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## **Abstract**

The tourism industry offers its customer a big variety of different sources of information regarding a travel destination. Number of different distribution channels present a destination, nevertheless, the information often do not correspond together and may mislead a reader. There are materials available, which are more related to a direct advertisement or less, yet, both of them can impact people's image of a destination. The number of different signals, which people receive from uncontrollable and uncountable amount of information sources affects their imagination of the destination and stimulates their approaches.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the questions regarding people's perception of incoherence in different information sources on travel destinations. The study went in depth within the enquiry regarding perception of incoherence in terms of past and present knowledge as well as in terms of past experiences. The different stimuli, as perspective or external signals coming from the environment were included in the evaluation and showed their impact on people's perception of information. Further, the aim was to investigate the subject according to the societies' (marketers, other tourists or destination itself) influence on people and their individual perception of information. It indicated the way, in which the images circulate in the environment and how people perception can change according to different stimuli. People's needs and expectation related to their holidays excessively evolve; therefore, the constant research on this subject is important.

The research is based on the selected theories and conducted focus groups interviews. The chosen target group is represented by fifteen people from six European countries in age between 23 and 34 years old. The result exposed that people value own experience and opinions of friends and relatives if facing uncertainty or unreliable information. The external distribution channels are rather used as secondary sources. Moreover, their perception of incoherence in different distribution channels is not as discouraging from travelling as a lack of information about a place at all. The analyses indicate that people prefer to create own understanding of received information, than to blindly depend on advertisements and other external sources. Further investigations present how the study could get elaborated and deepen the knowledge gained from this research.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Topic overview

There are several sources of information available for people that help to make a decision regarding a travel destination. In the academic literature the internal and external sources of information (the difference explained further in the project) are long known, and constituted a subject for several researches regarding their importance in decision making process (Sajjani [2011], Frochot and Kreziak [2008], Mansfeld and Pizam [1999], Kamins et al. [1997], Bowen and Clarke [2009]). Regarding a choice of travel destination, consumers' approach depends on several factors, which at last will allow making a decision for, or against a particular place (Lau and McKercher [2006], Yakup and Reyhan [2011]). There have been made many studies on aspects, which are influencing tourists' choices (Al-Haj Mohammad and Mat Som [2010]). Also, many theories got developed indicating that this subject has a constant need for further researches. People's needs and approaches to certain things constantly evolve and their behaviour keeps changing excessively, therefore *the evolution of tourists' behaviour encourages both changes and emergence of new meaning* (Williams [2006]). Constantly researching on tourists' preferences and perceptions of different sources and approach to it is important in order to meet their needs, and be able to adjust to it. Consumers searching for information about a particular destination will get a certain image of the place. *Consumers are increasingly empowered to decide how and when they like to be reached* (Lovelock [2007]), therefore they also choose the sources that may seem to be the most relevant for them. The tourists' approaches to the information received will then have its positive or negative consequences. People can decide to visit a place or choose another destination. However, it will also indicate that the destinations are highly depended on many different kinds of distribution channels and the ways in which the place is presented.

The big variety of sources can make a destination facing a problem of being perceived differently than the destination actually wishes to be seen. The tourism industry serves its consumers with a wide range of diversity of places to visit, likewise, variety of different materials presenting and judging a particular place of tourists' interest. There are materials, which are more related to a direct advertisement or less, yet, both of them can impact people's image of a place. Moreover, the sufficiency of information is crucial in tourism industry.

*The globalization of the industry intensifies the information required for all tourism transactions, and thus more effective communication and distribution channels are required in order to provide sufficient information and to undertake a transaction (Buhalis and Laws [2004]).*

Tourists are facing loads of information released by the destination advertising a place through official websites, brochures, radio programs etc. Many destinations are reviewed by other distribution channels, for instance, travel guide books, Internet pages, TV or others.

*Tourists even mix Internet and other non-media information sources, including commercial brochures and travel agents for planning trips (Ho et al. [2012]).*

The number of different signals, which people receive from uncontrollable and uncountable amount of information sources affects their imagination of the destination and stimulates their approaches. The images, which people will observe from different distribution channels *may be absorbed inadvertently, for example, from news broadcast, popular films and television shows* (Jenkins [2003]) and create an organic image (not related to a direct advertisement) of the place. Loads of different information interferes each other, like e.g. a personal experience, and might cause different image in people thoughts. Such a perception of image creation corresponds with a Circle of representation theory, where *images of the destination are projected collectively by the mass media. These images are perceived by individuals and may inspire travel to the destination* (Jenkins [2003]).

Circle of representation indicates that images are reinforced by the others and other sources, which constantly creates a new understanding and perception of the received message. The coherence of the information received from different channels is then doubted and challenged. One can imagine that it could cause a people's discomfort and lack of confidence while searching for the information. The coherence between the information presented by the destination and the other opinions about the place should be preserved and keep consistency. This means, that instead of reinforcing one way of understanding to another, the messages should rather complement each other. The coherence in presenting the place helps tourists to better imagine the product before purchase and the actual visit. One can say that the more information confirming one fact, the more accurate and reliable the information becomes. It is in people's nature to seek for information in order to eliminate the possible risk in perhaps the highest level.

*Marketing theorists long have argued that consumers seek information from a variety of sources when faced with risk of uncertainty. Because services appear to create particularly uncertain and risky purchase situations, it is logical to expect that consumer acquire information as a strategy of risk reduction in the face of this specific uncertainty (Murray [1991]).*

Coherence or incoherence in presented information may influence the final decision positively or negatively depending on the peoples' satisfaction with the

information and eliminated level of risk. Knowing this, one imagines that paying a particular attention to keep the information compatible should be one of the main goals of all the destinations. Nevertheless, some destinations may lose a track of all the written material about the place simply because of the loads of accessible information. The number of travel guide books or Internet pages may be simply hard to control. *Tourism distribution channels vary according to the type of the products and countries* (Buhalis and Laws [2004]) as well as each of the channels can be oriented differently and focus on various aspects of the destination ex. architecture, existing city life, culture, wide range of excellent restaurants etc. Consequently the information will vary from one information source to another, and will keep on emphasizing different features of a given place. Moreover, the official tourist organization representing a certain destination and other distribution channels are not the only existing sources giving opinion about the place. Number of stakeholders may have their own thoughts of the image of the place and may wish to present it differently, even with a focus on different target groups. This indicates how difficult it is for a customer to decide whom to trust and who provides most reliable information if those tends to vary. The general characteristics and image of the destination ought to be consistent and not confusing for the information receiver's comfort and confidence in decision making process. Taking into consideration people's perception of incompatible information regarding preferred destination, it is crucial to understand that their choice often will depend just on those distribution channels.

There may be situation among people that they may not have a possibility to confront the information with the internal sources e.g. ask relatives for an opinion. Such confrontation, nevertheless, would be of a high value *because we rely a great deal on others people's opinions to help resolve uncertainty* (Eiser [2004]). Otherwise, the information will come from the external channel, where somebody will *claim to be knowledgeable or expert in some way* (Eiser [2004]). It is only up to the reader to decide how much trust he or she can give to this information in comparison to some other sources. As a result, this can potentially cause customer's resignation from a visit, if his or her interpretation of the received information won't be satisfying enough nor meet the receiver's expectations.

## 1.2 Intangibility in Tourism

The tourism products *cannot normally be seen, touched, smelt, tasted, tried on for size or stored on a shelf prior to purchase* (Evans and Campbell [2003], Fakeye and Crompton [1991]). These intangible features of tourism products differentiate them from all the others, which can be tested before the actual transaction. This has a significant meaning regarding the investigating subject about people's perception of various information of the same destination. Intangibility of the tourism product is difficult enough to judge and estimate its qualities. Additionally, if the potential customer of tourism product receives loads of different information from number of different distribution channels, and if the information does not correspond together, the output of such research may cause a big confusion and disorientation in people's minds. Therefore, the coherence in sending the right and clear signals to the customer is very signif-



icant especially in the tourism industry. The travel, which tourists intend to experience, is one of a kind and hard to repeat in the exact same way. The tourism products consist of many diverse factors, like for instance interaction with service providers, which every time can be different. Those experiences can vary from trip to trip and the satisfaction then will be influenced by the unpredictable features of service providers or other, not depended on the tourists, factors. The trip cannot be tested in advance and cannot be predicted in hundred percent. Some uncontrollable elements of the trip, like delayed plane, not helpful receptionist, or distribution channels, which misleads the actual image of the place, will make some contribution to the journey. The issue of nonsearchability is then big. *It refers to the fact that intangibles cannot be searched or inspected before they are purchased and experiences can only be determined through extended personal involvement* (Lovelock [2007]).

People, by extending their knowledge about a destination, look for materials, which will present the closest and most reliable reflection of the place. They tend to go to the Trip Advisor or different travel blogs in order to read about other people's experiences. However, as people are different, the way they perceive things may vary as well. Some tourists may be more demanding than others and some may meet staff, which will be able to serve them better than others. Some tourists may be happy with the weather, and some may think that the weather ruined their experience. As Weiermair [2004] says *a lot of different service suppliers participate in creating tourism experience*. This indicates how unpredictable the experiences can be while on holiday. The intangible feature of such product may make people worry that they are certainly not able to plan the trip in its every aspect. Weiermair [2004] confirms it by saying that

*Intangibility of tourism products implies a large amount of risk and uncertainty about customer value. A guest, who booked a certain holiday package, does not know with certainty what he can expect and how he will eventually perceive and judge the quality experienced in his vacations* (Weiermair [2004]).

In tourism industry an awareness of intangibility feature is present and not left behind, while designing tourism product adverts. For example *travel brochures help to overcome the intangibility problem and this is why so much effort, expense and creativity are devoted to their design* (Evans and Campbell [2003]). Nevertheless, an effort of one distribution channel presenting the destination may not be enough when it comes to confrontation with others. Intangibility of tourism product makes its introduction to the consumer's senses, which may initiate their perception of risk or uncertainty.

### 1.3 The Risk & Uncertainty

The questions regarding risk arise in many disciplines and areas of life like health, lifestyle, economy, transport or climate change (Eiser [2004]). Moreover, according to the decision making process, there is a risk, which people may take by relying on certain sources of information. Risk in such situation can arise when consumer get different opinions regarding the same place.

*Distribution or marketing channels are system of mutually dependent organizations included in the process of making goods or services available for use or consumption* (Segetlija et al. [2011]). However, what is important to remember is that information is written based on a subjective opinion and interpretation of the authors. *Particularly for the destination it is crucial to create confidence, to determine quality criteria and to introduce measures to reduce risk for the customers* (Weiermair [2004]). The uncertainty occurs while people get a chance to get familiar with more than one source, and if the number of information will not confirm each other's information. Incoherence of the information regarding travel destination is therefore perceived as uncertainty due to the further consumer's satisfaction. The risk can be defined as something *representing any situation where some events are not known with certainty* (Chavas [2004]) or *any event that is not known for sure ahead of time* (Chavas [2004]). Eiser (Eiser [2004]) points out, that *we have choices to make, and these choices can have consequences for ourselves and others*, however, it is because *we need to act under condition of uncertainty that the concept of risk is of interest* (Eiser [2004]).

Chavas (Chavas [2004]), however, indicates the difference between risk and uncertainty. This rather *intuitive* difference, as he calls it, is that *risk corresponds to events that can be associated with given probabilities*. An example, which he presents, is flipping a coin, since the probability to get e.g. *tails* is 0,5, hence the outcome can be easily, equally judge positively or negatively. Uncertainty, from another hand is *more difficult to assess* like for example probability of *occurrence of earthquake in a particular location*. Here, the chances are not as equal and it may take longer time to assess the probability of such event. The meaning of the two terms, however, is very close to each other and both indicates emotions rather negative than positive. Both terms push people for better evaluation of the subject and require estimating how much the risk or uncertainty, which they are facing now, is going to affect them at the end. Therefore, for this study the risk and uncertainty is understood as feature of the same kind, which makes people anxious despite if the chances of the event to happen is of 50%, less or more. As a result of it, in this project the terms risk and uncertainty are used *interchangeably* because *the problem is also that there is not a clear consensus about the existence and interpretation of a probability* (Chavas [2004]). Regarding the risk in a decision making process about travel destination, people have the advantage that they can still have an impact on the possible outcome. Simply they can choose a place of limited risk in a dissatisfaction.

People's approach to the different sort of distribution channels can call up the thought of worrying that the choice will not be satisfactory enough, or be acceptable as much as necessary to encourage to the visit. The risk, that the information presented in the distribution channels will be coherent, should not be high. Instead should be incontestable regarding facts about the destination.

#### 1.4 Trustworthiness of the Information Sources – The role of Trust

The trust is a *mental stage* (Castelfranchi and Falcone [2001]), which allows people to rely on something and believe in information's trustworthiness. *Trust*

*is the subjective probability by which an individual, A, expects that another individual, B, performs a given action on which its welfare depends* (Castelfranchi and Falcone [2001]). Trustworthiness is defined as *a property of being able to be trusted, while trusting is to have a belief or confidence in honesty, goodness, skill or safety of a person, organization or thing* (Chiu et al. [2009]). Regarding people's approach to various sources of information, trust may play a significant role. People, while being unconfident, unsure or they do not have knowledge about something, they wish to find a mentioned *person, organization or thing* (Chiu et al. [2009]), which they can rely on and trust their opinion. One can imagine that people by extending their knowledge by reading certain materials, trust, that information is consistent and people who provide the information, trustworthy.

Many people may try to get the sources, which already have some reputation, which are long on the market, and which they heard about from friends or relatives, means those, which can be recommended.

*Reputation in turn affects the success likelihood of subsequent recommendations, forming an interesting cycle of consequence* (Chiu et al. [2009]).

Chiu, Leung & Lam (Chiu et al. [2009]) talk about recommendation as social interaction. Social interaction refers to the mentioned cycle of consequences, since people exchange their thoughts regarding travel destination, and may compare it with external sources. This, in result, has its consequences, positive or negative for the destination. Both, external and internal sources have its influence on people but the question can rise, whom can they trust and why the information is not often alike. One of the reasons can be that people judge things subjectively and experience things differently. Their expectations differ; hence, their satisfaction and final judgement may be different at the end. Nevertheless, as it was mentioned, people still tend to trust those who they know and those who may already have had a similar experience. Hence, the internal source may often seem to be more trustworthy. It is interesting to observe this phenomenon and make a further investigation on people's reasoning and choice, which they make based on received various information from different sources of different values and features.

## 1.5 Research questions

This research is based on the materials from various distribution channels regarding Aalborg, city in Northern Denmark. As the pre-research indicates, the official tourist web page of Aalborg Visit Aalborg presents the city in a certain way, which does not always correspond with other available sources of information on the market. Lack of cohesion in information (also among other external sources) for tourists may cause different reaction like for instance, confusion and, at last, discouragement, or others. However, for a better understanding of what incoherent information causes, the study sets the following questions:

- **What is people's perception of incoherent information about a tourism destination and how it is related to their prior knowledge and past experiences?**
- **How is image creation influenced by advertisement related sources, other people's opinion and people's individual approach to information?**

In the analysis the answers for the above questions will be given based on supportive theories and answers of the interviewees.

## 1.6 Structure of the thesis

Structure of this project is planned in a way, which facilitates understanding of researched subject and let a reader to follow the chapters in accessible form. For this reason, this thesis will be divided into five major parts (chapters), where each of them has its explained purpose. Each of the parts will be developed in order to build the project in one and coherent whole.

In the first chapter, the reader will be introduced to the researched subject and its general feature. There, the information about the subject's background and stated problem formulation is presented. The second chapter will contain information of applied methods and approaches during the research period, which presents the character of the thesis and the authors understanding of the matter. The choice of research area opens the chapter with an explanation of reason for conducting the study. Following, the features influencing the research are presented. In the third chapter, the reader will be introduced to the theoretical background of the subject. This chapter will be divided into sub-chapters, where each of them presents a chosen theory to scrutinize the topic and to be able to answer the problem formulation in an academic way. The chaos theory opens the chapter to be followed by the communication aspects. Later the perception of information theory is presented. Following the images part and circle of representation close the theory chapter. These information and gained knowledge will be implemented in the following, analysis chapter (chapter four) where the gathered information will be confronted with analyzed interviews. Conclusion (chapter five) will be a closing part of this project, where further investigation will be presented.

## Chapter 2

# Methodology

The purpose of this project is to academically scrutinize an issue related to people's perception of incoherence while searching for the travel destination with a support of diverse sources of information. This chapter explains the process of the study being conducted and indicates the approaches, which have been applied in this project. The choice of research area opens the chapter with an explanation of reason for conducting the study. Following, the features influencing the research will be presented.

