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Table of Content

Acknowledgement	5
Abstract	6
1. Introduction	7
1.1 Problem Formulation	10
2. Research Approach	11
3. Methodological Considerations	12
3.1 Paradigm	12
3.1.1 Ontology	13
3.1.2 Epistemology	15
3.2 Qualitative Research Study	15
3.3 A Hermeneutic Approach	17
3.4 Case Study	18
3.5 Empirical Data Collection	19
3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews	19
3.5.2 Considerations and the Creation of the Interview Guide	20
3.5.3 Selection of Respondents	22
3.5.4 Interview Setting	23
3.5.5 Representation and Validity	24
4. Delimitation	25

5. Theories	27
5.1 The Understanding of Place Branding	27
5.2 Political Complications in the Creation of a Destination Brand	30
5.3 The Necessity of Stakeholders in Destination Branding	34
5.4 Elements of Corporate Branding in the Management of Destination Brands	38
5.5 The Process and Commitment in Collaborative Destination Branding	42
5.6 Types of Power and Influence	44
5.7 Questioning the Clear Image	48
5.8 Summary	51
6. The Economic Aspect of Tourism in Denmark	53
7. Analysis	58
7.1 Political Challenges and Differences of Perspective	58
7.2 Having Something to Offer	62
7.3 The Advantages of Cooperation	65
7.4 The Challenges of Cooperation	67
7.5 Rights, Roles and Responsibilities	69
7.6 Applied Forms of Power and Influence	73
7.7 The Clear Story	76
8. Conclusion	80
9. References	83
9.1 Books	83

The Effects of Financial Cutbacks on Collaborative Destination Branding

9.2 Articles	84
9.3 Analyses and Publications	86
9.4 Websites	87
Appendix 1	89
Appendix 2	90

Acknowledgement

This research study concerning cooperative destination branding is the culmination of two years in the Culture, Communication and Globalisation program at Aalborg University with a focus on market and consumption. The student conducting the research has previously studied English at the University of Copenhagen, and it has been the aim to apply the various perspectives, understandings and proficiencies achieved in both programs.

The project owes great thanks to the respondents who have participated in the research. They have paid valuable interest in the project and taken time to contribute with important opinions and perceptions that have build the analysis and inspired new perspectives for the researcher. VisitDenmark has supplied all photographs on the cover of the project and, and both VisitDenmark and the Ministry of Business and Growth have been very helpful in the process of idea development and background researching. Furthermore, thanks must be given to the supervisor, Anette Therkelsen, for valuable guidance and knowledgeable inputs.

Enjoy reading!

Abstract

The purpose of this project is to examine the relationship between VisitDenmark, as the official Danish destination marketing organisation, and its cooperating partners in light of recent years' financial cutbacks. It focuses especially on how the decline of VisitDenmark's budget has affected the way that the parties collaborate and the changes of roles and responsibilities it may have inflicted. Furthermore, the view on the goal of a clear image of Denmark as a destination is examined as a consequence of those changes.

Applying a constructivist approach to the examination of the research questions the study recognises the existence of realities not represented here, but offers a view on the field of interest based on the specific selection of respondents and their realities. A total of eight respondents directly involved in the cooperation have contributed with perspectives and opinions which testify that the interests in the field are many and varied, and the methodological considerations allow for this diversity of points of view or outright disagreement. Their perspectives are perceived as interpretations of reality which are, according to epistemological considerations, interpreted by the researcher into an analysis of the subject.

Based on theories relevant to cooperative destination marketing and the current state of Danish tourism the study provides a view on the necessity of cooperation and the essential elements of it. Considering the political challenges of bringing the many various interests of partners and VisitDenmark itself together in a common brand, and recognising that necessity to reflect the destination that partners constitute, the study shows an increased necessity of leadership in the process in order to maintain the clarity, authenticity and credibility of the brand. However, it also shows that support from partners, both in terms of values and economy, is important for the brand's consistency, and that VisitDenmark's decreasing budget challenges the organisation's attractiveness to the partners. While the clarity that this support assists in obtaining is deemed important to the effectiveness of the brand, flexibility within the range of the identified brand values is also emphasised as necessary. In centralising the effort of branding Denmark as a destination, it is underlined not to confuse clarity of the brand story with uniformity of expression.

1. Introduction

Globalisation has, ironically enough, brought about an increased focus on individual places and concentrates not only on international unity. To the contrary, it has become all the more important for a place to stand out from the increasing number of international destinations in order to attract tourists and travellers bringing money to spend. In a globalised market the fight for attention is therefore essential to more than the experience economy as a general nation image can be used in positioning products, innovations or political cases, but it is particularly important to the tourism industry that aims to attract international positive awareness leading to a financial income through leisure and business tourism. A destination marketing organisation and its central part in the shaping of a destination's image is therefore connected and important to many aspects of society.

Even though it is often said that the world has, figuratively speaking, become smaller, each personal world has arguably grown immensely due to globalisation as the general reach of each person has expanded. This naturally means that each destination marketing organisation is now facing a much larger audience to target and many more destinations to compete with for attention. It also means that the organisations have had to turn creative in the attempt to always be a step ahead in terms of marketing and branding strategies. The founding father of nation branding, Simon Anholt, writes that "[a]s marketing matured from art to science in the consumer boom years following the second World War, amateur boosterism gradually developed into professional place marketing; and the promotion of places has continued to move forward in parallel with the promotion of products and services ever since, with place marketers adopting the new techniques of product marketers, more or less as soon as they appear"¹. However, though the branding of a destination may originate from the ideas of product brands there is an extra aspect to consider when marketing a place, and others argue that great strength of destination brands are found in its long history and development of an impression in peoples mind.² Places have always carried and embodied certain meanings. People have fought for them, conquered them, discovered them, owned them and travelled to them, through them and from them for different

¹ Anholt (2010), p. 2

² Branding Denmark(2010), p. 9. Hankinson (2007), p. 241

reasons. They have inhabited them, constituted them, identified with them and possessed them on more than a physical level. This connection and emotional ownership between place and people make a destination different from the average product, and both personal and professional interests appear to influence the discussion of what a specific destination brand should entail. Though there are different methodological opinions on how to perceive the concept of cultural truths, reality and how it all may be reflected in a place identity, many researchers in the field agree that "[a] successful brand, though flexible, must be consistent and cannot allow for polysemy, plurality or contradiction without the risk of becoming an indecipherable cacophony widely agreed to be the death of a brand"³. In this context this appears to correspond well with VisitDenmark's aim to present Denmark as a strong united destination brand.⁴ Others question the expediency and effectiveness of the clarity as consumers are argued to be capable of relating to complex place brands,⁵ and it may also be challenged by the process of a destination brand's creation as the organisations are often not working alone. As many other companies and organisations have also to gain from a positive nation brand cooperation and partnerships are common in this industry. Though the collaboration is based on a common goal it is conceivable that the underlying individual aims and agendas of multiple partners can smear the clear image of a place, especially if those partners are paying a higher percentage of the investments in the brand. Partnerships in destination branding bring many aspects and interests together and financial cut downs plausibly leading to increased economic dependence on partners may question the role and power of the destination marketing organisation.

This project sees these considerations in the context of a current financial decline of budget and the political framework. Each nation differ on the social and political structures, and despite modern connected economies they also differ on financial priorities and distribution, so in order to be specific this project is looking into the case of Denmark and the challenges the branding of the country as a destination poses. Due to a number of reasons the official Danish destination marketing organisation, VisitDenmark, has experienced a declining budget during the last five years time,⁶ and it is therefore faced by the challenge of producing equally good results

³ Mayes (2008), p. 127

⁴ VisitDenmark. Resultat og Retning (2012), p. 16

⁵ Ren and Blichfeldt (2011)

⁶ Appendix 1

with smaller public funding. Political incentives have provided a political framework to navigate within which emphasises cooperation, coordination, sharing of information and focusing of efforts. In order to achieve that an amount of money has been invested by the government in different industries to market Denmark,⁷ but it has apparently not been able to make up for other variables in the budget.⁸ In spite of those specially awarded money VisitDenmark is all together working on a decreasing budget, and though partner cooperation approximately doubles it which is both an economic necessity and an administrative requirement,⁹ it poses the question of how that development affects the process of creation and the ability to maintain the leadership and management of the Danish destination brand. It leads to the wondering of whether a financial need can change the influence of the process and create a willingness to let partners buy their way to an increased say on the final brand, and furthermore what consequences that may have for the brand and Denmark as a destination. It is conceivable that the increased influence of partners may turn the overall brand message to individual partners' advantage and that partners' possible mark on campaigns and projects would compromise the aim a creating a strong united brand of Denmark. However, it is also an option that the weakening of VisitDenmark's budget can reduce the attractiveness of what VisitDenmark can offer its partners and thus result in a lowering of the ambitions for the marketing of Denmark as a destination. Either way the economy is an essential part of the relationship between VisitDenmark and its partners, and it therefore appears inevitable that cut downs in VisitDenmark will leave a trace on the roles, responsibilities and result of the Danish destination branding process. The practical implications of these consequences, whatever they might be, is important to the place branding industry because they might create new challenges that needs to be identified or aspects contributing to the debate of importance and priority of the branding of destinations. The discussion of the framework and conditions for the destination branding process and results rest on underlying principles and values that are relevant to bring into focus, especially for a country as Denmark in which tourism spending constitute all of 3,6% of the national export income,¹⁰ and this research aims to contribute with clarifying aspects to that discussion.

⁷ Ministry of Business and Growth. Sammenfatning, Evaluering og Markedsføring efter 2012 (2013), p. 3

⁸ Appendix 1

⁹ Appendix 2

¹⁰ VisitDenmark. Turismens Økonomiske Betydning (2013), p. 13

1.1 Problem Formulation

With the point of departure in the specific situation in Denmark and the framework for VisitDenmark as the country's official destination marketer organisation this project therefore aims to examine the following questions:

- How does the financial cut downs on a destination marketing organisation influence the relationship between the organisation and its partners in terms of roles, responsibilities and influence on the place branding process?
- How does cooperating partners and the necessity of their financial support affect the aim of a clear image of Denmark that VisitDenmark seeks to present?

2. Research Approach

The purpose of this research is to analyse and understand some of the key factors in Danish tourism that are influenced by a declining budget. In recent years the public funding of the official Danish destination marketing organisation, VisitDenmark, has decreased in spite of the tourism business' impressive estimated return of investment, and this may challenge the future of the industry. This is perceived in the light of the cooperation between VisitDenmark and its partners who are every year attempting to increase the amount of visitors of their own attraction, destination, accommodation or the like and Denmark as a destination in general. By analysing the views of marketing specialists on both sides of the this cooperation, representing an extract of VisitDenmark and their partners, the study aims to shed light on and discuss the implications of the strained economic means on the relation between the parts, the effect on the cooperation and their views on the possibility of creating a clear image for the destination.

In order to answer its research question this project takes its point of departure in existing theories in the field of place branding and cooperative branding and in previous impressions of the matter gained during a six months internship in VisitDenmark. It will explore the field of interest through individual semi-structured interviews, and through constructivist methodological considerations it will value agreements and differences equally important. During the process the various perspectives and motivations of the respondents are kept in mind, and these interests are also attempted deciphered in the analysis of the gathered empirical material.

3. Methodological Considerations

It is through the methodological considerations and choices that the practical framework and structure of a research are shaped. This is why methodology carries such great meaning in order to understand a study in its specific context and conditions, and it is why the following section is aiming to clarify the specific choices that are made. It will start by explaining the overall advantages of a qualitative research in relation to this study, and it will subsequently continue to the explanation of the chosen paradigm including epistemology and ontology. It will look into the choice of an inductive approach, and it will lastly explain the reasons and choices of the empirical data collection.

3.1 The Paradigm

Shaping the entire approach to the research the paradigm constitutes the methodological core. Any attempt to answer a research question entails a number of methodological decisions, but they are all connected by an overall methodological ideology that determines how to conduct the study and in what way to perceive it. The choice of paradigm therefore already reveals, to both the reader and the researcher, a form of strategy for empirical data collection and in what perspective it is to be analysed.

As the area that is being studied in this research is the relation and social construction behind the influence on decisions, opinions and believes of members of this particular relation are important. This is supported by the need when understanding a social world to look into it through the eyes of those who inhabit it. In order to emphasise and give room for the possible differences of opinion within this social world and the complexity that the relation may entail, the paradigm chosen for this research is constructivism. As a demonstration of the construction of a social world Alan Bryman refers to an example of a constantly changing organisation: "The social order is in a constant state of change because the hospital is 'a place where numerous agreements are continually being terminated or forgotten, but also are

continually being established, renewed, reviewed, revoked, revised..."¹¹. Fitting the same description VisitDenmark makes an equally good example of an ever changing workplace which is stressed by the need to always produce new campaigns, perhaps with new partners, and not least by changes in its economic framework which is also a cornerstone in the framework of this research. Bryman goes on to explain that social categories such as culture or organisations "...can be taken to be an emergent reality in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction."¹² The acceptance of multiple ways to perceive reality allows for differences in opinion between VisitDenmark and its partners or between respondents within those two categories which in itself is important. This research will not provide a prophesy of how the cooperation between VisitDenmark and its partners will develop in the future, but based on the examination of some of the realities constituting the cooperation it will conclude and provide a suggestion of what is likely to happen and shed light on challenges to be aware of. It is therefore helpful to allow for the differences as they will thus improve the chance for the challenges to reveal themselves. It is important to stress, however, that these challenges may change as the pieces of the realities or their context change. Underlining the continuing development of the cooperation and the perspective on the aim, small changes within these realities may change the overall perception of the general partnership and even this study's conclusion may lead to an awareness that can alter the implicated partners' view on the challenges and therefore change their reality. Possible alterations will hopefully only assist to a positive development, but it points to the constructivist trade that while staying true to the empirical data this project cannot be reconstructed or replicated.

3.1.1 Ontology

The paradigm is a combination of the ontological and epistemological perspectives applied in the study. The former reveals the researchers relation to concepts such as the world and reality. Agreeing with Egon G. Guba that "...the only alternative to relativism is absolutism"¹³ this research has chosen a relativist ontological stand as it carries no ambition to reveal or believe in one

¹¹ Bryman (2008), pp. 19-20, including a quote from Strauss et al. (1973)

¹² Bryman (2008), p. 20

¹³ Guba (1990), p. 18

universal truth. Alan Bryman explains ontological considerations to be "...the question of whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions build up from the perceptions and actions of social actors"¹⁴. Even though the framework and conditions for the relation between VisitDenmark and its partners is partly set by firm and indisputable matters, such as a decrease of VisitDenmark's budget, the interesting part to this project is what happens within this framework. Focusing on this, the research chooses Bryman's second option of social construction and it is therefore important to underline that the respondents taking part in this project are perceived as individuals and not a unit or the category in which they appear in this context. They naturally represent their professional position rather than their personal perspective. However, it means that the representatives for VisitDenmark's partners are not viewed as a category of which one common opinion has to be subtracted, but as individual respondents with possible differences of opinion. It is naturally the case for the market directors from VisitDenmark as well. It also means that there may be other opinions among other partners or other parts of the process, but the stated advantages of these methodological choices justify their possible limitations. As the study is based and dependant on the interpretation of meaningful values and opinions of the respondents in order to get a beneficial insight into this particular social world, and this ontological perspective is particularly good in reaching that end¹⁵. Guba defines the relativist ontological point of view as follows: "[r]ealities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependant for their form and content on the persons who hold them"¹⁶. He furthermore explains that "[r]elativism is the key to openness and the continuing search for ever more informed and sophisticated constructions"¹⁷. This sense of multiple realities and ongoing search is very suitable for the particular subject of the study as destination branding, and the structures constructing it, will always revolve around the ever changeable culture of the destination and the political framework to work with. Ontological relativism recognises that the nature of both of these subjects influencing the joint effort of a destination marketing organisation and its partners and the creation of a nation image mean that

¹⁴ Bryman (2008), p. 18

¹⁵ Boolsen (2004), p. 29

¹⁶ Guba (1990), p. 27

¹⁷ Guba (1990), p. 26

the process of cooperation and creation must be studied from the perspective that it too is an ever changeable construct.

3.1.2 Epistemology

Being true to the choice of the constructivist paradigm the study applies a subjectivist epistemological approach. This is based on a believe that in the actual research process and interpretation of the data "inquirer and inquired into are fused into a single (monistic) entity. Findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two."¹⁸ The outcome of this project is therefore tightly connected to the researcher's interpretation of the collected empirical material, and it will thus be an interpretation of interpretations presented by the interviewed respondents.¹⁹ The amount of personal influence on the findings can arguably weaken the objectivity of the outcome, but at the same time the realisation of it is compensating for that risk. The rule of authenticity, which means that the work with sources should always be based on the original form of the empirical data, thus becomes an important aspect in these epistemological considerations. In recognising that the rule of authenticity is not flawless, as all data is constructed representations and nothing can be said to be the absolute truth, the project seeks to stay aware of the interpreter's influence on the material.²⁰ Therefore, even though knowledge is the creation of human interpretations and preconceived assumptions, it is compensated for by the ambition of the continual awareness of which interpretation is made by whom.

