are for the tourism industry and how they impact the institutional strengthening and sustainability development of the region (World Tourism Organization , 2015)

Still, within the same agenda of the World Tourism Organization, the Affiliate Members Programme has been initiated, bringing together over 500 private and public enterprises, and offering them a space to share and engage in dialogue regarding sustainable development within their focus. According to Yolanda Perdomo, the director of the Affiliate Members Programme, one of the main objectives is tourism development through private-public partnerships, with a focus on innovation and sustainability (World Tourism Organization , 2015)

Universities as resources for Public-Private Partnerships

Based on the research done by the World Tourism Organization in 2015, the implication of university projects within public-private partnerships has been seen as a propelling force for the sustainable development of students in finding career opportunities within the area (World Tourism Organization , 2015). Moreover, because universities are mandated to work together with public institutions from the exact location or region, tourism development opportunities are more accessible to attain due to the possibility of providing experts within the industry from their researchers and young professionals graduating from the said universities (World Tourism Organization , 2015).

For example, Slovakia has seen one case of PPPs directly connected to universities. More specifically, the “Association Tokaj” Wine Route was founded 14 years ago, in 2008, in the city of Košice (Urs, 2015). It is a collaboration between The Regional Development Association and the Institute of Tourism at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Hochschule Luzern) in Switzerland. It currently has 25 partners from both the public and private sectors of Slovakia (World Tourism Organization , 2015); (Urs, 2015). The main issues found in the region upon the beginning of the partnership were the generally poor economic situation, which affected the quality of the services at the destination, the low levels of education, and the underdeveloped information centres for visitors (World Tourism Organization , 2015). The collaboration aimed to enhance the cooperation between all stakeholders involved in the gastronomic tourism niche, with the focus on wine, and the economic development of the destination (World Tourism Organization , 2015); (Urs, 2015)

Peru is also one entity that has encountered the benefits of PPPs in connection with universities. The tourism development in the province of Arequipa has exponentially increased due to the partnership between San Ignacio de Loyola University, the Local Municipality Tourism Office, and local stakeholders (Cueva & Guerra, 2015). They have implemented projects to attract investments to improve the infrastructure and the quality-of-service standards within their tourism sector (World Tourism Organization , 2015). For this, they have received technical assistance from experts in tourism education that have graduated from the university and applied it to sustainable development and destination management of the province (Cueva & Guerra, 2015) (World Tourism Organization , 2015)

Green Hub Denmark

On that note, one public-private partnership of grand scale in Denmark is the Green Hub Denmark, with its headquarters in Aalborg, North Jutland. Their primary focus is on sustainable innovation development and large-scale testing aimed at climate change solutions (Green Hub Denmark, n.d.). The decision for the creation of this PPP was impacted by the Danish Government's 2030 goal of reducing CO2 emissions by 70% through investments and "green jobs" (Green Hub Denmark, n.d.)

Their vision revolves around being a collaborative platform for sustainable businesses that seek "solutions for a climate-neutral society" (Green Hub Denmark, n.d.). Their mission is mainly focused on sustainable framework development and collaboration strengthening to make a green transition to innovation, as stated on their website, Green Hub Denmark. Amongst their partners, there can be found institutions such as DI Aalborg, Erhverv Norddankmark, City of Aalborg, Port of Aalborg, and one of the biggest educational clusters, Aalborg University (Green Hub Denmark, n.d.)

As their mission is to enhance the sustainable development of Aalborg and the northern region of Denmark, the focus is centred around the application of sustainable technologies and the green, ecological industry development in Aalborg. This is emphasized even more in their statement that the ultimate goal of the PPP is to characterize Aalborg and North Denmark as "the Silicon Valley of green innovation" (Green Hub Denmark, n.d.)

Nevertheless, adding the fact that the Aalborg Campus from Aalborg University is located in the same area of interest as the Green Hub Denmark, the window of opportunity that the students at the University could bring to their mission can be noticed.

1.1. Problem Formulation

Although Aalborg is a rather important educational city in Denmark, having Aalborg University and the local university, University College of Northern Denmark, the involvement of the international students in the sustainability of local development has not been very high (ICEF, 2018)

In 2017, Denmark saw an increase in the number of international students arriving, welcoming over 34.030 students from abroad. An increase of 42% since 2013, when the number was around 23,950 (ICEF, 2018). Although, this number has been drastically reduced due to the SARS COVID-19 influence and it has soon to be affected by other factors.

According to a publication from 2018, a study conducted by the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science revealed that nearly 50% of the international students graduating in Denmark leave the country within 24 months after graduation (ICEF, 2018). The same information has been confirmed by the University World News in 2018, stating that “Some 26% of international students leave Denmark within three months of securing their degree, and 38% within 21 months,” (Myklenbust, 2018)

This has determined the Danish Ministry to reduce the number of English-taught bachelor's degrees and master's degrees across all of Denmark, as a means to ensure that the relevant profiles for the international students provide a higher chance of employment in the country (Myklenbust, 2018). The cut down started in 2017, when 28% of the spots have been cut down, while in 2022, after further consideration, the remaining spots for English taught degrees will be approximately 650, nationally (ICEF, 2018)

This sudden cut in the international study spots will have a negative impact, especially on Aalborg, as the only campus that will still be offering English spots to students will be Aalborg University, starting September 2022.

With these in mind, the focus of the thesis will be to explore further the implications of the partnerships between the City Municipality and the local universities. The end goal is to evaluate how the educational tourism factor can affect sustainable destination development, as seen by the Green Hub Denmark in its “green jobs” mission.

Therefore, the research question that consists of the basis of this thesis states as follows:

How can international educational tourism be seen as a possibility for sustainable destination development in Aalborg, Denmark?

2. Theory of science

Before carrying out the research, it is necessary to establish a sturdy understanding of the processes used throughout the thesis. In order to do that, the philosophy, methodology, and theory are used as means to answer the research question mentioned in the problem formulation (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019)

2.1. Ontology, Epistemology & Research paradigm

As the human way of thinking is constantly changing and evolving based on all the knowledge gathered, the explanations of the world's phenomena have developed rapidly from the first two traditional ways of philosophizing: namely, positivism and interpretivism (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016). The paradigm choice for this case study is the constructivist paradigm, which has been developed from the interpretivism research paradigm.

Ontology is viewed as “the nature of social entities” (Bryman, 2012) It often takes two perspectives of either having an objective stand, influenced by external actors or building the reality from perceptions and knowledge sharing (Bryman, 2012). As the research evaluates how educational tourism can be seen as a possibility for sustainable destination development in Aalborg, it becomes constructivist once the data collection aims to investigate the perception of the individuals involved in reality and not consider their perceptions as facts or truth (Bryman, 2012) It is essential to state that awareness regarding the reality constructed is necessary. Thus, being of the research represents only one view within a complex reality, influenced by the researchers’ pre-existing knowledge and interpretation of the data (Bryman, 2012)

Epistemologically speaking, it revolves around the question of “What can be regarded as knowledge” (Manson, 2002), focusing specifically on the process of gathering the knowledge and also its demonstrability. Hence, deepening the understanding that the said knowledge

must be (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016). The interpretation of the research will be made through social interactions with the individuals involved in the focus group from the problem formulation and through a reflexive attitude of the researcher (Manson, 2002)

Moreover, a hermeneutic viewpoint is observed due to the research process being iterative, following a path of interpreting human behavior, pushing ahead from only discovering the universal truths (Bryman, 2012). The mentioned reality is constructed through knowledge gathered via audio recordings from the interviewee's perspective and generates meaning from it (Manson, 2002). This allows the researcher to identify patterns within the data collection.

A constructivist paradigm is an approach that enables individuals to construct their own reality based on the knowledge and experiences they are taking part in (Honebein, 1996). It is highly dependent on the concept of learning through experiences, as argued by Hein in 1991. This concept is also prevalent within the educational field, as it supports the idea of discovering knowledge through experimentation by the (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016). This philosophical understanding has been best described by Confucius, in his quote, “I hear, and I forget. I see, and I remember. I do, and I understand.,” encouraging the researchers to get engaged in the process and discover the knowledge on their own (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016)

Typically, the constructivist paradigm is linked to the qualitative research approach. The reason for being so is due to the fact that qualitative research allows the data collection to be subjective, relying on the individuals' perspectives and engaging the researcher in getting in contact with the participants (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016) It naturally brings with an open-minded approach, allowing the findings to be constructed and create theories for the study (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016).

In terms of data collection, the instruments used are mostly qualitative, varying from interviews, and observations, to visual data analysis (Dogru & Kalender, 2007). Nonetheless, the paradigm allows the researcher to be flexible in the data collection and allows the possibility of having semi-structured interviews, encouraging the openness of the interviewees and respondents (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016)

Regarding the research methods, the constructivist approach allows various philosophical methods to be used. These methods typically include “Narrative Study, Case Study, Ethnography Study, Grounded Theory, Descriptive Study and Phenomenological Study” (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016). The benefit of using these research methods is that they

allow a longer time to spend evaluating the phenomena and the reality researched (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016)

Their data analysis takes an inductive approach (Fig. 2) as conclusions are made by collecting data and applying logical analysis strategies. Due to this, the thesis is most likely to develop a theory through the research process and not state it at the beginning of the (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016)

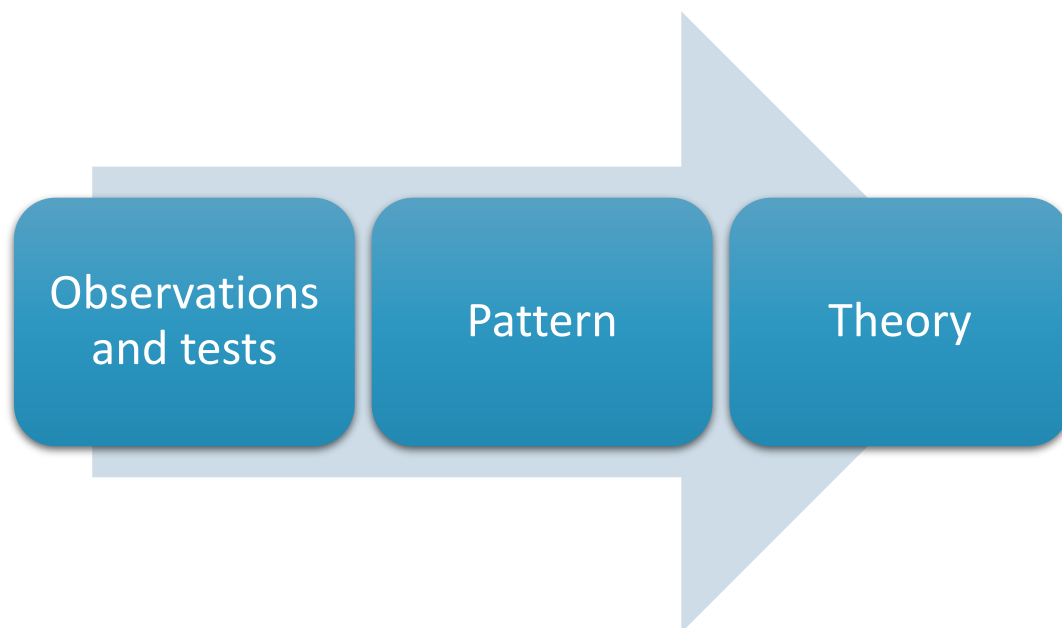


Figure 2. Visual representation of the inductive research approach model, adapted from Tie, Birks & Francis (2019)

Misconceptions about the constructivist paradigm

It is essential to emphasize the fact that constructivism has often been misconstrued and led to the understanding that students must “reinvent the wheel” (Dogru & Kalender, 2007). However, Adom et al. (2016) argue differently. They present a different understanding of the paradigm, which encourages students to become curious about the world, not reinvent the wheel but actually seek to understand its processes and functions.