### 2.1 The choice of research area

Studying people's behaviour is not new in the tourism industry; however, it retains its attractive nature to the researcher and need for a further investigation. The knowledge about customers' needs and expectations are meaningful to the service providers and it creates a constant need of scrutinizing behavioural evolvments. This consisted a ground motive of conducting the study and was a factor for leading the investigation into a less researched subject, which is not just how people look for the information, but what their perception of some given information is. The academic purpose of this project is to research, the particular aspects of people's approach to various information contained in different distribution channels, yet, presenting different information, about the same destination. The aspect, which leads to a thought, that it is necessary to make a research on this subject, lays in the conviction that people do not stay indifferent to the information receiving from different sources. From the existing literature, however, one cannot learn what people's approach to different information is and how it influences their perception of a destination image.

Information search, nevertheless, plays a significant role in the process of image creation and as one of the interviewees said *I believe that searching for information about a trip is the half trip itself* (Maria). One can imagine that frustration or uncertainty is not a feeling that should accompany this process. Therefore, an investigation on people's perception of incoherent information may have its outcome in better understanding of the customer needs, and answer the question of incoherence's nature in people's information searching process and information perceived. The study on incoherent information in distribution channels and importance of this subject is indicated by the fact that people's interests in different information sources are already well developed

and many searching methods are known to people (Money and Crotts [2003]). Hence, it is important not to ignore these factors, which may strongly influence peoples images, and which often are first to be evaluated by the customer. The different sources of information may greatly affect people's thoughts and cause expectations, which actually cannot be fulfilled by the destination and the service providers. In the academic literature, one can find many studies made on tourists behaviour (Swarbrooke and Horner [2007], Bowen and Clarke [2009], Pearce [2005]), however, not many studies indicate customer behaviour regarding perceiving information, which, even though is accessible, may have an opposite effect on the customer, than intended.

## 2.2 Research strategy

There are certain components, which influence the research and its structure, as well as assist in answering the formulated questions. The research, in order to keep its consistence, contains of (a) research paradigm, which indicates the way the author views the world (Moncur [2004]), (b) research design explaining the way, in which the study is conducted (Altinay and Paraskevas [2008]), (c) choice of respondents, explaining how the interviewed people are chosen (Altinay and Paraskevas [2008]), (d) settings and course of events, showing how the interviews were conducted, (e) analysis methods indicating how the author makes sense of the findings to answer formulated questions (f) sources (Altinay and Paraskevas [2008]), (g) generalisability, reliability and validity of the research.

### 2.2.1 Research paradigm

The word paradigm in Greek language *paradeigma* means model, pattern or example (Moncur [2004]). Guba and Lincoln (Guba and Lincoln [1994]) explain paradigm as a *set of basic beliefs*. The paradigm, according to the authors *represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to the world and its parts*. There are numbers of paradigms, which guide people to a certain action in everyday life but also those in connection with disciplined inquiry (Guba and Lincoln [1994]). Guba (Guba [1990]) points out three basic questions, characterized as ontological, epistemological and the methodological questions.

The ontological consideration of this project could be perceived in various paradigms as positivism, postpositivism, critical theory and constructivism. Constructivism is a paradigm characterising this research indicating that

*Reality is intangible, a construction of the human mind shaped by experiences of the world, it is dependent on the individual and can be changed with new information* (Guba and Lincoln [1994], Moncur [2004]).

This character of the study is confirmed by *interaction between researcher and the subject* (Guba and Lincoln [1994], Moncur [2004]), which plays a significant role in constructivism and is a crucial part of this research. The author of the project constructs her own understanding of the world and the investigated subject, and *presents a specific version of social reality* (Bryman [2012]). As a part of social construction the author herself presents a meaning based on her

own understanding of the subject. However, interviewees participating in this research are part of social construction and their knowledge and perception of a research subject is based on the previous thoughts and experiences. Bryman (Bryman [2012]) refers to it as

*How individuals make sense of the world around them and how in particular the philosopher should bracket out preconceptions in his or her grasp of the world.*

By further studies of individual texts and opinions, this gives a researcher a wider view of a whole explored subject (Boell and Cezec-Kecmanovic [2010]). Such interaction between researcher and interviewees enriches the study and explains an application of qualitative method mentioned further in research design. Firstly, however, epistemological consideration of this project will be presented as a second question stated by Guba (Guba [1990]).

The epistemological question asks about the relation between researcher and knowledge (Guba and Lincoln [1994], Moncur [2004]). An issue of this concept concerns the enquiry of *whether the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures, and ethos as the natural sciences* (Bryman [2012]). The epistemological approach can answer the question in positivist paradigm or interpretivism. An important issue here concerns objectivity, which is perceived differently according to an ontological consideration. According to Guba (Guba [1990]) *once committed to realist ontology, the positivist is constrained to practice an objective epistemology*. Consequently, by perceiving the world as social constructivist, one is more likely to commit to epistemological consideration of interpretivism. Regarding the epistemological consideration of interpretivism, the knowledge is based on subjective beliefs, values, reasons and understandings (Voce [2004]). Therefore, interpretivism is a paradigm characterising this research. *Humans shape the world through their own experience* (Moncur [2004]) and the nature of the reality can be expanding by interpretation (Moncur [2004]). In this research, it is represented by thoughts and interpretations of people interviewed for this study. Here, it is important not only what they think but why they did come to such a conclusion. People are different from each other and experience different things, which make them understand things differently. As well, *a person with an experience is in a better position to know the meaning* (Rennie [2000]). According to Rennie, each person has own values and beliefs and interprets own experience. Therefore, an interpretation made by the researcher is an interpretation of people who interpreted own experience and thoughts. Concluding, the author of this project by choosing interpretive approach admits that objectivity is not to be achieved in this study. According to Bryman (Bryman [2012]) it is meaningful to acknowledge, that *research cannot be value free, but to ensure that there is no untrammelled incursion of values in the research process and to be self-reflective*. This statement confirms Greenbank (Greenbank [2003]) by noticing that the researchers by choosing a particular research method are influenced by their ontological and epistemological position *that in turn will be influenced by their values*. Moreover, according to Carr (Greenbank [2003]), people who claim that their research is value-free are *deluding themselves* and, as McDonald in (Greenbank [2003]) adds, it is *misleading others*.

This indicates the difficulty of escaping from creating a value - free research. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie [2004]) say that *value-free*

*research is a myth.* This project is supported with number of theories, already existing materials, and empirical verification, furthered analysed with a purpose of being academically valid. However, the author of this research approaches the study as interpretivist, therefore this perception allows the study to be viewed through her eyes and understanding. *Interpretivists accept the influence of their values, rather than falsely assuming that they are able to depersonalise their research* (Greenbank [2003]). This statement reflects the picture of this research.

Methodological question is the third question stated by Guba (Guba [1990]) and answers the enquiry *how the researcher will go about the research* (Moncur [2004]). The answer to this question, however, is *constrained by answers already given to the first two questions, that is, not any methodology is appropriate* (Guba and Lincoln [1994]). Therefore, from the constructivist position this research has a hermeneutic base. Hermeneutics concern *how the understanding of parts relates to the understanding of a larger whole and vice versa*. It means that the amount of information collected during the research process become clearer while the researcher looks at the materials individually, then all gathered together, and individually again. The amount of the information moreover increases during the process; therefore, the information and the understanding the subject get extended until the research reaches its conclusion. In hermeneutics, the knowledge is deepening by a constant evaluation process and interpretation of gathered information (both theoretical and empirical). According to Lavery [2008] constant interpretation and circulation between theory and gathered information is to *increase the depth of engagement with and understanding of texts*. The process consists of getting to know the opinion of people interviewed for the purpose of this study, understanding the meaning and interpretation of gained knowledge. Both theoretical and empirical knowledge are analysed separately and together in order to produce as informed and sophisticated construction as possible (Guba [1990]). Here, the aspect of deductive or inductive study may represent another way of approaching the research. This study, however, is to a certain extent characterised by two of these approaches. As Veal (Veal [2006]) points out, the involvement of pre-understanding and pre-knowledge of theory and empirical data makes it hard for the researcher to have a precisely indicated deductive or inductive approach. The study according to Veal (Veal [2006]) has then element of inductive and element of deductive approach. In this research this is characterised by conducting qualitative interviews indicating inductive approach, which influenced the choice of theory. The deductive approach is here represented by reviewed existing literature, which affected the qualitative method and chosen theory.

### 2.2.2 Research design

In order to scrutinise the investigated subject qualitative method of research is chosen. Qualitative interviews correspond with a research paradigm, where the focus was set on the understanding of individuals and perception of the world in a way, which is shaped through experience. Qualitative interviews also show the subjective thoughts of individuals (Kvale). And since this study is based on individual thoughts and people's perceptions of incoherence in information, the qualitative method was the most appropriate to examine this phenomenon. By applying qualitative methods as investigation technique, the researcher is able



to make a better understanding of the answers and feel associated with people being interviewed than by applying quantitative method. In the qualitative research *the emphasis is on the stated experiences of the participants and on the stated meanings they attach to themselves, to other people and to their environment* (Eysenck [2004]). Understanding of people's perception and reaction is a crucial goal of this study. The study regarding feelings or emotions would not be done as precisely by using a quantitative method. In quantitative research the information obtained from the participants is expressed in numerical form (Eysenck [2004]) and understanding of answer's meaning is limited.

Qualitative study gives an opportunity for elaboration of thoughts and deepening the meaning of received answers. This qualitative study, in contrast to quantitative method, does not show an interest in number or any statistics (Veal [2006]), but focuses on understanding a meaning of given information. This was additionally chosen in order to enrich the study by collecting more precise information, which is rather harder to achieve by using a quantitative method (Veal [2006]).

Moreover, the character of the study is touching upon a sensitive subject like perception of incoherence. The aim of the research is to investigate people's approaches to it in regards their own feeling and subjective opinions (Kvale [2008]). Therefore a method of applying a focus group interview was chosen. *The aim of a focus group is not to reach a consensus about, or solution to, the issues discussed, but to bring forth different view points on an issue* (Kvale [2008]). In this research, the focus is set on investigating what people's approaches are in regards to incoherence, which means that the research wants to know what people *feel or think about something* (Krueger [2009]). The important thing about focus group is that

*It is not to infer but to understand, not to generalize but to determine the range, and not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people in the groups perceive a situation* (Krueger [2009]).

This method, therefore, by letting people to interact and discuss among each other, assists in getting a more emotional and expressive answers than in the one-to-one interview Kvale [2008]. In regards to it, a bigger group will indicate more opinions, hence, broader point of view of the subject (Krueger [2009]). However, as Krueger & Casey (Krueger [2009]) also suggest that a researcher can adjust number of interviewees in one group according to the investigated subject, aim of the study, complexity of the topic, number of questions etc. In regards to this project two persons per group were chosen. This decision was made due to a few factors. Firstly, the interviews were planned to be conducted via Skype with people who have never visited Aalborg, therefore, not those who live in Denmark to mineralize this possibility. Second, due to the online methods of conducting the interview the researcher had to consider the technological aspect of it and the least breakable option. Therefore, the written method was chosen over speaking method. This caused a consideration that it may be difficult to let everyone write and answer all the questions and keep the interactions vital. The navigation of all the interviewees answering each question would be difficult with many participants. Despite those factors, a subject of the research is rather sensitive and considers people's feelings and emotions.

According to Krueger & Casey (Krueger [2009]) *if the research investigates an issue or behaviour* it is recommended to choose fewer people for the interview. In result, fifteen people were interviewed in total. Ten of them were in groups of two. Two persons, however, due to the difficulties in finding a common time were interviewed separately. This is considered as a weak point; however, the reason of utilizing their answer in the research is based on conviction that their answers still brought a useful perspective to the subject. Nevertheless, to verify if their answers differ meaningfully or not, from the people participating in the focus groups, three other qualitative interviews were conducted. The result of conducting extra interviews was moreover considered as useful for the research due to the collected bigger number of valuable opinions. The findings are presented in the analyses part.

### 2.2.3 Choice of respondents

This research investigates people's perception regarding incoherent information in various sources of information regarding travel destination. According to the first consideration concerning people who should be interviewed, no limited number of people was set as well as no specific choice of target group was established since evaluation of every group would have a significant meaning to this study. Moreover, the author is aware that a bigger verity in people participating in this research would give a bigger opportunity in deeper examination of the subject. However, due to the limited time assigned for this research and complexity of analysing number of several groups during this period of time, the author decided to focus on one target group. The people chosen for interviews are representatives of European countries in age between 23 – 34 years old with no children, under employment. The author of this research sees this segment in four corresponding ways. (i) They are young people, with an ease to travel especially in Europe due to the open borders, (ii) no children, which also influence a way of perceiving the world and differentiate them from families with small children or even empty -nestors, (iii) economical independence, (iv) they never visited Aalborg or Denmark. Their knowledge about the city is based on materials handed in by the researcher during the conversation or opinions of friends. These features characterise people contributing in this study and their answers are not intended to generalize an investigated subject. The goal is to understand and interpret the findings.

### 2.2.4 Settings and course of events

Regarding the organizational aspect of the interviews conduction few things are set. The interviews are conducted on Skype in a written method to avoid misconnections or other technical obstacle, which could easier occur while talking. During one interview two persons participated with an intention of an interaction between people with often different cultural background, which could enrich the discussion and final findings. The language of the interviews is English due to the fact that English is a common language between a researcher and two of the interviewees. The strategy of conducting the interviews is inspired by Warr's (2005) study mentioned by Bryman (Bryman [2012]), which she called *icebreaker*. It was to ask the participants easy questions at the initial stage of the discussion, which works as an opening to further conversation

Table 2.1: List of Interviewees

	Nationality	Age	Gender
<b>Joanna</b>	Poland	25	F
<b>Marcin</b>	Poland	25	M
<b>Maria</b>	Greece	30	F
<b>E-dog78</b>	Greece	34	M
<b>Antonios</b>	Greece	30	M
<b>Rafal</b>	Poland	25	M
<b>Eleonora</b>	Poland	25	F
<b>Laci</b>	Hungary	28	M
<b>Benoit</b>	France	28	M
<b>Maron</b>	France	28	M
<b>Inga</b>	Latvia	24	F
<b>Martin</b>	Germany	25	M
<b>Marianne</b>	Germany	23	F
<b>Marcin S</b>	Poland	27	M
<b>Csaba</b>	Hungary	25	M

with released and relaxed thoughts. Regarding this study, the questions are planned in a certain way, which is not disjointed from an investigated subject, but, which should give interviewees an impression of informal character of the conversation and lead their thoughts into direction of travelling, holidays or information searching subjects. This method is additionally perceived as

*Less artificial as many other methods, because, in emphasizing group interaction, which is a normal part of social life, it does not suffer from the problem of gleaning information in an unnatural situation* (Bryman [2012]).

The purpose of this method in this project is to learn about people's feelings and possible reaction to incoherence in received information. Therefore, the natural situation where everyone feels comfortable is crucial. The duration of the interviews vary according to the time the interviewees could spare on it. Therefore, the duration of the conducted interviews is between one and two hours. Moreover, some of the people are better in elaborating on own feelings and expressed things in different ways than others, however, all of the interviewees show interest in the subject and let the research go in depth with the asked questions. According to Bryman (Bryman [2012]), it is good to prepare the interviewees before the exact interview and stimulate them with, for example, some pictures. Regarding this project the researcher introduces the interviewees to the subject of incoherence instead of showing any particular sources.

### 2.2.5 Analysing methods

In this thesis, the meaning of the answers given by the interviewees plays a significant role. The analyses are based on the provided answers. The analyses method applied in this study is called meaning condensation, which implies a shorter version of what the interviewees said (Kvale [2008]). In this method according to Kvale [2008] the researcher first reads the whole interview in order to understand the whole meaning of the text. Then the research determines the *meaning units* as they are expressed by the interviewee. Later, the researcher restates the meaning of the units according to own understanding. Further, the application of certain understanding of the text is explained *in terms of the specific purpose of the study* (Kvale [2008]). At the end the most necessary themes of the interview *are tied together into a descriptive statement* (Kvale [2008]).

### 2.2.6 Sources

The materials used to scrutinize the subject are of a broad theme, which means that the answers for the stated questions were not searched only in sort of tourism related materials. Some of the valuable knowledge is gained from the different disciplines of study like for example psychology (Castelfranchi and Falcone [2001], Chavas [2004]) or marketing (Lovelock [2007]). The combination of those materials enables to look at the issue from a wider perspective and by this, not limit the view at the researching stage that could cause overlooking some of the important information. The researcher cannot be sure, nevertheless, that accessed all the possible materials. However, the summary of chosen literature constitutes a logical composition of materials with help of which the problem formulation can be answered.