3.2 Qualitative Research Study

Even though the framework and circumstances are partly founded on something as quantitative and measurable as economy, this study applies a qualitative approach. This is chosen due to the focus and aim of the research because even though the decrease of VisitDenmark's budget is a

¹⁸ Guba (1990), p.27

¹⁹ Boolsen (2004), p. 28

²⁰ Dahler-Larsen (2008), pp. 43-44

contributing factor to the research question, the matter in focus is the social construction between VisitDenmark and its partners. In this regard it is more advantageous to "...emphasiz[e] words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data"²¹. The research will seek to understand, examine and describe the problems and their cause within the specific context of the relation between VisitDenmark and its cooperating partners, and a qualitative approach will contribute to that by stressing certain perspectives and values. "To seek to understand the social world as it is for those whose social world it is is possible only if one practices the art of listening to them in their own terms and attend to the social world they construct for themselves"²². In order to do that it is important to make use of a strategy that applies the perspective of the people being studied, emphasises the context and process of the specific culture and is flexible to towards the boundaries or development of the research. These are all core values in the qualitative research study.²³

It has become more and more common to make use of a qualitative strategy. Whereas it was once restricted to the work of ethnographers or anthropologists it has now spread with a remarkable pace to the area of social science, and marketers and political spin doctors are now fighting to be ahead on the development of qualitative methods and research. These methods are often used in the attempt to understand the interaction between people, and it is therefore popular amongst students of administration, culture analysis, social work and marketing. The present research is an example of both the first and the last category.²⁴ Peter Dahler-Larsen furthermore identifies three reasons to make use of a qualitative research strategy. Firstly the specific area of interest may be relatively unexplored, secondly it may be rather complex and constructed by disorganised structures of information, and thirdly the subject may consist of cultural constructions created by the field of interest itself.²⁵ Examining the recent development in the social construction and reconstruction of the relationship between VisitDenmark and its partners, and placing importance on its changing economic framework leading to its possible disorganised, or reorganised, structures, this project qualifies very well as a qualitative study.

²¹ Bryman (2008), p. 366

²² Dahler Larsen (2008), p. 30 including a quote from Zaner (1973)

²³ Bryman (2008), pp. 384-389

²⁴ Dahler-Larsen (2008), p. 17

²⁵ Dahler-Larsen (2008), p. 29-30

3.3 A Hermeneutic Approach

Building the structure of the project it is important to settle on a form of process as it helps identifying the steps along the way and the ways to take them. It determines the nature, the aim and the order of the practical working process as it decides if the study is moving from hypothesis to practical testing or from empirical findings towards the shaping of a theory. "...[T]he deductive process appears very linear"²⁶ as its point of departure in a clearly defined hypothesis limits the necessity to improvise or change direction during the research, while the inductive process often lead to new wonderings by answering the original question. Sharing this circular form of process the hermeneutic approach is chosen for this research as it compliments and fit very well with the constructivist point of view and place importance on the context of the source. The hermeneutic circle refers to the understanding that the smaller parts, in this case individual opinions of VisitDenmark and partner respondents, constitute the overall impression, and that alterations of the smaller entities may therefore change the image all together which may then influence the context or the smaller parts again. As such the approach accepts the subject to be ever changing and the research can therefore be argued never to be done, but most often the process stops when a reasonable result is reached.²⁷ In this case the contemporary aspect of the subject, which is underlined by the estimation that not all effects have had time to reveal themselves, it makes sense to work under the impression that this is an account of the state of affairs right now, but changes within the structure, the budget or the opinions may alter the result all together, as well as this project itself may. Originally hermeneutics is a phenomenon drawn from theology and, "...when imported into the social sciences, is concerned with the theory and method of the interpretation of human action"²⁸. Based on Max Weber sense of 'verstehen' focusing on an interpretive understanding of social actions as a way to clarify the cause, course and effects of something,²⁹ the hermeneutic approach continuously moves back and forth between the smaller entities and the whole in order to construct a clearer impression.³⁰ In this case it expresses itself by absorbing different aspects at a time and developing the perspective on the relationship and the challenges between VisitDenmark and its partners before formulating a conclusion.

²⁶ Bryman (2008), p. 10

²⁷ Kvale (2004), p. 57

²⁸ Bryman (2008), p. 15

²⁹ Bryman (2008), p. 16

³⁰ Kvale (2004), p. 58

3.4 Case Study

As a means of getting closer to an in depth understanding of the situation the project is a case study that looks into one particular example of the matter in question. As previously explained the choice of paradigm makes general statements problematic, and it is therefore an effective methodological tool to place the point of departure in one specific case. Bryman explains that "[i]t is important to appreciate that case study researchers do not delude themselves that it is possible to identify typical cases that can be used to represent a certain class of objects, whether it is factories, mass media reporting, police services or communities. In other words, they do *not* think that a case study is a sample of one"³¹. While this is also true about this study, this case is also what Bryman describes as an exemplifying case study which means that the case is "...chosen not because [it is] extreme or unusual in some way but because either they epitomize a broader category of cases or they will provide a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered"³². This means that while the research cannot claim to represent all examples of the subject, it has chosen a specific case of interest that entail the most advantageous context and conditions for the discussion of the research questions. The case used in this project is naturally the relationship between VisitDenmark and their partners and thereby also the image of Denmark as that is the product and result of this particular cooperation. There may be many elements of this case that differ from other destination marketing organisations, but other aspects might inspire discussions or developments both in VisitDenmark or other organisations. The fact that the aim of the study is not generalisation also justifies that "[w]hat distinguishes a case study is that the researcher is usually concerned to elucidate the unique features of the case. This is known as an *idiographic* approach."³³ The uniqueness of the constellation of respondents, circumstances and their mutual influence on each other means that it will be impossible to repeat or reconstruct the study, but it provides the possibility to get an in-depth understanding and examination of the subject in terms of the specific case.

³¹ Bryman (2008), p. 55

³² Bryman (2008), p. 56

³³ Bryman (2008), p. 54

3.5 Empirical Data Collection

These methodological considerations are put into practice both when collecting the empirical material, in processing it and in analysing it. As mentioned in the section about the hermeneutic approach each part of the empirical data collection builds on top of the other. The ideas and perspectives gained from an internship at VisitDenmark in Norway and conversations with the main office in Copenhagen have, along with readings on the subject, laid the ground for the interviews of representatives for a selection of VisitDenmark's partners. Their answers are then, along with background talk with a source at the Danish Ministry of Business and Growth, contributing to the interview questions for four of VisitDenmark's market directors. These next following sections will focus on the collection of the empirical data.

3.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Consequently staying within the realm of the qualitative methodology the study has also conducted qualitative interviews. They are further specified as semi-structured interviews as they value the flexibility and realism of the qualitative interview, but are also dependant on specific questions being answered. "In qualitative interviewing, 'rambling' or going off at tangents is often encouraged - it gives insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important."³⁴ Neither unstructured or semi-structured interviewing is firmly bound to a schedule. The semi-structured interviewer do have "...a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an *interview guide*, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply."³⁵ This provide a necessary flexibility that is needed in order to obtain the insight view into each individual world that this the methodology of this research builds on, but at times it guides the interview to stay on the subjects relevant to the research questions. The semi-structured interview is often an advantage if the research question has already narrowed down the focus of the study and knows what to focus on, rather than aim to explore a topic or gain a general impression.³⁶ Furthermore, the semi-structured interview provides a good connection to the interviewee due to a less formal tone than the structured interview, and it allows new ideas to emerge, which is all

³⁴ Bryman (2008), p. 437

³⁵ Bryman (2008), p. 438

³⁶ Bryman (2008), p. 439

the more important in single interviews as there is no other participants to prompt ideas or opinions unthought-of. While loosely sticking to an interview guide the interviews for this research has therefore given its respondents as much latitude as possible.

3.5.2 Considerations and Creation of the Interview Guide

Even though a semi-structured interview is flexible and to some extent impulsive, it is also dependant on an interview guide. This guide is, as the name implies, a plan of which the form and order are open to changes, but none the less it has to be carefully created and considered.³⁷ The considerations Steiner Kvale emphasises and recommends to make are about the structure of the interview, openness in regard to the purpose of the interview and study, the degree of exploring a subject or testing a hypothesis, the dimension of intellectuality versus emotionality, and whether the statements of the interviewee should be described or interpreted.³⁸ The first has already been explained in the previous section, and the rest is also carefully considered. In regard to the openness about the project, the respondents have all been aware of the overall subject of the study, but not the researcher's own thoughts or opinions, until after the interview has been conducted. This is done in order to provide the best conditions for them to give answers that are well founded and centred around the topic, but are also free from outside influence. It is, however, included in the epistemological believes of the research that influence of the researcher is inevitable as all knowledge is interpreted, which answers Kvale's fifth point. Similarly the described inductive approach answers his third point as it decides the explorative nature of the interview and the advantage of being able to elaborate on themes that were not initially though essential. Finally the tone of the interview is kept professional rather than emotional because the subject of the interview is placed in the professional sphere of all the respondents who are all chosen due to their professional position. Therefore it has also been natural to expect knowledge and a certain insight to the field, and it has been possible to bring in words and concepts discussed in the industry.

³⁷ Kvale (2004), p. 129

³⁸ Kvale (2004) , pp. 131-132

While being on the subject of the wording of the interviews, Kvale has also inspired the actual questions. He presents nine different kinds of questions, and in spite of the flexibility and the consequently unpredictability of an semi-structured interview, they have all been used during the conducted interviews - either planned or improvised. The nine types of questions and examples of them are as follows:

- A. Introducing questions: *Please start by describing the company, its values and its target group?*
- B. Follow-up questions (getting the interviewee to continue or differentiate his or her answer): a simple nod or repetition of a key word may indicate that he or she should continue.
- C. Probing questions (getting the interviewee to elaborate): *What do you mean by X? Can you give an example of that?*
- D. Specifying questions (getting concrete): *Can you for instance feel a difference between the planning of the campaigns this year and last year?*
- E. Direct questions: *Do you want more influence?*
- F. Indirect questions: *To what extend are people around here aware of the cooperation in their everyday work?*
- G. Structuring questions: This is not necessarily a question but can merely be a sentence making the interviewee aware of a shift of focus or topic. *Now, moving on to a more general perspective...*
- H. Silence: Pauses allows the interviewee to reflect on the answers and may bring forward new perspectives.
- I. Interpreting questions (confirming an interpretation): *Would it be fair to say... or does that mean that...³⁹*

These types of questions make it possible for the interviewer to indicate the attention that cannot be expressed by joining in the discussion. For the benefit of the recording of the interview and the neutral conditions for an honest answer, the interviewer should generally let the interviewee do

³⁹ Kvale (2004), pp. 137-138. Bryman (2008), pp. 445-447

the talking, but through these questions and a listening attitude the researcher can demonstrate activity, commitment and control of the direction of the interview.⁴⁰

3.5.3 Selection of Respondents

In order to obtain the best relevance for the project the respondents have been carefully selected and contacted based on their connection and role in the cooperation between VisitDenmark and their partners. VisitDenmark market directors in different were approached in order to gain varied responses as colleagues working together every day may influence each other's perspectives, and different markets might present different challenges and benefits from the cooperation. It is furthermore an advantage that the participants from VisitDenmark are all in the same position as their perspectives are as such equally important and influential in the organisation, and they are all responsible for what is sent out by VisitDenmark in Norway, Sweden, Great Britain and Germany respectively. These are the VisitDenmark's biggest markets and are chosen on the basis their importance as these markets therefore bring the highest income from tourist travelling to Denmark.⁴¹ When it comes to respondents on the partner side of the cooperation, however, it is deemed an advantage to get more varieties of partners as the wide range of types of partners may also represent a greater variety of perspectives on the matter. This is not done in the attempt to make the study representative, as the paradigm has already excluded that, but in order to give speech to possibly important aspects that could otherwise have been neglected. The participating partner respondents therefore both cover Denmark geographically and the different types of cooperating businesses representing Tivoli, Skallerup Seaside Resort, VisitNordsjælland and the Association of Danish Holiday House Letters. Finally, a helping hand was given by a source in the at the Danish Ministry of Business and Growth in the process of gathering an insight into the background of the subject and the specifically the newly closed plan of aggressive global marketing of Denmark who is selected due to the ministry's own appointing of who is most knowledgeable on the matter. The advantages and limitations of the choices of these markets and partners are elaborated on in the section of delimitation, but within the framework of those

⁴⁰ Bryman (2008), p. 447

⁴¹ VisitDenmark. Turismens økonomiske betydning i Danmark (2013), pp. 9-10

consequences these respondents are believed to cover and represent many valuable perspectives in this research.

3.5.4 Interview Setting

In order to obtain the best conditions for the respondents to speak freely, both the physical and the social setting have to be considered. For the most part the interviews take place in the comfort of the respondents' own offices which is meant to give each respondent a feeling of being on their own ground and more easily make them open up about their opinions. Actually all interviewees are in their own offices when the specific interview takes place, but due to geographical distances to the VisitDenmark market offices the interviews with those respondents are conducted through Skype.⁴² This can naturally make it harder to create a sense of natural and comfortable interaction, but as digital interaction for similar reasons is already an important form of communication for the respondents in question, this is not perceived as a major challenge.

The reason why the setting is important is that the interviewees, for the most part, have never met the interviewer before, and all aspects that might gain the confidentiality must be considered. It is therefore also important to attend to the social connection that will encourage the respondent to quickly open up. Kvale stresses the importance of briefing the respondent of the purpose of the interview and the function of the recorder, and making sure that there are no insecurities about the situation or the application of the stated opinions.⁴³ Not revealing the details of the research or the interviewer's personal opinion these points are all kept in mind when conducting each interview, and it is the hope and the impression that they along with the physical setting help the informal and open communication along. During the research process the transparency of the interviews changes as the initial plan of smearing the link between comments and respondents conflicts with the realised necessity to point to empirical material, but the solution described in the following section maintains the blurring of which respondent says what, while also maintaining a qualitative validity.

⁴² Skype is a computer program used to make video calls.

⁴³ Kvale, p. 132

3.5.5 Representation and Validity

Being founded on a relatively small selection of respondents this research carries no ambition to represent all opinions on the subject or the reflection of one clear reality. As previously explained the chosen paradigm makes it impossible to achieve it as it would at least require an exact description the opinions of everyone connected to the cooperation between VisitDenmark and all their partners. Even then the influence of the researcher would be inseparable from the presentation of the researched, and the attempt to solve these challenges would be far too time consuming. It should therefore be clarified that this research builds on the collected empirical data from a selection of respondents from VisitDenmark and its partners who through their professional positions are qualified to contribute with relevant and valued perspectives. Those perspectives were originally meant to be able to be tracked to any respondent as a means of creating the openness of the interviewees, but due to the consideration of qualitative validity these tracks are revealed in special editions of the research. This means that normally there will be no transcriptions of the interviews, but in the rare confidential versions they will be enclosed.

Peter Dahler-Larsen argue that data is reliable if they are reproducible when the research process is repeated, but he also admits that in qualitative research this criterion is unrealistic in the sense that the world is dynamic, that especially the researched field will most likely be influenced by the awareness of the study, and that an exact replica will therefore be unrealistic and unreasonable to expect.⁴⁴ His criterion of replication can therefore be replaced by a criterion of reliability which can be fulfilled through communicative validity. This entails a verification from the respondents of the interpretation of their statements and could also entail a discussion of the theoretical and methodological framework with researchers from the same field of study. In this study the first is often done during the interview through interpreting questions but also through clarifications afterwards, and the second is done through guidance and discussions of a research supervisor and fellow students of the same line of study. It is therefore reasonable to say that this research, with its methodological boundaries, can be perceived as valid and reliable.

⁴⁴ Dahler-Larsen (2008), p. 82

4. Delimitation

For a better understanding of the focus of this research is it important to also understand its limits. This will make a better argument of what it does focus on and reduce the risk of misunderstandings and confusion about the study's conclusion and application.

Firstly, it is important to emphasise that this research is only focusing on one out of many industries that work with the branding of Denmark. Leisure tourism is a big industry in Denmark with favourable odds of investments according to VisitDenmarks own research,⁴⁵ but there are other organisations working to create a profitable profile abroad in order to attract positive attention to the country. Many of these organisations have a kind of political agenda that centres around emphasising certain parts of Denmark to improve particular fields of interests, such as investments in Denmark, Danish export, Denmark as a green nation and so on. The view point of the paradigm leads to a recognition that these types of organisations are also contributing to the final image of Denmark as it may influence the outside impression of the destination and the general perception of reality, but the discussion of its implications is too extensive to be considered in this research. Focusing on VisitDenmark and its partners as senders and creators of the image of the destination Denmark the research would not gain from these aspects as it widens the parameter of the research to the extent that it would become overwhelming in terms of time consumption and incomprehensible in terms of structure. Therefore, even though the partners of VisitDenmark may also have an interest in other branding projects about Denmark, and those projects may have an influence on potential tourists, this study focuses purely on the relation between VisitDenmark and its partners and the image they aim to make.

Along these lines it is also important to clarify that the Danish context of the research includes certain organisational structures. Beside the parallel organisations that brand the nation for different purposes, though there may also be similarities, the national destination marketing organisation and its relation to partners may be structured differently in other places and other economic or societal decisions may influence it. Therefore, in line with the stand on generalisation, this particular research will not delude itself to fit destination marketing organisations elsewhere,

⁴⁵ VisitDenmark. Resultat og retning (2012), p. 5

but encourage that considerations about these aspects will be made in case it inspires an examination of similar relations in other destinations. It is furthermore worth mentioning that these structures will in this research be followed vertically rather than horizontally. Beside the limitation regarding theme when excluding parallel branding organisations it allows a focus on what the consequences may be of political economic decisions and follow it from the set framework to the implementers in VisitDenmark and their partners and ultimately to the result, the presented image of Denmark.

Lastly, returning to the considerations about selection of respondents limits and requirement are also set for the sources of empirical data collection. These are naturally set to create the best conditions for a satisfactory answer, and while the specific choices have been explained in a previous section, this section points to the limits of the project and therefore also what the limits exclude. The chosen markets in VisitDenmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany and Great Britain, are all markets in close proximity to Denmark. This means that they are also markets that can attract more tourist to Denmark percentagewise than distant markets that may be struggling harder to raise awareness of Denmark and reasons to go there. These challenges may raise different issues, but in order not confuse these challenges with the particular research question for this study, the distant markets are not represented in here. The selected partners are also kept relatively centred geographically as they are all situated in Denmark. This is done to ensure that all participating markets have the same qualifications for knowing and having contact with them. Not all partners are equally relevant to all markets, but they are all known across the VisitDenmark organisation and relevant to foreign tourists visiting different parts of Denmark. Choosing partners or branches placed in the markets own countries would most likely reflect a closer connection, but it would part the research into four, one for every market, instead of keeping the research focused on VisitDenmark as a whole, and it would therefore be more suitable for a research on a single market. Within these limits set for the selection of empirical data collection and the general scope of the research the next sections will have better conditions for staying focused on the specific issue and answering the research question in the best way possible.