This encourages students to apply their knowledge, hypothesize, assess theories, and draw conclusions from the data collected (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016). Thus, that will be the basis of this thesis.

2.2. Methodology

As a follow-up to the constructivist paradigm chosen, a flexible and, at the same time, structured methodology will be used. Grounded Theory has been deemed appropriate for the research style because there is limited information available regarding the reality presented in the problem formulation (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019). Thus, due to observations and research, the concept of educational tourists supporting the sustainable tourism development of Aalborg is only now being taken into consideration by the local authorities (Appendix, Chapter 1).

The direction of the Grounded Theory goes toward constructing an “explanatory theory that uncovers a process inherent to the substantive area of inquiry” (Glaser & Strauss, The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for quality research , 1967) (Birks & Mills, 2015) (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Thus, emphasizing the idea of generating an explanation for the theory or phenomenon resulting from collected primary and secondary data.

The founders of the Grounded Theory are Glaser and Strauss (1967), combining the educational background of both researchers: Glaser worked primarily with descriptive research and statistics, while Strauss worked with symbolic interactionism (Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills, & Usher, 2013) (Mills, Birks, & Hoare, 2014); (Charmaz, The power of potential grounded theory, 2012). Although the initial use of the Grounded Theory was not within the business or educational environment, it can be applied to it as well. Glaser and Strauss (1967) have created an essential element for the Theory based on “constant comparative analysis” (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019) for organizing and analysing the qualitative data.

The Grounded Theory works on generating explanations of the data inductively. Glaser and Strauss did this method in order to challenge the beliefs at the time that saw quantitative data as the only “valid, unbiased way to determine the truths about the world,” usually done through deductive testing (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007); (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019)The two founders later challenged these beliefs in their publication “The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research” in 1967, expressing the validity and reliability of the qualitative research and the comparative analysis method (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019)

The Grounded Theory has seen certain developments and enhancements throughout the years due to the constant advancements of researching techniques. In a study from 1998, Strauss and Corbin have described it as a “theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered

and analysed through the research process.”. (“A grounded theory of the corporate identity and corporate strategy ...”) Additionally, it has been defined as a “set of integrated conceptual hypotheses systematically generated to produce an inductive theory about a substantive area” by Glaser and Holton (2004). These definitions determine Grounded Theory as the “area of study that allows the theory to emerge from the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

Two years later, in 2006, Charmaz took a more constructivist approach to the theory, interpreting it as a “method of conducting qualitative research that focuses on creating conceptual frameworks or theories through building inductive analysis from the data.” Howbeit, Birks & Mills (2015) have argued that the Grounded Theory is more of a process from which the analysis of data results in theory; aligning with the idea that “theory is not discovered (...) rather, constructed by the researcher” (Birks & Mills, 2015)

Tie, Birks & Francis (2019) have indicated in their study on Grounded Theory that the process is not linear but goes more towards a relatively constant and recurring research process. At its core, Grounded Theory studies often begin with purposive sampling, which leads to data collection and analysis. For this, the thematic analysis is used to generate codes, combined with the comparative analysis and theoretical (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019) (Figure 3).

As shown in Fig.3, it can be assessed that the methods used for data collection are interconnected, dynamic, and can be iterative (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019)

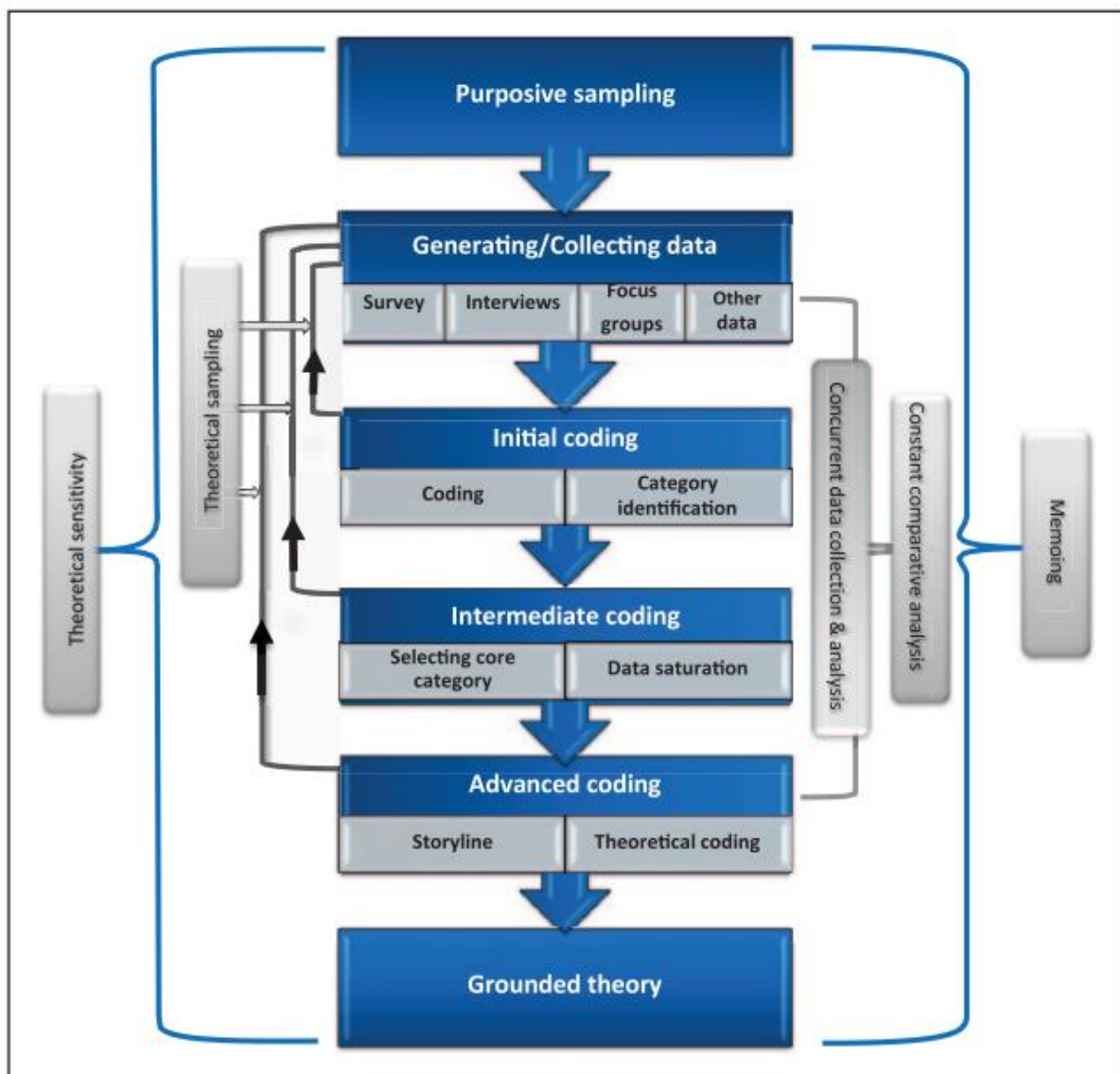


Figure 3. Research design framework: summary of the interplay between the essential grounded theory methods and processes, retrieved from Tie, Birks & Francis (2019), on the 18th of May 2022

2.3. Reflexivity

According to Pocock (2015), tourism studies have been often criticized for the lack of reflexive accounts, basing all understanding and discussions on the research process. However, it has been argued that involving the researchers' knowledge of the themes from the interviews and the topic, in general, can lead to a higher validity and reliability of the project, making it more credible and, thus, transparent (Pocock, 2015)

This specific process is known as a helpful tool for generating knowledge in qualitative research (Berger, 2015). It stands for allowing the researcher a self-evaluation space and an awareness of how their position might affect the outcome of the process and the research (Bryman, 2012). Berger argues that "...turning of the researcher lens back onto oneself to

recognize and take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation" (Berger, 2015)

This perspective definitely challenges the objectivity of the research and the knowledge that exists outside of the researchers' point of view. Berger (2015) argues that the personal characteristics of the researcher have an impact on what kind of information will be collected and assessed and how it will be influenced during the research. This is particularly relevant during interviews, as the relationship between interviewer and participant might determine the language used, the depth of the arguments, and the filtering of information (Berger, 2015)

With this in mind, it is crucial to state that my personal experience as an international student in Denmark for approximately six years, studying at both universities in Aalborg and going through the process of experiencing educational tourism during my studies. This insight has positively influenced my sampling choices, as it was possible to ensure a trusting relationship with the participants.

Pocock (2015) also refers to reflexivity as "...not simply as reflective or confessional writing, but as an epistemological acceptance of the embodied and emotional researcher intersecting with the entire research process", by acknowledging the entanglements with the research project. ("Emotional entanglements in tourism research - ScienceDirect") In this case, it is directly referred to my student experience of six years in Aalborg, and the emotional connections that have been developed throughout the years. Although, these connections and knowledge, have only fueled the curiosity of evaluating how can international students - like me - benefit the city of Aalborg and help its sustainable development eventually.

To ensure that objectivity still guides the results of the analysis, the theoretical framework allows the researcher to keep the discussion separated from the subjective experiences and understandings of the matter. In this sense, I opted for a quantitative data collection for the international students and a qualitative data collection for the representatives of the institutions considered. This is because I am way too close to understand the students and their perspectives on educational tourism. Therefore, an objective barrier is deemed to be necessary for the validity of the results.

2.4. Quantitative research

Following through the patterns shown in Fig.2, the initial sampling is purposive based on the topic presented in the problem formulation and the theme surrounding it: international students at Universities in Aalborg, Denmark. The reason for choosing this group as the sample is due to the fact that the circumstantial data generation is rather fundamental for the Grounded Theory research design, and it further impacts the theoretical (Glaser & Strauss, The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for quality research , 1967) (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007)

Although purposive sampling is often used during qualitative research (Bryman, 2012) this time, it has been applied to qualitative research. This is mainly because the target group of interest is well established in the problem formulation. Due to my familiarity with the subject, reaching the relevant audience was more accessible to collect the data needed.

The questionnaire is rather structured, with only a few open-ended questions. Yet, it was meant to evaluate the perspective of the international students in Aalborg and their stand regarding how they see their role in the sustainable development of the city. The survey had two categories, the first one focusing more on establishing the general information of the respondents, followed by practical questions related to the subject of educational tourism.