### 2.2.7 Generalizability, reliability and validity

It is necessary in an academic research to indicate the quality of the study. The generalisability, reliability and validity explain why this project can be viewed as academically relevant work.

*The word generalizability is defined as the degree to which the findings can be generalized from the study sample to the entire population* (Myers et al. [2000]). This study does not focus on applying the findings in to the entire population. This qualitative study is based on a limited number of interviewees with a purpose of interpreting their knowledge, which possibly may indicated the direction in which the further researches, if conducted, may result.

Reliability *deals with replicability* (Silverman [2006]) and can be distinguished between external reliability and internal reliability. External reliability refers to *the degree to which a study can be replicated* (Bryman [2012]) and internal reliability refers to *whether, when there is more than one observer, member of the research team agree about what they see and hear* (Bryman [2012]). In this study the external reliability is not considered since there is one author of the study. Reliability means to which extent a given research can be done again and research the same results. In regard to this project reliability may be hard to achieve, since people who got interviewed in this specific period of time manifest the knowledge, which is applicable for this certain moment. This

may not be possible to repeat and get the exact same result since researchers *deal with human beings in differing and ever-changing social situations* (Veal [2006]).

Validity can also be represented both internally and externally. Internal validity refers to *whether there is a good match between researchers' observations and the theoretical ideas they develop* (Bryman [2012]). The external validity refers to *the degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings* (Bryman [2012]). The research and its validity is influenced by several factors. For example the personal interest of the interviewees or pre-knowledge and understanding of the subject.

## Chapter 3

### Theory

The theories used in this project should give a better understanding of people's perception regarding incoherent information in different sources of information on travel destinations. The chaos theory is introduced as the first one due to the way of its utilisation. The chaos theory will be used as initial basis of the study. The theory explains that the information comes from different direction and often can be misunderstood due to the jamming factors appearing (sometimes unpredictably) on its way. The jamming factors are related in this project to incoherence in transmitted information. The transmitted information, even though has its considered audience, does not ask if the information was received. The chaos theory, therefore, is rather understood here as one way direction in sending information. Hence, the communication aspect assists this part in order to introduce an interactive relation among sender and receiver.

The information communicated can, as well, be perceived differently according to various factors. The perception of information will be discussed, and will explain that is dependent on concepts as experience, the mention jamming factors and incoherence. The perception of information will lead to the part related to image, which people create based on gained knowledge theoretically or through experience. The images section will be an introduction to the circle of representation theory, where it is explained that images circulate in the environment and evolve due to the constant move between the society's influence and individual understandings. The Figure 3.1 presented below is introduced in order to make the chapter easier to follow.

#### 3.1 Chaos theory & Butterfly effect

The Chaos theory will be used as an initial basis of the study. Chaos theory, *is a study of nonlinear dynamic systems* (Levy, 1994) that are highly sensitive to initial condition (Hilborn, 2004). The butterfly effect is a term used in the Chaos theory to describe how small variation can affect gigantic systems. Edward Lorenz who in 1963 popularised this effect (Hilborn, 2004), presented the butterfly effect as a concept illustrating that one flap of butterfly's wings can create a whole sequence of various events.

*For a chaotic systems, even the smallest change in initial condition, due, for example, to the flapping of a butterfly's wings, may lead to*

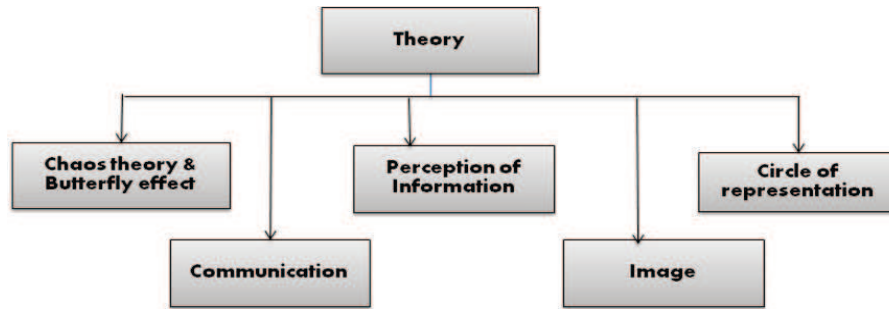


Figure 3.1: Conceptual model presenting the theory chapter

*dramatic changes in the behaviour of the system* (Hilborn, 2004).

The model was based on the interaction of different elements of weather, which could lead to a creation, delay or even acceleration of tornado on the other side of the world. In this project the use of Chaos theory is determinate by mean that the interaction or interrelation between tourists and distribution channels is largely extended. The information come from different directions and is based on observations of number of people, giving various opinions about the same place. This also means that the *decision by one actor take into account anticipated reactions by others and thus reflect a recognition of interdependence* (Levy, 1994). The number of distribution channels available for the tourists creates a picture of a place in people's imagination and affects the way they will perceive it. If the customer is willing to get familiar with more than one distribution channels, there is a risk that the information may not be coherent, hence, the picture of a destination unclear.

Here, the Chaos theory and butterfly effect are used to frame the understanding of incoherent information's cause and effect regarding various distribution channels. It will help to evaluate how the differences in information sources can influence people's behaviour and an approach to the given distribution channel or a destination. This theory is framing the theoretical part of the study and leads to other theories, which will be used in order to scrutinize the nature of people's reaction to unpredictability, uncertainty and trust according to incoherent information in various distribution channels. This cause and effect approach will indicate if a butterfly's wings flap represented by incoherence can actually meaningfully affect people's perception of a destination. The butterfly's wings flap is associated in this project with an incoherence in the information, but more generally, in communication. The cause and effect approach is related to the communication aspect in relation to its purposeful nature (Hargie et al., 2009). This is a reason for sending information; however, the butterfly's wings flap can change the understanding of transmitted information. Communication, therefore, will be further discussed as an important, and one can say, inseparable aspect associated with tourism industry.

### 3.2 Communication

In the literature, an explanation of communication is presented as something, which

*Requires that at least two contributors are involved in an ongoing and dynamic sequence of events, in which each affects and is affected in a system of reciprocal determination* (Hargie et al., 2009).

Communication, hence, is understood as two ways direction move where the sender does not only inform of something but is affected as well by the receiver's understanding of it. Communication consists of concepts as message, information and knowledge (Zins, 2007) where the last one will be discussed later on. To define the first two concepts, Zins, 2007 says that *the message is a meaningful content of information*. Message can also be viewed as *encoded information* (Zins, 2007). Hargie et al., 2009 refers to a message and say that it is

*A pattern of thoughts, configuration of ideas, or other response to internal conditions about which individuals express themselves. Such expression, however, presupposes some form or behavioural manifestation: thoughts and feelings, to be made known, must be encoded or organized into a physical form capable of being transmitted to others.* (Hargie et al., 2009)

He also defined message *as the content of communication embodying whatever it is that communicators wish to share* (Hargie et al., 2009).

Information, however, is understood as a concept, which *refers to the selection within a system* or as *selection of meaning* (Zins, 2007). In other words

*Message is a medium through which data, information and knowledge are transmitted and used.* (Zins, 2007)

It means that the message is used to send information to the receiver. Information in social psychology is generally defined as *anything that produces changes in consciousness of the human being – a perception, a sensation, an emotion, a memory, a thought* (Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Information can also be seen in a context e.g. situation or task (Pan and Fesenmaier [2000]:11). Pan and Fesenmaier [2000] explains that it *involves motivation and intention, which is further connected within a broader social context as task, personality and culture*. Nevertheless, the way, in which the information will be understood, depends on many factors, as for instance mentioned culture, experiences and prior knowledge (Fulcher, 2003).

After having said the above, one additional aspect of communication should be considered. Hargie et al., 2009 refers to communication and says that *communication is purposeful*. People interact between each other and *communicate their emotions for some purpose* (Hargie et al., 2009). In the tourism industry this concept plays a significant role and is used in e.g. marketing practices. The tourism industry offers many distribution channels for the customers. Information contained in travel guide books, brochures, Internet sites or in many others, takes a role of introducing a particular knowledge to somebody who



may know little about a destination or does not know anything yet in particular. The responsibility, which the distribution channels have regarding providing a reliable information is big. Distribution channels' role is *to bring buyers and sellers together* (Buhalis and Laws, 2004). They should *provide convenient point of sell and/or access to consumer* (Buhalis and Laws, 2004) and be informative so people can make an easy judgement on the destination by themselves.

For people, this situation may be perceived in several ways. The more information sources, the less consistence and reliability, or, the more information, the bigger perspective. Hence, it becomes easier to understand the overall picture. *For information to become meaningful, signs must pass through attention* (Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Different information sources may focus on different aspects of a destination; therefore, they catch attention of different targets. As the Figure 3.2 illustrates, a sender transmits encoded information to the receiver, however, it may be disturbed by a noise, which in this sense is represented by incoherence of information in distribution channels. Also, the way, in which the receiver perceives it, depends on different factors, related for example (which is not mentioned in the model) to the past experience and interpretation of the receiver. This indicates as well that *what is received differs from what is transmitted* (Losee, 1998) and feedback will be able to verify it.

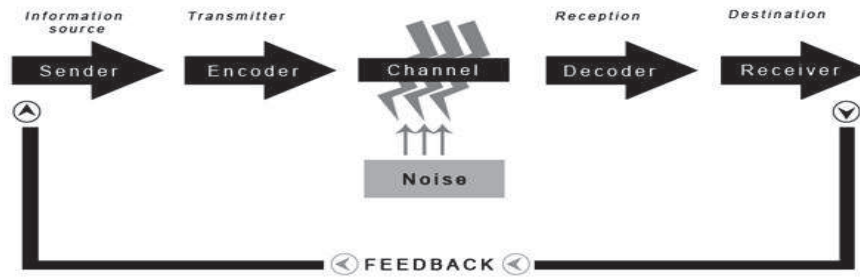


Figure 3.2: Shannon's - Weaver's model of communication

*People use information to create knowledge* (Bartlett and Toms, 2005). The knowledge, which is the third concept of communication means

*Knowing, familiarity gained by experience; person's range of information; a theoretical or practical understanding of; the sum of what is known* (Zins, 2007).

The knowledge, which they will create based on all the received information from different sources generates a judgement in people minds and help to approach the message in own, subjective way. Knowledge is called as *structured and organized information that has developed inside of the cognitive system or is part of cognitive heritage of an individual* (Zins, 2007). Knowledge here is understood as a subjective understanding and personal interpretation of received information. Knowledge can be also understood as *information structured for use* (Gregory, 2009). Information reaches people through many channels, including interacting with others. Here, one can say, information is a *dynamic*,

*interactive social process of inquiry that may result in the making of meaning or the making of decision* (Bartlett and Toms, 2005). The subjective treatment of the information is often judged by others who then generate own understanding of it. Therefore, information can be understood as a circulating tool of social interaction. Communication is significant in tourism industry. The components of communication play a significant role where the first step toward purchasing a product or service is information search (Simon Wong and Gladys Liu [2011]), which enables people to create a knowledge.

It is necessary, therefore, to understand how people look at the information, how they do perceive it and which outcome it can bring. In the tourism industry, communication is a crucial tool affecting people decisions and choices; therefore, the subject of its nature should not be overlooked. Information, as one of the communication's concepts, according to Buhalis, 1998 is seen as *lifeblood of tourism*. This, as well, indicates how important role it plays in the industry and how many things depend on the information. Buhalis, 1998 mention how big role it plays in regards to competition. Nowadays, people have a big choice of information sources; hence, the information market is rather difficult. However, information is a first thing, which consumer will see before the purchase and before the actual visit. Therefore, a study on people perception of incoherence in information is crucial to know the target and be able to provide them with expected product or service. In tourism industry information plays a big encouraging or discouraging role. To illustrate the meaning of information the Figure3.1 indicates in how many stages the information plays a crucial role and shows that adequate information counts.

Motivation and searching behaviour are not, however, a main subject researched in this study, nevertheless, by having a brief look at this aspect, one can see that information is present in every stage in making decision process, searching for the information, collecting data, eliminating data, choosing again, encouragement, discouragement and so forth. Information is *lifeblood of tourism* (Buhalis, 1998). The investigated question regards what people's perception of incoherence in distribution channels is, therefore, the consideration is taken that the answers can vary and present different approaches to it. The discussion regarding different ways in approaching information is presented below and has its purpose in answering a main question from the problem formulation regarding people's perception of incoherent information about a tourism destination.

However, before going in depth within the next two sections of perception and image, the introduction to the two of these terms is necessary. The perception (discussed below) and image (see next section) play important role in this discussion and the whole project. Both of these concepts are evaluated, however, for a better understanding of the similarities and differences, the brief characteristic follows.

The image, in its academic definition is characterised as *the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions individuals have of attributes and/or activities available at the destination* Lin et al. [2007]. And the perception is understood as *the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted* (Oxford Dictionaries). Both of these concepts are discussed further.

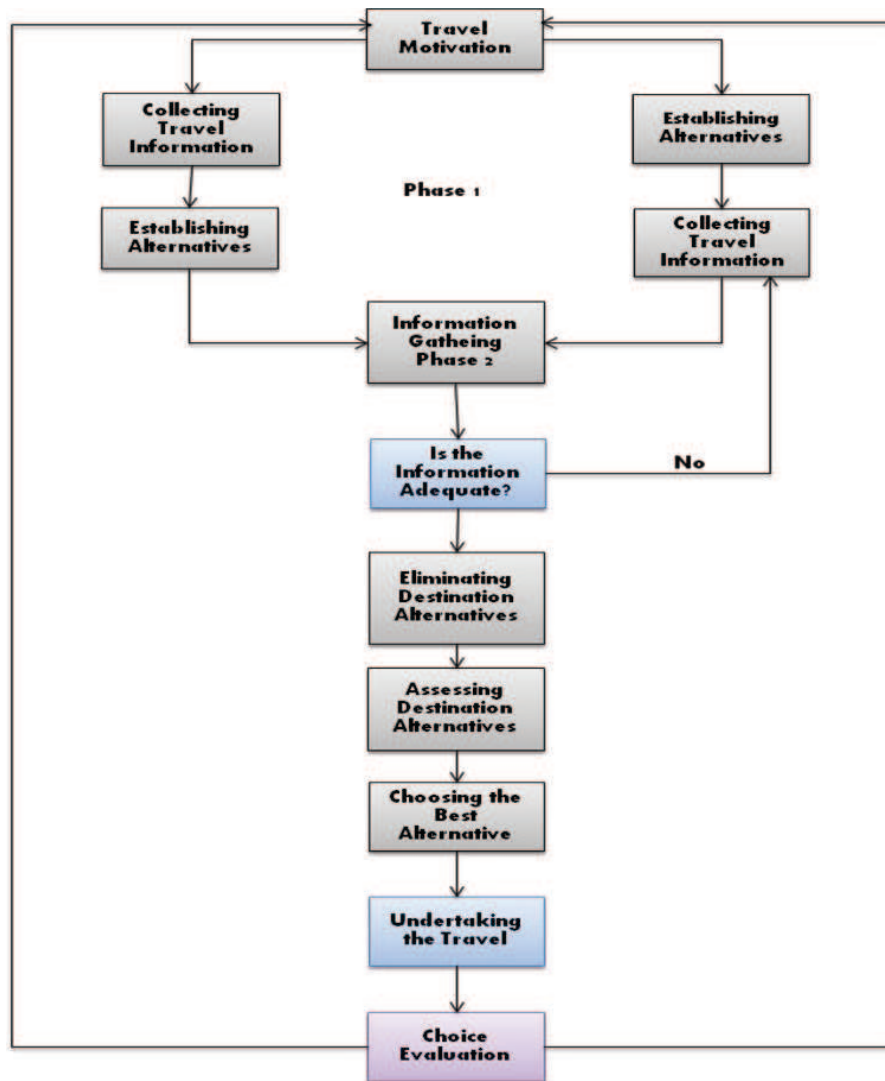


Figure 3.3: Conceptual model of tourist destination choice (Mansfeld 1992:402)

### 3.3 From Bottom-Up to Top-Down: Perception of Information

The theory of perception has been developing and has its beginning in a visual perception where psychologists were discussing about its nature. The word perception comes from Greek and means *receiving, collecting, and action of taking possession, apprehension with the mind of senses* (Shankar, 2008). According to more recent definition it is *the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses or the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted* (Oxford Dictionaries). Perception is the *based on knowledge* (Gregory, 2009). To approach it academically, two psychologists

made a big research on perception's nature.