5. Theories

The understanding of the analysis, discussion and particular implications of this research conditions a point of departure in previous knowledge of the topic. This section will therefore clarify the most necessary and relevant theories that have been posed in relation to this field of interest in its specific focus and context. While providing a general literature review it will firstly clarify the specificities of place branding and different ways to perceive it, and it will then look into how place branding can be complicated by partnerships and its differences from a non-place product. It will explain the benefits and necessity of partnerships in branding of a destination and continue by making clear what elements a successful partnership should contain, according to theorists, and what the process of such a relationship looks like. Lastly it will look into the ways of influencing a partnership through different means of power and present the view that a place brand may also benefit from a more diverse image. Going through these different aspects and theorists in the field these following pages will present crucial elements of the debate regarding the research question and it will therefore provide the relevant knowledge on which to base the analysis.

5.1 The Understanding of Place Branding

Going through the various points of importance in place branding the academic literature appears to establish that it is a complex field due to differences in perspectives, approaches and interests. It is argued that globalisation has transformed places into products and that they have to be branded accordingly in order not to sink into oblivion and poverty.⁴⁶ The notion held by for instance Philip Kotler that the new world economy, globalisation and mass communication and transportation changes that idea of places, and his thoughts on 'strategic place marketing', meaning that places should be promoted in the same way as products, lead to the suspicion that marketing places is a new phenomenon.⁴⁷ However, it is also argued that "[p]laces have been

⁴⁶ Klüver (2010), p. 31

⁴⁷ Klüver (2010), p. 31

promoting their attractions and their images throughout history, because they have always needed to attract settlers, customers, visitors, traders, investors and the category of people we today call 'influencers'⁴⁸. In fact, even though the concept of place branding may appear very young as Simon Anholt introduced it in the academic literature as late as in 1998, the true strength of a place brand is in its history and stability. Constituting some of the strongest brand communities the world has ever seen nations provide a fixed point to build identities around, and the real challenge of place branding is therefore not to create an image from scratch but to distil, combine and present the identity of a place that is already firmly established.⁴⁹ It is therefore arguable that place brands are feeding, and feeding on, the way people perceive themselves, their surroundings and what may be foreign to them, and in doing so they draw a line from place branding to the foundation of all other branding. "...[I]t is easy to see how expertise in promoting the products of a certain country leads, via the observation that a positive country image provides a powerful brand asset to that country's exports, to the conclusion that the country's image needs management just as a corporation's or product's brand need management"⁵⁰. Similarities and bonds therefore exist between place brands and non-place brands, but place brands are accentuated for its complexity and extent of values and the following sections of theory will therefore, among other points, explain the political issues of those characteristics that differentiate it from non-place brands. It will, however, also outline how the business, in spite of those differences, may draw on corporate branding which in its multidisciplinary nature, number of stakeholders and social responsibility share those characteristics to some extent.⁵¹

The complexity of place branding is not only to be found in the diversity of the product but also in the differences of approaches and basic beliefs of those extending their academic point of view. The way place branding is discussed is dependent on the view of the concepts of place and culture, and the perception of successful communication of those concepts. One approach known to be held by the 'inventor' of nation branding, Simon Anholt, but supported by others⁵² is that there is no shortcut to a successful place brand image in the mind of the consumer. Though publicity and media in general may reinforce the image, behaviour and the

⁴⁸ Anholt (2010), p. 1

⁴⁹ Branding Denmark (2010), p. 9

⁵⁰ Anholt (2010), p. 3

⁵¹ Therkelsen and Halkier (2008)

⁵² E.g. Fan (2010)

experience of the product (i.e. the place) is essentially the only way to succeed.⁵³ "[i]f a country is serious about enhancing its international image, it should concentrate on the national equivalence of 'product development'"⁵⁴. This builds on the assumption that positive experiences will spread by word of mouth, that the communication of place is a reflection of reality, and that the budget is therefore better spent investing in the improvement and actions of the place. This does not contradict that reality may be different depending on the eye of the beholder, or that place brands also consist of "...a multidimensional assortment of functional, emotional, relational and strategic elements that collectively generate a unique set of associations in the public mind."⁵⁵ Corresponding with the constructivist viewpoint of this study it is hard to find a researcher arguing for the uniformity of a place or a culture, and studies on cultural identities tend to reject the notion of a single place identity,⁵⁶ but the construction of this multidimensional image can vary. Contrary to the previous point of view other researchers believe that place branding is an effective means in generating and changing place identities,⁵⁷ and that the construction of a place thus takes place in the discussion, presentation and branding of it rather than the other way around. These two approaches to place branding appear very different, but except the disagreement of the starting point one does actually not exclude the other, and it may arguably be the most likely possibility that both of these practices are working simultaneously creating a circular process where experience and communication continue to reaffirm each other.

Recognising the complexity of the product, however, does not necessarily lead to a reflection of that multidimensionality in the communication of the place. Though a culture and a place consist of many things the general lines may be emphasised in order to avoid confusion. The general perception is that "[a] successful brand, though flexible, must be consistent and cannot allow for polysemy, plurality or contradiction without the risk of becoming an indecipherable cacophony widely agreed to be the death of a brand"⁵⁸. This perception will, however, be challenged in a following section of theory, but as the strategy of a clear destination image still

⁵³ Anholt, (2010), p. 10

⁵⁴ Anholt (2010), p. 10

⁵⁵ Fan (2010), p. 98

⁵⁶ Mayes (2008), p. 125

⁵⁷ Mayes (2008), p. 126

⁵⁸ Mayes (2008), p. 127

appears to be prevailing it will first look into the questions of how to value the various elements, and what challenges it may entail for the coordination of stakeholders.

5.2 Political Complications in the Creation of a Destination Brand

Stressing the importance of the difference between regular product brands and place brands many political issues are addressed in place branding due to the nature of the brand's creation. Can-Seng Ooi emphasises the need to look into the political background of place branding in order to gain a more thorough understanding of the successful branding of a destination, and he takes a critical stand on the perspective that non-place product brand strategies can usefully be applied as he perceives "...significant circumstantial and contextual differences"⁵⁹ between the two. Even though some researchers argue that "[t]he academic literature has acknowledged the link between stakeholder coordination and the destination brand, recognizing that destination brand development is a matter of coordination rather than a managed activity..."⁶⁰, Ooi maintains that "...differences in branding place-products and commercial organizations and manufactured products/services are largely ignored..."⁶¹. He underlines his claim of the need for an increased focus on the political perspectives by stating that "[t]he poetics and politics are intertwined because the brand will only be more credible and more visible to tourists when different tourism agencies and local residents accept, support and communicate the brand story."⁶² However, it should be clarified that politics in this context does not refer to politicians or political ideologies but to the process of negotiation with stakeholders and the framework that these discussions take place within.⁶³ According to Ooi the creative process of inventing and presenting, which he describes as the poetics of a destination brand⁶⁴, is complicated by conflicting perspectives because "...according to national branding authorities, the brand is meant to communicate a

⁵⁹ Ooi (2012), p. 125

⁶⁰ Bregoli (2012), p. 212

⁶¹ Ooi (2012), p. 108

⁶² Ooi (2012), p. 109

⁶³ Ooi (2012), p. 109

⁶⁴ Ooi (2012), p. 109

coherent and attractive image of the country destination to the world, but to the tourism business, they want the brand to promote their own products."⁶⁵ Looking into this political background of a destination brand Ooi poses four main purposes for such a brand and leads his discussion of place branding's characteristics and political challenges back to those points, thus emphasising its relevance.

First and foremost a place brand should build a positive public opinion of the place in question. This point agrees with Simon Anholt's view on the necessity of a positive image as the image of a destination that takes place in the mind of the consumer, in this case tourists, is perceived as separate but influenced by the brand that is sent out by the destination marketing organisation.⁶⁶ Whereas Anholt believes in "...the national equivalent of product development"⁶⁷, that positive consumer experience will travel by word of mouth becoming the most effective form of marketing, and that public relations can only emphasise and not create that positive image, Ooi appears to have slightly more confidence in a coordinated effort to influence public opinion through various sources of information. While trying to influence the word of mouth and general accessible travel related information of a place "...one common strategy to increase the credibility of the brand is to deploy 'independent' travel reviewers..."⁶⁸, but Ooi also points out some important challenges. Contrary to non-place brand marketers a destination marketing organisation cannot run a campaign from upwards down through the organisation and rule out anyone that does not comply. As the different layers of the Danish administrative marketing structure - national, regional, communal and local - are separate but interdependent in the creation of a common expression, Ooi points out the challenge that "[many Danish tourism businesses] want to change their products according to their own experience rather than to a macroscopic branding strategy."⁶⁹ This requires a support from a unanimous reality that according to the discussion in the previous section can be hard to gain but is perhaps obtainable if the brand message is created around a unified reality.

⁶⁵ Ooi (2012), p. 110

⁶⁶ Anholt (2010), p. 10

⁶⁷ Anholt (2010), p. 10

⁶⁸ Ooi (2012), p. 111

⁶⁹ Ooi (2012), p. 123

Secondly, Ooi views the function of a place brand as packaging the place selectively for the tourists. In order to create a clearer and more coherent image of the destination, thus making the destination more accessible in the mind of the consumer, certain attractions, sights or other partners that especially enhance the values aimed for may be emphasised in the overall image.⁷⁰ This provides tourists with reasons to go and ready options for activities when they get there, but unfortunately it may also marginalise smaller partners or partners that simply does not comply with the directed brand strategy. One way to avoid disagreement and potential obstruction from those partners, which beside unwanted noise blurring the clear image of the destination may also reduce the partners' financial contribution, is to provide some sort of ownership for the partners of the brand.⁷¹ These values that will attract marginalised partners, or merely that inclusion is a necessary factor, point to social, cultural and political issues and responsibilities that Ooi claims not to be a pivotal part of strategies in commercial firms that are not publicly funded⁷² and therefore do not carry the same obligation to maintain the support of public opinion.

Function number three of a place brand on Ooi's list is the brand's obligation to make the destination stand out in the crowd of places to visit on the global market. While wanting to reflect a certain uniqueness that is grounded in the place destination marketing organisations may not be able to fit its partners, or the inhabitants, into their vision. "With concerns about the touristification of society, many local stakeholders are resistant to being caricatured for tourists. The branding authorities have to respond to the divergent streams of thought one way or another, and convince people that the identity is quintessentially the society's own."⁷³ This basically reflects the previous discussion between Anholt's and Mayes' ways of perceiving the identity and reflection of a place,⁷⁴ but it also clarifies the specific challenge that, whereas commercial firms are driven by their motivation to sell, necessary agents in the campaigns of destination marketing organisations may not prioritise increased tourism enough to change themselves or their product in a more tourist-friendly direction. It once again raises the question of the brand reflecting reality or the other way around, and it underlines that "[i]ssues with regard to 'whose brand?', the well-

⁷⁰ Ooi (2012), p. 111

⁷¹ Ooi (2012), p. 111

⁷² Ooi (2012), p. 124

⁷³ Ooi (2012), p. 112

⁷⁴ Mayes (2008), Anholt (2010)

intended but somewhat ineffectual attempt to draw cooperation from tourism players to enact the brand and the lack of resources to garner support are just as important as the poetics of the brand."⁷⁵

Fourthly, it is the function of a place brand to prepare the tourists for their experiences and shape them while they are there. Ooi suggests that positive expectations are likely to lead to positive experiences when he says that "...tourists who cognize the brand story will eventually interpret the destination in like manner [...]. The brand offers a story that tourists can build their experiences around."⁷⁶ The problem about this story, however, is that while non-place brands can "...change their marketing stories with new models and range of products while their brand maintains some semblance of continuity and assured quality [...]"⁷⁷, "...tourism destinations as place products cannot be outsourced or changed easily in the way that consumer and fashion products can"⁷⁸. Mads Mordhorst supports this viewpoint by claiming that the biggest mistake about place brands would be to think of nations as unbranded as they are in fact super brands loaded with valued associations, and that the brand story is therefore more difficult to change.⁷⁹ Linking to the first point about dependence of support to from stakeholders to the unifying brand, the story of a place and its associated values can be a challenge if the stakeholders do not agree on it and support the story that the destination marketing organisation wants to tell.

Underlining the importance of this political puzzle behind the scene of the final destination brand Ilenia Bregoli adds that "[i]n light of the fragmentation of destinations on one hand and the need to provide tourists with a seamless experience on the other, the coordination of the stakeholders working within the destination is pivotal"⁸⁰. Besides pointing out these critical points specially challenging to place brands Ooi spots a possible key to the problem when he states that "[c]onvergence of support for the brand requires effort, energy and resources"⁸¹. However, relevant to this particular research Therkelsen and Halkier explicate the problem further by establishing that "[a]s a semi-autonomous public agency *VisitDenmark* relies overwhelmingly

⁷⁵ Ooi (2012), p. 122

⁷⁶ Ooi (2012), p. 113

⁷⁷ Ooi (2012), p. 124

⁷⁸ Ooi (2012), p. 124

⁷⁹ Branding Danmark (2010), p. 9

⁸⁰ Bregoli (2012), p. 212

⁸¹ Ooi (2012), p. 124

on central government for funding, and this has been either reduced or at least not expanded in recent years, accompanied by demands for greater efficiency and gradually eroding international market shares [...], and hence the need to maintain or generate political support at the national level is obvious."⁸² Combining these points of the necessity of political negotiations and support and the differences between place brands and other regular product brands Ooi "...suggests that the varying amount of resources available to win the hearts and minds of other tourism operators, the strength and will available to branding authorities to bring about change in society, and the host society's views towards tourism play a role in determining whether the destination brand can act as a cohering force for the tourism industry."⁸³

5.3 The Necessity of Stakeholders in Destination Branding

The complications of the destination brand poses great challenges to the marketers, but it may be worth analysing the necessity of stakeholders and the perceptions causing them. In the sense that stakeholders populate the place in question and constitute it with their products, they are entitled to a part of the ownership and is essential to the creation of an authentic marketing of that specific place. This view is put forward by Mihalis Kavaratzis who views both public and private partners of the destination marketing organisation as stakeholders along with the inhabitants and otherwise users of the place. He argues that "...there is an urgent need to rethink the role of stakeholders towards a more participation- and involvement-oriented practice"⁸⁴. While Ooi in the previous section argued that "Branding [a destination] is essentially a commercial program but there are social and political considerations in promoting it"⁸⁵, Kavaratzis supports the complexity by stating that "...place branding is in essence not a managerial process but one of co-ordination"⁸⁶. From the perspective that stakeholders constitute and ultimately own the destination, Kavaratzis argues that "...the involvement of all stakeholders in all steps of the place

⁸² Therkelsen and Halkier (2008), p. 170

⁸³ Ooi (2012), p. 124

⁸⁴ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 8

⁸⁵ Ooi (2012), p. 122

⁸⁶ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 9

branding process should be welcomed and encouraged by place brand marketers"⁸⁷, and he offers three critical points of how stakeholders are not currently applied optimally followed by three reasons for their absolute necessity to a successful place brand.

An overall problem with the way destination marketers cooperate with stakeholders today is, according to Kavaratzis, that "...stakeholders are paid 'lip service' rather than being offered the chance to participate in branding their place, in effect being considered a 'necessary evil'"⁸⁸. However, the notion that stakeholders constitute the meaning of a place, which corresponds perfectly with the chosen methodological paradigm of this research, leads to the argument that defining a place identity and an audience and attempting to make the sale with only those two components are too simplified and neglects the actual product - the stakeholders. As the multiple entities within a place, according to the constructivist perspective, constantly develop and reconstruct the place as a destination, the first failing point of today's stakeholder cooperation in place branding is that "...place branding should not be understood as a linear process of necessary steps but as a complex web of intertwined, simultaneous processes"⁸⁹. The second general flaw in the relation between destination branding organisations and their partners is related to the same line of thought as "[t]he authoritative idea that the place brand is something that can be forced upon people, insiders and outsiders alike, is evident [...] but has little resemblance to reality"⁹⁰. This will be further discussed in the section regarding questioning of the strategy of one clear place image, and it builds on the notion that a place brand should be careful not to draw out nuances in their total image and that "...multiplicity should not be ignored by place branders"⁹¹, as this may in fact be the way to a truly interesting and differentiated place image.⁹² It also hinges on Kavaratzis third point of inadequacies as it draws attention to the low level of authenticity and the lack of realisation of the connection between the place in question and the smaller parts that it consists of. He believes that "...there is a necessity for meaningful consultation with residents as this is the only way to produce a sustainable place brand and to

⁸⁷ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 8

⁸⁸ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 8

⁸⁹ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 10

⁹⁰ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 11

⁹¹ Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), p. 422

⁹² Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), p. 422

avoid the pitfall of developing 'artificial' brands imposed from outside"⁹³. These are all points of interest that Kavaratzis spots in today's use of stakeholders in destination branding, but he lists further three reasons why the role of stakeholders should be reconsidered in future cooperation.

Similar to Ooi and others in the previous section Kavaratzis believe it to be a heavily politically loaded subject. In order to create and maintain a strong brand image, help has to be found in the public support, and great motives to involve stakeholders in this process therefore include "...improving the quality and effectiveness of policies through the activation of their knowledge and resources, gaining back legitimacy for state action, strengthening the sense of belonging and citizenship and deepening democracy by increasing the negotiation capacity of excluded groups"⁹⁴. However, involving stakeholders is not always easily done as it involves a balance and distribution of ideas and interests that may even attempt to compromise each other in order to get ahead.