The questionnaire was directly distributed in study groups from Aalborg University and University College of Northern Denmark, as well as on the LinkedIn network, as a means to reach out to international students from Aalborg who are or have been looking for job opportunities locally. This clustered distribution has been possible as I am part of the same group as the project's focus group. The questionnaire was open for seven consecutive days during the month of May 2022 and has collected a total of thirty respondents.

2.5. Qualitative research

Following the same pattern, theoretical sampling is a result of the codes and categories developed and it has the role of filling in the gaps and clarifying the uncertainties developed within the codes collected (Charmaz, Constructing grounded theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis, 2006). In order to fill in the voids, interviews will be used as means to “produce rounded and contextual understandings on the basis of rich, nuanced, and detailed data (Manson, 2002)

The aim of the interviews is to collect information coming from the tourism industry representatives, university representatives, and local public institutions regarding the possibility of implementing educational tourism as one of the strategies for the sustainable development of the tourism industry in Aalborg.

The sequence of the interview is semi-structured, having a certain flow of questions based on theory, yet allowing the interviewee to give more in-depth answers and not constrain them to a single narrative. This is due to the fact that there is a particular interest in finding out the interviewee's point of view, making the interview process more flexible (Bryman, 2012). The questions posed were open-ended, allowing the interviewees to construct their reality, yet follow-up questions were added in order to get a better understanding of the interviewees' perspectives (Bryman, 2012).

On the same premise as the paradigm, the interviews do not have the role of extracting the knowledge, but rather constructing it through the interactions (Delmont & Mason, 1997). Taking into account the fact that the topic is more complex and revolves around experiences and perspectives, the semi-structured interviews seemed more useful for data collection (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). To ensure extra validity of the interviews, they were carried out individually, through an online communication platform (Zoom), where the recording and the storage of the data were more attainable (Bryman, 2012).

Purposive sampling has been used for the interviews, allowing a non-random selection of participants (Bryman, 2012). This has been done as a strategic measure, due to the topic at hand, and the professional background of the interviewees, as they appeared to be relevant taking into account the problem formulation.

Interview guides were developed for each of the interviewees, collecting two interviews of twenty and, respectively, 30 minutes. All conducted online. Although having an online interview allows the interviewee to feel comfortable and more eager to share details during the interviews (Seitz, 2016). On the other hand, an emotional barrier could be sensed during the interview. It was nearly impossible to read out the interviewees' body language or make sure that they were entirely focused on answering the questions presented (Seitz, 2016).

For the first interview, the focus went on universities in Aalborg and their implication in ensuring educational tourism. The first interviewee is Anna Hammershøj, Lector at the University College of Northern Denmark, with a particular interest in culture, tourism, and methodology. The questions from this interview guide were oriented towards how University

College of Northern Denmark ensures that their international students benefit the region and the city, through both tourism encounters and career opportunities. The interview was divided into three themes: General information, Background and Familiarity of the subject, and Applicability of the subject. The complete interview guide and transcript can be found attached in the Appendix (Chapter 1), although a description of the results will be provided later in the discussion.

The second interview was conducted with Miguel Oliveira, representative of the Aalborg Kommune and Project Manager for the International House North Denmark. The questions for this interview guide were focused on the public authorities' implication on the integration of international students from Aalborg in the sustainable development of the city and further plans regarding their integration. It followed a similar pattern of having three themes, similar to the ones above, yet the content of the themes was changed and adapted to their job description. The complete interview guide and transcript can be found attached in the Appendix (Chapter 2), although a description of the results will be provided later in the discussion.

2.6. Analytical approach

2.6.1. Coding

At its core, coding is an analytical process “used to identify concepts, similarities and conceptual reoccurrences of data” (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019) It is the main link between the results from the data analysis and the development of the theory that resulted from the data (Charmaz, Constructing grounded theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis, 2006)

For the purpose of this analysis, we will make use of the constructivist terminology used for the codes, which Mills, Birks & Hoare detail in their book from 2014 based on Grounded Theory. Therefore, the terms used are:

- Initial coding
- Focused coding
- Theoretical coding

Initial coding stands as a preliminary step in the analysis. Its main purpose is to start breaking down the data collected in order to be able to compare the incidents within and pinpoint the similarities and differences in the data (Birks & Mills, 2015) (Mills, Birks, & Hoare, 2014)

Charmaz (2006) particularly recommends generating as many codes as possible throughout the analysis and keeping the exact keywords used during the data collection in the codes. This initial coding aims to categorize the data and give it meaning by labeling the patterns and emphasizing the differences. The guiding questions during initial coding sit around “what does the data assume?” and “from whose point of view” is the data from (Charmaz, *Constructing grounded theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis*, 2006)

Focused coding, also known as intermediate coding, according to Birks & Mills (2015), is one of the most data-driven steps in the coding process. It encompasses identifying a core category, the constant comparative analysis, and the theoretical data saturation (Birks & Mills, 2015) This is the step that allows the data to get transformed into theories. A core category takes shape during this step, especially once the developed categories form around this main one. It culminates with theoretical saturation, which emphasizes that the current data analysis does not bring any new material to the existing categories of the (Birks & Mills, 2015)

The last stage of the coding is the theoretical coding, which is the culmination of the data collected that leads to a Grounded Theory (Evans, 2013); (Saldaña, 2013) or as stated within the definition of Grounded Theory, “integrating the substantive theory” (Glaser & Strauss, *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for quality research* , 1967). As the process goes on, the initial coding has the role of fragmenting the data, while the theoretical coding reconnects the data in a more organized theory (Glaser & Strauss, *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for quality research* , 1967). This idea has been supported by Saldaña (2013), describing this last step as “integrating and synthesizing the categories derived from coding and analyzing how to create a theory.”

This type of coding leads to a storyline that conceptualizes the core category identified in the data analysis (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019). Once this step is completed, the “Grounded Theory is finalized using theoretical codes that provide a framework,” and thus, providing an explanation of the theory (Birks & Mills, 2015)

2.6.2. Constant comparative analysis

With the idea of identifying the consistencies and differences between the data collected and aiming to refine the theoretically relevant categories, the constant comparative technique is used within the analysis. It is the method representative of the Grounded Theory approach, which transforms the research into a more dynamic discussion rather than keeping it more of a description (Glaser & Strauss, The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for quality research , 1967).

Through the process, more theories and concepts are being generated as a result of the inductive processes (Mills, Birks, & Hoare, 2014). The mix between theoretical sampling and the constant comparative analysis directs ongoing data collection (Birks & Mills, 2015). Moreover, in order to enhance the inductive conceptualization, Birks, and Mills (2015) argue that it “is a form of reasoning that begins with an examination of the data and the formation of a number of hypotheses that are then proven or disproven during the process of analysis.”

This type of analysis is used as an analytical process for coding and category development, commencing with the first data collected (Birks & Mills, 2015). As presented in Fig.3, the findings in the data collection will be identified as incidents (Birks & Mills, 2015). For the first step of the analysis, we compare each code and its incidents. These initially generated codes are later on compared to other codes. This second round of codes, later on, collapses into categories. The next step sees the research comparing the incidents in a category with previous incidents (Glaser & Strauss, The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for quality research , 1967). Later on, the new data is compared with the data acquired at the beginning of the collection and examined (Birks & Mills, 2015)

2.6.3. Limitations

Memo-ing

During the analytical process of Grounded Theory, memo-ing is seen as one of the essential methods that ensure quality (Glaser & Strauss, The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for quality research , 1967). Analogically, it has been compared to the “mortar” used between building blocks in order to keep them together

Memoirs have been described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as “reflective, interpretative pieces”, used to document ideas from the researcher throughout the data collection process.

At their core, they should be detailed records of the researchers' contemplations and feelings (Glaser & Strauss, The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for quality research , 1967). Their role in the Grounded Theory is to enable the researcher a preview of the codes early in the coding process, thus leading to an easier category development (Lempert, 2007). They are seen as "informal analytic notes about the data and theoretical connections between categories" (Glaser & Holton, Remodeling grounded theory: Forum qualitative research, 2004)

Throughout this analysis, however, memo-ing was not used during primary research. The reason for not doing so is directly linked to the reflexivity of the data collection and the objectivity of the data. To ensure that the data will not be altered during the research process and to let the codes naturally flow, I, the researcher, have decided not to include memo-ing as one of the methods. Due to my closeness to the topic and problem formulation, any narrow lead could alter the data results, leading to misinterpretation of the codes and categories.

Primary data collection - interview sampling

In order to understand more about the concept of educational tourism and the current strategies taking place in Aalborg, several invitations for interviews were sent out to representatives from Aalborg University, AAU Career, Business Aalborg, and Erhvervshus Nordjylland. Unfortunately, there was either no response from the representatives or declining participation.

Therefore, that side of the data was not possible to be collected during the writing of the thesis. Thus, crucial information that could be altering the results and the final theory is not taken into account. As a result, shifting the focus of the data analysis to focus on the international students and their experiences regarding educational tourism.

3. Literature Review

In the process of analyzing the data collected, it is crucial to get acquainted with the concepts used for the thesis. Therefore, the concept of Public-Private Partnerships (also known as PPPs), combined with sustainable tourism and educational tourism literature, will be evaluated.

The purpose of doing so is to establish the connection between them - if any - and how they were applied in other contexts like Aalborg's. Once that is established, the data analysis will be completed with this knowledge in mind and elaborated in the Discussion chapter.

3.1. Public-private partnerships

Before initiating the conversation regarding the public-private partnership, it is important to determine what a partnership is and why institutions should form one. To begin with, the working definition of a partnership states that it is “a collaborative relationship between entities to work toward shared objectives through a mutually agreed division of labor.” (“Partnerships: Frameworks for Working Together - UWM”) (World Bank, Partnerships Group, Strategy and Resource Management, 1998). Explaining that the actual reason for the implementation of partnerships lies in the joint efforts of two or more parties, working together, through well-shared and divided responsibilities, in order to achieve a common goal. It naturally follows an organic approach, where the organization evolves due to the experiences gathered together (Strengthening Nonprofits: A Capacity Builder's Resource Library, 2010)

This is further supported by the belief that partnerships are seen as a new generation of public governance, which aims to “overcome the deficits of the earlier waves of privatization and marketization” (Hammerschmid and Angerer, 2005; Osborne, 2010), alluring at the practices conducted throughout the 20th century,

As to why should two parties form a partnership, the answer is rather obvious “there is added value in working with other organizations” (World Tourism Organization , 2015). This goes hand in hand with the definition mentioned above, as partnerships are often seen as a power move, growing organically as the process is ongoing.