James Gibson from 1950 argues that perception is direct (Noë and Thompson, 2002) and consists of *a bottom-up process, which means that sensory information is analysed in one direction* (Fulcher, 2003). In his explanation there is no need of interpretation or processing the information because the picture of what people actually see is clear. *For Gibson our nervous system is perfectly attuned for detecting necessary information in the environment* (Fulcher, 2003). Gibson's theory, however, got its opponent and in 1970 Richard Gregory argued that *perception is a constructive process which relies on top-down processing* (Fulcher, 2003). He argued that knowledge and past experience are crucial for perception. People, by perceiving something, develop a hypothesis, which is based on prior knowledge (Fulcher, 2003), hence, people do interpret received knowledge. Gregory (in Shankar, 2008) says that top-down approach *refers to the use of contextual information in pattern recognition*, people see and understand better when are given an example or whole picture of a case. He explains it in an example where, in order to understand a difficult handwriting it is easier to do it if one can read a whole sentence instead of a single, given word. This research associate with the top down approach and this will be further discussed.

In time, this approach even though introduced in 1970 got evaluated by other researchers who view this theory with more recent approach and give it a present time approach (Noë and Thompson, 2002; Fulcher, 2003; Shankar, 2008). The sources from 1970 may seem to be outdated, however, according to many people's interest in this theory and number of researches made in regards to it (Noë and Thompson, 2002; Fulcher, 2003; Shankar, 2008), it makes this source consistent and helpful. In the further part of this chapter Gregory's perception of information will be explained more in depth and introduced in regards to this research.

The purpose of applying Gregory's theory of perception is to answer the first question from the problem formulation. With an assistance of interviewees' answers the aim is to find out what people's perception of incoherent information about a tourism destination is in regards to the prior knowledge and experiences. To understand Gregory's theory and explain it more in depth it is necessary to say that there is an important, additional aspect. Even though he does not agree that the perception is only direct, as Gibson claims, he acknowledges importance of considering this approach in a holistic understanding of perception. He says that

*it is useful to distinguish top-down knowledge from the past; bottom-up sensory signals from the present; and general rules, such as for perspective, which we may say, are introduced sideways* (Gregory, 1998).

This indicates that perception is more complex and there are more stimuli reaching person's brain in order to create an understanding of perceived information. He argues that *even though perception depends on rich knowledge from the past stored in the brain, there must be a problem in identifying the present moment from past memories* (Gregory, 1998). And as he adds *the present moment needs to be identified for behaviour to be appropriate to what is happening out there now*. As an example, Gregory, 1998 shows a situation, where a person

is crossing a road and sees a red light. He or she must know that the light is red now, not in the past. Therefore, the combination of past and present knowledge, and the knowledge perceived from a perspective gives a wider view on the information. The Figure 3.4 visualises how people generate hypothesis based on those factors. Gregory distinguishes between conceptual knowledge, which he explains as *all we know, or think we know* (Gregory, 1998) and perceptual knowledge explained as *implicit semantics* (Gregory, 1998) where semantics is understood as *the study of meaning* (Britannica Encyclopaedia). Hence, in different words, perceptual knowledge can be explained as implied interpretation but not in a direct meaning (Thesaurus Dictionary). The interaction between conceptual and perceptual knowledge generates then a hypothesis and let people create a perception of what they see and how they understand it. The understanding of the information based on the past experiences is, however, fulfilled by the present signals sending from the environment (Gregory, 1998). The picture of reality is processed to the brain and gives a meaning to the object. Hence, the person is able to interpret the situation from the past and apply it in a present situation. The understanding of what has happened in the past, as it was mentioned, helps to make an easier judgment of the situation. This approach of combination of knowledge from the past (conceptual knowledge) and from the present (perceptual knowledge) will be extended by applying another suggestion of Gregory, which says that people *receive information from the environment, which is also combined with previously stored information about the world which we have build up as a result of experience* (Fulcher, 2003). The perception, according to him is not influenced only by the experience and present knowledge but also by different signals received from different sources of information. Those have impact on the way people perceive things, and this aspect will play an important part in the analysis. The external signals impacting people's perception (hypothesis generator) are not applied in an original model introduced by Gregory (Gregory, 1998), however, these factor got added for a purpose of this research.

The perspective understood as *the capacity to view things in their true relations or relative importance* (Britannica Encyclopaedia) will be considered as a factor influencing people's perception. Due to the time, which person's brain got for an interpretation of the message, the way of understanding of the meaning evolves. The sideways input, as Gregory calls it, will be considered in this analysis. The output is the final stage of the process of perceiving information and the first stage for another. All the received information, influencing people brain, generates an understanding of the message and perception of given subject. This stage let people to evaluate if the perception of the information was a success or a failure. Either way, experience, which just got evaluated, is a conception, which will be remembered in the future and will consist of information saved in the brain, to be released in a next relevant situation. For this study it is necessary to figure out how people perceive the incoherent information about a destination, and this, is closely related to perception of image of a destination. The distribution channels, by transmitting information let people to create an image, which based on received information they will generate. The concept of image, therefore, is further discussed.

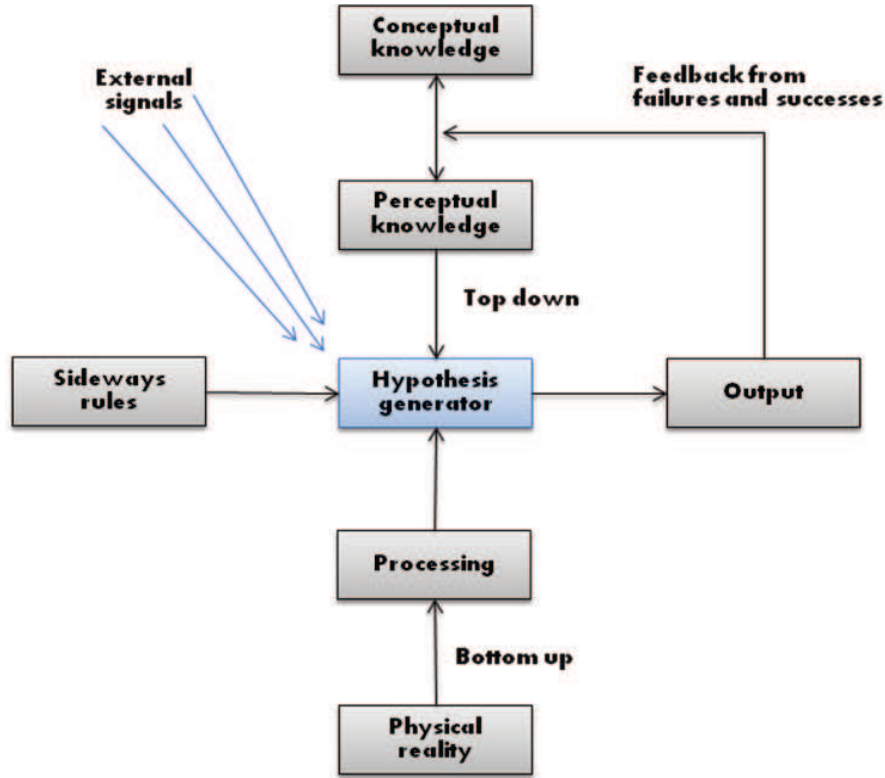


Figure 3.4: Perception processing (Based on Gregory 1998:2)

### 3.4 Image

The image of a tourist destination *is a major influencing factor in travel destination choice* (Hanlan and Kelly, 2005). Baloglu and McCleary, 1999) call it *a valuable concept in understanding the destination selection process of tourists*. The image, in its academic definition is characterised as *the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions individuals have of attributes and/or activities available at the destination* (Lin et al. [2007]). However, it is referred to *as more holistic impression (mental picture or imaginary) of the place* (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). The image creation, therefore, is influenced by different characteristics, presentations, information, which people receive from the environment about the destination, but also factors, as motivation or socio-demographic characteristics (Frochot and Kreziak, 2008).

Echtner et al., 1991 see image formation *as the development of a mental construct based upon a few impressions chosen from a flood of information*. By the information flood they mean all the sources, which influence people from the environment both externally and internally. Moreover, the image still evolves after the actual visit of a destination (Hanlan and Kelly, 2005). In the tourism industry the number of sources of information and the distribution

channels is already big, and still growing. The number of magazines, travel books, guides, web pages, but also discussion among friends and relatives in regards to a particular place is hard to control. The Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) face a challenge to achieve clarity and consistency of image of the destination (Hanlan and Kelly, 2005). DMOs since are not the only organisation, which can give an opinion about a place, confront the way they want to present the place with other distribution channels. Additionally,

*the existing literature shows the development of destination image as a multi-staged process, where travel consumers develop an initial image of a destination through exposure to information sources beyond the control of the DMO* (Hanlan and Kelly, 2005).

Kim and Yoon, 2003 confirm that the image creation is not only something that people creates independently, but it also contains ideas held collectively about the destination. The signals coming to people from uncontrollable amount of sources impact people's imagination of the place, which creates some expectations about the destination. Nevertheless, as mentioned, the actual visit will make the image change in people's mind. It is also important to mention here the use of past experiences in regards to the image formation. As Gregory said that both perception and image are influenced by the past experience. People without an experience based their imagination of the place on the knowledge gained differently from other inputs. Lin et al., 2007 wrote that

*Past experience with the destination is the most important factor predicting destination image because tourists with past experience tend to search less information from external sources.* Lin et al., 2007

Therefore, the difference between internal and external sources became very meaningful in the image creation. The information sources distinguished between external and internal will be now presented more in depth. It will give an introduction to the image components and image formation part, which follows afterward. This order will help to see an overview of a discussed subject and keep track on it. The Figure 3.5 presents a proposed integrated model as an overview of discussed elements in this project.

### 3.4.1 Information Sources

The information sources, as it was already mention, are represented by a big number in tourism industry and offer a variety of materials for the customer. *Information search is undertaken by tourists early in the decision process and is divided into two stages: internal and external search* (Frochot and Kreziak, 2008). Both of them will have an impact on the image, which people will create. As the image formation will be distinguished between organic and induced, means more or less related to the advertisement practices, the internal and external sources are divided into more or less close to a person searching for the information. Internal sources are, therefore, represented by factors as memory, past experience, advices from friends or relatives. Those factors are personally affected.

According to Frochot and Kreziak, 2008 if that information will happen not to be satisfying enough or insufficient, people will then turn to look in the

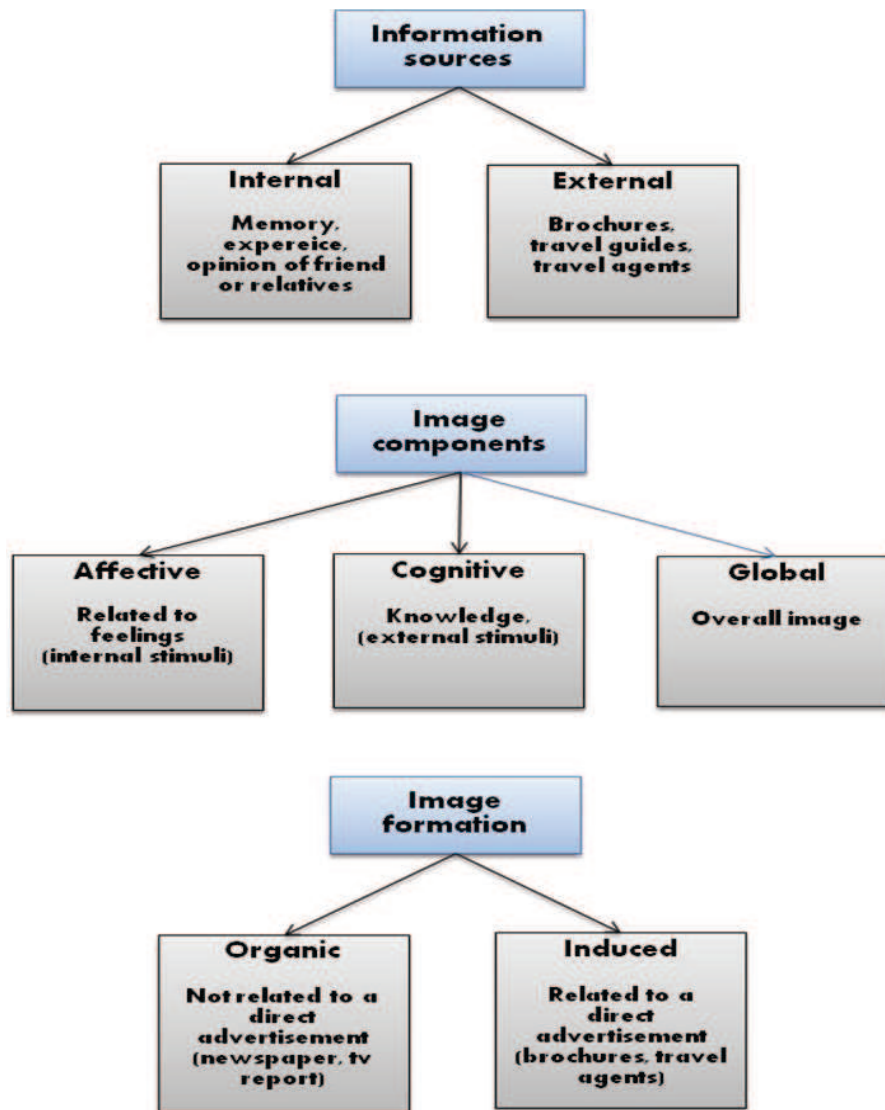


Figure 3.5: Proposed integrated model as an overview of discussed elements

external sources. Those are related to factors as travel agents, brochures, official web pages etc. Frochot and Kreziak, 2008 argue that a sufficient search plays a significant role for people, due to the intangibility in tourism products and the price, which they are going to pay. Murray, 1991 refers to it as collecting information helps to prevent a possible risk. Based on the existing literature one can say that the opinions of friends or relatives have a significant meaning regarding image creation and choice of a destination (Frochot and Kreziak, 2008; Hanlan and Kelly, 2005; Murray, 1991). Word of Mouth (WOM) became an important tool in image creation. People tend to trust more those that they can rely on. The information from external sources work for many people



as a secondary source used for expending knowledge or find more induced information. This will be shown more in depth in analysis part (see Chapter 4).

### 3.4.2 Image components

It is relevant to mention that before people are going to look for any specific sources, they already have a particular perception of the place. They have own experience from the past and thoughts that make them build a specific opinion about the place. Lin et al., 2007 argue that people use bi-dimensional model of destination image - the cognitive image and the affective image. The cognitive image component refers to knowledge about a destination called external sources, or stimuli (Kim and Yoon, 2003), mostly focusing on tangible features. The affective components, from another hand, presents the feelings about a destination like pleasant-unpleasant, exciting-gloomy, relaxing -distressing, called internal sources, or stimuli (Kim and Yoon, 2003). It can create expectations regarding a destination. In this situation, one can combine two of the components and a past experience.

It will help to look at the particular destination from a perspective and judge the destination based on different competitive advantages (Kim and Yoon, 2003). Baloglu and McCleary, 1999 add also a global component understood as an overall image, which is a result of the combination of affective and cognitive one. Kim and Yoon, 2003 say that the cognitive image precedes the affective one but later these two components create an overall image, which helps to make a decision regarding destination and create an understanding about the place (see Figure 3.6).

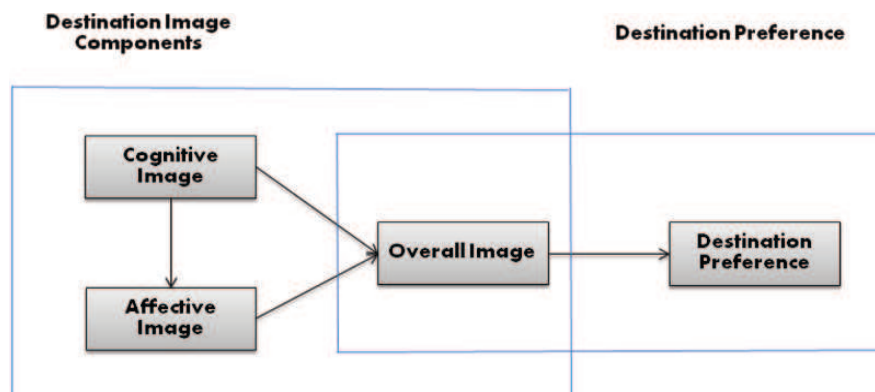


Figure 3.6: Integrated model (Lin et al. 2007)

These two dimensions, knowledge and feelings, and global image created afterwards, can affect the whole result of an experienced travel. Baloglu and McCleary, 1999 notice, however, that there is a *common agreement among diverse researchers* and that *affective evaluation depends on cognitive assessment of objects and the affective responses are formed as a function of the cognitive ones*. They explain that even though there is a distinction between cognitive images and affective, these two are interrelated. The distinction is that people

create an image separately based on feelings or knowledge, but only those two components gathered together can give an overall image of the place.