"...[A] common tool for defining the importance of stakeholder groups in general management is the categorisation of these groups based on two axes: the influence they exert and the interest they show in the specific project. In this sense, it is thought that project managers prioritize - or even only engage with - those stakeholders who are both powerful and interested. This is not applicable within place branding, however, as it leads to elitism, lack of inclusiveness and ultimately to a brand alien to the place"⁹⁵

It is therefore not enough to include representatives or pick and choose among the realities that fit the budget and the strategy of the marketer the best. It is important to attempt to cover the diverse realities inhabiting the destination even if they are not easily combined with the others, and the tensions this may create should be seen as a valuable asset as it is the fuel of creativity to bring forward the differences.⁹⁶

Furthermore, in spite of the differences between non-place brands and place brands having been emphasised by several researchers⁹⁷ it is noteworthy that the development in branding in general has shown an increase of participation. As place branding has long drawn and

⁹³ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 12

⁹⁴ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 12

⁹⁵ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 13

⁹⁶ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 13

⁹⁷ E.g. Therikelsen and Halkier (2008), Ooi (2012), Klüver (2010), Anholt (2010)

originally springs from general branding theories, inspiration may still be found in general marketing as long as it is customised for the specific context of place branding. "...[T]he recent emergence of a service-dominant logic for marketing [...] places the concept of co-creation at the heart of contemporary marketing and resonates to a great extent with place branding"⁹⁸. This also corresponds well with the previously stated argument that involvement in a brand will strengthen the brands cohesion in spite of conflicting interests,⁹⁹ and that may explain why "...there is evidence that the most effective place branding initiatives are those where a wide range of local players are involved and energized"¹⁰⁰.

Lastly the Internet has provided an entirely new way for stakeholders to get involved with a place brand, and the value of that form of marketing is high due to its rapid spread and authenticity. Kavaratzis explains that "[a]dditionally to the traditional brand-to-consumer communication, the online environment has made consumer-to-brand communication equally important and, perhaps more importantly, it has made consumer-to-consumer communication easier providing unprecedented levels of direct engagement of customers and other stakeholders with one another"¹⁰¹. This naturally also poses a risk of fragmenting the clear image, which will be discussed in a following section, as it has become harder to control the what is sent out about the product (i.e. the destination), but seeing as a more realistic reflection is the exact point, this may even work as an advantage. For instance, the constant access to travel accounts online is a source of consumer-to-consumer communication that carries a great extend of authenticity.¹⁰² Bloggers and other voluntary contributors to destination branding are also free from strategies and formalities, which can make them appear more accessible to other potential tourists.

These are all reasons why Kavaratzis suggests that these and other stakeholders in general should have a bigger role to play in the future destination branding. He proposes that "[m]anagers are one of many stakeholder groups that participate in place branding and not the ultimate decision makers. They thus have to re-evaluate their role and sense of authority over the

⁹⁸ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 8

⁹⁹ Ooi (2011), p. 111

¹⁰⁰ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 15

¹⁰¹ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 14

¹⁰² Schaad (2010), p. 202

branding process, their influence on directions and the meaning of the place brand"¹⁰³. This involves that "[m]anagers should see themselves as leaders of the place brand dialogue. They should act as initiators, facilitators and moderators of the dialogue between the several stakeholder groups over the meaning of the place"¹⁰⁴. Whether this works in practice is yet to be tested, but it most certainly presents a new way of thinking about the parts both destination marketing organisations and their partners play in the cooperation.

5.4 Elements of Corporate Branding in the Management of Destination Brands

Another take on the role of the destination marketing organisation as managers of the brand and the strategy of management is also represented in the place branding literature. In spite of previously presented points of view and his own belief that "...places as products differ in several fundamental respects from commercial products"¹⁰⁵, Graham Hankinson draws on corporate branding theory when describing his five guiding principles for destination branding. While agreeing with Mads Mordshorst's notion of places as super brands loaded with cultural values¹⁰⁶ and stating that "...this product will, for most of its history, have evolved in an unplanned manner[, u]nlike mainstream marketing..."¹⁰⁷, and place branding should as such not be seen as "...an *ab initio* activity but a re-branding exercise"¹⁰⁸, he also emphasises the similarities between corporate brands and destination brands. However, in this comparison he distinguishes between corporate branding and product branding, and because of that, and his reasonable arguments, he stays in the periphery of the previous perspectives. The argued similarities between corporate brands and place brands are as follows: "...[B]oth types of brand are required to reflect and be reflected by a set of sub brands and consumer experiences, [...] both types of brand are dependent upon the establishment of an appropriate organisational culture with good departmental coordination

¹⁰³ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 15

¹⁰⁴ Kavaratzis (2012), pp. 15-16

¹⁰⁵ Hankinson (2007), p. 241

¹⁰⁶ Branding Denmark (2010), p. 9

¹⁰⁷ Hankinson (2007), p. 242

¹⁰⁸ Hankinson (2007), p. 242

internally and strong, compatible alliances externally[, and] both types of brand must manage and communicate with a wide range of stakeholders"¹⁰⁹. Bearing this in mind the following five points are rooted in corporate branding but can according to Hankinson all provide useful guidance to destination marketers as well.

In contrast to Kavaratzis' beliefs in the previous section, Hankinson advocates for strong, visionary leadership when he argues that "[w]hether the destination brands are successful or not largely depends upon effective brand leadership by the DMO"¹¹⁰. This builds on the notion in corporate branding that "...strategic vision, corporate culture and brand image are linked together and therefore a key management role must be to ensure alignment between these three components"¹¹¹. Naturally, there is no indication that the clear vision core values set by the destination marketing organisation¹¹² should not reflect reality, or an interpretation of it, and in that sense it is not entirely contradictory to the idea of degrading the marketer to a coordinating function, but it differs on the importance of the coordinators word and opinion and it relies on the premise of as clear an image as possible which will be contested in a following section.

This point of view is also to be found in the second guiding principle which advice organisations to stay brand-oriented in their organisational culture. "Evidence suggests that incoherent communications, unclear core values and unclear allocation of responsibility and authority within an organisation undermine a brand's integrity and lead to organisational disengagement with its brands"¹¹³. F. Robert Dwyer and John F. Tanner, Jr. explain corporate relationships to be "...exchanges safeguarded by ownership or vertical integration"¹¹⁴ which means that goals are shared across the different levels of a corporation, similarly to a destination marketing organisation, and the control of activities and developments are as such enhanced.¹¹⁵ In much the same way Hankinson argues that "...a successful brand will reflect the corporate values which the staff hold and use"¹¹⁶. It is highly likely that support will be found among the staff

¹⁰⁹ Hankinson (2007), p. 246

¹¹⁰ Hankinson (2007), p. 246

¹¹¹ Hankinson (2007), pp. 243-244

¹¹² Hankinson (2007), p. 247

¹¹³ Hankinson (2007), p. 244

¹¹⁴ Dwyer and Tanner, Jr. (2009), p. 54

¹¹⁵ Dwyer and Tanner, Jr. (2009), p. 51

¹¹⁶ Hankinson (2007), p. 244

following Hankinson's principle as it also includes selecting and training employees "...whose values will support the brand"¹¹⁷. His argument of internal support is thus self explanatory, but this does not change the validity of his argument that "[c]onsistency between brand values and organisational culture leads to credibility in the eyes of stakeholders"¹¹⁸. While this corresponds with Kavaratzis' and Ooi's perspectives Hankinson differs in his belief that with an outset in the organisational culture and aiming at a clear brand image "[b]uilding the brand must begin with the DMO before being extended across partner organisations"¹¹⁹.

The emphasis of the leadership of the destination marketer continues when it comes to coordinating departments and aligning the process of destination branding and stakeholder cooperation. "...[T]he lead must be taken by the DMO [Destination Marketing Organisation]; first by the alignment of its own departmental processes and procedures in support of the brand experience and secondly, by the establishment of a brand-oriented culture through recruitment, education, training and reward systems consistent with the brand values"¹²⁰. This is based on the corporate view that "...the importance of aligning the relevant business process with the corporate brand and the contribution these processes made to the delivery of customer value"¹²¹ "...[require] a fundamental review of all marketing and non-marketing departmental procedures and processes and their re-orientation around the brand's core values"¹²².

Fourthly, destination brands share the characteristic that "[c]orporate brands are also multidimensional and multidisciplinary"¹²³, and "...they interface in a variety of different contexts including social responsibility, compliance and corporate governance"¹²⁴. It is therefore also "...necessary to establish relationships with other longer term influencers such as education and arts institutions whose influence is more passive than that of the media but it may be more permanent"¹²⁵. This corresponds well with Anholt's notion that countries should "...concentrate on

¹¹⁷ Hankinson (2007), p. 244

¹¹⁸ Hankinson (2007), p. 244

¹¹⁹ Hankinson (2007), p. 247

¹²⁰ Hankinson (2007), p. 248

¹²¹ Hankinson (2007), p. 245

¹²² Hankinson (2007), p. 245

¹²³ Hankinson (2007), p. 245

¹²⁴ Hankinson (2007), p. 245

¹²⁵ Hankinson (2007), p. 249

the national equivalence of 'product development'¹²⁶. The down side to it, however, is touched upon by Ooi's discussion of politics and its conflicting interests, and Hankinson confirms his point in a more traditional sense of politics when he claims that "...ultimately the responsibility remains with elected members whose time horizons reflect the timing of the next election. Such horizons are frequently inconsistent with the longer term aims required in the case of commercial activities such as the development and maintenance of a brand image"¹²⁷. In spite of that obstacle, it is stressed that successful place branding should be based on consistent communication across a wide range of stakeholders of different characters.

Lastly, and in spite of the emphasis on the destination marketing organisation as a leading institution, the value of strong compatible partnerships is of greatest importance. It is argued that corporations are not economically in a position to react to an ever changing market very quickly and they can therefore benefit from joining forces as "... a swifter and more effective response may be made through co-operative partnerships and alliances"¹²⁸. This means that even competitors on the market should be seen as potential partners¹²⁹, and in much the same way the partners of a destination marketer organisation can benefit from working together in the creation of a common destination brand strategy, and the marketer is more likely to achieve success in the previous guiding principle by maintaining a positive and open relation to its partners. "There is evidence to suggest that poorly managed partnerships lead to the adoption of the lowest common denominator approach to destination branding[...] There is also evidence that the undue influence of dominant partners can lead to the abandonment of potentially effective strategies. Balanced buy-in from stakeholders whose role is to deliver the brand experience is nevertheless crucial..."¹³⁰. This indicates that while the marketer, according to Hankinson, should set the standard and set of values in the destination brand, Kavaritzis' point of management is not entirely ruled out as he also claims that "[t]he key role of the DMO is to manage the conflicting interests of partners and to accommodate their needs"¹³¹, and in spite of them having the power of the final word the destination marketing organisations are therefore best advised to take partners' realities

¹²⁶ Anholt (2010), p. 10

¹²⁷ Hankinson (2007), p. 243

¹²⁸ Hankinson (2007), p. 246

¹²⁹ Hankinson (2007), p. 246

¹³⁰ Hankinson (2007), p. 250

¹³¹ Hankinson (2007), p. 250

into account. It is therefore suggested "...that destination brand management requires strong, visionary leadership and organisation-wide commitment from the highest level downwards to a set of brand values which encapsulate the destination's brand promise"¹³², and "[t]he role of the DMO throughout this process is to ensure consistent communications, both collectively and individually with all stakeholders: partners, visitors and residents"¹³³

5.5 The Process and Commitment in Collaborative Destination Branding

The necessity of stakeholders and collaboration in destination branding, however, also require an important process of coordination. Indicating a support of Kavaratzis' and Hankinsons' belief in a united goal, in spite of conflicting ideas and interests Youcheng Wang offers three reasons why the process is essential:

"First, the task of destination marketing is usually characterized by the fragmented nature of the tourism stakeholders, who are responsible for components of the total offer [...]. Second, because of the fragmented nature of the tourism industry, no single agency can control and deliver a rich combination of tourism product and service portfolio at a destination [...]"¹³⁴ "Third, executing a collaborative strategy at the destination level depends on a great deal of coordination, communication and consensus building, which oftentimes engender negotiation and even confrontation [...]"¹³⁵

Realising that every partner relationship differs, he identifies the five stages every process of collaboration must undergo in destination branding. In understanding them it is important to keep in mind that in accordance with the concept of constructivism it is recognised that,

"[f]rom a developmental process perspective, collaborative relationships are socially contrived mechanisms for collective action, which are continually shaped and restructured by actions and symbolic interpretations of the parties involved [...]. The development and evolution of a collaborative relationship should be viewed as consisting of a repetitive sequence of cooperation, conflict, and

¹³² Hankinson (2007), p. 251

¹³³ Hankinson (2007), p. 251

¹³⁴ Wang (2008), p. 151

¹³⁵ Wang (2008), p. 151

compromise mechanisms, each of which is assessed in terms of the objectives each party in the relationship set forth in the beginning [...]"¹³⁶

Firstly, the assembling stage is centred around the probing of ideas, what to work on and who to work with. This may be done based on market analysis, past experiences and different forms of idea generation, and it is in this initial phase that the aims and benefits of the joint action are discussed. For this stage to be successful and worth continuing the aims of all parts and the domains they are placed within have to be levelled and in accordance, and the commitment of the participating partners has to be high. Furthermore, the feeling of interdependence, complementary features and mutual interests in a particular focus are important and the sense of knowing a partner's agenda often makes it an advantage to build partnerships on already existing relationships.¹³⁷

In the following stage, the ordering phase, the ideas are narrowed down to a specific strategy. Resources are coordinated, issues are emphasised or omitted based their applicability and value, potential problems are considered and a program is formed. Through this process the relationship is formalised, and it may be necessary for the leader of the cooperation to clarify the norms, conflict management and common agenda to the partners of the project.¹³⁸

Thirdly, the implementation of the strategy is an absolute pivotal stage as this is the decisive point for the success of the investment of time and resources in the project. Plans are put into action, and attentions are paid to the details, and along with the initial phase this is the part that requires the most commitment and involvement from stakeholders. At this stage everyone should know their place and function in relation to the overall objective, what they have put in and what they can expect to gain. In order for this stage to succeed it is absolutely vital that all roles and expectations are clearly defined, all accessible resources are put into the execution activities, and that there is a constant flow of communication to keep the agents informed of potential arising problems and reaffirm their own function.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Wang (2008), pp. 152-153

¹³⁷ Wang (2008), p. 156

¹³⁸ Wang (2008), pp. 156-157

¹³⁹ Wang (2008), p. 157

If the three first stages are well executed the fourth stage of evaluation should be a happy one. This is the point to look back at the accomplishments as the results begin to appear, and identify what worked well, what would do well to be reconsidered, and whether the overall goals were achieved.

Lastly, the fifth phase of the process of collaboration is the transformation of the partnership into what it will become in the future. Wang identifies five possibilities of such a development as either evolving into stronger relationships, generating new projects, continuing in the same course, continuing with changes to its forms or constellations, or ending all together, of which the two former possibilities appear to be the prevailing options.¹⁴⁰ This is naturally only if there is something to build on for further cooperation, and in that relation trust among the participating partners and the leader of the project is important. This may very well be why "[t]he level of intensity can be reduced a great deal if it [revolves around] a repeat project, such as a yearly event or festival, especially when the same group of organizations who [are] familiar with the procedures [are] involved"¹⁴¹.

5.6 Types of Power and Influence

This process of cooperation and necessity of involvement from stakeholders are bound to occasionally result in conflicts. The questions of roles and influence in destination branding and the conflicting interests also bring the issue of power relations into play, and they underline the importance of the interest in the social construction between the destination marketing organisation and its partners. Conflict management and prevention of the even arising often rest on honesty and openness between cooperating partners along with constant reaffirmation, communication, and patience.¹⁴² However, even when explicit conflicts do not arise, and especially when they do, other means may be applied in order to influence the cooperation into focusing on specific ends and interests. These tools are described by four forms of power by

¹⁴⁰ Wang (2008), p. 157

¹⁴¹ Wang (2008), p. 158

¹⁴² Wang (2008), p. 159

Dennis H. Wrong: force, manipulation, persuasion and authority.¹⁴³ These strategies are not necessarily used negatively or carry a harmful sentiment, but they are to some extent a natural part of the process of negotiation and have previously been applied in the analysis of power in destination branding.¹⁴⁴ Wrong's definition of power as "...the capacity to produce intended and foreseen effects on others avoids this equation of power with the ability to impose sanctions"¹⁴⁵. This means that resistance or opposition is not necessarily present when power is exerted, and even though it naturally relates to differences or points of disagreements, it is a natural part of any social construction of collaboration.

The most obvious, and perhaps traditional, form of power has to do with physical, biological and psychological power. It manifests itself in one form or another, has a destructive nature and is more useful in preventing actions than influencing them.¹⁴⁶ For that reason, and due to the faith in general civility in the destination branding business this is not a form of power expected to be found in this study, but it may be important to know where the line between force and other types of power goes. Ultimately, force is expressed through physical violence, but it may also be executed through the exact opposite, as for instance working strikes or peaceful demonstrations. It may be employed through the deprivation of others' primary needs, such as food, sleep or rest, or it may be of a psychological nature, for instance verbal abuse or degradation.¹⁴⁷ Common to the various types of force is that they require some form of action, because even though the mere threat of force can be sufficiently frightening, this is a matter of authority and an estimation of whether or not the person doing the threatening is likely to manifest this specific superiority.¹⁴⁸ Force itself and the ability to use force is therefore considered force,¹⁴⁹ but threatening to employ it is not, making the line between this and other forms of power very distinct.