The concept has been discussed back and forth between scholars, that were adamant over the fact that “Partnerships are (...) the best way, in the end, to govern the complex relations and interactions in a modern network society” (Teisman & Klijn, 2002). Although, more in-depth literature argues that the political reality of each country will impact the performance of the partnership, leading to an overloaded performance of the partnership in the first place (Teisman & Klijn, 2002)

The concept of public-private partnerships, also known as PPPs, is not new and has been impacting the tourism industry for the past two decades (Islam, Ruhanen, & Ritchie, 2018). A particularly insightful report delivered by the World Tourism Organization in 2015, states that “PPPs are beyond a developmental tool, but are sometimes essential to stimulate creativity, enhance competitiveness and achieve visionary results which may be difficult if both parties operated in isolation” (“PPP for tourism growth and development in developing countries.”)

This quote summarizes the holistic impact and the importance of the diverse partnerships within a destination, as it creates connections between institutions, it opens up doors for innovation and it also encourages destinations to become better, more sustainable, and more attractive to the public (World Tourism Organization , 2015)

Cross-sector partnerships have been proven to be challenging to maintain for longer periods of time due to the clashing of cultural interaction and divergent needs that each stakeholder has (Baum, 1997)

Chaskin and Prudence (1996) argue that the main advantage of such partnerships is the impact on the community in the long run, as it can lead to improvements in the infrastructure of the area, increasing their capacity with time (Chaskin & Prudence, 1996)

In addition to that, a diverse pool of funds can be accessed due to the diverse group of partners, that can be eligible for funds application for which some of them may not - making the completion of projects more feasible (Belz & Baumbach, 2010). (World Tourism Organization , 2015). Nonetheless, the positive public image that can result from the PPPs is another great benefit, as it leads to the perception of actively having a commitment to a destination development and community development through their projects Private-public partnerships (PPPs) (Baum, 1997)

In regard to Denmark, the social-democrat party from 1999 was the first to launch the concept of PPPs. In order to solidify it, an Action Plan developed by the Government has been launched in 2004, with ten requirements for the local authorities has been approved, leading to the implementation of new tools within the PPPs and tourism (Petersen, 2011).

Some of the actions inquired in the Action Plan were focusing on legislative measures that enabled “universal public-private partnership testing”, the launch of seven development

measures and the establishment of “a PPP Competence Unit”, led by the Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs (Petersen, 2011). The downside of the Action Plan was in its limitations, as it played mostly in favor of the local governments, affecting the environmental projects and local municipalities (Petersen, 2011). Currently, there is still a moderate level of commitment coming from the Government, in regard to supporting the PPP initiatives (Verhoest, Petersen, Scherrer, & Soecipto, 2015).

3.2. Sustainable destination development

Although through the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the ongoing Green Agenda for 2030 developed by the World Tourism Organization, many businesses and destinations still find it challenging to find accurate ways of translating sustainable tourism into practical actions (Ali & Frew, 2014). The most known definition of sustainable tourism is “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Tourism Organization , 2015). And it directly states finding solutions to meet the current customers’ needs, without affecting the generations to come and their needs within tourism, environment and life quality.

The reason for this is that finding the perfect balance between economic development of the destination and a sturdy protection of the environment is rather difficult to achieve in a highly attractive industry such as tourism (Ali & Frew, 2014). Therefore, sustainable tourism is seen as a mechanism in trying to achieve this balance (Swarbrooke, 1999)

As tourism destinations are the most impacted by the growth levels of tourism, implementing sustainable tourism measures has been a growing concern (Ali & Frew, 2014). Various ideas, varying from pollution indicators, monitoring, eco-labelling, codes of conduct and alternative ways of tourism have been developed and sent for implementation (Swarbrooke, 1999). The downside of these practices have been labeled as “lack of quality, technical content, reliability, maturity, equity and effectiveness,” even after more than forty years of sustainable tourism development and implementations (Van Der Duim & Van Marwijk, 2006).

The issue with the implementation of sustainable tourism lays in the fact that the theory behind it is still relatively weak in comparison to other concepts within tourism (Moscardo, 2008). This has been further agreed on by arguments stating that the concept of sustainable tourism is still stagnating over the idealization of concepts and fundamentals, speculations on what effectiveness levels they may present, which affects the applicability of the principles in the businesses from all over the world (Pigram , 1990) (Liu, 2003)

The idea of a way too theoretical approach to sustainable tourism is also supported by Sharpley (2010) who categorizes the notion as a “myth” which stands in the way of sustainable tourism becoming a practical reality anytime soon (Sharpley, 2013).

3.3. Educational tourism; Edu-tourism

The educational tourism sector is a rather under-researched topic within the tourism industry, therefore current researchers seek out ways of determining what does it actually mean and how does it change due to the growth market (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017)

The segmentation model of educational tourism has been developed by Ritchie in 2003, and since then it has been considered “the international standard on the subject” and was used as the basis for most theoretical developments in the past years (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). The researchers present skepticism when it comes to the reliability of the model, emphasizing that applying it to educational tourism presents a risk of excluding relevant sectors of the industry.

In support of this, (Pitman, Broomhall, McEwan, & Majocha, 2010) proposed a “process approach” and moves the concept towards defining educational tourism as a “transformative experience”. At the same time, Stoner et al. (2014) was advocating for the concept of global citizen to take the role of representing an “educational travel”.

Leaving from these considerations, McGladdery & Lubbe (2017) build up their case by combining research from within the educational tourism fields and argue the importance of rethinking the concept of educational tourism.

Before they begin their research, the authors explain the two types of educational tourism, divided into domestic educational tourism and international educational tourism. For the first type of tourism, researchers have been arguing on the basis of what constitutes educational tourism, given the lack of consensus between the studies (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). At its core, educational tourism occurs when traveling with the purpose of learning about a unique environment is present, yet any other purposes or characteristics of the travel have led to different definitions (Pitman, Broomhall, McEwan, & Majocha, 2010) (Ritchie, 2003) (Stoner, et al., 2014)

Amongst the definitions at hand, they either included or excluded certain segments due to the technical perspective attributed to the concept (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). The definitions include dynamics such as defining educational tourism as a “consequence of fragmentation of cultural tourism,” calling it a different niche of volunteer tourism (Richards, 2011). On the other side of the spectrum there are recommendations of fitting under the same umbrella educational tourism together with volunteer tourism, youth tourism and backpacking, on the basis that they are close within sectors (City of Cape Town, 2009). In the study from City of Cape Town, 2009, they also bring up the argument of dividing educational tourism into four sub-types, such as “eco-tourism, heritage tourism, farm tourism, and student exchanges between institutions” (City of Cape Town, 2009)

These definitions and reevaluations of the term are a result of the segmentation model developed by Ritchie in 2003. This model divides the segments into age groups and the push & pull factors of these groups to make decisions. As educational tourism is primarily based on learning as the main indicator of motivation, Ritchie argues that this can happen either formally or informally, through a guide or self-driven (Ritchie, 2003) (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017)

The limitation of this model is that it puts the tourist in one of the two bubbles: driven to travel for education or driven to travel for tourism. The article argues that this is problematic as it does not reveal the correct motivation behind the reason of the travel, when age segmentation is applied (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). The example given in the research states that seniors’ tourism is placed under the “tourism” driven motivation, while studies show that, in fact, senior tourists are primarily driven by their life-long learning desire (Pitman, Broomhall, McEwan, & Majocha, 2010).

More examples of misplacements within the segmentation model have been presented by the researchers, who have explained in depth the main issue with generalizing the educational tourism. For example, although teachers view a study trip as an educational experience for the children, they may perceive it a fun, get-away, thus not having the same motivational pull when it comes to categories (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017)

On the other hand, international educational tourism, also known as IET, combines both educational tourism and international education experiences. The reason for this is that they are both based on the feature of “travelling to learn” which describes the international educational tourism (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017).

The difference between educational tourism and IET is that the latter is considered a “tertiary-level educational phenomenon” (Knight, 2004). IET has a more grounded background in literature, which led to various conceptual models being developed in order to enhance the knowledge and cultural integration of the international students in the host country (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). The concept has been best defined as ““the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, function or delivery of post-secondary education,” which encourages even more the idea of cultural integration of the international student (Knight, 2004).

When it comes to reconceptualizing the educational tourism, the authors recommend integrating experiential learning theory. For the development of this model, they have opted for a clearly defined and learning-stage appropriate outcome, as a means to an effective learning (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017).

In the newly added model, three outcomes have been used as reference: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The advantage of the newly proposed model is that the outcomes are measurable, leading into an evaluative effective learning. (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). Throughout this thesis, however, the focus will be on the international student tourism, although a good overview of the situation, the concept and the current discussions about the matter were deemed necessary before beginning the data analysis.

4. Data analysis

For data analysis, the Grounded Theory approach will be applied. Thus, the sequence of the results presented encompass a mix between the Coding technique and the Constant Comparative Analysis - both specific to the research design.

Prior to the Initial Coding, the sample's demographics is identified and evaluated to create a persona of interest that will influence the target audience of the final theory. Therefore, as portrayed in Figure 5, stating the first question of the questionnaire, it can be noticed that the majority of the respondents, encompassing 73.3%, were between the ages of 18-25. It is followed by a smaller percentage of 23.3% of respondents above 26 years old, with 3,3% of respondents being over 30 years old.

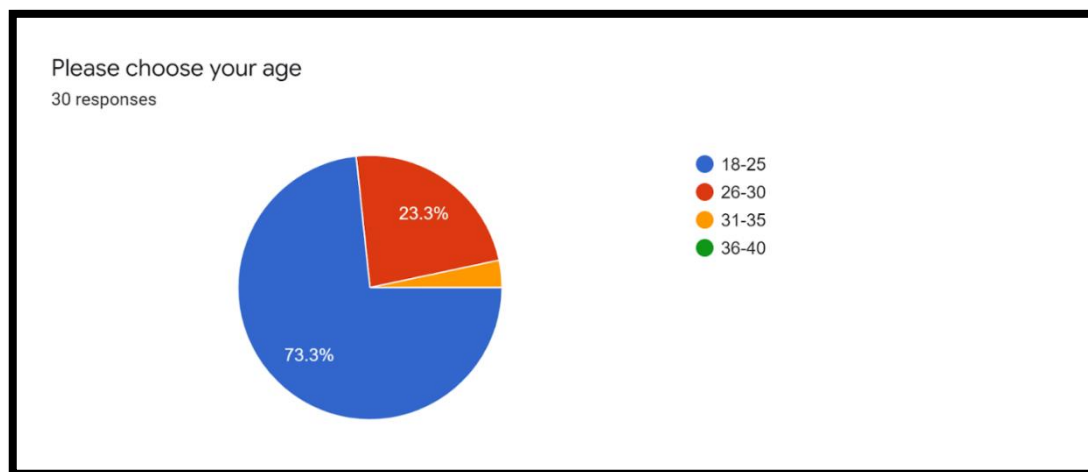


Figure 4. Question 1

The results indicate already that our primary audience is either undertaking their bachelor's degree or master's degree. The education level is also confirmed by the following graphic that shows the close results between the two main education programs. Master's degrees dominate with 46.7%, closely followed by 40% of bachelor's degrees.