### 3.4.3 Image formation

In 1972 Gunn established that the formation of the image could be separated between organic and induced (Lin et al., 2007). The organic formation is a result of exposure to information sources as news reports, magazines, films, documentaries, friends and relatives. It means, those sources, which tourism marketers have the least impact on. The organic image, however, evolve to an induced image, when a person decide to go for a holidays to this destination and starts to look for formal information sources like brochures or travel agents, (Frochot and Kreziak, 2008) means those, where advertising practices take place. The actual visit helps to confront the information gained before the trip, make own judgement of the place and construct a new, richer image. This phase, where a person can see a place and judge it gives even more complex picture of the place, and the image become even more clear than in the induced phase (Frochot and Kreziak, 2008).

The authors say that to be able to create a complex image of the place, people have to experience it through all the phases. Otherwise, people with no experience with a destination *will develop solely cognitive response* (Frochot and Kreziak, 2008). However, as Fakeye and Crompton, 1991 mention,

*the individuals who has never visited a destination or sought information on that destination will have some kind of information stored in memory, even though it may be incomplete, to which she or he adds other pieces.* (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991)

Therefore, one can say that the image is formed through the past experience and knowledge, however, the complexity of the image perceived vary according to those two concepts. Having said all the above, the theory of circle of representation can be introduced. It will help to answer a second question from the problem formulation regarding what affects an image creation and how it is influenced by the society's impact and individual approach to information. Circle of representation regards the circulation of the images in the environment, hence, the mentioned aspect about image are useful in better understanding of the whole process of image formation and circulation.

## 3.5 Circle of representation

Jenkins, 2003 presents a circle of representation (on Figure 3.7), where she explains the phenomenon of images circulating in the environment and evolve due to the constant move. The purpose of applying this theory into the research is to answer the second question from the problem formulation regarding what affects an image creation and how it is influenced by the advertisement related sources, other people's opinion and individual approach to information. Jenkins agrees that the images are perceived by individuals and may encourage travelling. Those images, which she refers to, come from different sources like external or internal. Then the image is getting perceived by a person and the image has its affective and cognitive components. During an actual visit the

image formation will be affected by the actual experience and perceived more complexly. However,

*Tourists can be exposed to a range of different stories associated with a destination, both before and during their actual destination experience* (Morgan et al., 2010).

Jenkins, 2003 says that during an actual visit a tourist will most likely visit the iconic attraction, which he or she will know from the moment when his or her knowledge and image of the place was only cognitive. The tourist may then, besides creating an image in his or her own mind, take pictures, which after holidays will show his friends and relatives. This will work as image projection, which begins the cycle again.

According to Edwardset al., 2009, pictures taken by people convey the way they perceive, understand and interpret the world. The pictures shown to others afterward are perceived as a proof of the experience but also as a *tool* for saving the experience better in memory. According to Van Dijck [2008] *the photographs forms part of their process of communication and identity formation*. Van Dijck [2008] adds that it has another purpose as of helping people to remember where people were and what they did. It helps to show people's life style and how it was in the past. This, however, as the time passes by will also evolve, and people will look at it from a perspective Van Dijck [2008]. This has an impact on the way in which people will present the pictures and their memories to others.

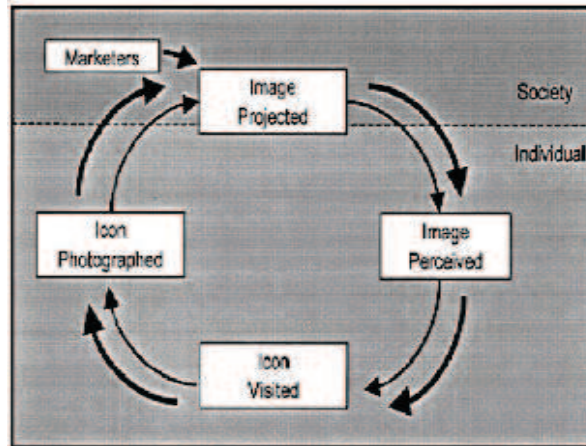


Figure 3.7: Circle of Representation (Jenkins 2003:308)

The communication between a person and sources and other people is crucial in image circulating process.

*There are some points of similarity between a human being and a communication channel. For example there are inputs or stimuli that go into the human, and outputs or responses that come out of the human* (Fitts, 1995).

This way, the image is in a constant evolving process. One person by perceiving something in certain way will create own understanding of it and sent the signal further to the environment, which somebody will receive from. According to Morgan et al., 2010 *the stories told by the personal at the destination, stories told by friends and family and stories told by other tourists* are influencing the way people will perceive the destination image.

Each of these sources is represented by people who have experienced the destination and have a certain, generated image of the place by themselves. The society's impact, therefore, plays a significant role in the image creation. When decided to visit a place, which people heard about from other people, they will create own understanding of what they have heard before and confront it with what they see by themselves. By taking the pictures of visited place and presenting them to their friends or other people, the image will circulate further and impact other people perception of the place.

### 3.6 Theory application

This part explains how the presented theory will be applied in the analysis section and how the theories correspond together. The brief introduction will help to keep the analysis section more accessible and easier to follow. The chaos theory is presented first, however, is applied in order to answer the third question from the problem formulation. The theory will show how big effect incoherence has on people regarding travel destination. The answers of interviewed people will assist in showing people's approaches to this issue more in general. To scrutinise the subject more in depth, the perception of information part will explain it in terms of past knowledge and experiences. Those two theories will be followed by the circle of representation theory, which assists in answering the second question from the problem formulation. It will show what impacts an image creation and how it is influenced by the society's impact and individual approach to information. It will also show how the images circulate in the environment and how this process impacts people.

The use of interviews will have a crucial meaning for the theories verification, however, the number of interviews cannot indicate that the findings can be consider in a big scale. It can show, however, the way in which the findings can proceed if decided to make a research involving bigger group of people. The theories applied in order to go through the investigation academically, are corresponding together and supplement each other. The chaos theory, even though does not consist a main question in the investigation, is an essential part of the following work. The general question of how big effect incoherence has on people regarding travel destination is an opening question to the rest of the analysis. As it was explained, the butterfly's wings flap is understood as incoherence in information received. Information, assists in image creation and without knowing the answer for this question, it would not be as relevant to go in depth into more detailed enquiry. Therefore, chaos theory opens the analysis part and is followed by the main question asking what impacts the image creation based on experience and past knowledge. The two theories supplement each other by investigating the nature of incoherence in presented information and image creation step by step, slowly going more in depth.

The circle of representation is the theory, which corresponds with the two

previous once, by investigating how the circulating images affect people and how the images evolve. This theory can be applied and scrutinised in depth thanks to the two previous theories, giving background information and deeper understanding of the research area. Each of this theory has a specific purpose. Each of the theories leads to the understanding of the whole subject and make the enquiry fulfilled and comprehensive to the degree, which the subject requires in order to answer the formulated questions. The investigation is based on chosen information about Aalborg.

### 3.7 Examples of Aalborg from various sources

While searching for the information about Aalborg, one can find a lot of different sources, which often do not characterise the city in a similar way. Since this project is focusing on investigating people's perception of incoherence in sources of information on tourism destination, sources presenting the city in various ways are chosen for the investigation. Interviewees get familiar with the sources, which they are asked several questions on the city's image, perception regarding incoherence of the messages received, importance of cohesion and other, which are further presented in the analysis chapter.

The sources of information presented to the interviewees are represented by a) Visitaalborg, the official tourism organization's webpage of Aalborg, b) Lonely Planet travel guide book (2012), c) DFDS Seaway Ferry Cruises webpage offering trips to Aalborg, d) AARP Travel, a webpage where a customer can organize a trip by booking a hotel, fly, cruise, or rent a car, and e) Toowsit Travel Guide webpage. All of these sources present Aalborg and each of them does it in a specific way, which will be now presented. (To see websites addresses see appendix 2.)

Visit Aalborg tries to cover as many aspects of the city as possible, consequently many different target groups can possibly find something attractive. The webpage shows many pictures, helping to visualise the city, which contributes in building an image about the place. The webpage can easily appeal to couples or families and people with different interests and various culinary expectations as the city offers many restaurants. By exploring the webpage, one can feel that all necessary information about the city are covered. Nevertheless, other mentioned sources of information look at the city from more judgemental position.

Lonely Planet (2012) notices the transformation of the city from being industrial to become more touristic by saying

*A concerted effort has been made to rejuvenated the central industrial areas and turn neglected spaces into something far more appealing, and authorities are wooing tourists with free city bikes free summertime city-circle bus* (Lonely Planet 2012:260).

However, by looking at this sentence as one of the first after reading about the geographical location of the city, one can see that there is nothing more interesting beside the free city bikes. By studying the guide further one can find descriptions of other attractions, architectural features and other characteristics.

DFDS Seaway Ferry Cruises webpage sees Aalborg as *The University City in North Jutland*. Further the city is presented as a city best known for its university and industrial stature. Later the attractions are presented starting with museums, through a zoo and a beer walk as an attraction for adults. An overall positive opinion differs from what Visit Aalborg and Lonely Planet broadly presents. AARP Travel, which cooperates with Expedia (one of the most popular booking sites), does not introduce the city as a place very much worth visiting. In the first sentence about Aalborg it is written “We won’t pretend that Aalborg is our favourite city in Jutland – Århus is”. Such beginning can have a very discouraging affect on a reader, even though, in the following sentence it is written “But once in this city opening onto the Limfjord, we always manage to have a good time, and so will you if you avail yourself of all its attractions, especially some of those in the environs.” Additionally, as an important thing, which according to the AARP Travel is worldwide known, is akvavit. As a characteristic the historical part is presented, however, in a meaning that the history is well preserved and “History is a living reality in Aalborg”. Toowsit Travel Guide presents Aalborg in a descriptive way, not giving a clear, personal judgement of the place. The facts like good roads, prices for the buses, number of restaurants and main attractions are presented in a formal way. From this information is hard to get a feeling of the atmosphere of the place, which for some may be too dry, but for others maybe live a space for own way to create an image of the city. The mentioned sources are accessible and available to the people. Beside others, those are among those that can be seen by people planning a trip to Denmark and Aalborg. Further analysis will help to scrutinise the role and perception to incoherence and how big effect it has on image of the place.

## Chapter 4

# Analysis

### 4.1 Chaos Theory & Butterfly's effect

The Chaos theory and butterfly effect are used to frame the understanding of incoherent information's cause and effect regarding various distribution channels. The interviews conducted in a process of investigation are used in this part in order to scrutinise this knowledge. The interviews were analysed according to the meaning condensation method where the research first read the whole interview and later implies a shorter version of what the interviewees said. However, before going in depth within this part, it is necessary to know which information sources people use the most in general. It is useful to know in order to show where, i.e. in which sources the incoherence may appear.

Marcin says that he uses *firstly always internet* because, as he says *it is simple*. Inga, Benoit, Eleonora, Marcin S and E-dog78 say that they use Internet the most and E-dog78 adds

*I find information about my destination from Wikipedia and YouTube. First I read about the destination and in YouTube I see video information.*

Laci agreed with it, after mentioning that the opinions of other count the most. However, he added later *I also use internet, of course*. Csaba has the same opinion as Laci and says that he uses *mostly internet or friend decisions*. Laci was a part of focus group and Csaba was interviewed individually. Maria says that she uses *both internet and travel guides* which Joanna confirms, however, she says that she use book only *if I have them at home. I don't buy unless I am sure that I will travel to the country*. In this case the travel book is already chosen after decision made about the travel destination, not to learn in order to make a choice. The similar approach has Marianne. She says *when I have picked a destination I usually search for information by internet and often also by looking some books up at the library*. For her the destination will be chosen first and the knowledge will be expanded afterwards by looking at different sources. Here it is interesting to mention that Joanna was a part of focus group and Marianne was interviewed individually. Similarly, as in case of Csaba and Laci, the answers, are understood as corresponding despite the methods of conducting an interview.

Antonios says that Internet and books are the sources, which he uses, which Rafal also confirms by saying *I always try to do some research on the Internet, but the last time I have bought a travel guide*. Slightly differently Maron talks about it and says that travel books are better for him than Internet because, as he says

*I'm too lazy to look on Internet. I don't need to print the page and he adds in a guide, I have all the information that I need in the same book. And Martin says that he uses basically only internet, if somebody I know happens to have a guide book or something I would take a look.*

The opinions collected in numbers show that 7 people (4 men and 3 woman) use the Internet and the travel books where both of the sources are use equally; 7 persons (5 men and 2 woman) value Internet over other sources and 1 men prefers the travel guide books. People's age does not seem to play a big role since for instance Marianne and Antonios both value Internet and travel guide books. Inga and E-dog both value Internet despite the age. The gender and nationality is does not play a big role in their answers and does not show a pattern in preferences of the sources .The Table 4.1 shows an overview of information sources mostly used by the interviewees.

	Travel guides book	Internet	Travel guides book & Internet	Word of Mouth
Joanna PL 25			😊	😊
Marcin PL 25		😊		😊
Maria GR 30			😊	😊
E-dog78 GR 34		😊		😊
Antonios GR 30			😊	
Rafal PL 25			😊	😊
Eleonora PL 25		😊		😊
Laci HUN 28		😊		😊
Benoit FR 28		😊		😊
Maron FR 28	😊			😊
Inga LV 24		😊		😊
Martin GER 28			😊	😊
Marianne GER 23			😊	😊
Csaba HUN 25			😊	😊
Marcin S PL 27		😊		😊

Table 4.1: Information sources mostly used by the interviewees



Nevertheless, according to the opinion of friends and relatives, the interviewees confirmed what was mentioned in regard to this in the information sources part. WOM plays a significant role and the opinion of friends and relatives counts the most. As said, people trust those that they know, hence, the external sources as travel books or the Internet become a secondary source used for expending knowledge or find more detailed information. Inga says

*I think the word of mouth is still the strongest influence simply because you get the information from people you trust-like relatives and friends, and, secondly, you also want to participate in discussion about the destination and it pushes you to go to that place.*  
(Inga)

And Rafal confirms *I think friends' opinion can be reliable, especially close friends or family*. Others confirm it, however, Antonio says that *I don't look other opinion from other people because is totally different from what you see* and when asked about the opinion of friends and relatives he says *it can be as guidelines*. Based on the interviews conducted, one can see that WOM, the Internet and the travel guide books are the most popular form of information search. Those answers are useful in the further part of the analysis, where the investigation will go in depth in the subject of incoherence, its cause and effect. The given answers present an overview of which sources people tend to use and where (if it does) the incoherence may appear.

Chaos theory will be applied now by showing if and how the incoherence in information based on Aalborg example, affect people and what effect it causes in the way they perceive the destination. According to the interviewees, the incoherence can be understood in various ways. For instance E-dog78 sees it as following *When you get info from different source you get more complete picture of city*. The incoherence of different sources did not cause the uncertainty, but rather a better overview of the place. Maria says about the given sources that

*They try to give different views of the same city but they focus on different aspects of it and adds I think one support the other in order to get a complete view of the city but not in a confusing way.*  
(Maria)

Rafal and Maron agree that the information provided are sufficient by saying

*I think you can get whole view by reading all information together. The most important thing is to gather simple facts from those information* (Rafal).

And Maron confirms *I have enough information. For me, I don't see confusion between the websites, it's just a question of presentation*. Marianne says

*I had the feeling that all those pages referred and focused on different things. One on the zoo f.e. the other one on akvavit, the next on historical sites and some of them on nightlife. But all together I got a comprehensive picture of the city* (Marianne).

Laci says *I think they correspond, but the way of writing is different. Different styles*. Antonios provides an answer, which one can understood as the bigger differentiations in answers gives better picture of the city, by saying *that can*

*fulfilled each other because of the difference of the opinion.* Marcins S says *I don't think this city can surprise me with something after all this descriptions.* However, Joanna, Inga and Benoit have different opinions and say that

*It's ok but cannot be the only source of information. I need more to make myself sure that I am not falling for the advertise of the city (Joanna).*

And Inga says

*if compare all the websites you gave me, I would say that the city [is] presented in slightly different ways and adds later I would go anyway but wouldn't expect too much from the trip not to be disappointed in the end. (Inga)*

Benoit confirms *My feeling is that I will need to cross check with more web sites... so in other words I would say that the information are misleading.* The answers collected indicate that interviewees' level of seeing the incoherence is not big. None of them said after getting familiar with all the information that incoherence would discourage them from the visit, but rather make them double check and extend their knowledge about the destination, or, simply, not expect much. The incoherence of information does not cause a negative, discouraging effect.