Manipulation as a means of power is differently subtle and may in fact be better described as hidden influence of a subject. This form of power is often exerted without the subject

¹⁴³ Wrong (1979)

¹⁴⁴ Marzano and Scott (2009)

¹⁴⁵ Wrong (1979), p. 21

¹⁴⁶ Wrong (1979), p. 27

¹⁴⁷ Wrong (1979), pp. 24-28

¹⁴⁸ Wrong (1979), pp. 26-27

¹⁴⁹ Marzano and Scott (2009), p. 252

being aware of the power holder's influence, and successful manipulation may even leave the impression of free choice and leading to a greater enthusiasm.¹⁵⁰ Peter M. Senge, who has studied organisational practise and leadership, argues that common visions are stronger than most other motivations, and that it commits people not only themselves but to others, thus creating the optimal conditions for cooperation.¹⁵¹ In a destination branding context problems arise when participants, though recognising the interdependence and the necessity of coordinating activities, are mainly driven by their own competitive advantages and stay focused on their separate interests.¹⁵² This is of course a natural instinct of a partner, as the premise for any business is turning a profit, but as common visions are strengthened by common care,¹⁵³ manipulating partners to care for the common cause can be beneficial to all parts even though manipulation in general is often associated with negative values such as mistrust and dishonesty.¹⁵⁴ Propaganda and advertisements naturally carries elements of manipulation,¹⁵⁵ and it is therefore assumably already a part of the destination branding business, but that is regarding the outcome of the cooperation and not necessarily the process itself. However, Wrong, poses the perspective, though he does not fully agree, that "[t]he offering of rewards are the counterpart of force and the threat of force, the use of positive rather than negative sanctions to obtain compliance, but the subject's dependence on rewards in a stable relationship frequently converts the relationship into a form of economic coercion or exploitation"¹⁵⁶.

Persuasion as a form of power carries some of the same characteristics, but it is a much more transparent process for the influenced part. Contrary to manipulation the subject is aware of the attempted influence, and as he or she is then free to decline the persuading arguments or present counterarguments, the parties thus become equal, whereas the other three forms of power all include a more powerful position for the influencer.¹⁵⁷ Successfully persuading a subject requires the ability to be well articulated, often also when speaking to larger crowds,

¹⁵⁰ Wrong (1979), p. 29

¹⁵¹ Senge (2003), pp. 182-183

¹⁵² Wang (2008), p. 160

¹⁵³ Senge (2003), p. 183

¹⁵⁴ Wrong (1979), p. 29

¹⁵⁵ Wrong (1979), p. 29

¹⁵⁶ Wrong (1979), p. 31

¹⁵⁷ Wrong (1979), p. 32

possessing a certain amount of psychological intelligence and a good reputation.¹⁵⁸ These are all features that will improve the chances of the subject accepting the arguments provided which is an absolute necessity in order to convince. The honesty and equality in the process of persuasion almost qualify it as a managerial tool rather than a form of power,¹⁵⁹ but as it is still a form of influence of one actor by another it still falls under the category of power. In fact, Wrong claims that "...successful persuasion is one of the most reliable forms of power from the standpoint of the power holder, requiring little expenditure of resources on his part and running the least risk of arousing the antagonism or the opposition of the power subject"¹⁶⁰.

Whereas this is based on the subject's assessment of the content being communicated, authority rests on the source of the communication and the relationship between the influencer and the influenced. This form of power can be divided into five categories of which the first is coercive authority and relates to the threats, capability and willingness to apply force as previously described. The second is authority by inducement and relates to "...relationships in which one party submits 'voluntarily' to the employer's commands in return for economic rewards well above sheer subsistence needs"¹⁶¹ or in general comply due promises of rewards instead of threats. Thirdly, legitimate authority refers to the right to be obeyed within the context of a certain scope without any questions asked, and in a related, yet different, sentiment competent authority refers to knowledge or abilities on a certain field of interest.¹⁶² This means that while both are limited to a specific area, legitimate authority demands action regardless of the subject's own opinion, and competent authority earns it by qualifications. The last form of authority, personal authority, is close to the latter, but refers instead to personal qualities such as emotional capacity, experience and morals.¹⁶³

These are all forms of power, force, manipulation, persuasion and authority, which may be applied in order to influence actions, opinions or beliefs of another party. In terms of cooperation, and especially the discussion of who is supposed to be leading it, it is interesting to

¹⁵⁸ Wrong (1979), p. 32-33

¹⁵⁹ Marzano and Scott (2009), p. 253

¹⁶⁰ Wrong (1979), p. 34

¹⁶¹ Wrong (1979), p. 45

¹⁶² Marzano and Scott (2009), p. 253

¹⁶³ Marzano and Scott (2009), p. 253, Wrong (1979), pp. 60-61

see how these mechanisms are, or are not, traceable in the cooperation in destination branding and in this case more specifically in the relation between VisitDenmark and the selected partners.

5.7 Questioning the Clear Image

As indicated in the previous theory sections a destination brand circles around a clear destination image in order to stand out positively in the mind of the consumer. However, with the general increase of people's travel experiences and the technological possibilities of sharing those experiences through the Internet, it is debatable if this clear image is truly the most profitable way to go. Carina Ren and Bodil Stilling Blichfeldt question this perception of how to brand a destination from the perspective that the identity of a place is too complex to fit the narrow description that a single clear image can provide. This section will clarify the premise they are questioning and their arguments for considering alternative strategies.

Understanding the line of thought behind the strategy aiming at a clear destination image Ren and Blichfeldt recognise the logic it implies. "The basic idea is that a clear identity can 'hit' the recipients better in today's over-communicated world than a fuzzier image can and thus, dissemination of a clear and focused identity increases the extent to which brand communication can affect destination images formed by tourists"¹⁶⁴. This builds on the notion that other theorists have originally provided for the non-place branding business that brand identity is the identity of the product, in this case how the place marketer wants the destination to be perceived, while the brand image relates to consumers' actual perception of the product, again in this case how potential tourists view the destination.¹⁶⁵ This bears close resemblance to Anholt's idea about the brand being within the realm of the producer and the brand image taking place in the mind of the consumer without further influence.¹⁶⁶ Ren and Blichfeldt therefore explain that,

"...the key idea underlying most normative theory pertaining to place branding [to be] that if the DMO excels at communicating brand identity, then consumers will see what the DMO wishes them to see. Therefore, to construct one clear

¹⁶⁴ Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), p. 419

¹⁶⁵ Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), p. 417

¹⁶⁶ Anholt (2010), p. 7

identity and subsequently communicate this to target audience should make target audiences (in this case tourists) hold *one, clear image* of the destination; an image that will hopefully make the brand stand out positively when tourists decide where to go on holiday."¹⁶⁷

Through reduction of superfluous 'noise' around the communication of the intended brand identity, potential tourists are allegedly much more likely to keep this image in their mind and be more inclined to choose this destination above others in the moment of decision.¹⁶⁸ "Blurred and/or multifaceted brand identities will thus not draw visitors to the place and in order to avoid this situation, traditional normative branding theories prescribe that destination images should be kept simple, emphasising a few strong points-of-difference"¹⁶⁹.

Beside the obvious problem that this is according to theory and therefore lack important practical perspectives such as dependency of partners' support of that one clear image, the questioning of simplicity in destination marketing is also one of methodological beliefs. To begin with the former Therkelsen and Halkier explain, in accordance with Ooi's political challenges, that due to administrative and economic structures the decision about one clear image is not up to the destination marketing organisation alone. Relevant to this particular research they maintain that "[i]n order to create a coherent Danish tourism brand, the national body [...] has to ensure the collaboration of actors that are *either* independent private firms at liberty to pursue their own promotional strategies *or* at least, like the subnational tourism boards, have a significant degree of autonomy based on access local/regional funding and detailed knowledge about their local tourism"¹⁷⁰. This indicates that while the idea of a clear brand image is logically and theoretically well founded, the reality of place branding and the context it has to be viewed in add extra dimensions to consider. Ren and Blichfeldt describe the difference:

"This kind of thinking has proven successful within the world of tangible goods - after all this is the basic premise that underlies the 'unique selling proposition' theory. Keeping it simple and emphasising only one, or a few, aspects (or attributes) of the products is a viable strategy within the world, from which the branding theory originates (i.e. that of tangible goods).

¹⁶⁷ Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), p. 417

¹⁶⁸ Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), pp. 417+418

¹⁶⁹ Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), p. 419

¹⁷⁰ Therkelsen and Halkier (2008), p. 169

Destinations, however, are different from tangible products [...] Such differences especially hinge on the fact that, overall, a destination has many more facets than a tangible product. Even more importantly, destination image (i.e. how tourists see the place) is not exclusively shaped or created by marketing activities and considerations"¹⁷¹

As previously established a place brand differs from a non-place brand in several ways, one of them being multiple stakeholders and opinions, and the discussion of whether of the branding reflects reality or of it in fact constructs a reality is therefore highly relevant. Having chosen a constructivist paradigm from which to discuss this research the recognition of multiple realities is an accepted premise, and for the same reason it must be considered valid that these multiple, and possibly conflicting, perceptions and images constitute a whole and varied pool of travel information to draw on as a tourist. Eric Schaad emphasises the tourists' co-creation of the destination by stating that "...the free and instant access to publication of [travel] accounts via the Internet seems to foster an authenticity in the accounts that retains the style, idiosyncrasies, and biases of the writers while at the same time allowing for the free expression of perceptions without artistic affection or editorial oversight"¹⁷². This leads to Ren and Blichfeldt's argument:

"Rooting destination identities in the multiplicity of resources, stories, physical structures and practices which exist locally may not only create a more heterogeneous, but also a more trustworthy representation - not of what the destination is, but what *it can be*. By allowing locals, tourists, managers and mediators to impact and shape the destination, [they] argue that the destination is made possible as a truly unique and innovative brand, a brand which is not fixed, but is rather open to negotiation, interpretation and co-construction."¹⁷³

From the constructivist point of view that people interpret their realities differently it is recognised that a culture is never definitive and the single clear identity is not a realistic representation. The question is if it is true, as Robyn Mayes argues, that even though "[t]here can be no essential or true place identity"¹⁷⁴, "[a] successful brand, though flexible, must be consistent and cannot allow for polysemy, plurality or contradiction without the risk of becoming an indecipherable cacophony widely agreed to be the death of a brand"¹⁷⁵. On the other hand Ren

¹⁷¹ Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), p. 420

¹⁷² Schaad (2008), p. 202

¹⁷³ Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), p. 431

¹⁷⁴ Mayes (2008), p. 126

¹⁷⁵ Mayes (2008), p. 127

and Blichfeldt make the case that "...moving away from a rigid system of clarity and inevitable simplification does not necessarily result in vagueness or confusion. Rather, [they] propose that it could give rise to an acceptance and subsequent strategic use of the diversity of not only the destination, but also its potential visitors."¹⁷⁶ Either way the time of the one-way communication of a clear place brand may have passed with the advance of technological possibilities for everyone to participate in the creation of the image, and the advantages of multiple place brand images may therefore be worth considering. Well founded arguments are presented on both sides of the debate, but this researcher misses the apparently left out consideration of combining a maintained aim of a common brand identity with the inevitable multiple brand images. There appears to be no doubt that destinations are difficult, if not impossible, to clearly define, and that they will as such always consist of many things, but holding on to a strong common brand identity, can perhaps limit the fragmentation of the image and make the destination marketing process easier to work with.

5.8 Summary

The sections of theories establish that not only the destination branding process, but also the theories on it, consist of many different opinions and sometimes conflicting arguments. The overall political, and almost ideological, lines seem to justify the perception that stakeholders are pivotal to the consistency and integrity of the destination brand, while it also poses challenges to the construction of it and the combination of the many various interests it should represent. This links to the discussion of the roles in the process, and whether the destination marketing organisation should, to the liking of Kavaratzis, be perceived as one of many agents contributing to the brand by coordination, or if it, as Hankinson suggests, should undertake the leadership of the brand creation similar to the way it is done in corporate branding. It is claimed that throughout the process of destination branding openness, honesty and commitment are important for the five stages of cooperation presented by Wang to be successful and carry any hope for possible collaborative projects in the future, and this makes some of Wrong's presented forms of power

¹⁷⁶ Ren and Blichfeldt (2011), p. 432

more likely to be applied in destination branding than others. While force and manipulation both carry negative connotations, persuasion and authority are generally perceived more positively due to the level of honesty and a sense of having earned the influence respectively. Lastly, the strategy of seeking to create a clear image is supported by most theorists but questioned by Ren and Blichfeldt who emphasise the impossibility to distil a destination into one single thing and the ability for tourists to comprehend differences within the brand identity. These points reflect the discussion within the area of interest and are all valuable arguments in the following analysis.

6. The Economic Aspect of Tourism in Denmark

As a consequence of globalisation tourism has become an important source of income to nations around the world. In Denmark the tourism industry has surpassed the medical and agricultural industry in terms of employment, and it is estimated to constitute 4,2% of the employment total of the nation.¹⁷⁷ Tourists travelling to Denmark from foreign counties contributed in 2011 with 41% of the tourism spending total and thus made out 3,6% of Denmark's export income¹⁷⁸ which underlines the importance of the tourism business as a beneficial industry in Denmark. Those foreign tourists in 2011 are estimated to be 2,4 mil. people who all together spent 19,1 mil. nights in Denmark.¹⁷⁹ The spending that is made by these tourists, however, is not restricted only to the products and services that are traditionally regarded as a part of the tourism industry, and even though the main part of the income is spent on traditional tourism businesses, a great deal is also spend outside of that category, and other Danish products and services therefore also benefit from Danish tourism.¹⁸⁰ In fact, over half of the jobs that are created as a result of the tourism turnover are not traditionally perceived as a part of the tourism business.¹⁸¹ Even though it is nice that so many Danes are tourists in their own country, which must then be the remaining 59%, and it generally is good for the Danish tourism business, the money the Danish tourists spend most likely goes from the amount they might have spend on something else on the Danish market, and from a Danish economic and nationalistic aspect it is therefore very important to focus on the foreign tourists.¹⁸² In the case of this particular study this works well with the decision to focus on the foreign markets of VisitDenmark. Even though there is no guarantee that the Danes would spend their Danish holiday budget on other things that would otherwise benefit the Danish

¹⁷⁷ Dansk Industri (2013)

¹⁷⁸ VisitDenmark. Turismens Økonomiske Betydning (2013), p. 13

¹⁷⁹ VisitDenmark. På ferie i Danmark (2013), p. 4

¹⁸⁰ VisitDenmark. Tourismen i tal (2011)

¹⁸¹ Dansk Industri (2013)

¹⁸² TV2 Finans (2012)

economy, the previous numbers illustrate that Danish tourism carries great potential for growth, economic circulation and workplaces to the Danish society in general.¹⁸³

In the grander scheme of things, this is what it is all about. Numbers, employment and statistics are, at the end of the day, what the tourism business, as any other industry, is centred around, and even though the aim of this particular research is focused on the relationship between VisitDenmark as a destination marketing organisation and its partners, and thus has more to do with the people than the quantitative measures, results and economy make out the context in which the relationship should be viewed and the parameter on which to estimate its success. Therefore it is very unfortunate for Denmark that the country is losing market shares.¹⁸⁴ in the period from 1993 to 2007 the percentage of foreign tourists in Denmark out of the total amount fell or was unchanged every year going from 64% to 49,4% in the course of 14 years.¹⁸⁵ This is partly due to a rise in Danish tourists travelling in Denmark and does therefore not mean that the number of foreign tourists dropped equally dramatically. It did drop, however, and even though this development has changed there is still a long way to the results Danish tourism has been able to present in the past.¹⁸⁶

It is in this context the national interest in tourism and any attempt to influence it should be viewed. Being a relatively new concept in marketing nation branding can cause heated discussions of how to apply it most usefully and with what focus, but Mads Mordhorst establishes that the motivation for using it is soft power and economy.¹⁸⁷ By creating a positive nation image the government might generate soft power which can then be turned into authority and influence on international politics, and the economic perspective has already been illuminated above. An important issue when looking back on the development of the Danish nation brand is naturally the global economic crisis, but also the Muhammed crisis in the middle of the previous decade which emphasised the need to consider and work with the Danish reputation and image abroad. Even though it is not stated as an official reason it is conceivably what in earnest placed Danish nation branding on the political agenda and thereby created the incentive to implement the Plan of

¹⁸³ Dansk Industri (2013)

¹⁸⁴ Dansk Industri (2013). VisitDenmark. Resultat og Retning 2011-2012 (2012)

¹⁸⁵ VisitDenmark. Fakta om turisme (2008), p.5

¹⁸⁶ VisitDenmark. Resultat og Retning 2011-2012 (2012), p. 3

¹⁸⁷ Branding Denmark (2010), p. 12

Aggressive Global Marketing (HOGM¹⁸⁸).¹⁸⁹ In this context the plan serves as an example of the measures taken to improve the Danish nation brand and the framework it creates for the tourism business. It is important to underline that the HOGM does not only focus on tourism and Denmark as a destination brand, but works with several industries that are all representing Denmark in different aspects. In this context, however, the effects on the tourism industry are naturally what is relevant. The plan was created on the basis that the knowledge about Denmark was very limited and unfocused abroad, but to the extent that it existed it was generally positive, and analyses showed that Denmark had great potential and a lot to offer.¹⁹⁰ The overall aim was therefore to place Denmark among the top 10 nations in the OECD countries and the new growing economies in terms of knowledge of the country's strengths and competences in 2015. The means to achieve that were identified as transverse initiatives focusing on better organising, stronger coordination and more distinctive events among fields of interests: Denmark as a creative nation, Denmark as a tourist destination, Denmark as a country of education, Denmark as a country of investment, and the modernisation of export promotion.¹⁹¹ In terms of tourism this meant that in order to increase the awareness of Denmark and its tourism possibilities, the industry had to concentrate on coordinated marketing and focus on certain forms of media and target groups. More specifically, three main challenges was identified as turning the negative development of Danish coastal tourism, improving the visibility of Danish city experiences, and limiting the administrative struggles of getting there in terms of visa regulations.¹⁹² The two former were highly relevant to VisitDenmark's work as it may provide political support for certain projects, but on the other hand it may arguably limit other focuses at the expense of this political decision, and this will also be discussed in the following analysis. Either way, it created a framework for the Danish tourism industry to navigate within.