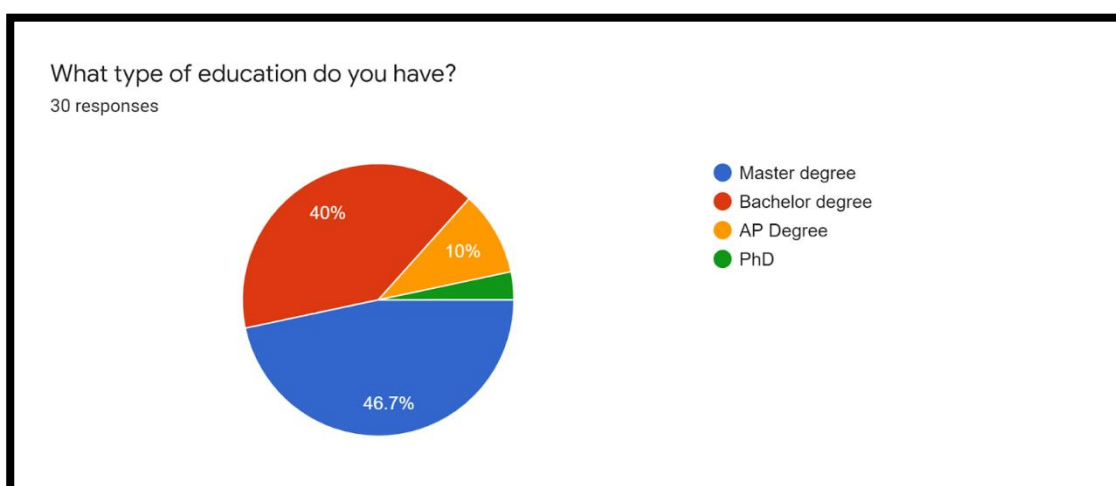


Figure 5. Question 3

In order to pinpoint a little closer their presence and educational background in Aalborg, they have been asked to mention which University they are part of, as a means to evaluate which target should be considered our primary focus further on in the analysis. The results have shown that Aalborg University is leading in the results with 63.3%, the rest of the respondents being from the University College of Northern Denmark.

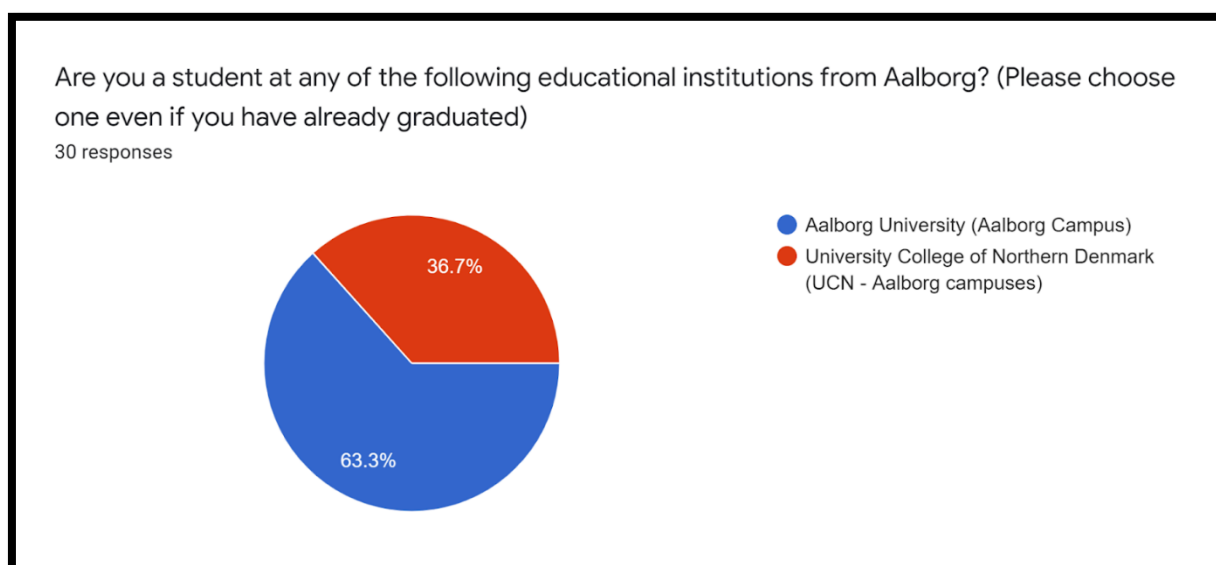


Figure 6. Question 5

The respondents were asked to mention their country of residence within demographics, leaving the options open and not providing a list of countries targeted just to Europe. In spite of this, the results received are 100% of respondents that are originally from a European country, with a particular emphasis on Eastern and Central Europe, as shown in the graphic:

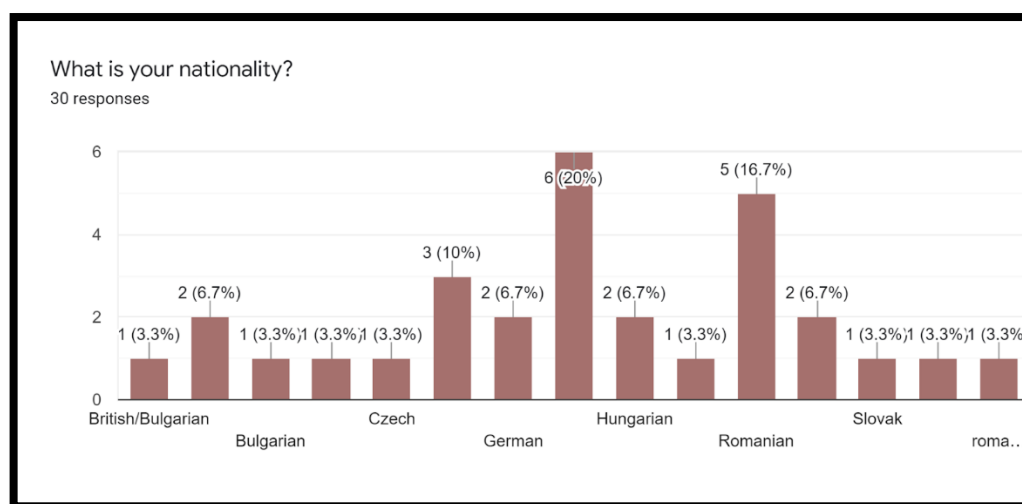


Figure 7. Question 2

Therefore, based on the preliminary results, we can conclude that our target group representing the international students has the profile of a young professional aged between 18-25 years old. They are master's degree students and bachelor's with a predominant presence from Aalborg University - the main educational center in Aalborg. The respondent's educational programs are centered around Tourism, International Hospitality Management, Marketing and Sales, Culture, Communication & Globalization, and International Business

Management. The comprehensive list with results can be seen in the Appendix, Chapter 3, page 16.

Initial coding analysis

Taking into consideration that the main targeted persona has been identified, the Initial Coding will seek to evaluate the principal codes and categories from the results. For this, the second part of the questionnaire will be analyzed, which focuses on Practical questions regarding their educational experience in Aalborg.

As portrayed in the literature review, study trips can be considered a tourism experience during education programs. Despite this, when questioned about their experience, the respondents have denied any participation in study trips during their programs, with only 33.3% of respondents confirming that they did have the opportunity during their studies (Fig. 8). It is also crucial to mention that within the last two years, the global pandemic influenced by SARS COVID-19 has altered the extracurricular activities within all educational institutions around the globe (Vlachos, Hertegard, & Svaleryd, 2021). This leads to the idea that the results of this particular question may be contaminated and not represent the ordinary reality.

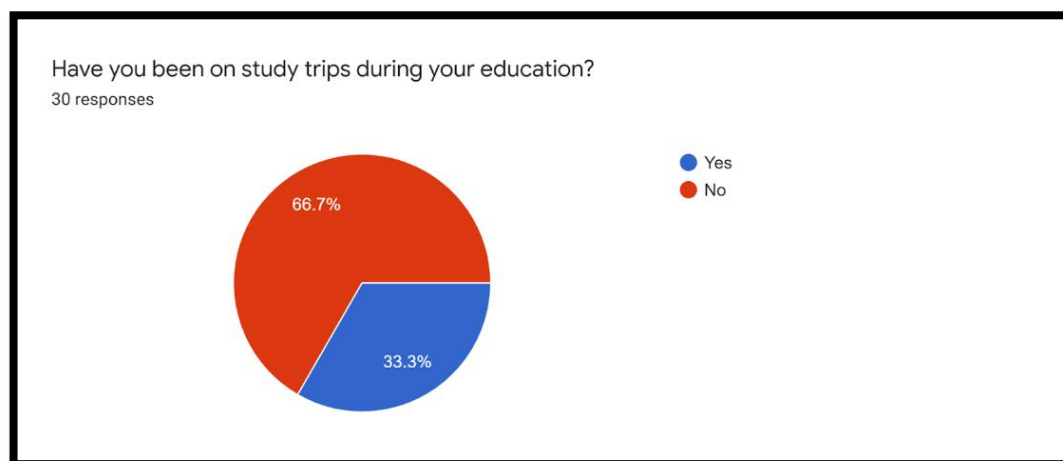


Figure 8. Question 6

Additionally, there were two questions that were meant to analyze more in-depth the results from above. The first question was regarding the area in which the respondents who chose “YES” to have traveled. The data shows that there were two types of study trips: one within Denmark and the other outside of Denmark. The results have varied from areas in Europe (e.g., Netherlands, Denmark) to countries from outside of Europe (e.g., China, Australia,

USA). Within Denmark, the study trips cluster has been restricted to North Jutland (Appendix, Chapter 3: Questionnaire).

The second follow-up question evaluated whether the respondents find the study trips useful for their career development in Aalborg. The results were predominantly positive or leading towards positiveness through the “maybe” tag. Yet, this confirms that students are more likely to develop once they get involved within the industry.

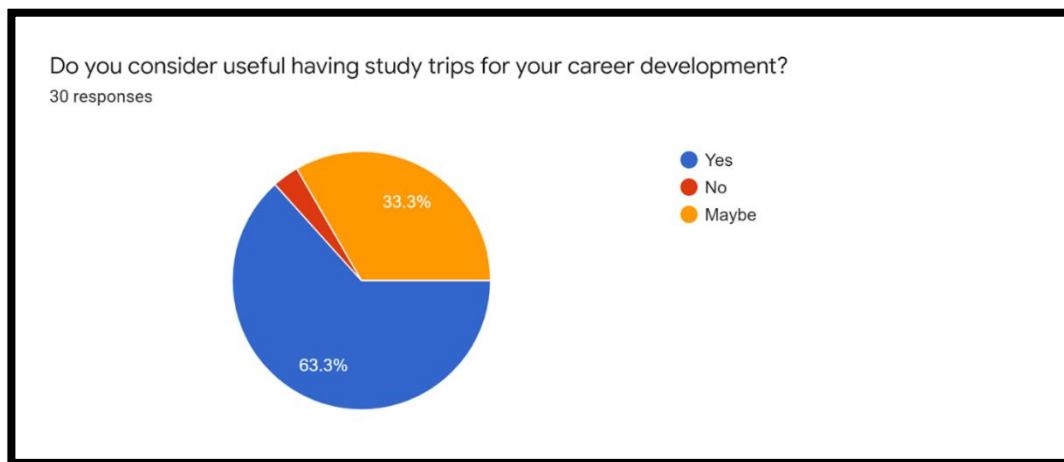


Figure 9. Question 7

The eighth question has been focusing on evaluating whether the respondent has been traveling within Denmark during their study experience, but not as part of their education curriculum. The responses were almost in antithesis to the previous ones, portraying the greatest majority of respondents who have been traveling solo during their stay.