Figure 4.2 presents a collection of interviewees experience in travel, age, gender and nationality, and perception of incoherence in information given about Aalborg. It indicates that the experience in travelling does not make it easier to feel confident about the place. From another side, one can say that travelling once or twice a year, makes people confident enough not to feel confuse and discouraged by sources presenting different information about the same place. Therefore, it is difficult to see here if number of travels a year is a factor, which influences perception of incoherence. It may rather be the experience with searching for the information and comparing it with experience already gained. It is hard to say that only experience with searching for the information or only experience with travel affects people. Maria says *I believe that searching for information about a trip is the half trip itself.* For some people, the whole experience, from the moment of search till the end of the journey will influence the perception of incoherence when searching for information in the future. In relation to age or gender one can say that the perception of incoherence is not that differentiated. Elsrud, 2001 says that risk and adventure are *still partly gendered embracing its masculine supporters while excluding its female intruders.* This can be partly confirmed by this research where only 1 men and 2 women confirmed that the information make them feel uncertain and they would have to make a double check.

The rest were not feeling uncertain due to the number of incoherent information. Information search, however, can be seen as a process, which influence the imagination of the place and risk perception. The given answers are based on the whole picture of the city gained from the provided materials. However, if one looks at the process of getting familiar with the information about the city, one can see that the lack of incoherent feeling is not that obvious at the first phases of the research. To illustrate it, one can look at the given answers just after seeing few first sources. Martin says

	Number of travels (per year)	Feeling of incoherence	Gender
Joanna	15	Yes	F
Marcin	5	No	M
Maria	1	No	F
E-dog78	1	No	M
Antonios	1-2	No	M
Rafal	3-4	No	M
Eleonora	1-2	No	F
Laci	2-3	No	M
Benoit	2	Yes	M
Maron	3-4	No	M
Inga	1	Yes	F
Martin	1-2	No	M
Marianne	1	No	F
Csaba	2	No	M
Marcin S	4	No	M

Table 4.2: Experience in travel in relation to incoherence perception

*Before this information I didn't know anything about Aalborg except where it is (geographically) and, of course, I know Aalborg Aquavit so of course my perception changed due to the information provided... seems to be a nice place, especially for young people. Some opportunities for free time fun (karnival, nightlife) and in summer of course close to the sea. All in all a positive impression (Martin).*

Maria, for example says

*The first 2/sources/ give info but they are a kind of confusing. On the contrary, the 3rd one is clear, gives a complete picture of the city and about everything that somebody may ask for. (Maria)*

Joanna, by referring to these sources says that *the second link tragedy* but adds later *third link is very clear and transparent*. Rafal's answer indicates the process impact of the city's perception by saying *My first impression was that Aalborg is mostly industrial area. However, reading more deeply showed that it is interesting from side seeing and historical point of view*. Laci evaluated the whole process of getting familiar with the information and says

*The first focus on especially for young people who like "moving" and going to museums, pubs, to the zoo and also focuses on English*

*people because of the last lines. I don't like the second because of the first sentence. It compares Aalborg to Aarhus and says Aarhus is the winner. If I have only 1-2 days for Denmark, I wouldn't go to Aalborg after this info. The third is only "how to get Aalborg easily", it doesn't say that much for me. That last is also good, because it reaches everybody: families, couples, friends etc (Laci).*

It indicates that the information gathered all together are meaningful for a better understanding of what the destination has to offer. Uncompleted information or lack of some facts can indeed work unpromisingly. Benoit and Maron change their opinion while getting more information about the place. Benoit says

*For the quote, absolutely not appealing! Sounds like the city was industrial. Not interesting for tourists and that it is still a 'work in progress'. There is nothing very interesting since they only mentioned the free city bikes... (Benoit).*

And Maron adds *I agree with Benoit for the quote. It looks like Alborg start from far away and now it's better, but still not so good.* However, as they read on, they know more about Aalborg and say about DFDS

*Quite a nice description from Alborg and it is quite attractive for me. But they present only the good part of the city and there is no 'negative' critic on it at all, I will cross check with another one (Maron).*

Benoit comments on the same information and says *Better than the quote of course but not really attractive.* The information sounds better than the first; hence, the knowledge about the place is extended even though the information is not appealing and not informative enough. Inga says *my approach changed while I went through websites.* Csaba notice how his perception changes and says

*All 4 is different, the first one with sea and sunset is calm, I could imagine the city is very natural and people can relaxing and wandering. After the second homepage I could say I can see a lot of ships harbours there, and maybe I will get some info about the Vikings (Csaba).*

It indicates that the information is not enough to build a comprehensive picture of the place but helps in creating a first impression, which may influence the perception of seeing other materials later on. The process of getting more information about the destination turned out to be, in most of the cases, positive (not discouraging at the end) even though the interviewees were going through sources, which were not appealing. The step by step process helped them to see the city as a more complete picture only after reading all of the provided information.

The weakness of this method to figure out how people perceive incoherence is, however, as following. Interviewees knew that they will read a certain number of sources. As well, they had a chance to confront the first, not appealing information with others later on, which appeared to be more positive for them.

Nevertheless, one cannot say if a person by looking for the information by him or herself would extend the research after few bad opinions about the city red as first. Still, this case, as presenting an interesting aspect of the subject, does not represent a main focus for this research. What is important for this study is that the incoherence does not appear to people after confrontation of several, different information. It rather makes the information supplement each other and make them corresponding together. As the interviewees mention more information make the picture of the city more complete (Maria). The effect of incoherence on people regarding travel destination is not negative in a sense, which would cause a resignation from the visit, unless not appealing information is not verified with other sources. It means that it is rather a lack of information that affect people than incoherence itself. 4.1 presents the process of getting familiar with information and level of incoherence.

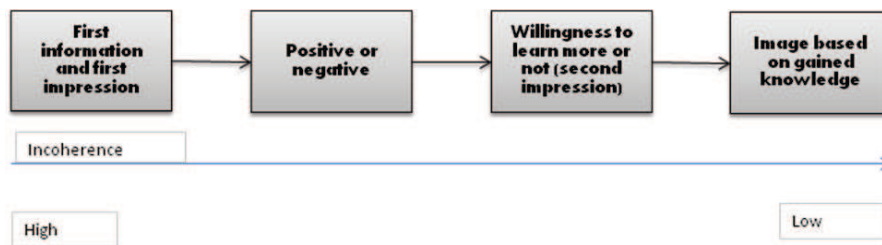


Figure 4.1: Incoherence according to a number of information parameters

Nevertheless, findings as such, do not mean that incoherence cannot be perceived differently, according to different factors. The reliability of the sources is not meaningless. Trust, according to the interviewees plays an important role. The incoherence, even though is not judge by the interviewees as a big issue may be reduced, due to the sources, which provide the information. As Maria says, she would trust those sources, which are more popular. Maria adds

*For example if I see something on National Geographic, Booking etc I believe easier in what I read! Sources like sites from nowhere may confuse you and give you info that may not exist!* (Maria)

The popular sources count what Rafal and E-dog78 confirmed by saying

*When I'm going to travel many miles away from my home I want to trust a popular source and not site that I don't know. After all the people make the source popular.* (E-dog78)

And Rafal says *Brand is quite important for me* (Rafal). The number of seen sources is not meaningless; however, the reliability of sources plays an important role for people as well. Even if the big number of sources does not make them uncertain, the reliability and known brand will make the butterfly's wing flap less appealing. The lack of sources and, moreover, reliable sources is rather the factor, which make people uncertain and cause uncertainty than incoherent information itself. People tend to rely on popular sources, known brands and opinions of friends and relatives. These factors affect the way people see incoherence and the level of perceived risk in terms of different information. Marcin says

*I don't feel uncertain, the city seems to me to be very predictable to be honest for me it seems that the live in the city go a little bit slow.*

The information, even though differ from each other with a content and presentation of the city, do not cause a feeling that something may go wrong in a degree, which would meaningfully affect the visit. However, as they say, gained experience, which includes the search and the visit, will be a lesson for the future. As Antonios says *decisions bad or good can be lessons for the future as also for the mistakes*. The approach to whom to blame for a dissatisfaction is, however, viewed differently even though it is perceived as an experience, from which people learn. Joanna says *sometimes you cannot predict what can go wrong like for example that someone will steal a photo camera*. This is an unpredictable factor, which even though is unpleasant, is not depended on information about the city presented in the sources.

In relation to Aalborg as a city in Denmark, where there are *low violent-crime rates* (Travel State Gove), the information of such incident is rather not necessary, even though stealing can occur everywhere in the world. Even so, according to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction in terms of information sources and experience from the holidays Maron says *I don't blame myself, I will turn on the website/book which gave me these information*. Benoit confirms it while saying *indeed I will not feel comfortable with the decision I made more than blaming the others*. The others interviewees have, however, different opinions. Laci says

*I'm responsible for my decisions. So if I ask someone to say something about a destination where he or she already have been and say: it's a nice place, worth to see, I trust them. Doesn't matter what the "result" will be, I would never blame them, because they had a great time there, unfortunately I didn't (Laci)*

And Eleonora adds

*If somebody will give me wrong information on purpose and it will affect a lot my trip like I won't have enough money I'll blame him. But basically I agree with Laci (Eleonora).*

Inga says in relation to her experience

*If the hotel wasn't great on my past trip, then later I'll be choosing more carefully where to stay. The same with transport. Moreover, I very rarely use an official travel guides of a destination because they are commercial as well and sometimes not based on actual experience and can mislead you. (Inga)*

The final stage of the holidays, which is its evaluation, is to some degree dependent on information sources. For some people, information gained from the information sources will have an impact on the way they will perceive the whole experience. Some of them as Maria or Laci will not see that it is a fault of bad information but factors, which may not depend on somebody to be blamed for. Other, as Maron and Benoit will be disappointed that the information were

misleading. Eleonora, however, by agreeing that fact as price, matters, still will not be blaming information sources for not predicting her bad experience.

In summary, the incoherence in information sources perceived by people depends on several factors. Incoherence or lack of such a perception develops through different stages and is dependent on number of information available. Moreover, this information should be reliable. Perception of incoherence varies, depending on how many sources people compared and how trustworthy they are. Incoherence tends not to play a big role when people can confront the information with friends or relatives, or opinion of other people who have already visited the destination. Interestingly, people do not feel insecure due to the fact that information is incoherent, but rather due to a little number of information or that the information is not reliable. People's approach to the satisfaction aspect, however, varies. Some would blame the sources for providing wrong information but some would take the responsibility for own choice and draw conclusion for the future. Hence, incoherence as such does not have a big impact on the way people perceive the destination image and the butterfly's wing flap does not cause uncertain feelings about the place in this regard. The effect of incoherence would not discourage people from a visit, but rather encourage for a double check. It would be rather mentioned by the interviewees factors, that influence people's creation of the image on travel destination. As well the aspect of interviewing people using focus group methods or a qualitative interview did not show the pattern in which the answers would change in this regard.

## 4.2 Perception of Information – Gregory's theory

The purpose of applying Gregory's theory of perception is to answer the second part of the first question from the problem formulation. With an assistance of interviewees and meaning condensation method of analysing, the aim is to find out what people's perception of incoherent information is in regard to the pre-knowledge and past experiences and knowledge gained during the information search. It will give a broader picture of an investigated subject and let to go more in depth within the researched area. As it was said, the combination of past and present knowledge, and knowledge perceived from a certain perspective, gives a wider view on the information. Past experience or pre-knowledge affects people's opinion and creates a specific understanding of received information.

The structure of this part, in order to keep its coherence, is presented as following. Several factors influence the way the hypothesis and imagination of the place are generated. The Conceptual knowledge (from the past) and perceptual knowledge (from the present), representing top-down approach will be presented as first in relation to both pre-knowledge and experience gained in the past, as well as present knowledge. According to Gregory's theory these two concepts interact with each other, hence, this part will be analysed in one section. This part will be followed by the external signals. As mentioned, according to Fulcher, 2003, perception is not influenced only by the experience and past or present knowledge but also by different signals received from different sources from

*Previously stored information about the world which we have build up as a result of experience* (Fulcher, 2003).

Following, the concept of perspective will be applied, which is here understood as “*the capacity to view things in their true relations or relative importance*” (Britannica Encyclopaedia). The sideways effect will be explained as a factor influencing peoples’ perception in regards to the interpretation of the information. The perspective will be applied here as concept, which according to Gregory, 1998, is introduced sideways. Finally, the output and feedback of the whole process and an experience itself will be analysed. To follow the way people perceive information see figure 3.4(p.30)

The top down approach represented by the conceptual and perceptual knowledge is meaningful in the process of hypothesis generation. The conceptual knowledge (past experiences and pre-knowledge) and perceptual knowledge (present knowledge), was confirmed by the interviewees as being an important factor assisting in information perception. Joanna, for example, when looking at the information about Aalborg got an association with Ireland. She says *I have some associations to Ireland... don't know why. By the pictures maybe*. Her experience, which she got while on her trip to Ireland, brought her thoughts about this country when she was looking at sources providing information about the city in Denmark. Since she got such association, she may expect that her trip to Aalborg might be similar to what she experienced in Ireland. Her expectation can vary, according to which image of Ireland she has. She adds later that Aalborg is like *Scandinavian Ireland*. She compares Aalborg as the *unknown* with something, which she knows well by experience - Ireland. The conceptual knowledge, hence, is put to the test together with perceptual knowledge and just gained information from the provided information sources. These concepts interact with each other and assist in creating an image of Aalborg. Nevertheless, the fact that tourism products are intangible and she cannot verify how it is actually going to be, she does not feel the risk of going to Aalborg.

Hence, the incoherent, just gained information (perceptual knowledge) compared with past experience (conceptual knowledge) will not cause a discouragement from visiting the city. The way people perceive the city based on provided information moreover impacts the way they will plan their trip and the visit. The combination of conceptual and perceptual knowledge gives a *lesson* for the further search. Rafal and Antonio claim that specific planning of the trip is not necessary. The incoherence of the information does not bother them as they say, that carefully planned trip does not usually work perfectly in the practice. Antonios says *I never plan. Plan can be fail most of the times because of many factors*. And Rafal adds in terms of uncertainty *you can always check rating on trip advisor. Overall rating is average of all ratings*. The experience gained in the past (conceptual knowledge) and knowledge gained from the sources (perceptual knowledge) let them believe that *big planning* regarding activities every day is not necessary. Rafal says *the only things I strictly plan are dates of departure and arrival. The rest comes up during the trip, however it is good to know, what the options are*. They have the perception of the city, which seems to be, as Marcin says *predictable*. Therefore, the image, which they have of the city does not make them worry that incoherent information can negatively influence the experience.



Marianne says *I learned that for longer journeys you don't need a plan but it depends on how you travel*. Factors like weather, as Antonios says, can make the plan fail, but it is not something that anyone can see coming if holidays are booked e.g. long time in advance. Maron refers to his experiences in travelling as to something that he feels very confident with. He searches for the information and plans his trip accordingly to the distance to the destination. He distinguishes between Europe and Asia and says *if I'm going to Europe, I booked all my hotels before leaving, that is not the case in Asia for example where I book there*. The knowledge, which he has based on the previous trip made him establish a certain way in which he plans his trips and knows what can be expected. He assumes that he can evaluate a life style of Aalborg when he says in relation to one of the sources that *they said 300 restaurants, that means for me that people are going out and 'plenty of life'*. As in Joanna's case, he compares his knowledge with information, which he just received about the city. He draws a conclusion and creates an image of the place based on factors from the past but also from information just gained.

Maria's experience, however, pushes her to plan the trip as much as she can. She says

*We plan our holidays in the best possible predicted way in order to be satisfied when we face it, but we also leave some space for surprises, because many things can happen in a trip or can go wrong.* (Maria)

She prefers then to secure the trip and, at least, plan the things, which she believe should not go wrong. This approach may, however, suggest two things. First is, that her experience with travelling did not go according to the planning, or that she is careful in general. This was not established, however, either way it indicates the correlation between the conceptual and perceptual knowledge. Uncertainty plays a big role for Inga.