Beginning in 2007 and running until the end of 2012 the HOGM has provided an extra economic resource for new initiatives and innovation. "The purpose of the effort was to create a clear and positive image of Danish strengths and values abroad so that Denmark may also in the future stand strong in the global competition of creative and competent employees,

¹⁸⁸ In Danish it translates to Handlingsplan for Offensiv Global Markedsføring, hence the abbreviation HOGM

¹⁸⁹ Branding Denmark (?), p. 12

¹⁹⁰ Økonomi- og Erhvervsministeriet. Handlingsplan for Offensiv Global Markedsføring af Danmark (2007), p. 11

¹⁹¹ Økonomi- og Erhvervsministeriet. Handlingsplan for Offensiv Global Markedsføring af Danmark (2007), pp. 9-10

¹⁹² Økonomi- og Erhvervsministeriet. Handlingsplan for Offensiv Global Markedsføring af Danmark (2007), pp. 40-42

tourists, students, investments and global market shares"¹⁹³. This has generally, and according to the Ministry of Business and Growth, been enhanced due to the HOGM, and in terms of the tourism business the results at hand show excellent progress. In spite of an inevitable uncertainty it is estimated that the effort contributes with 1.000.000 extra nights and 500 mil. DKK extra turnover pr. year which has then led to the creation of 260-760 extra jobs every year. The result of this is that each extra position has cost 23.000-67.000 DKK to create, and in terms of tourism the HOGM therefore appear to have had a great influence viewed from the perspective of the general Danish society.¹⁹⁴ According to VisitDenmark the money from this plan has made it possible to create the extra visibility or activities that have provided greater impact on the markets, and it is therefore possible that as it has now ended there will not be enough money in the future to uphold or repeat some of the project that have partly been financed by the this extra pool of money.¹⁹⁵ The Ministry of Business and Growth recognises this by stating that if the campaigns originating from the HOGM were to stop the greater part of the extra created jobs would most likely disappear.

The great estimated effects of the extra funding in the tourism business which the above exemplifies naturally leads to the speculation of why the HOGM stopped as planned in 2012. This question is outside the realm of this particular research, and its political issues and discussions are too extensive to encompass in this project. The global economic crisis that has arisen since the implementation of the plan makes it plausible that it has been necessary for the tourism investments to give way to other societal priorities. Marketing may not carry the public and political understanding and support when the quality and conditions of other pivotal structural sectors of society are strained. As mentioned the influenced parts are encouraged to continue the projects and strategies of the plan in their future work, and as such the extra money invested in the period 2007-2012 may, depending on the perspective, be perceived as an effort to create a platform to boost and inspire the future work, and push it in a certain direction, rather than aiming at a continuing support. It is important to underline, in this relation, that these are only speculations made by the researcher, and the HOGM was never intended to stretch over a

¹⁹³ Translated from: Ministry of Business and Growth. Sammenfatning, Evaluering og Markedsføring efter 2012 (2013), p. 1

¹⁹⁴ Ministry of Business and Growth. Evaluering af Handlingsplanen for offensiv global markedsføring 2007-2012 (2012), p. 115

¹⁹⁵ VisitDenmark. Retning og Resultat 2011-2012 (2012), p. 14

longer period than it did. The money for it was set aside in a period when the political reality and the probably also the image of Denmark were different, and there was never been any promises or hopes of prolonging it. It is as such not a retrenchment but simply not a continuation of an investment either. However, though money was invested in this initiative the overall budget for VisitDenmark reveals general declining state subsidies in VisitDenmark which is also shown in Appendix 1. The plan's objectives, means and results exemplify how the industry is measured, what values lay the ground for the overall strategy, and it creates a sense of what official framework the Danish tourism industry works within.

7. Analysis

The previous pages have all contributed to a foundation on which to base the analysis. It has created an understanding of the context and previous knowledge on the field of interest and the methodological framework of how to approach and conduct the analysis and draw conclusions. The next pages will therefore build further on that foundation by processing the gathered empirical material into context specific discussions. While keeping in mind and being centred around the research question the following sections will examine, interpret and analyse relevant issues based on expressions and opinions of the eight participating respondents, and in doing so it will produce deductions, conclusions and suggestions based on an extract of the Danish tourism business. With a point of departure in the theories and the topics of greatest interests and importance to the respondents it will start by outlining political aspects and the general possibility of fulfilling the purpose of a destination brand. It will then move through necessities, advantages and challenges of cooperating with partners in the creation of such a brand, and proceed to the practical aspects of the cooperation in terms of negotiations and leadership. Finally, this will culminate in an assessment of aims and expectations of the brand as a result of the cooperative process in terms of clarity and alignment of the presented image.

7.1 Political Challenges and Differences of Perspective

The political issues of place branding appear first and foremost to be complicated by the many opinions, interests and various strategies present in the tourism business. The challenges that Can-Seng Ooi describes are all at the centre of attention to both VisitDenmark and partner respondents, but various daily obstacles and positions in the structure of the cooperation place the importance of them and perspectives on them differently. This is also noticed by a VisitDenmark market director who explains that by keeping a long-range strategy and preserving a wider perspective on branding Denmark as a destination, the chances of increasing the overall income are also improving, as opposed to a more narrow focus, which would perhaps be good for a few partners, but generally a loss of income for most. The challenge and balance of this issue,

however, is to make partners identify themselves with the process and maintain an overall strategy while staying aware of their need to focus on the day to day turnover.¹⁹⁶ This perspective recognises the previously presented theorists' unanimous claim that it is important for a brand that its stakeholders constitute a base of support, but even though all partner respondents are supportive of VisitDenmark as a strong destination marketing organisation in general, and are troubled by the repercussions of financial cutbacks, the difference of outlook from that of the market director is evident. According to one partner the umbrella of the Denmark as an umbrella brand is now so high that it is hard to reach.¹⁹⁷ While another partner points out that the key values in the branding of Denmark are too fanciful and airy for the people closer to the product to identify with, which creates a distance rather than eye level,¹⁹⁸ a third argues that the fusion of too many wide covering values carries the risk of drowning out the individual stakeholder.¹⁹⁹ Also present are the reflections on the dilemma that the wider VisitDenmark goes in its representation of Denmark, the more difficult it gets for a partner to spot the tangible returning profit of a particular investment, but at the same time no good campaign can be made without substantial investment by the stakeholders.²⁰⁰ It arguably appears that in spite of support of the concept of an umbrella brand it is a fine balance to define the values for a brand that are both broad enough to cover the various types and interests of their stakeholders, and at the same time are not so broad and embracing that they become impersonal. A suggestion bridging these two strategies and making the individual stakeholder more visible is, as one respondents proposes, to create partnerships consisting of a few partners representing different industries and packaging a full experience reaching from suggested transportation, accommodation, attractions, eateries and so on.²⁰¹ As Ooi argues the packaging of a place selectively for tourists is one of the obligations of a place brand, and this has been the case before, but due to financial cutbacks and an increased focus on fewer but stronger campaigns it is not possible in this way to produce a promotion of Denmark based on one or very few partners. A VisitDenmark respondent argues that the economic limitations combined with the governmental demand of partner financing have led to

¹⁹⁶ VDK3, p. 6

¹⁹⁷ Partner4, p. 11

¹⁹⁸ Partner1, p. 3

¹⁹⁹ Partner2, p. 5

²⁰⁰ Partner3, p. 4

²⁰¹ Partner3, p. 5

the necessity of including a wider range of partners as VisitDenmark can rarely contribute with more than 25% itself. No partner will leave the decisions to VisitDenmark if they are paying the remaining 75%.²⁰² On the one hand side this development adds to the necessity of less specific details, and thus decreases the coveted eye level for some partners, but on the other hand side it also limits the danger that Ooi predicts about excluding certain partners due to the lack of financial resources. Other partners who have been used to these special initiatives may, however, experience a degenerating motivation to work with VisitDenmark.²⁰³ This is, according to a VisitDenmark respondent, obvious as changes will naturally cause discontent with those favoured by the previous strategy.²⁰⁴

In spite of the varying perspectives on the level of specification in the brand the concept of focusing the means, efforts and attention on a small selection of projects are well received. In accordance with the governmental HOGM VisitDenmark's official strategy has moved towards a focus on fewer but bigger and more cogent campaigns,²⁰⁵ and the partners generally respond that it is right to create the possibility to really excel in the chosen projects, but once again there is a difference in perspectives and priorities. While it appears that VisitDenmark stays oriented on Denmark in general, albeit through division into target groups, several partners are focused on a more specific audience. A line can be drawn from the wish for closer identification to their call for VisitDenmark to focus on the markets that are most likely to make a profit for the partners. Confirming the point of view that there is sometimes a clash between VisitDenmark's general long-term perspective and the partners' need of a more tangible effect, a partner states that naturally VisitDenmark is always most popular when they bring guests to their stakeholders.²⁰⁶ The best way to do that is suggested to be communicating more specifically to those who are likely to come for specific reasons as for instance fishing magazines, wellness magazines and the like.²⁰⁷ Focusing hard on the ideological values of Denmark such as green energy or tolerance is important, but according to this partner it risks spending everything on

²⁰² VDK3, p. 1

²⁰³ Partner2, p. 3. Partner3, p. 8

²⁰⁴ VDK1, p. 2

²⁰⁵ Ministry of Business and Growth. Sammenfatning, Evaluering og Markedsføring efter 2012 (2013), p. 2.

VisitDenmark. Resultat og Retning 2011-2012 (2012), p. 16

²⁰⁶ Partner2, p. 13

²⁰⁷ Partner2, p.

something with very little personal connection and will therefore have trouble drawing visitors to the partner, which is the selling argument to them. However, a VisitDenmark respondent points out that sometimes partners' wishes are not always consistent with what experience and expertise recommends for a certain market, and letting partners freely prioritise of their exposure may miss a great audience of possible visitors. Prioritising the people that have already been or shown interest in coming to Denmark because it feels safe, can leave out other consumers with money to spend that VisitDenmark has a better understanding of and ability to reach.²⁰⁸

This brings the attention to the VisitDenmark and partner respondents' priorities of geographical areas of focus. Even though VisitDenmark expresses great understanding and believes that the nearest markets are extremely important as most tourists come from there,²⁰⁹ all four partner respondents apparently have to emphasise that most of their visitors come from the local or very close markets and that only there will they support VisitDenmarks projects. Three out of the four partner respondents argue that VisitDenmark should focus more of their attention on those markets rather than putting their energy into the new and more distant markets or regret that the organisation, in their opinion, has moved its focus from near to a wider global perspective.²¹⁰ One of them has the impression that the Danish market has roughly disappeared,²¹¹ another advises VisitDenmark to cut down on the distant markets and remember to focus on the places the main part of the visitors come from and where the money will more surely return²¹². It should, however, be mentioned that there is also an understanding from the partner respondents that VisitDenmark has an obligation to market Denmark in the more distant corners of the world, but looking at it from a traditional marketing perspective, which several respondents do, they also have an obligation to return the biggest profit which, based on their experience, is done closer to home. The traditional marketing perspective is in line with Hankinson's belief in similarities between destination branding and corporate branding, and parallels are drawn both by VisitDenmark and partner respondents. Coca Cola is mentioned several times, and according to a partner it has a similar umbrella stretching over the brand but

²⁰⁸ VDK2, p. 3

²⁰⁹ VisitDenmark. <http://www.visitdenmark.dk/da/danmark/ingen-vaekst-i-dansk-turisme-i-2012-0>, accessed 12 May 2013.

²¹⁰ Partner1, p.7. Partner2, p. 3. Partner4, pp. 3-4.

²¹¹ Partner4, p. 8

²¹² Partner3, p. 3

adjusts the brand to its target group and spend its marketing budget on the investments that will result in the biggest sell.²¹³ The VisitDenmark respondents naturally all emphasise the importance of their own market to Danish tourism and although biased they do as such agree, but the overall VisitDenmark statistics show that in the year 2012 the three markets growing the most were countries as far away from Denmark as China, Brazil and Russia.²¹⁴ A natural explanation of this may of course be that it requires fewer extra people to travel from China to increase the number of Chinese visitors, than it would do in Germany, but it nonetheless indicates a focus on new distant markets. As a partner points out visitors from these distant countries are most often one time visitors and benefit specific businesses whereas the loyalty is greater in the closer markets.²¹⁵

Lastly, VisitDenmark market directors refer to the visitors' previous assumptions about Denmark as a way of providing a good consumer experience. While one believes that few people have any impression of Denmark at all, and that the lack of expectations results in positive surprises,²¹⁶ another believes, in accordance with Ooi, that the strong positive image of Denmark in that market helps the tourist knowing what to expect and be open and look for those positive experiences they anticipate.²¹⁷ Therefore, it is not entirely clear if expectations are necessary, but as all market directors are aiming at a positive place image this must be the most advantageous, and it may suggest that at least no image is better than a negative one.

7.2 Having Something to Offer

While every business is dependent on a certain amount of profit the bigger picture is important for the possibilities of marketing even smaller partners. Even though each partner respondent is talking from their own specific point of view, and points to the problems that are of special interest to them, there also seems to be an understanding that VisitDenmark has been forced to restructure and reprioritise due to economic cutbacks. The cooperation between themselves and

²¹³ Partner3, p. 10+14

²¹⁴ VisitDenmark. <http://www.visitdenmark.dk/da/danmark/ingen-vaekst-i-dansk-turisme-i-2012-0>, accessed 12 May 2013.

²¹⁵ Partner3, p. 10

²¹⁶ VDK4, p. 3

²¹⁷ VDK3, p. 3

VisitDenmark is referred to as positive, but there is also a general recognition that VisitDenmark, due to a decrease of what they can offer, is becoming a less attractive marketing partner for the individual business.²¹⁸ While both VisitDenmark and partner respondents generally point to VisitDenmark's expertise and know-how in destination marketing as a great asset, a partner points out that financial cutbacks often leads to a reduction of staff which then in turn ends up limiting the essential advantages VisitDenmark has to offer.²¹⁹ Other partners reflect on the idea that maybe too much money are spent on the processes that are not directly aimed at marketing but is put into administration, analysis or the like.²²⁰ This can possibly be explained with the need to justify the decision to invest public funds in VisitDenmark as the HOGM emphasises the necessity of measuring effects and tangible results of investments.²²¹

This naturally leaves VisitDenmark caught between conflicting wishes, but the administrative expenses are not mentioned by VisitDenmark respondents who rather emphasise the need of being the preferable alternative for partners' marketing. A VisitDenmark marketing director stresses that it is absolutely pivotal to use the segmentation and distribution proficiencies that VisitDenmark possesses to provide a good solution for the partners, and that only by creating a real advantage for them is it possible work together.²²² Similar opinions by all four VisitDenmark market directors indicate that while the difference in perspective established in the previous section may be a challenge, it is essential to the VisitDenmark respondents to create a profitable solution to their partners that may hopefully overcome those differences and provide a common platform from which to draw on in the marketing of the individual tourism agent. It is emphasised by three VisitDenmark respondents that partners should be persuaded to cooperate through the proving of the organisation's proficiencies and results,²²³ and through this point of view they are all also aware of their partners' need to always carefully consider if what VisitDenmark offers can create a bigger income than marketing their business individually or pooling their financial means with other partners. While one VisitDenmark market director argues that public funding requires

²¹⁸ Partner2, p. 5

²¹⁹ Partner2, p. 8

²²⁰ Partner3, p.11. Partner1, p. 6

²²¹ Ministry of Business and Growth. Sammenfatning, Evaluering og Markedsføring efter 2012 (2013), p. 3

²²² VDK1, p. 5-6

²²³ VDK1, p. 5. VDK2, p. 4. VDK4, p. 6

the organisation to be the better alternative in spite of cutbacks,²²⁴ the same respondent knows that the money VisitDenmark put into a campaign buys the mark of the destination, Denmark, and the way to make that mark the most attractive option of marketing is to be good at getting creative and clever ideas.²²⁵ This idea of compensating for the decrease of money with innovative ways of thought and new creative mindsets is confirmed by another market director stating that major brands with bigger economic magnitude are able to make up for their possible lack of details with frequency.²²⁶ This means that as the level of wit and content in a campaign goes down, the need for economic resources to pay for exposure goes up, and the other way around. It furthermore challenges some practicalities of Hankinson's comparison of corporate brands and destination brands as governments are often restricted on one or both of these elements by the set political framework. This argument probes the thought that by reducing the investments in VisitDenmark the government forces the organisation into developing its creativity and innovation. The problem naturally rises if the ideas fail to materialise and the organisation does not have the capacity to be the preferable choice of marketing through either one or the other. Fortunately this does not appear to be the case, according to the VisitDenmark respondents, but one market director suggests that in order to keep the level of attraction in the eyes of the partners and maintain their financial support it is necessary to become better at thinking along new lines and perhaps trying bridging ministries or sectors that are not compatible on the surface but may share special interests in terms of certain projects.²²⁷ Other ministries such as the Ministry for Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Environment may be interested in some of the same aspects of Denmark that VisitDenmark is seeking to emphasise, and such a ministerial cooperation could serve as an example of the continuation of the interdisciplinary collaboration that the HOGM recommends and advocates for.²²⁸

What VisitDenmark is offering on the creative level is mostly considered attractive to the partner respondents. Similar to VisitDenmarks' need of showing Denmark as a destination, however, the various partners need to consider their mark on it in relation to what they invest. Recognising the tolerance of less visibility when the investment is smaller one partner suggests

²²⁴ VDK1, p. 5

²²⁵ VDK1, p. 8

²²⁶ VDK3, p. 7

²²⁷ VDK4, p. 9

²²⁸ Ministry of Business and Growth. Sammenfatning, Evaluering og Markedsføring efter 2012 (2013), p. 3

that letting partners join in the campaigns for free will most probably increase VisitDenmark's attractiveness while also improving the chance of a common message about Denmark as partners would tend to support the campaign without too many objections and demands.²²⁹ This naturally leads back to the economic limitations and underlines that the demand of creative quality of the offers that VisitDenmark gives its partners appears to rise with the organisation's decreasing ability to invest financially.