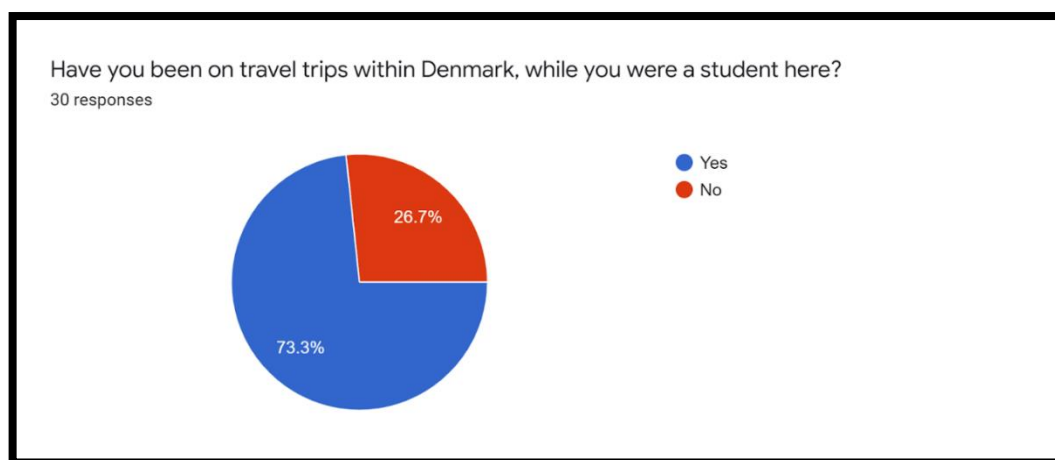


Figure 10. Question 8

Similar to the previous question, follow-up inquiries encouraged the respondents to share the place they have visited. There was an evident predominance of trips conducted within North Jutland, with responses varying from “I have visited many places since I've moved to Denmark, but mostly I explored Northern Jutland,” to “Copenhagen, Skagen, Mols Bjerger, Blokhus, Vejle, Aarhus,” and “Various cities/areas, cultural places in Nordjylland”(Appendix, Chapter 3: Questionnaire)

The students were asked to confirm or not if, during their education, they had the opportunity to closely collaborate with local businesses from Aalborg for their study projects. The results were predominantly affirmative, with 16.7% of respondents denying any collaboration or interaction with local businesses during their project writing.

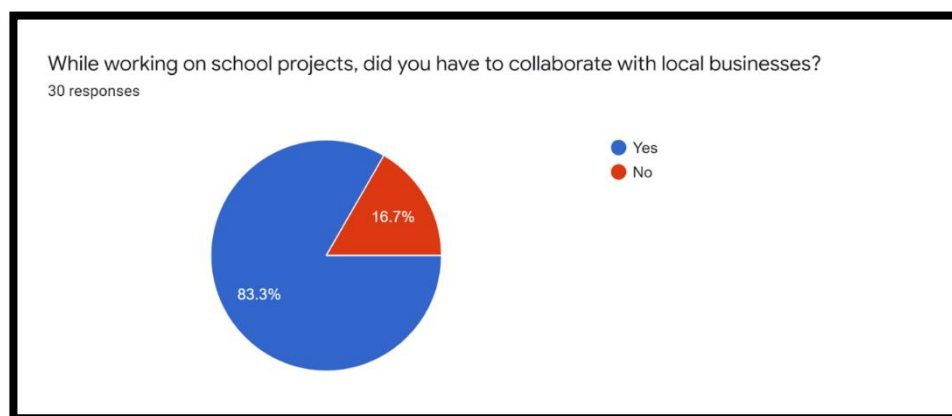


Figure 11. Question 9

Through a follow-up inquiry, it was possible to evaluate the industry from which the businesses that they have used for collaboration are from. A predominant industry was within “green energy,” local municipalities from Northern Denmark, and the “hospitality industry;” yet, the presence of the green energy companies has been noticeable, as stated by one respondent “At school - The Springerren maritime museum, At AIESEC - different kind of fields, I would say a bit of everything. However, as we are in Aalborg, you cannot avoid energy engineering companies.”

Surprisingly, when asked about the possibility of career opportunities sprouting from these collaborations, the vast majority of the respondents have disagreed with the statement of being a productive collaboration in any way, as can be seen in the graphic below.

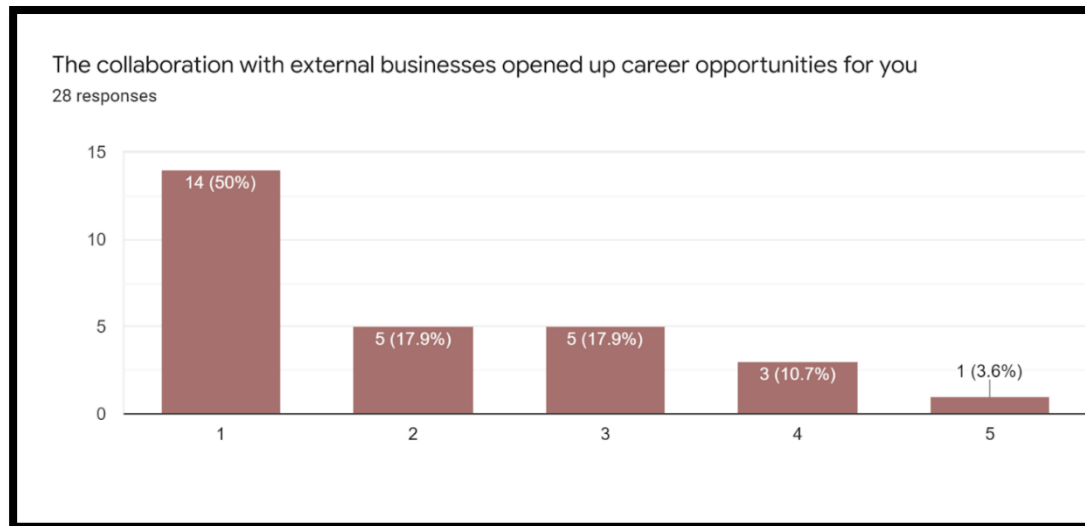


Figure 12. Question 13

Although the results were negative in terms of career opportunities, the respondents have agreed with the statement which refers to their knowledge intake regarding their study industry. The results have been predominantly positive, thus compensating for the lack of opportunities from their previous perspective.

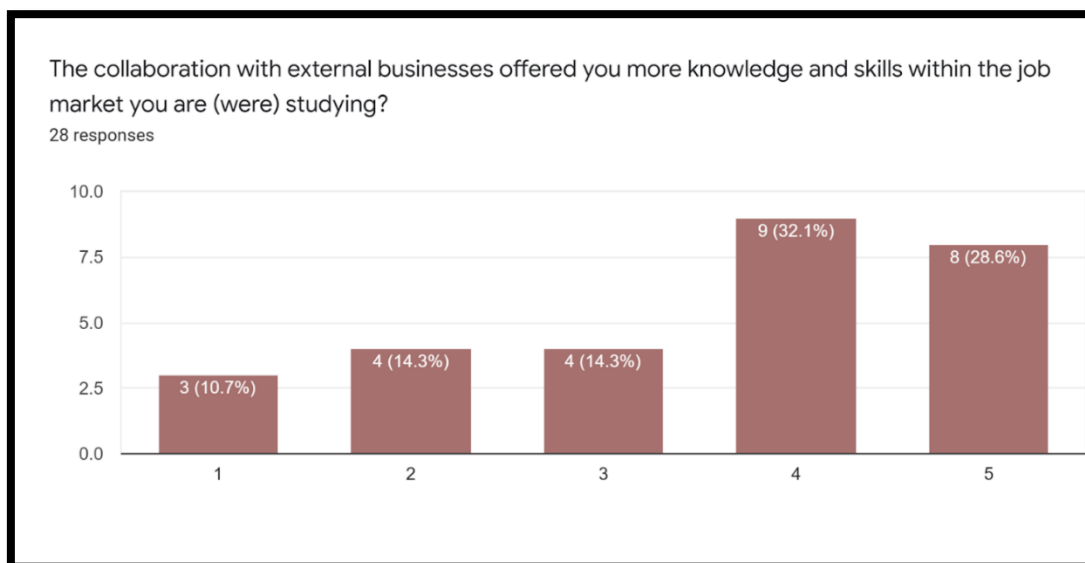


Figure 13. Question 13

As a final inquiry in the questionnaire, due to the idea of public-private partnerships enhancing the opportunities for international students, they have been asked to state whether they know such institutions in Aalborg. The results show that although the greatest majority is aware of such institutions, there is a substantial number of respondents who were not aware of the possibilities coming from outside the university.

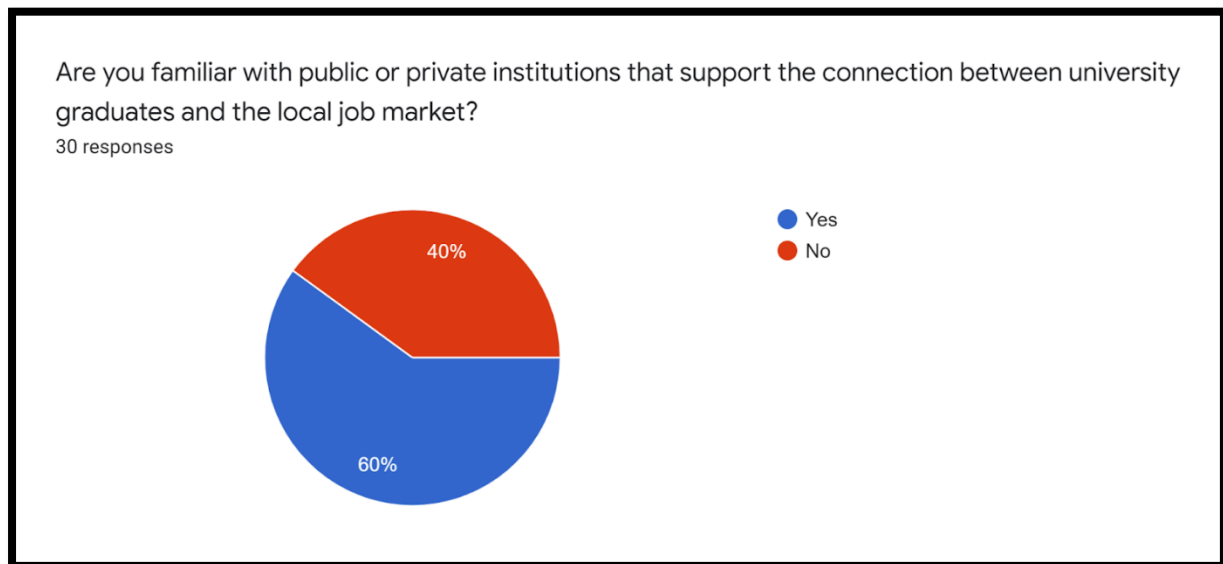


Figure 14. Question 14

As a follow-up to the question, they have been asked to name institutions that they have worked with for their career. Amongst the most popular answers, “International House North Denmark,” “Ballisager” and the unemployment unions have been considered the most relevant by the respondents.