*I'm very paranoid about this and usually very nervous before the trip just because I don't know what I can get or will I get exactly what I've ordered. I wish to be able to see the ordered product closer or get more truthful info* (Inga)

Those answers show how different experiences people have and how big difference it causes in terms of perceiving the destination. One can say that each trip to any destination creates a certain way, in which people will perceive different destinations in the future. They will expect things to be as they may have already experience, and hope that e.g. in Aalborg will be as in Ireland (Joanna), or that Aalborg will be full of life (Maron), because 300 restaurants in other places meant a reach city life. The answers confirm in this aspect what Gregory has said that people's perception is a system of past experience and knowledge gained now and then. One can simply not judge one destination based on given information without referring to the past experiences. The incoherence of information will be as well referred to the knowledge gained in the past, and the consequences, which it caused. In relation to the external signals, one can say that people cannot stay completely indifferent to it. People watch TV, read some articles in the newspaper etc. and they too influences the way people will perceive a destination. Inga has a specific point of view in this regards and says

*TV and newspapers' articles can catch my attention only in terms of social and political instability in the country, as in Egypt now, for example. I really like to go to Egypt but just because of chaos which is going on there I wouldn't choose Egypt as my next holiday destination. However, social sites like Facebook are influencing my choice more often because of the interesting facts it posts"*(Inga).

Martin has a similar point of view as Inga and refers to external signals. He says that the external signals do matter for him in some aspects when he says

*I think it does create an image... If you have for example bad news regarding the destination (e.g. Egypt at the moment...) I would seriously consider whether I go there or not* (Martin)

It indicates, that the external sources do influence people's perception of the place and can make people aware of a risk if decided to travel. External signals then play an important role in the image perception, but rather temporarily, according to a specific period of time. It is an important source, which if reached by people can lower or increase their uncertainty level. However, regarding Aalborg, a relatively small and not world-wide popular city, it may be difficult to come across some information about the city. Nevertheless, by looking at it from a perspective of people's culture and nationality, which is as well mentioned by Gregory as an influential factor, one can see that the background and cultural differences may have some impact on the way people perceive external signals. Marcin refers to his *polish mentality*. He says

*I am always afraid that when I look at the brochure in travel agency that they try to cheat me in some way. And he adds that "it is something that is connected with the polish mentality. I don't like to think that someone earn a lot of money on me.* (Marcin)

He refers then to the impersonal opinion of the external sources and says

*Official site does not present the personal feelings of the writer. So for me it was less important. It was too much third person view.* (Marcin)

Joanna confirms Marcin's opinion by saying that *that feeling can come out from the thinking that advertises in Poland are a big fat lie in TV, newspapers etc...* They perceive external signals from own, subjective perspective, but also based on the cultural background. They, even though that are aware of the fact that perceive the external signals based on own nationality, they are influenced by the information circulating in their environment. Therefore, the signals coming from outside sources will not influence positively their image of a destination until a reliable source will confirm it.

Nevertheless, by looking at the sources about Aalborg, Joanna says about one of them that *has a lot of pictures which is ok. I need more to make myself sure that I am not falling for the advertise of the city, which is what that website is*, but she adds later that visiting Aalborg will not be risky for her. She says *I wouldn't say risk because I have a personal view from someone who lives here*. It indicates that the external inputs, if come from a reliable source will not be perceived negatively despite the nationality or cultural background.

Different approach presents Maria (Greek) who shows trust to external signals, coming, for example, from TV or the Internet and says *if I see something on National Geographic, Booking etc. I believe easier in what I read*. The effect of external signals will vary depending on persons' experience and knowledge. Moreover, the nationality and culture, in which a person grows up and where he or she was absorbing information from environment can also be influencing. Perception of external signals is subjective and will vary from person to person. The sideways rules are important in the hypothesis generating process. The sideways input is applied when the information's meaning according to the times passed, evolve and the understanding of it changes. The perspective, which comes from the side after a certain period of time, influences people's perception as well. In relation to the perspective people show the subjective approach. For some of them looking at things from perspective can be considered as a lesson for the future. As Joanna says, according to a bad experience *I consider that as a precious experience for future*. Rafal confirms it by saying *decisions bad or good can be lessons for the future as also for the mistakes*. They decided to take an advantage of what they have experienced and use it in the future. Maria says that it is better to forget about bad things, which happened during the trip and says

*The most important thing is to have the tourism experience and keep the good things in mind and memories! Not the one that might have disappointed you.* (Maria)

She knows that from the perspective of time it is better to keep good memories. This, however, changes the way she or others will perceive the destination and create an image of the place. Even though bad things occurred and made her unsatisfied at some point, these things do not count after certain period of time. Inga says that her image of the place changes in time. She comments

*The places I visited look much better and interesting for me now after a while, than before I was actually travelling there and spending time there and adds to most of them I would like to go again. And even pay attention to it development* (Inga)

Martin has, however, different opinion as says *I would usually say I do not remember a place better than it was* but he mention that he will not remind about it. Later, he says, however, *Happened a few times that places were better than I expected. And this is what I will remind* (Martin). This indicates that at most, the perspective influences people perception of the image of a destination and the way they will remember it and present to others (this will be further discussed in the circle of representation, see section 4.3). Things can be remembered but not play a significant role after all. The physical reality and information processing, as it was mentioned, fulfil the understanding of the information gained from the past experiences (Gregory, 1998). The present picture of the reality by being processed to the brain gives a meaning to the information perceived. This enables a person to interpret the situation from the past and apply it in a present situation. Therefore, when a person sees certain information and remembers which outcome it caused, then can apply it easier in the present situation.

For instance, as mentioned, for Maron, 300 restaurants presented in Aalborg will indicate that Aalborg has a reach city life. He applied this information to the past experience, where most likely he visited a city with as many restaurants and a reach city life. In reality, 300 restaurants do not have to indicate that there is *plenty of life* (Maron) in the city, or at least that the number of restaurants causes this character of the city. Even though, it may be just one of the components, which create the character of the city, for Maron this will be the indicator of a certain life style in Aalborg. The output is a stage where both the information and knowledge gained in the past and in the present time and external signals confront each other and generate a hypothesis about a destination. The destination is now *explored* (Gregory, 1998), however, on this stage, theoretically. Person's perception of a certain image of a destination has been created based on many factors coming from many different directions. In regards to get a full image of a destination and give a feedback to the perceived information a person is to explore the place. The experience will enable him or her to evaluate previously gained information. This experience will be then a new cognitive image, which as well as other things experience before will influence people's perception of the information in a future information search.

#### 4.2.1 Sub-conclusion

Summarizing, the top down approach represented by the conceptual and perceptual knowledge is significant in the process of hypothesis generation and will not cause a discouragement from visiting the city. People may have different association with perceived information; however, in case of incoherence they will refer it to the past experience, which will make them aware of the possible outcome. It is difficult to judge the place only based on experience or only based on the information received now. The common picture gives a better overview of information. People cannot stay completely indifferent in relation to external signals. Information circulating in their environment and those perceived from TV, newspaper or Internet assist in creating image of a certain place and judge the level of risk. In regards to perspective, one can say that it influences people perception of the image of a destination and the way they will remember it and present in further to their friends and relatives. The past and present information collected through life experiences influences people's images and play an important role in the further image projection.

### 4.3 Circle of representation

The circle of representation is applied in order to scrutinise more in depth the way, in which the images evolve. This theory will help to investigate what affects an image creation and how it is influenced by the advertisement related sources, other people opinion and individual approach to information.

The way the image evolves is influenced by the society as presented at the figure 4.2. The society, like friends or relatives, opinions of other tourists or the destination itself (Morgan et al., 2010) has an impact on the way people perceive the place. The images, from another hand, are influenced by what people have seen and experienced by themselves. Further their experience is shared with others to begin the circle again. The models applied below are

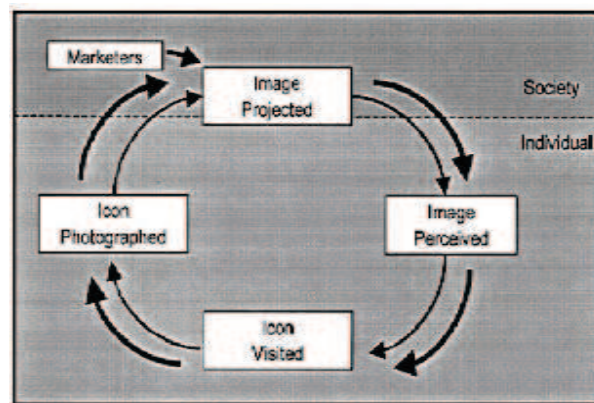


Figure 4.2: Circle of Representation (Jenkins [2003])

part of one model presented in a theory part. It was decided to separate the parts in the analyses in order to explain each component separately and give a better overview of the chapter and make it easier to follow.

### 4.3.1 Society

#### 4.3.1.1 Marketers

A specific destination promotes itself, which has an effect in the produced webpage or brochures. The destination is present in different travel guide books etc. It means that people, if willing to, have the possibility to access the information related to a direct advertisement (induced image) or not (organic image).

#### 4.3.1.2 Image formation

According to the organic and induced images people have an approach, which make them aware of the place more in a general terms. As Inga and Martin were referring to it, the TV or articles in the newspapers are interesting in terms of the political issues. Inga said *TV and newspapers' articles can catch my attention only in terms of social and political instability in the country.* Martin said that if you have information about a city from the TV or other sources he would reconsider his choice. He says

*If you have for example bad news regarding the destination (e.g. Egypt at the moment...) I would seriously consider whether I go there or not (Martin).*

Csaba says that information from TV or newspaper can work as an encouraging factor. He says

*When I see some info about a destination in newspaper or TV and I find it interesting, maybe I check the price and other info in internet, but normally, the place what I visit, is because of family, friends, sport, study. (Csaba)*

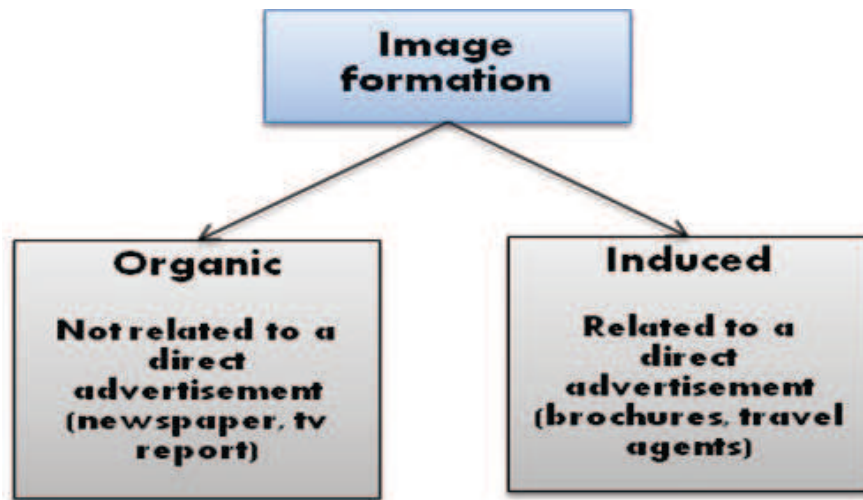


Figure 4.3: Conceptual model. Image formation.

This approach confirms what was mentioned in the theory part that the induced image follows the organic one. People hear something from different sources not related to a direct advertisement, and when they get more interested in it, then will go to check in sources as brochures, travel agents or official web pages. Csaba refers to his friends and relatives as the most valuable source, and it will be their opinion, which he will be listening to, however, the information coming from TV will be an input to the conversation and exchanging thoughts. Marcin S can be influenced a little by the information from TV but as he says *some of the program in TV but not a lot usually I am travelling to the destination which I can afford*. Here one can see that TV or articles in newspapers can impact people's decision and imagination of a place to some degree. Even though for instance Egypt will be perceived as a great place for holidays, but the political situation in the country will indicate that it can be dangerous to go there, the information will be seen as valuable. For Csaba, the information will make him curious to double check, however, opinion of friends who can say something about the place will still be more important. Marcin S can get interested too, but the economical issue will be first to consider. The information from TV or newspapers creates a specific image of the place. Nevertheless, it is interesting to mention that Inga (Latvia) and Martin (Germany) focus more on political situation of the place and Marcin S (Poland) and Csaba (Hungary) on the economical possibilities and opinions of friends or relatives.

To summarise these two concepts of induced and organic image, one can say that the induced images is important in order to know a present situation of the place and as a stimulus to search more information about the place. People are more willing to first believe and listen to their friends than sources related to a direct advertisement.

#### 4.3.1.3 Information sources

The internal or external sources influence the way people perceive the destination in a specific way. People tend to perceive these two types of sources differently according to their reliability. The images come from different sources like internal or external as presented in 4.4. The information from those sources will be perceived by people according to factors mentioned before, like past experience or knowledge but also, according to the way, in which the images will evolve in people's minds. The process of the way, in which the images change according to the information red, was explained showed that both of them will have an impact on the image, which people will create. The analysis will verify this information and will explain it more in detail.

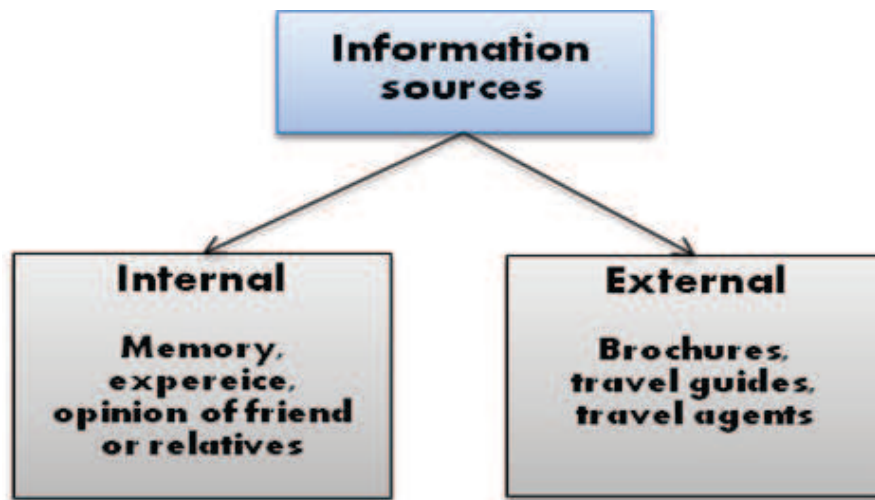


Figure 4.4: Conceptual model. Information sources.

According to the external sources people show their approaches as following. Inga stated that *my approach changed while I went through websites to a better position*. The first information, which she red were not appealing to her as she said in relation to the quote from Lonely Planet

*According to the quote the city doesn't seems to be very attractive to me, just because I get the information about industrial areas and even they were reconstructed for tourist needs, still don't attract to visit the city as it is seems boring. (Inga).*

She adds then that the information from DFDS and AARP is not attracting her either, but the next given information from Toowist make her willing to visit the city when she says

*I really like the third link because the information is more deep and detailed, for example, travel information, opening times of attractions which is very important when you are planning the trip by your own. This is the kind of information I'm always looking for. Moreover, owing to all this information you can actually see that*

*the city has its interesting life and it might be worth to visit it.*  
(Inga)

Marcin confirms it by saying

*For me the city is similar to town that I live in so that make me feel that this city is not the place that I can rest in but after getting more info about this city I start to think that is a good place for the weekend trip.* (Macin)

Rafal adds

*My first impression was that Aalborg is mostly industrial area. However, reading more deeply showed that it is interesting from side seeing and historical point of view* (Rafal).

And Marianne says in relation to the pages of DFDS and Visit Aalborg

*Although it has industrial background together with the student life and historical background it seems to be a place not as big and fast living as London for example but relaxed instead. This impression is mainly created by the picture on the first page, which is also the one I feel most appealing. Secondly I would concentrate on what visit Aalborg presents me* (Marianne)

Martin says that he did not know anything about Aalborg before those the interview beside the geographical position and Aalborg Aquavit so, as he adds *of course my perception changed due to the information provided.* The images evolved during the searching process while looking at the information coming from different sources. Maron comments

*It's the game... I want to see these kind of marketing page. At least, it means that the city makes effort to attract people and we can guess that these effort are not only concentrated on the website and that some effort are done in the city too* (Maron)

This makes people to create an image of the place. Their knowledge, however, is not verified and not confirmed. Therefore, internal sources play a significant role in a creation image of the place. In relation to the internal sources, according to Csaba, he can look at many sources, but friends' opinion will be the most valuable. Inga also confirms that WOM is the strongest factor affecting her. She says

*I think the word of mouth is still the strongest influence simply because you get the information from people you trust-like relatives and friends".*

Marcin S says *if they [friends] are happy I am thinking to go to this place.* And Rafal confirms *I think friends' opinion can be reliable, especially close friends or family.* Others, as well, value opinion of friends or relatives; however, Antonio says that *it can be as guidelines.* WOM plays an important for people and to some degree will refer to their opinions and advices.