7.3 The Advantages of Cooperation

The cooperation between VisitDenmark and its partners naturally exists on the basis of a mutual gain from the others' presence. While all VisitDenmark respondents agree that they have something of importance that can benefit their partners, they are also very aware that they are equally, if not to a greater extent, dependent on the cooperation. All four market directors state explicitly that the partners are the absolutely necessary foundation of VisitDenmark's work, and without them it would be impossible to do what the organisation does.²³⁰ Underlining the dependence of partners all together one respondent explains the current strategy to be that without partners there are no projects.²³¹ However, another respondent, while agreeing to dependence, mitigates the situation slightly by also stating that there is no partner that is so important that a project cannot be done without that specific partner.²³² A third VisitDenmark respondent turns the situation around for another view and entertains the thought of how the dependency is mutual as long as the organisation maintains the better alternative as a marketing partner.²³³

Even though the decrease of VisitDenmark's economic investments in branding projects is noticed by the partners they do express other forms of dependency and advantages to be found for them in the cooperation. Just as the a market director explains that the partners are not only needed for their money but also very much for the support from the brands constituting

²²⁹ Partner3, pp. 3-4+10

²³⁰ VDK2, p. 4. VDK3, p. 2. VDK4, p. 5. VDK1, p. 4

²³¹ VDK4, p. 5

²³² VDK3, p. 2

²³³ VDK1, p. 5

the product, Denmark, a partner respondent states that one of the great advantages of cooperating with VisitDenmark is to be able to lean on the significant strength of the brand that the organisation has build and the values associated with it.²³⁴ The brand message that is constructed in Norway is pointed to as a example in this context, and the strength of the slogan 'Det er dejlig å være norsk - i Danmark' (It is great to be Norwegian - in Denmark) is accentuated by the partner respondents as a successful base to work from and a powerful boost to specific campaigns on that market. Norwegians are known to be attracted and very aware of Denmark as a destination,²³⁵ and this naturally leads to advantages for partners in terms of marketing their own specific product.

Furthermore, the sharing of information is accentuated as a great advantage for both partners and VisitDenmark market directors. On the partner side a respondent praises VisitDenmark's good grasp of the situation of industry and its ability to coordinate the efforts,²³⁶ and two VisitDenmark respondents equally accentuates the importance of understanding that partners constitute the product and the valuable function as a professional sparring partner.²³⁷ This creates the sympathetic impression that the dependence on each other is also based on the notion, on both sides, that the other holds a valuable key to the mutual success, and as long as both parts believe this there is a foundation for continued cooperation. This approach to the partners fits well with Kavatzis' recommendation to destination marketing organisations to recognise destination branding as a complex rather than linear development, the importance of the connection to the smaller parts of the product, and that a forced brand carries little resemblance to reality. These points are challenged by the impression of the distance expressed in the previous section, but it also signifies a recognition expressed by a partner respondent experiencing this distance, that the cooperation with VisitDenmark creates a basis and a framework for networking not only with VisitDenmark but also other partners joining in projects and campaigns.²³⁸ Exactly this connection and interaction between partners, who may be perceived as rivals in the market, are also emphasised as an advantage by a VisitDenmark respondent. In line with Wang's findings that instead of fighting each other it can be useful for

²³⁴ Partner3, p. 2

²³⁵ VisitDenmark. Brandmåling 2012 (2012), p. 64

²³⁶ Partner2, p. 3

²³⁷ VDK2, p. 2. VDK, p. 2

²³⁸ Partner1, p. 5

partners to cooperate in attracting visitors to a destination, as it is likely to increase everyone's chances of more guests,²³⁹ a VisitDenmark market director argues that it is better for any given Danish business to compete locally than globally.²⁴⁰ Regardless of its size, level of attraction or turnover it is more likely that other businesses in Denmark, which should perhaps not be perceived as rivals, will attract visitors and thereby increase the number of people who might visit once they are there, than any other businesses around the world. This means that while big theme parks or strong destination brands may appear to drown out smaller partners in campaigns, it is plausibly profitable to support those initiatives by cooperating to convince people to choose Denmark as a destination, and then fight for attention once the tourists are there. A partner emphasises this point by saying that tourists rarely go to only see or experience one thing and quickly leave, but they seem to bundle their experiences,²⁴¹ and this makes the cooperation with VisitDenmark and other partners stand out as a clear advantage.

7.4 The Challenges of Cooperation

In spite of all the benefits of cooperation the considerations of doing marketing on their own appear to be ever present with the partner respondents. The differences in perspective and priorities and the challenge in coordinating them with an overall strategy into a common project are emphasised especially by VisitDenmark respondents, but there are aspects of this coordination that are further complicated by the strained budget. Important to keep in mind when discussing these difficulties is that even though VisitDenmark's budget constitutes a cornerstone in this study, the general economic crisis is also forcing partners to prioritise critically in their own budget,²⁴² and the suggestions that are made by several respondents about how to ease the process may be ideologically reasonable but practically impossible. Financial cutbacks have for instance made it impossible for VisitDenmark to offer campaigns to only a few strong partners, which could simplify the content, or offer smaller partners to join campaigns for free in order to

²³⁹ Wang (2008), pp. 160-161

²⁴⁰ VDK1, p. 6

²⁴¹ Partner3, p. 4

²⁴² Partner2, p. 13

improve the chances of standing united in sending a common message.²⁴³ On the other hand side the requirement of partner funding, which means that VisitDenmark has to match the amount of money provided by the government with investments made by partners, may also help VisitDenmark in avoiding spending money on projects that are not dependent on the organisation's investments. According to a VisitDenmark market director this specific rule can reduce the risk of subsidising projects that partners would otherwise have paid for themselves and thus created the same campaign for Denmark as a destination without being an expense to the organisation. There are supposedly examples of this in the past.²⁴⁴ Beside the economic aspect this is likely to turn out as the partner suggests or in compromise which, according to the respondent, is rarely desirable in terms of the long term destination perspective.²⁴⁵

Many challenges are naturally appearing when interests are fusing into a common result, but two of the main challenges that emerges from the interviews with the eight respondents are already identified by Kavaratzis' discussion of the necessity of partner cooperation. The first links with the following sections on rights and influence and has to do with the risk of creating a form of elitism and favourability among partners based on their position and economy in the tourism industry. By explaining that campaigns often takes form through a continuous dialogue with a few economically viable partners who can provide professional feedback, the respondent confirms Kavaratzis' argument that stakeholders are categorised and prioritised based on two aspects: "...the influence they exert and the interest they show in the specific project"²⁴⁶. This is traceable in other respondents comments as well, and on the partner side a respondent estimate that smaller partners may feel that considerations are mainly focused at bigger partners.²⁴⁷ The problem about this is the obvious risk of creating different levels of influence and thereby neglecting certain aspects of Denmark as a destination in spite of the ambition to stay close to the product and representing a strong unified brand with broad support from its stakeholders. On this note a partner presents the interesting point of view that for a popular tourist attraction it would be possible, although cynical, to prioritise its own individual marketing rather than invest in VisitDenmark's as the people who would come are likely to visit

²⁴³ Partner3, pp. 3+10. Partner2, p. 6. VDK3, p. 1

²⁴⁴ VDK3, p. 1

²⁴⁵ VDK3, p. 1

²⁴⁶ Kavaratzis (2012), p. 13

²⁴⁷ Partner2, p. 8

this attraction even if it has not been exposed through VisitDenmark's communication.²⁴⁸ This emphasises the previously stated importance for VisitDenmark of being able to create offers and benefits for partners in order to maintain especially the big investors and it underlines the challenge it is to continuously stay attractive in a time when partners also have to lead a hard-headed economic strategy.

The second challenge also touched upon by Kavaratzis is the quickly emerging possibilities of online marketing. Not focusing too much on it regarding the clarity of image that is put out one respondent argues that there is a challenge in using the internet as a source of communication without drowning each other's voices out. Pumping money into online exposure may only artificially increase the competition and price for internet advertising and attention.²⁴⁹ A challenge can therefore be to make use of the online possibilities in a way that strengthens the common cause without giving anyone the feeling that it compromises their cooperating businesses or is counterproductive to the investments made in the visibility of individual partners. In general most challenges naturally arise from conflicting opinions and communication. The discussion of those challenges is most probably never ending, and while these are characteristic and thematic in the respondent interviews they are not restricted to this specific section but are present in the other parts of the analysis as well.

7.5 Rights, Roles and Responsibilities

The division of rights, obligations and reasonable expectations of others as well as oneself may also be a source of disagreement in the discipline of cooperative destination branding. While Kavaratzis has argued in favour for equality in the process of creation and maintained that the destination marketing organisation is only one of many agents creating and constituting the final destination brand, Hankinson has declared his support to the strong leadership similar to that necessary in corporative branding. The many references to examples of corporate brands and

²⁴⁸ Partner3, pp. 1-2

²⁴⁹ Partner2, p. 12

'normal businesses'²⁵⁰ further justify Hankinson's perspective as the respondents appear to believe in the similarities between their own branding business and those following Hankinson's description. This believe constructs the social reality the respondents navigate and build the cooperating strategy and principles within, and it may explain the tendency among the respondents to support the strategy following a strong leader. VisitDenmark respondents state rather clearly that the strategy is for the organisation to create and develop campaigns and projects that partners can then decide to join in on or let pass.²⁵¹ It is, however, also underlined by a VisitDenmark respondent that the organisation should not bundle everything together but be careful to listen to its partners and provide the most attractive source and outlet of communication through legitimacy and credibility while acknowledging their perspective and thinking commercially.²⁵² It is this balance between control and rights to outline the strategy on the one hand and the absorbing of the inputs from partners and the coordinating function on the other that appears to constitute the differing points of view and that also seem to be put under pressure due to lowering budget. Ideally these two things would naturally be combined, but the economic necessity of making broader campaigns with more partners at a time can arguably make it more difficult to relate to too many wishes and ideas from participating stakeholders. As a partner respondent notice it is difficult to say whether the changes of VisitDenmark's approach to the division of roles and decisions the partner respondents detect have to do with the organisation's economic development or are purely based on a strategic choice and ideological belief of management.²⁵³ The VisitDenmark respondents appear to be split on the view of the organisation being firm and dominating with two respondents emphasising the new requirements from VisitDenmark to partners and the lessened ability to work with few enough partners to consider all interests,²⁵⁴ and the other two emphasising the need of flexibility and meeting the terms of partners.²⁵⁵ However, the partner respondents generally express an observation of change. While the flexibility in VisitDenmark's offers to partners is hard to spot in the comments of the partner respondents, beside the expression of an understanding at the market offices of

²⁵⁰ E.g. Partner1, p.7. Partner2, p. 10. VDK1, p. 3. VDK3, p. 7

²⁵¹ VDK2, p. 2. VDK3, p.2

²⁵² VDK1, pp. 3+4

²⁵³ Partner3, pp. 7-8.

²⁵⁴ VDK2, pp. 5-6. VDK, p. 2

²⁵⁵ VDK1, p. 7. VDK, p. 8

partners individual situation,²⁵⁶ and their firmness and immovability are disputed,²⁵⁷ the changes are, to the extent they are noticed, generally well received. One partner respondent expresses that the more fully developed campaign options offered on the relevant markets have created an increased simplicity and transparency of the cooperation,²⁵⁸ while the perceived new option of joining in at different levels is praised by another.²⁵⁹ Two partner respondents furthermore support the idea of VisitDenmark conducting a form of monopolistic branding of Denmark, to a certain degree, economically supported solely by the public funds but morally supported by the partners who would then be more free to join without reservations.²⁶⁰ Though this would arguably make it easier to construct an unambiguous image of the destination, the budget and request of financial contribution of partners and the advantage of the need to attune the brand to the perceived reality make it impossible.

Even though VisitDenmark is officially aiming at fewer but larger and more cogent campaigns, which implicitly calls for a firmly set direction for the projects, the variation of opinions on what the strategy is, or should be, in terms of leadership and sternness, also brings the definitions of responsibilities into question. One of the elements that Hankinson draws on from corporate branding is that ambiguity can jeopardise or undermine the integrity of a brand, but the interviewed respondents also present a difference of opinion on that matter. The general understanding from VisitDenmark is that partners naturally put their own businesses first and prioritise the interests that will benefit themselves rather than the greater good for the destination all together. This is especially evident in the interview with a VisitDenmark market director that argues that it is common sense for partners not to want to invest in advantages for business rivals, or other companies in general and, linking back to the necessity of being the better alternative, also claims that it would be naive to appeal to partners' ethical support in the brand.²⁶¹ This believe is shared by a partner respondent who argues that VisitDenmark constitutes a solution for an error in the marketing structure as none of its partners who are focused on the thriving of their own business can be expected to adopt the macro perspective of marketing the

²⁵⁶ Partner1, p. 3

²⁵⁷ Partner4, p. 6

²⁵⁸ Partner3, p. 7

²⁵⁹ Partner1, p. 5

²⁶⁰ Partner2, p. 6. Partner3, p. 10

²⁶¹ VDK1, p. 2

country even though it might give themselves a slight advantage in the granter scheme of things.²⁶² VisitDenmark is in that context described as vital in combining and coordinating the smaller entities into a common product and brand. The general understanding that it is the responsibility of VisitDenmark to create attractive reasons to support the Danish brand and the challenge to do so caused by a strained budget²⁶³ is unexpectedly met by a partner respondent's comment of solidarity while maintaining the primary focus on individual turnover. Beside the recognition of the organisation's duties, one of the difficulties in a destination marketing organisation is described to be getting the smaller partners to perceive the granter perspective and realise their responsibility that there may continue to be a destination at all in the years to come,²⁶⁴ but at least one partner respondent verbalises that feeling of responsibility. In spite of an awareness of the partner's privileged position and value of attraction, which a very hard-headed approach might have used to reduce the economic support, this partner shows a recognition of the obligation to promote Denmark and thereby support the projects of VisitDenmark, naturally only when possible and profitable.²⁶⁵

However, the responsibility may also be exerted through participation and commitment in the process of projects. The rights and options of getting involved in the development is by one partner described as extremely limited,²⁶⁶ while another states that the specific partner rarely seeks out influence on decisions or developments in VisitDenmark.²⁶⁷ Keeping Wang's identification of the phases of cooperative destination branding in mind and combining it with VisitDenmark's increased need of directing and deciding more, it appears that his idea of high stakeholder commitment in the first phase, the assembling stage, is slightly compromised. All VisitDenmark respondents emphasise the importance of staying close to partners needs and drawing on the knowledge of the hands on experience of the project that partners can provide. However, the strategy and necessity of increasing VisitDenmark's part in the creative development and making a 'take it or leave it' offer arguably compromises the feeling of interdependence and common interests, that Wang emphasises in this stage, and it may also

²⁶² Partner2, p. 4

²⁶³ VDK3, p. 5

²⁶⁴ VDK3, p. 6

²⁶⁵ Partner3, p. 1

²⁶⁶ Partner4, p. 6

²⁶⁷ Partner1, p. 4

reduce the feeling of ownership in the brand that Ooi considers to be important for the support and strength of a brand. Generally partners show little awareness and insight in VisitDenmark's events, projects or campaigns before they are offered to participate in a developed concept, but they express an impression that the offered concepts seek to include partner perspectives and are as such close to Hankinson's believe in strong leadership reflecting its perceived reality.

7.6 Applied Forms of Power and Influence

The general perception among the respondents that VisitDenmark develops a campaigns or projects without too much involvement of the partners is not necessarily contradictory to partners' power and influence in the process. While acknowledging that VisitDenmark has become the approaching part in the cooperation, the VisitDenmark respondents also express a need to stay aware of the partners' wishes and thereby support Hankinson's belief that the leader should manage conflicting interests and accommodate partners' needs. In the sense that VisitDenmark can be an attractive agent for Danish tourism businesses, and necessary for the coordination of their interests in the marketing of Denmark as a destination all together, and that partners hold an increasing part of the financial foundation for the executed projects, both parts are bound to each other in interdependence. As it has previously been established financial cutbacks in VisitDenmark risks lessening its attraction value if the organisation fails to compensate by working smarter, and VisitDenmark's need for partners to join the project could therefore be perceived as empowerment of the partners. However, VisitDenmark respondents clearly express a strategy of maintaining the integrity of the brand and an uncompromising approach to the brand values and foundation of the work of the organisation. One of them states that the organisation is not dependent on any partner enough to be willing to compromise its principles, and that it has nothing to do with pride but the belief in what is best for the destination and the development in the market. The integrity is what the organisation receive its public funding for, and it is therefore obligated to make that a top priority.²⁶⁸ This invalidate the thought of a power increase of the partners, but as changes have happened in the perception of each others' strengths, and the

²⁶⁸ VDK3, p. 4

amount of invested money which must invariably be perceived as power in an industry aiming at growth, it is worth looking into the power relation and option of influence between VisitDenmark and its partners.

In accordance with any previous assumptions and expectations no signs of force is found in the comments of either VisitDenmark or partner respondents. Besides the obvious argument negative physical actions such as deprivation, violence or obstructions are not beneficial in the tourism business, force does not appear as good strategy for keeping and stabilising a relationship to build on in the future.

Manipulation is also not revealed in the interviews although it cannot be as categorically dismissed. Both Wang and the VisitDenmark respondents emphasise the openness and honesty in the negotiation with partners, but the need for the organisation to convince the partners of the greater good for the destination points to an advantage of applying manipulation to a certain degree. Two market directors clearly states that it is a challenge to connect the long term perspective of the organisation and the shorter term perspective of the cooperating partners,²⁶⁹ and though there is no support in the interviews to argue that manipulation is happening both Wrong and Senge sees the potential in this strategy in order to unify the parts in a common cause. Furthermore, manipulation would be hard to detect in any interview if it is successfully performed as the subject would not realise the influence and the performer would most likely, due to the social perception of negative connotations, not own to it.