The survey concluded by investigating whether or not the respondents see themselves as having a positive impact on the sustainable development of the city of Aalborg. The data shows that more than 70% of the respondents agree with the statement, while the rest 23.3% are neutral towards their impact.

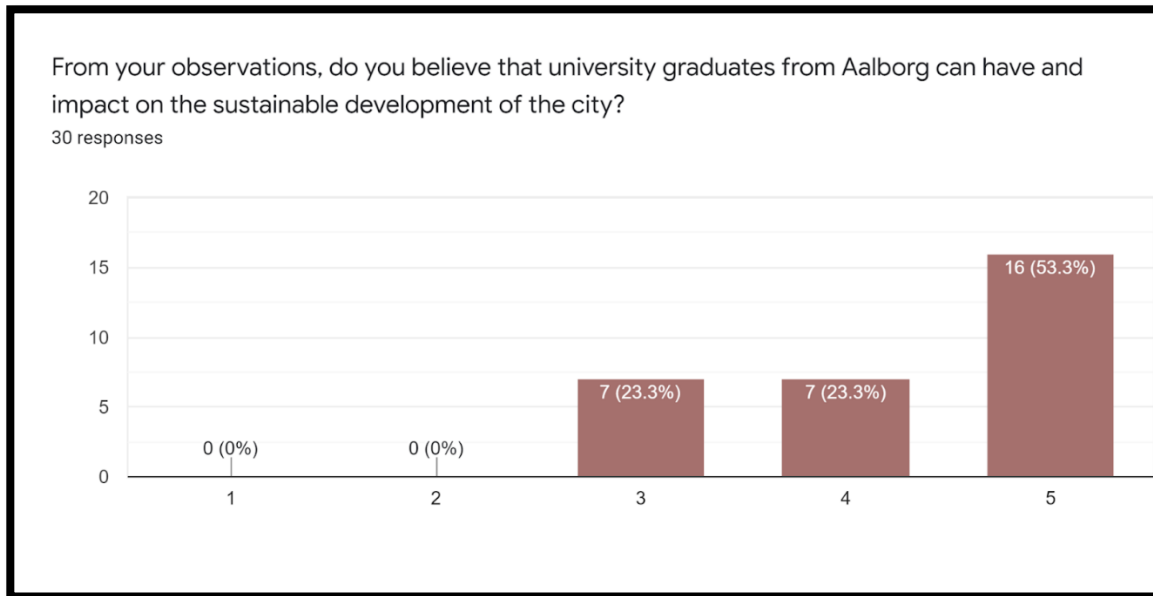


Figure 15. Question 18

Tags, and Categories from Initial Coding

With these in mind, the initial coding can be interpreted. In Table 1, the data has been transferred into tags, which were then translated into categories. For the clarity of the data division, the tags are simple, distinctive, and easy to understand. The tags are purely based on the results of the questionnaire presented (Appendix, Chapter 3: Questionnaire).

TAG NAME	CATEGORIES
<i>Study trips</i>	Study trips during education programs in Denmark Study trips during education programs outside of Denmark
<i>Solo trips</i>	Individual trips within Denmark Individual trips within North Jutland
<i>School Project Collaborations</i>	Collaborations with local businesses for school projects Career opportunities resulted from collaborations with local businesses.
<i>Career opportunities</i>	Public institutions facilitating the job opportunities within Aalborg
<i>Tourism contribution</i>	International students contributing to the local tourism industry

Table 1. Initial Coding representation

Focused Coding analysis

Throughout the next step of the analysis, the categories identified above will be reexamined while looking at the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. Each category will be compared with the data from the interviews, and later, concluded.

Themes identified

Although the semi-structured interviews were not included in the first analysis of the data, they come in as secondary, more in-depth testimonies that aim to confirm or disprove the arguments identified from the international students' perspective. Three themes have been detected during the analysis and they all relate strictly to the growth and role of the international students in the development of Aalborg

The first theme identified is focused on the importance of study trips and their impact on students. This has been highlighted in the first interview (Appendix, Chapter 1) by A. Hammershøj who stated that:

“The students have the opportunity to meet companies, to hear about their activities, and perhaps to cooperate with them in the future for project work and internships, so we have examples of that. Sometimes companies they met during their first days at school, have become their internship places or collaborators for project work. So that is also a thing quite a success. There also is a study trip in the second semester, usually, the destinations vary. But the last 7 years we have offered a study trip to southern Italy, we had to north Jutland. To Skagen, Saeby, we also offered study trips to China, a few years ago - so yeah, that is a big part of what we offer as international hospitality, first-hand experiences.”

She also states that *“It can inspire them (e.g., international students) to stay here and find employment, so in that regard, you can also talk about sustainability, especially because we need an educated workforce in Denmark.”* (Appendix, Chapter 1)

Besides the career development that the study trips bring over the students through either practical experiences or research collaborations, but also the regions the study trips take place in. There is a balanced mix between study trips inside Denmark - with emphasis on North Jutland - but also outside of the continent.

The second theme revolves around the implications of educational tourism on sustainable development. Data from both interviews emphasize the importance of studying abroad as a means to constantly sustain the host destination. In Interview 1 (Appendix, Chapter 1), the interviewee states: *“(...) the way I see it is that taking an education in another country has also touristic elements in it (...)staying here for a year or two, they do not fall under the strict definition of a tourist. Still, they experience the local destinations, and they generate visits, friends, and relatives because they also have friends visiting them.”*

In the second interview, (Appendix, Chapter 2), M. Oliveira talks about the connection between international students and tourism, emphasizing that *“And the reason I also like this topic is that I also believe that by going to another country, in this case, Denmark, to study, I believe that you are not only being a student in that country, but you are also in many different ways, you are also a tourist, you are also a citizen, you are a customer.”*

Both interviewees have mentioned Aalborg Karneval and North Jutland as a choice made by the students when visiting the region *“A good example is Aalborg Karneval (...) where you can see thousands of students from Aalborg and from abroad who are in Aalborg for the first time (...) might also be tempted to travel and see the different beaches or the coast sites ”* (Oliveira, 2022, Appendix, Chapter 2).

The third and most prevailing theme has been focused on the career opportunities that there are for international students. The data accumulated, it was possible to identify the ideal and most sought out career opportunities for the international students arriving in Denmark.

The last theme identified assessed the current situation regarding the limited English-taught opportunities for the upcoming students. M. Oliveira emphasized the fact that *“there's actually an expectation of less students coming to the master's degree education and almost no international students coming to the local university University College, not Denmark. So that would mean that we have something close to a little bit over 1,000. Steep decreasing. ”*

This has been confirmed by A. Hammershøj who mentioned that *“This is the last year, as you are probably aware, this is the last year that we are hosting international students or at least English-speaking students. Because all these programs cease to exist from the fall of 2022.”* (Appendix, Chapter 1 & Chapter 2).

Regarding the industries that are still of great interest to the Danish market, *“definitely engineering and it's particularly the whole system, science, technology, mathematics, and engineering, these industries, they are the most important for the international community”* (Oliveira, 2022, Appendix, Chapter 2). He also added that *“That's where we see the biggest success rates and most specifically within the It programming and different engineering, for example, energy engineering (...) robotics, automation, and so on.”*

On the other side of the spectrum, business-related opportunities in Aalborg are rather low on the success rate of employment, mainly due to the language and cultural requirements that are imposed by the visitors *“this is a very hard industry because in a region like Aalborg or a city like Aalborg, where the majority of tourists or the majority of speakers, the customers are Danish or Norwegian or Swedish or German”* (Oliveira, 2022, Appendix, Chapter 2).

Reaching out to international students and connecting them with the local job market has been one of the main priorities of Aalborg Kommune in the past years. On another note, M. Oliveira mentioned that the main mission of the International House North Denmark project is *“ supporting our local companies with sustainable business development. Exactly. Helping companies, finding the right qualified workforce” and more specifically “help companies with recruiting highly skilled profiles within the green transition industry.”* Aiming once again to the current plans of Aalborg for a green transition as planned by the Green Hub Denmark.

By taking the categories from the Initial Code analysis and the categories derived from the themes from the Focus Code analysis, we can determine the commonalities between each other.

The first main category standing combines the Study Trips & School Project Collaborations with the First theme. It is clustered towards universities and their direct “informal curricula” and activities they have planned for the students in collaboration with local businesses. It leads to the hypothesis that the universities from Aalborg (in particular) focus on creating practical experiences for their local students and, international students, who could end up in either internship, collaborations, or employment. Unfortunately, considering the data derived from the students, this has not been proven entirely successful in the long run. Although, it does provide a better understanding of the industry amongst students.

The second category derived from the aforementioned analysis is focused on the travel implications that the international students have over Aalborg and North Jutland. The cluster formed is between the Second theme and the tags of Solo Trips and Tourism Contribution. The hypothesis shows that international students are more likely to stay in Denmark for a minimum of two years, a time during which they are prone to travel and bring their acquaintances to visit. A popular attraction is Aalborg Karneval and the nearby coastline, of Skagen, Blokhus. During that time, *“They stay at the destination, they learn the local way of life, local foods, and support local businesses in their consumption, because they have to eat and drink and experience the destination, so that is a sustainable way of experiencing a destination”* (Appendix, Chapter 1).

On this note though, it is important to emphasize the impact that the Danish Law will have in the future. As there will be fewer and fewer new students moving to Aalborg, the impact that they will have on the tourism industry locally will also be affected.

The last category formed is that between the Third theme regarding the sustainable job career and the tags of Career Opportunities. This category is determined by the joint efforts between both the local public institutions and the local universities to ensure that there are career opportunities available for international graduates. The hypothesis derived from this revolves around career opportunities for students within the green sustainability industry, having a valuable potential of ensuring sustainable destination development for Aalborg.

Taking into consideration that the collected primary data has been used, and three hypotheses have been detected, it is possible to say that theoretical saturation has been achieved.

Theoretical coding

The last step in the Grounded Theory analysis is theoretical coding, which aims to create the final theory from the data presented.

In order to do so, a run-through between the finalized categories will be done, aiming to conclude with the final theory. To achieve this, the storyline tool will be applied, which is a strategical method to combine the fractured coding from the Initial Coding analysis and reorganize it into a cohesive theory (Birks & Mills, 2015)

The data analyzed portray opinions from both the public institutions of Aalborg - of Civil integration and Education - and the perspectives of the international students present in Aalborg. Throughout the analysis, the main target of the topic was identified: the

predominant group of international students present is aged between 18-25 years old, with a central or eastern European background, enrolled in study programs focused on Business, Engineering, and Technology.