Summarising, one can say that WOM is the most valuable source. Opinion of friends and relatives will be more important than information from the



external sources. It indicated that the more people get to know about the place the better picture of the destination they have.

#### 4.3.1.4 Other tourists

The marketers' opinions and WOM are, however, not the only ones, which are influencing people's image of the place. As Morgan et al., 2010 say, an opinion of the society has its influencing factors. People receive information not only from distribution channels or friends, where the second was mentioned as the most reliable source, but also from other tourists. Maria says that booking.com, between others sources, make her believe more in what she can expect from the destination. Marcin confirms that he likes to know what other tourists think and says *I check articles on the web and the comments that are under them*. Joanna says that the opinion of friends or relatives counts the most but as she adds *I check also comments of people that I don't know*.

Rafal says that *you have to be careful and not follow everyone's choice on the internet* but as he says later *you can always check rating on trip advisor*. It shows that he read comments of others as a source, which makes him aware of the situation but does not take it for granted. Laci comments that likes to use Tripadvisor as well. Martin says that he has two favourite sites opodo.de and expedia.de and says *I read quite a lot of the other people comments* and adds

*Of course you have to differentiate between the comments, some are quite superficial... others though can give a more detailed description than the description of the hotel itself and also sometimes they describe the situation more true and objective* (Martin)

Antonios, however, tells that the opinions of friends can be use as *guideline* and adds *I don't look other opinion from other people because is totally different from what you see*. Antonios shows a very individual perception to the information search and other people's opinion. Other interviewees, however, are willing to know what people who has already visited the place, have to say. It seems to be relevant for them to get as much of different experiences as possible to conclude with own understanding of all gathered information. As well, in this aspect it is visible, that it is not the incoherence in different sources that causes the uncertainty but rather lack of information in general. People prefer to know more and be aware of the different situations that may come, rather than hear only one thing either positive or negative. Some of the interviewees mentioned that if the information is too good, it does not make it reliable but rather sounds as *fairy-tail* (Inga) and is too good to be true. That is why they need to search for more information. Nevertheless, this indicates the evolving nature of image according to the information gained. The society, this is, marketers advertising the place, other tourists or friends, have an impact on the way people create and recreate their image about a destination.

This stage, however, is not ending the circle yet. As mentioned

*Tourists can be exposed to a range of different stories associated with a destination, both before and during their actual destination experience.* (Morgan et al., 2010)

People, after getting familiar with everything that the society wants them to know, often may get a chance to verify the cognitive and affective images, and visit a destination. On this stage, however, it is interesting to see how different images people have created based on the same provided sources during the interview. For E-dog78 and Maria the city seems industrial and full of history as she says

*It's an industrial city but also one with a big history and many ruins and historical items remain in the centre of the city.* (Maria)

Marcin says that for him it is *tooooo much industrial* and that it is a *city of autumn*. Martin says that Aalborg is a *nice place, especially for young people*. Joanna called it, as mentioned, *Scandinavian Ireland* and adds that the city is like a *peace and quiet*. Eleonora said that *from this sites I'll say touristic*. Laci from another hand says *easy to get there, Aarhus is better to see, there are many things to see*. Maron says *for me, the city looks to be quite attractive because it's an old city with its own history* and also says there is *plenty of life*. Benoit comments that

*It is difficult to say because all the links are so different that's why I would open many web site to check the differences but my feeling is not that good to be honest. A nice place for the WE maybe.*

The answers show how differently people perceive the same information and how different experiences they have. For some of the interviewees the city is too industrial, for some is good from a historical point of view, for some touristic or good only for a weekend. Some interviews see it as a quite city and other as a life-full. The information sent by the marketers is then not understood as intended. As it was mentioned in the communication section, communication is understood as two ways direction move where the sender does not only inform of something but also is affected by the receiver's understanding of it. The noise from figure 3.2 is here visible and indicates that even though people individually are not affected negatively by the incoherent information, as a group, perceive the information very differently. They do not have the same perception to the information received. Therefore, one can say that the information is not communicating what it is intended to, but rather requires from people to look for more of their own experiences from the past travels in order to understand this particular information. *Communication is purposeful* Hargie et al., 2009 and as it was mention *people use information to create knowledge* Bartlett and Toms, 2005. In regards to Aalborg, the information is understood very differently, hence, the intended information, which should create a specific knowledge, is not received.

### 4.3.2 Individual

The cognitive and affective images were coming from the external sources or from own feeling about the place. During the visit, however, the knowledge gained before the trip is verified and the images evolve again. People perceive the image according to what they knew and can give a feedback to that information. If it will be positive or negative, depends on the level of the image created before the trip. The images 4.5, from one hand are then getting related

to feelings (affective component), which people have about the place, and from another hand to the knowledge (cognitive component), which they gained from various sources. Those images then assist in building an overall image (global image)

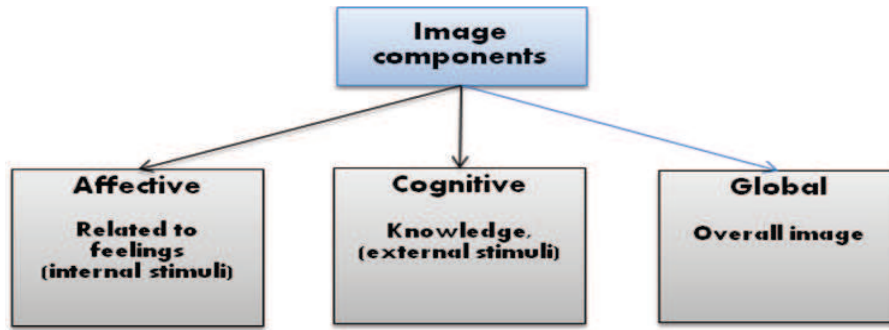


Figure 4.5: Conceptual model. Image components.

As it was mentioned, people before going to look for any specific sources, they already have a particularly created awareness of the place. They have own experience from the past and thoughts that make them build a specific opinion about the destination. The opinion then is based on the internal and external stimuli. In a searching process, however, the images get created not only by the external or internal sources and people knowledge or feelings about it, but also by the individual experience.

Martin says that when he is on holidays his perception changes according to what he has known before the trip. He says

*I do compare it... and sometimes I am surprised, both positive and negative... One example: I didn't think the "Arc de Triumph" is that big.*

Martin asked about sharing his experience with others says that *probably they will be thinking, hey, Martin said it is bigger than he thought... now I'm excited how big it really is.* He add thats *I take some pictures... But I think in comparison to most of the other people I know I take quite few pictures. But of course I do pictures of the big sights.* According to Edwardset al., 2009, a picture taken by people, convey the way they perceive and understand and interpret the world. The taken picture, therefore, will represent the way the author of the picture perceives it and understand it and does not mean that if somebody else will go to the same destination, will interpret the place it in the same way and will take the exact same kind of photo. The same may occur in relation to the example of Arc de Triumph. Martin though it is smaller and will tell his opinion to others. His friends, however, will just know that it is bigger according to Marti's perception, which does not have to be the same as the others. This subjective perception of images, however, makes other people creating own image of the place despite the fact that it is a personal opinion that they heard of. Inga admits that it may be a touristic thing to make pictures of iconic places and says

*It is predictable, silly and funny, but yes, I'm taking many, many photos on holidays and well-known sights will be in my collection as well.*

She admits that she shows her pictures to the friends but never with a thought that it can influence their image of the place. This, however, is not dependent on her, therefore, one can say, her friends will create a specific image of the place after seeing the pictures and listening to her stories. Images circulate in environment and get shaped by many factors. People create own knowledge about the place based on the information from marketers, other tourists or friends or relatives will tell them. Images evolve according to the amount information received, the image will change.

#### 4.3.2.1 Sub-conclusion

The people are influenced by different kind of information about a destination related directly to the advertisement (induced image) or not (organic image). The society i.e. marketers or other tourists, tell things, which people perceive and create a specific image about it. Regarding marketers and sources related to direct advertisement it is important to reach a certain level of communication between the communicator and the information receiver. By looking at the answers of the individual interviewees' one can see that they vary, however, mostly people would not be surprised with the city's offer. It seems to be *predictable* (Marcin). The information differs but people were able to create a certain image of the place claiming that more information helps in building image of a place. However, by looking at the answers from the interviewees as a group, one can see that the information about the city got understood very differently. Therefore, in this sense, the noise is visible in perceiving a clear picture of the city. The perceived image, therefore, is based not clearly on what the source want to tell, but also based on recalled own experiences from the past. From another hand, however, people can verify the knowledge and gained experience by their own. The individual confrontation with information gained from the society makes the image evolve and adjust to own understanding and interpretation of the destination image. The people, by collecting own impressions of the place and sharing it with friends or other people will generate a new beginning of the circle. Those who will listen to their experiences may as well start to build own imagination of the destination.

## Chapter 5

# Conclusion and Further investigation

This research investigates the questions regarding people's perception of incoherence in different information sources. The study goes in depth within the enquires regarding perception of incoherence in terms of past knowledge or experience but also according to the society's (marketers, other tourists or destination itself) influence and individual perception of information. The study is made based on example of Aalborg and chosen information regarding this city. The people's needs and approaches to certain things constantly evolve and their behaviour keeps changing. Therefore, in order to be able to adjust to their needs the industry need to make a constant research on the subject.

The tourism industry offers its customer a big variety of different sources of information regarding a travel destination. The number of different signals, which people receive from different information sources affects their imagination of the destination and stimulates their approaches. The information in different sources often varies and can be responsible for people's feelings of uncertainty. People's decision will often depend on those information and those should not be misleading due to an intangible nature of tourism products. Regarding people's approach to various sources of information, trust plays a significant role. People, while being unconfident, unsure or they do not have knowledge about something, they wish to find a sources, which they can rely on and trust their opinion. Reputation of sources, hence, plays an important role.

The research itself is influenced by several factors. The ontological consideration of this project is characterised by constructivism. Constructivism is a paradigm characterising this research and is confirmed by *interaction between researcher and the subject* (Guba and Lincoln [1994]). Interviewees participating in this research are part of social construction and their knowledge and perception of a researched subject is constructed based on the previous thoughts and experiences. The author of the project, however, constructs her own understanding of the world and the investigated subject.

The epistemological consideration answers the questions in the interpretative paradigm. Regarding the epistemological consideration of interpretivism, the knowledge is based on subjective believes, values, reasons and understand-

ings.

Methodological question answers the enquiry *how the researcher will go about the research* (Moncur, 2004). The answer to this question, however, is *constrained by answers already given to the first two questions, that is, not any methodology is appropriate* (Guba & Lincoln 1994:22). Therefore, from the constructivist position this research has a hermeneutic base. Hermeneutics concern *how the understanding of parts relates to the understanding of a larger whole and vice versa*. It means that the amount of information collected during the research process becomes clearer while the researcher looks at the materials individually, then all gathered together, and individually again.

Moreover, in order to scrutinise the investigated subject, a qualitative method of research was chosen. Qualitative interviews correspond with a research paradigm, where the focus was set on the understanding of individuals and perception of the world in a way, which is shaped through experience. This qualitative study, in contrast to quantitative method, does not show an interest in number or any statistics Veal, 2006, but focuses on understanding a meaning of given information. The character of the study is touching upon a sensitive subject like perception of incoherence. The aim of the research is to investigate people's approaches to it in regards their own feelings and subjective opinions (Kvale [2008]). Therefore a method of applying a focus group interview was chosen.

The analyses method applied in this study is called meaning condensation, which implies a shorter version of what the interviewees said Kvale [2008]. The theories used in this project give a better understanding of people's perception regarding incoherent information in different sources of information on travel destinations. For this purpose three main theories were chosen.

The chaos theory was used as initial basis of the study. The theory explains that the information comes from different direction and often can be misunderstood due to the jamming factors appearing (sometimes unpredictably) on its way. The chaos theory, however, is rather understood here as one way direction in sending information. Therefore, the communication aspect assists this part in order to introduce an interactive relation among sender and receiver. The information communicated can be perceived differently according to many different factors. The perception of information part explains that is dependent on concepts as experience but also the jamming factors and incoherence. The perception of information is related to the image, which people create based on gained knowledge theoretically or through experience. The part about image is an introduction to the circle of representation theory, where it is explained that images circulate in the environment and evolve due to the constant move between the society's influence and individual understandings.

The analysis made based on the chosen theories and conducted interviews indicate that the incoherence in information sources, perceived by people, depends on several factors. Incoherence or lack of such a perception develops through different stages and is dependent on number of information available. Perception of incoherence varies, depending on how many sources people compared and how trustworthy they are. People value opinion of friends and relatives, and moreover, do not feel insecure due to the fact that information is incoherent, but rather due to a little number of information. In regards to perception of incoherence according to factors as past experience and pre-knowledge, perspective, present knowledge and external signals, the result is as

following. The top down approach represented by the conceptual and perceptual knowledge is significant in the process of hypothesis generation and will not cause a discouragement from visiting the city. By having different association with a perceived information causing uncertainty, people tend to refer it to the past experience, which will make them aware of the possible outcome. It is difficult to judge the place only based on experience or only based on the information received now. The common picture gives a better overview of information.

People cannot stay completely indifferent in relation to external signals. Information circulating in their environment and as well as those perceived from TV, newspaper or Internet assist in creating image of a certain place. According to the concept of perspective of time, one can say that it influences people perception of the image of a destination and the way they will remember it and present it further to their friends and relatives. The past and present information collected through life experiences influences people's images and play an important role in the further image projection. The people are influenced by different kind of information about a destination directly related to the advertisement or not.

In regards to marketers and sources related to direct advertisement it is important to reach a certain level of communication between the communicator and the message receiver. By looking at the answers of the individual interviewees' one can see that the information in the sources vary in their opinion but mostly people would not be surprised with what the city has to offer. The interviewees claimed that even though the information differs, the number of sources help them in building image of a place. However, by looking at the answers from the interviewees as a group, one can see that the information about the city got understood very differently. Despite the fact that people see things differently due to the different experiences, the incoherence is visible in perceiving a clear picture of the city. Interviewees got very different images of the place. The perceived image, therefore, is based not clearly on what the sources want to tell, but also based on personal experiences of the interviewees from the past.

Shortly, one can say that the incoherence in information sources does not discourage people from a visit in a general term. Nevertheless, opinion of friends or relatives will be considered as more valuable than any of the external sources. Different factors influence people's perception of information. Those are past and present knowledge, past experience, perspective and external signals. The analyses confirm that one cannot simply look at information without comparing it to the past experience and past knowledge.

External signals, however, are influencing people, but rather in terms of risk and uncertainty. They are important in planning the trip. People tend to look differently at the destination from the perspective of time. The analyses confirm that the images circulate in the environment. The factors, which influence them are the society, individual experience but also culture of a person perceiving it. This study, nevertheless, has its weakness, as for instance lack of the possibility to observe if people actually will go to Aalborg and ever experience the city. Verification of the knowledge gained during the interview would give even better picture of how the images evolve and if they were right to say that the uncertainty in terms of incoherence was judge correctly. This research contributes to the general study about consumers in tourism industry

in regards of incoherence in information sources; however, this topic can still be elaborated. The investigation can be conducted by verification how people of different segments would react to incoherence and to which degree they need to have things planned. As mentioned families with young kids may have a different approach to this subject than empty-nesters or other groups.

Moreover, the way in which the further study could be worth conducting is to organise a face to face focus group with a bigger number of participants. The personal interaction among people and the research could bring an interesting result of the study. An interesting aspect to make a research on and show a different approach to the subject would be to choose a destination more broadly known for people like e.g. a capitol of a country. However, the requirement should be that people participating in the conversation never visited the place before. This would show a difference how people perceive incoherence of a place not only based on given information about not known destination. It would show how e.g. their pre-knowledge and external signals influence creation of an image of a place.



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## Appendix A

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**<http://www.toowist.com/guide/Aalborg/216>** [Accessed last 27.11.2012]

## Appendix B

### Interviews on the attached CD

- MARIA AND E-DOG78 conducted: 04.11.2012
- JOANNA AND MARCIN conducted: 08.11.2012
- RAFAL AND ANTONIOS conducted: 13.11.2012
- ELEONORA AND LACI conducted: 14.11.2012
- BENOIT AND MARON conducted: 25.11.2012
- INGA conducted: 09.12.2012
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