Similar to another study on power in destination branding conducted in Australia this study can, however, identify applied persuasion and authority as means of influence. Persuasion, which may not be an official strategy but merely the natural form of negotiation, fits very well with Wang's advice of honesty between partners and a general idea of fairness. In spite of differences in the level of enthusiasm all VisitDenmark respondents show support to the organisation's strategy of being the approaching part in the cooperation process and to the brand that it results in. It therefore also seems logical not to try to hide any details from either the partners or the interviewer. Persuasion furthermore fits nicely with Wrong's observation that it maintains an equal relation as the subject is free to make the informed decision to decline the

²⁶⁹ VDK2, p. 3. VDK3, p. 6

offer, just as the partners are free to not participate in VisitDenmark's projects. Two partner respondents' comments on the negotiation process exemplifies that the honesty is reciprocated as partners who state their position on either economy or structure are mostly met with understanding and negotiation to find a suitable solution for both parts.²⁷⁰ Linking to aspects of authority abilities such as good articulation and intelligence combined with good reputation are emphasised as support in the process of persuasion, and these are all features partner respondents describe VisitDenmark to possess. The ability of make good offers for the partners, however, is closely related to means of persuasion, and the comments regarding VisitDenmark's decreasing attraction due to a declining budget, and its struggles to replace it with smarter and more creative work processes and projects, may indicate a risk of degenerating VisitDenmark's ability to persuade.

Though persuasion appears to be the most widely applied form of influence between VisitDenmark and their respondents, which makes good sense as it is most profitable to build partnerships on unhidden agendas, authority appears also to be a contributing factor. While coercive authority such as threats are just as absent as force, authority by inducement is arguably present. In spite of VisitDenmark sticking to their strategies, one market director admits that those partners allowed the function as sparring partners in the developing phase, a selection of partners based on who may be economically viable enough to dominate the project, will naturally have a bigger influence on the final result.²⁷¹ Another market director states that the big partners in that specific market are very important and it can sometimes be necessary to go to great lengths in order to keep them happy with the cooperation, but ultimately it is about the substance and results.²⁷² This leads to the previously established and much emphasised vital ability to work smarter in compensation for the lack of financial resources, and this refers to the competent authority. In spite of unanimous agreement that combining the interests of the many cooperating partners is a challenge, the partners generally have very high regards for the work VisitDenmark performs, and every VisitDenmark respondent explain thorough work and good results to be the key to success. While one market director states that the attractive platform of communication

²⁷⁰ Partner1, p. 3. Partner3, p. 6

²⁷¹ VDK3, pp. 2-3

²⁷² VDK1, p. 7

that VisitDenmark represents builds on legitimacy and credibility,²⁷³ another argues that only through good results is it possible to convince the partners of the benefits of the chosen strategy.²⁷⁴ A third emphasises the integrity of the brand as the top priority,²⁷⁵ and lastly the fourth points to the good relationship and the partners knowledge of VisitDenmark's reliability and what the organisation can do. It is because of that they are likely to take a chance and believe a possibly untested strategy if it is presented to them, but it also requests the previously discussed level of honesty as partners will then be more safe that possible risks would be clarified as well as advantages.²⁷⁶ Evidently, authority and persuasion appears to slightly overlap as authority is arguably a necessary ingredient in persuasion. Once again it seems right to underline that the use of power and influence should not be perceived in a negative sense but merely as a tool of negotiation. This negotiation, however, is naturally complicated due to the lessened ability to make financial offers, but as a partner respondent states, it does not appear to changed in the course of the budget decrease of VisitDenmark.²⁷⁷ To the contrary, VisitDenmark stays focused on the quality of the brand rather than attempting to ingratiate itself with partners, and very symptomatic to that a VisitDenmark respondent claims that, seeing as VisitDenmark depends on its partners, the consequence of them not contributing to the projects would probably be to close the organisation.²⁷⁸ Luckily, due to the impression of competent employees, this does not seem to currently relevant.

7.7 A Clear Story

Through the previous sections it has been established that one of the main challenges in destination branding is to combine the many interests held by stakeholders. This is a challenge in itself, but it is furthermore important that the interests are fused into a brand maintaining a certain standard and integrity, which calls for a highly developed sense of coordination and, according to previous discussions, a leader outlining the strategy. However, there is still an

²⁷³ VDK1, p. 3

²⁷⁴ VDK2, p. 4

²⁷⁵ VDK3, p. 4

²⁷⁶ VDK4, p. 6

²⁷⁷ Partner3, p. 8

²⁷⁸ VDK4, p. 5

alternative to the clear image of a destination. As previously clarified Carina Ren and Bodil Stilling Blichfeldt offer the perspective that destinations can gain from creating an image of the place in question that allows higher diversity and acknowledges tourists' ability to comprehend a more multifaceted destination brand. It may be that these thoughts are too modern to have really caught on, because in spite of their well founded arguments they are not traceable in the comments of any of the participating respondents. The arguments building Ren and Blichfeldt's claim are validated by the presented discouragement that it will at all be possible to present Denmark with a clear image. One partner presents the view that the elements of the destination are too different in administration, economy and influence to create a common authentic image of Denmark.²⁷⁹ However, a common core of certain values still appear to be the goal and guiding principle for the cooperation, and though the respondents once again are generally clear that the subject is a vexed one with numerous perspectives, they appear to agree that a common coordinated set of values are beneficial to the communication. It emerges from the discussion, however, that the concept of a clear and common image should perhaps not be taken as literally as the term may imply. Perhaps it is exactly this difficulty in melting all the interests into one, that makes the respondents talk about a story, rather than an image, building on common values. A VisitDenmark respondent explains that one of the core values in the campaigns is diversity of the destination,²⁸⁰ and as such it gives way to all the details and is also strengthened by the small personal stories of closeness and various experiences that social media for instance can be an outlet for. Telling a story of diversity thus eases some troubles of fitting everything into one version of Denmark. Another VisitDenmark respondent states that people should be careful not to confuse the aim of a common image or story of a destination with the wish to be identical on all markets. The creation of a common story should not just rely on saying the same things in the same way for the same amount of time using the same forms of communication, but the brand should be communicated in the way that fits the specific market and forum in which it is discussed.²⁸¹ This point of view is supported by yet another VisitDenmark respondent claiming that the strategy of creating fewer but bigger campaigns risks that they do not fit the markets as

²⁷⁹ Partner1, p. 4

²⁸⁰ VDK2, p. 9

²⁸¹ VDK3, p. 6

well,²⁸² because what fits the markets in Scandinavia might not be beneficial to the markets in southern Europe, and what those markets want to emphasise about the Danish destination brand may not appeal to tourist in Germany or Great Britain. The flexibility of the brand, and the way of communicating it, is also emphasised by the last VisitDenmark respondent who explains that it is important to be aware of whether Denmark the is most beneficial brand to emphasise for a project or if it might be better to tone it down a little and turn up regional or local destinations.²⁸³ This should all be considered based on the focus of the project and the target audience. Still underlining the complexity partners also support the flexibility as one states the greatest benefit from working with VisitDenmark to be the organisation's ability to customise the communication to the specific markets. The cultural differences are emphasised as important to be aware of in the communication,²⁸⁴ and the knowledge in the market offices of what works best in that cultural context can therefore be very useful to the partners in Denmark. Similarly other partners claim that even though the common unifying values are good to aim for, it should always leave room for differences between target groups, and segmentation should not be perceived as contradictions.²⁸⁵ Summing up these opinions, which are expressed in different ways but appear to carry the same meaning, a VisitDenmark market director establishes that having and expressing the common values and brand story is not about having a common version and interpretation of Denmark, but rather create and appeal to the same form of expectations and impression.²⁸⁶

These opinions shared by the respondents thus recognise Ren and Blichfeldt's argument that sticking too firmly to a specific image can be counterproductive to destination branding. However, they also maintain a belief in the coordinated expression of the destination brand, which in essence is also described as one of the great advantages for partners to work with VisitDenmark,²⁸⁷ and that what is created from the coordination should rather tell a story than show an image. Based on the opinions of this specific selection of respondents it therefore appears that the optimal solution is a combination of the two conflicting strategies regarding

²⁸² VDK4, p. 9

²⁸³ VDK1, p. 7

²⁸⁴ Partner1, p. 6

²⁸⁵ Partner3, p. 10. Partner2, p. 10

²⁸⁶ VDK3, p. 6

²⁸⁷ Partner2, p. 3

clarity and consistency, or at least to apply a more nuanced, less literal and, so to say, less clear cut perception of what the clear story is.

One of the problems arising, though, is the balance between the strategy and ambitions for the communication of the brand and what is economically feasible. The strategy of creating fewer but bigger campaigns is generally supported for its theoretical effectiveness, but a VisitDenmark respondent states that while the campaigns do get fewer in amount it can be difficult to detect them getting any bigger in strength and extent. According to the respondent the strategy is a result of the financial cutbacks as the lack of money can be compensated for with creativity which in this case is the attempt to align the effort in the different markets.²⁸⁸ Following this line of thought it would therefore be fair to argue that the financial cutbacks in VisitDenmark have implicitly supported and strengthening the strategy of increased coordination of VisitDenmark in the various markets. This strategy of centralisation remains a cornerstone for the work of VisitDenmark and carries great advantages in the eyes of both VisitDenmark and partner respondents, but while strengthening the common brand story it also call for a reminder that even a clear story requires a level of diversity in order to attract widely. Emphasising this need a VisitDenmark respondent points out that choosing a too narrow way to express a brand requires a lot of money to compensate for the loss of details and specifics regarding message and audience. That is not possible in the tourism business at the moment.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ VDK4, p. 7

²⁸⁹ VDK3, p. 7

8. Conclusion

Places have always represented a certain value. Inhabitants and visitors have used them in the creation of their identity in different ways, and their ability to attract people, and the money they bring to spend, has always been important to the thriving of a place. During recent decades the phenomenon of place branding, springing from general marketing strategies, has brought about an increased focus on the efforts of the marketing of places to bring tourists and invite them to spend their money in various ways once they are there. It is as such not a new phenomenon, but the awareness of the concept and the many theories on how best to do it have brought on many different perspectives and an increased understanding of why it is important to invest in the marketing of a place as a tourist destination. A place's value of attraction is not only beneficial to those businesses selling their products to visitors as the money spent in place spreads to other industries, and this general economic growth of a society justifies why destination branding has become a point on many political agendas.

In Denmark the issue has likewise been a much debated topic. The awareness that the impression of Denmark around the world did not fully live up to its potential prompted the Danish government to undertake the project of marketing Denmark with an extra amount of money and clearly defined wishes to focus and coordinate the efforts made in various industries. Some of this money naturally went to VisitDenmark, as the official Danish destination marketing organisation, but in spite of this initiative the overall budget of VisitDenmark has been decreasing since 2008. In all fairness it should be emphasised that the termination of the HOGM plan by the end of 2012 did not come unexpectedly as it was always meant to stop then, and those specific money from HOGM should themselves not technically be considered a financial cutback, but rather the planned stop of an extra amount of money. However, it does contribute to an overall financial decrease of VisitDenmark's budget, that challenges the organisation's ability to keep up the standard of destination branding. From a narrow tourism perspective it is naturally regrettable that governmental investments in the marketing of Denmark as a destination are decreasing, and from a wider perspective the very positive return of investments in VisitDenmark shows that, in terms of economic growth it is a good for the Danish society. Speculations can therefore be made

of why the economic support is declining, but the most reasonable answer seems to be that other aspects of the society also have to be prioritised.

The analysis of the respondent interviews shows a necessity for cooperation and an interdependence between VisitDenmark and their partners. While partners constitute the product and half of VisitDenmark's financial foundation, they also play an important part in the support and integrity of the brand as their partaking is important for the brand's authenticity and credibility. However, focusing first and foremost on the turnover of their own business partners are required to always consider whether it will be most profitable to join VisitDenmark's initiatives, or to market themselves individually. It is therefore pivotal that VisitDenmark works competently at offering its partners projects and campaigns that are beneficial to them and to stay the better alternative in their eyes. This gets increasingly challenging with the reduction of options to make economic offers, and as the amount of money VisitDenmark can afford to put into projects is falling, partners are requested to invest more. A way to make up for this and stay the better alternative is to work smarter and more creatively and to convince partners to participate by being able to show good results. However, partners also benefit from the cooperation, and especially VisitDenmark's ability to coordinate and know their markets are accentuated as an advantage. The organisation's valuable knowledge, competent employees and network in the business are valuable assets for partners, and in terms of financial cutbacks it is therefore important to be aware of these strengths and be careful in cutting down on the human resources.

One of the great challenges of Danish destination branding is to combine the many interests in the field, both the specific interests of partners in relation to their line of work, and the difference in time perspective between VisitDenmark and most of their partners. In recent years the structure of the cooperation has changed in the sense that VisitDenmark has increasingly been the leading actor of the destination branding process, and it has therefore become their job to combine interests, develop projects and campaigns and convince partners to join. It is hard to say whether this change of leadership comes from a basic change of managerial beliefs or originates from an economic necessity, but as the financial cutbacks have forced VisitDenmark to increasingly base campaigns and projects on a wider range of partners, it appears logical that more actors in the process calls for a stronger leadership in order to maintain a clarity in the

proportionately growing number of interests. Contradictive to the initial idea of partners taking advantage of VisitDenmark's growing dependence on partners' economic investments, the study shows that both VisitDenmark and partners are generally supportive of the development of this role for VisitDenmark. It simplifies the way and options for cooperation even if it also reduces some of the advantages of the bigger partners. Naturally, it requires VisitDenmark to stay close to the product and be aware of what its partners need in order to develop the brand and the projects in a way that partners will continue to support. However, the strengthened leadership of VisitDenmark combined with the high priority of integrity of the destination brand also optimises the organisation's options of maintaining a clarity of the brand, and developing the brand in accordance with its highly regarded knowledge, abilities and beliefs in the field of interest. The belief in the integrity of the brand and the attractiveness of the product makes it easy for the VisitDenmark respondents to be open and honest with their partners in the process of negotiation, and the means of influence are therefore based on persuasion and authority. Partners of a certain economic magnitude can represent a certain authority and may also practically gain more influence and a bigger role in the development of the destination brand.

In terms of the view on a clear image of Denmark as a tourist destination the interviews show that the aim should rather be described as a story consisting of certain values. These values are what creates a cohesion in the brand and make it easier to create an understanding and positive expectations to Denmark as a destination. In spite of VisitDenmark's strengthened leadership, however, the VisitDenmark respondents agree that within the range of these values a certain amount flexibility is also needed. This is partly because diversity is an element of the brand, and the personal stories are therefore important to the general brand message, but it is also partly due to the concern of creating the best conditions for the brand in terms of segmentation and the markets it is communicated on. Sticking too firmly to a set expression and form can therefore be counterproductive to the success of the brand, compared to a focus on creating and emphasising a shared impression and expectations to Denmark as a destination, and this fundamental belief does not seem to have changed due to economic cutbacks. All respondents emphasise the great number of opinions on this topic, but common to them all appears to be that the challenges the financial cutbacks pose are better overcome together in cooperation.

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Appendix 1

Economic overview sent by e-mail with the message that next year VisitDenmark will only receive the basic amount of 113.200 t.kr. The abbreviation t.kr. means 1.000 DKK, which is also how the numbers in the overview should be interpreted.

TABEL 1 Historisk oversigt	Regnskab									
	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003
Indtægter										
Statsfinansiering (basisbevilling)	113.400	113.400	114.200	117.300	115.000	113.600	112.000	112.000	114.900	118.500
Øvrig bevilling	16.512	21.854	26.523	17.451	33.257	15.847	22.765	12.357	14.728	8.209
Statsfinansiering i alt	129.912	135.254	140.723	134.751	148.257	129.447	134.765	124.357	129.628	126.709

Appendix 2

This following overview is similarly to Appendix 1 sent by e-mail from VisitDenmark and is likewise measured in t.kr meaning 1.000 DKK.

TABEL 2 Historisk oversigt	Budget	Regnskab	Regnskab	Regnskab
	2012	2011	2010	2009
Indtægter				
Statsfinansiering (basisbevilling)	113.400	113.400	114.200	117.300
Øvrig bevilling	15.500	21.854	26.523	17.451
Statsfinansiering i alt	128.900	135.254	140.723	134.751
Partnerfinansiering	116.580	121.670	122.597	102.895
TouristOnline A/S		0	9.121	8.452
Scandinavian Tourist Board ApS	7.148	7.722	9.944	7.985
Partnerfinansiering i alt	123.728	129.392	141.662	119.332
Partnerfinansiering i pct. af indtægter i alt	50,7%	48,9%	50,2%	47,0%
Indtægter i alt	252.628	264.646	282.385	254.083
Omkostninger *				
Aktivitetsomkostninger	239.586	252.940	257.558	

The Effects of Financial Cutbacks on Collaborative Destination Branding

- Markedsføring	164.077	174.637	182.964	
- Markedsføringsrelaterede kapacitets omk.	75.509	78.303	74.594	
- Løn, pension m.v.	56.269	58.463	54.957	
- Drift, husleje m.v.	19.240	19.840	19.637	
Administrationsomkostninger	12.951	13.430	12.283	
- Løn, pension m.v.	9.651	10.027	9.050	
- Drift, husleje m.v.	3.300	3.403	3.233	
Finansielle poster	91	31	398	
Omkostninger TouristOnline A/S		0	9.254	9.786
Omkostninger i alt	252.628	266.401	279.493	259.718
Heraf kapacitet og finansielle poster	88.551	91.764	87.275	
Salg af TouristOnline A/S	0	0	2.996	
Driftsresultat excl. TouristOnline A/S	0	-1.755	5.721	-4.301
Driftsresultat TouristOnline A/S		0	-133	-1.334
Driftsresultat VisitDenmark koncern	0	-1.755	5.854	-5.635

* Løn, pension, drift, husleje, forsikring m.m. er opdelt i markedsføringsrelaterede kapacitetsomkostninger og administrationsomkostninger ud fra en definition af, at administration vedrører It-drift, direktionssekretariat, HR samt Økonomi & Administration, svarende til (2012/2011 14,64%), (2010 14,14%) af alle årsværk. Opdelingen er først gennemført fra 2010, hvorfor sammenligningstal fra tidligere ikke er medtaget.

Scandinavian Tourist Board ApS indgår under fordelte omkostninger med (2012 8.898, 2011 9.433, 2010 9.944 og 2009 8.070).