To offer them opportunities for growth and development, their local universities organize study trips, collaborations with local businesses for project writing, internship opportunities, and employment connections for after graduation. The SARS COVID-19 Global Pandemic has altered the number of physical interactions between students and companies which has affected the success rate of such interactions. Although the health crisis has slowly been controlled, international students were once again affected by another external factor, this time, political, coming from the Danish Government. This time, it came as an aid to the international students within the IT industry, Engineering, and Environment, but it has drastically affected the students within the business and humanities sector studying in Denmark. The decision of the Government was to cut down on the latter programs of universities, which were taught in English due to the low rate of employability in this industry. Thus, significantly dropping the number of international student arrivals in the city, leaving only 650 English-taught spots nationally.

By not receiving more international students annually, the local tourism rates are also prone to decrease. As international students often travel to the area and ensured sustainable, continuous resources within the local destinations, decreasing the number of arrivals, will affect the motivation or need of foreigners to visit Aalborg.

On the other hand, Aalborg Kommune has also been actively working with various private and public institutions in order to provide career opportunities for international students from Aalborg. Within the Kommune, there are currently discussions regarding the upcoming Green Strategy of Aalborg, which focuses on retaining the international workforce specialized in Engineering, Automation, IT, and Technologies. This has been confirmed by M. Oliveira who is actively involved in the career programs for internationals: *“That's where we see the biggest success rates and most specifically within the It programming and different engineering, for example, energy engineering or not civil engineering, but robotics, automation, and so on”* (Appendix, Chapter 2).

Moreover, the Business Development department of Aalborg Kommune is currently undergoing a shift in the strategy development, aiming to involve more sustainability actions in the future, M. Oliveira added:

“ (...)the Business Development Department at the municipality, we are actually now drafting or creating the business strategy for the next three years because the current strategy is actually outdated. It just stopped right now. We just achieved some of the goals, and there was a little bit there was a part of sustainability or sustainable business development was actually one important factor in our strategy.”

There are more institutions that contribute to the job opportunity creation in Aalborg. International students and graduates are already familiar with institutions such as Job Center, Unemployment Unions, and Career Fairs and they have been actively using them to create a network within their desired industries in Aalborg.

Taking this into consideration, and the previous analysis carried out on the primary data, a final theory can be drawn as Aalborg Kommune is currently strategizing to achieve more sustainable destination development, a stronger partnership between Aalborg University and Aalborg Kommune could ensure more opportunities for their international graduates to integrate into the local job market. By doing so it will also contribute to the overall sustainability of the city and the sustainability of the local employment, by utilizing professional graduates fully specialized in the green industry,

To summarize, the theory resulting from the analysis states as follows: educational tourism can contribute to the sustainable destination development of Aalborg by attracting and retaining international students specializing in Engineering, IT and Automation at the Aalborg University programs.

5. Discussion

Throughout this chapter, the hypotheses identified above will be discussed and examined one by one, with the purpose of constructing the closest theory that can lead to the answer to the research question posed: *How can international educational tourism be seen as a possibility for sustainable destination development in Aalborg, Denmark?*

The theories will be discussed based on the data analysis from Chapter 4 and from the extra data that could serve as support from the Appendix.

Hypothesis 1: Study trips during course programs benefiting the local tourism

During the education curriculum – “informal curriculum”- students at universities are offered study trips within Denmark and abroad. The regions of interest are within North Jutland, and they usually visit companies within the service sector, tourism, and business (Appendix, Chapter 1).

Although the initiatives are engaging, and they can benefit to the overall knowledge and industry understanding of the students – as agreed by 56.7% of the respondents – they were not particularly beneficial to the students in terms of career opportunities. The results of the poll regarding this question were over 70% disagreeing with any opportunity arising from the experience.

This has definitely been affected by the SARS COVID-19 pandemic which has affected the physical interaction between businesses and the students. Although activities were carried out online, they did not have the same effect on the results from that interaction, minimizing any possibility of a sustainable development for Aalborg.

Therefore, this hypothesis does not offer relevant information to construct the reality.

Hypothesis 2: individual travels within Denmark during studies

The second hypothesis focuses on the free time of the student, in which they are not influenced by any of the initiatives from universities nor public institutions. As they are still in Aalborg as students, and education was their main reason for visiting Aalborg, they are still under the category of international educational tourism.

Through their presence in Aalborg, they are benefiting both the local business when getting in contact with the local culture and the local food (Appendix, Chapter 1), but also the areas around the city – especially the coastal areas from North Jutland. It is an interesting phenomenon to notice that although the students live here, they still enjoy the city and the surroundings as tourists would. Moreover, families and friends are often visiting the students during their education, which brings an additional form of sustainability for the local businesses.

However, it is very important to take into account the fact that the greatest majority of the English-taught programs will be shut down from September 2022. This will have a detrimental impact on the number of arrivals in Aalborg from that time. This will automatically snowball into having less pull factors to drive them and their families to come

to Aalborg, whereas the Copenhagen area may be more preferred instead (Appendix, Chapter 2)

Therefore, the second hypothesis does not support enough a theoretical answer to the research question.

Hypothesis 3: Career opportunities for freshly graduates amongst international students

The last hypothesis derived from the primary data analysis focuses on the career opportunities provided with the help of the partnerships between businesses, universities, and Municipality.

It is important to mention that in the questionnaire, more than 60% of the respondents have agreed that they are aware of public institutions that aim to help them find a career opportunity in Denmark.

Upon further research, it has been confirmed that from the industries that have the higher success rates were IT, Green Energy and Engineering, as there is a huge demand on the Danish local market for such professionals. In addition to this, language is not an imposing barrier within these industries, as most terms and processes are in English. Thus, adding another benefit to employing international students (Appendix, Chapter 2)

At UCN on the other hand, one of their main focuses are business graduates, which unfortunately are part of the specializations shutting down this year. The low rate of employment within this industry has been confirmed as well, as the areas of service, tourism and architecture have proven to be the hardest matches for international students – language being one of the main barriers.

In spite of this, focusing on the industries with the highest employment rates in Aalborg has a higher chance of becoming sustainable in the future. Besides the fact that it provides a sustainable lifestyle for the student, by still developing and growing in Aalborg, but it also ensures a constant flow of specialized young professionals that can cover the job demand in Aalborg and the regions.

Therefore, the final hypothesis has proven to be able to construct a theory surrounding the problem formulation that answers the research question.

Final theory:

With all these being said, the theory constructed at the end of this extended grounded theory states the following: support from the local Municipality for the international students in Aalborg, in their search for job opportunities within the Engineering industries, has the potential to represent still a constant sustainable resource for Aalborg.

This concludes that the research question within the problem formulation has been answered.

6. Conclusions

This research sought to identify new initiatives through which the sustainable development of Aalborg, a city in Denmark can progress accordingly to the Danish Agenda of Green initiatives set for 2030 (Green Hub Denmark, n.d.)

Taking the steps of a Grounded Theory research, the problem formulation looked at the current trends within sustainable tourism in Denmark, and the possibility of creating purposeful partnerships within the community for a greener future. Therefore, with the Green Hub Denmark's mission in mind, that of focusing "on sustainable framework development and collaboration strengthening to make a green transition to innovation," the focus of the report has been targeted towards the younger workforce of Denmark, specifically international students.

The thesis begins with presenting the problem formulation where examples of successful public-private partnerships within universities have resulted in beneficial outcomes for the destination, and even improvements in the sustainability instruments from the destination. The examples given were from Slovakia and Peru, where the partnerships with the local universities have generated young professionals specialized in the tourism development that have contributed to the forward-looking development of the region (World Tourism Organization , 2022).

Thus, the focus of the thesis was on *How can international educational tourism be seen as a possibility for sustainable destination development in Aalborg, Denmark?* Before diving into the concepts and analysis, the theory of science has been introduced. The thesis is based on the constructivist paradigm design, where the beliefs state that the reality is constructed through the points of view of the individuals, and it does not exist as a universal truth (Honebein, 1996).

Therefore, the research approach has been purely inductive, focusing on collecting the primary data, evaluating the patterns, and then generating a theory that aims to give an answer to the problem formulation (Delmont & Mason, 1997). The data collection methods used were semi-structured interviews and semi-structured questionnaire, distributed to international students from Aalborg through the private channels available. The interviews were carried out with one university representative and one representative from the local Municipality, with the purpose of understanding their reality and construct the theory later on.

The Grounded Theory approach stays as the base of the analysis, for two reasons: the first is the limited amount of information regarding the impact of international educational tourism in Aalborg, and the framework which allows the flexible collection of data. The result of the Grounded Theory is aimed to give an answer to the problem formulation under the form of a theory (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson , & Kangasniemi, 2016). The data was analyzed through the process of Coding and Constant Comparative Analysis due to the fact that it allows the data to be initially fragmented and divided into codes, then leads to creation of categories upon which further data collection aims to offer a more generalized understanding of the reality. The process culminates with the final theory creation made from the disassembling of the newly generated codes and categories, and reassembling them in an inductive, logical, and holistic way (Birks & Mills, 2015)

Data collection has showed two realities, different at first, yet interconnected. From the quantitative analysis, data showed that the persona profile of the international student in Denmark is a young adult, within bachelor's or master's studies, with a profile within business or technology at Aalborg University. The results showed that although various initiatives taken by the universities to get them in contact with possible job opportunities, the students have not felt like it was beneficial for their job search, yet they can see the benefits of working in Denmark.

On the other hand, from the semi-structured interviews, data showed that the public institutions are mostly aware of the new regulations of cutting down the English-taught programs and that leading to a sudden decrease in international students' arrival starting September 2022. On a brighter note, they do acknowledge the sustainable benefits that the international students have on the destination and seek to work with projects supporting that.

The most prominent result was the common agreement on the sustainable workforce the soon-to-be-graduates from Universities within Engineering, IT and Green Energy.

The analysis has concluded with the discussion, where the theory has been constructed based on all the data collected. Upon analyzing the codes, the research question has been answered by the following theory: support from the local Municipality for the international students in Aalborg, in their search for job opportunities within the Engineering industries, has the potential to represent still a constant sustainable resource for Aalborg.

This conclusion has been taken due to the fact that both Aalborg Kommune and the local universities support the lead generation for career opportunities for their international students. Their aim is to help them stay in Denmark as much as they would like to, while pursuing a career in the industry they have specialized in.

The research shows that study programs specializing in engineering, green energy and IT are the ones with the higher success of employability in Aalborg, on the polar opposites sitting the service and hospitality industries. Thus, by ensuring that the international students stay in Denmark, educational tourism can still prevail and keep a steadier pace than what the drop in English-taught programs has foreseen.

Therefore, the research has been concluded, with the problem formulation answered, after a thorough grounded theory analysis. The study has followed the concept of an “area of study that allows the theory to emerge from the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

7. Bibliography

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