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ATTRACTING GERMAN TOURISTS TO THE CITY OF KOUVOLA THROUGH A TOURISM DESTINATION WEBSITE

Master's thesis 2015

ABSTRACT

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This study explores the elements required of a website to promote a tourism destination effectively. Successful promotion of a tourism destination comprises the identification and satisfaction of target customer needs regarding content and functionality of the website.

The aim of this study was to identify the needs and wants of German tourists in relation to the city of Kouvola as a tourism destination as well as functional features of effective tourism destination websites. The findings served as a basis for the development of a promotional message to be conveyed by the tourism destination website while addressing functional issues enhancing user experience with the website.

This research was carried out by using content analysis. Data was acquired by an online questionnaire and interviews directed at German tourists, and by examining existing tourism destination websites.

While the city of Kouvola can satisfy the needs of German tourists, the lack of information hinders travellers from visiting the city. The tourism destination website needs to concentrate on features related to relaxation and the generation of experiences, while offering extended customer services and increasing site user engagement.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Kymenlaakso region, in which the city of Kouvola, hereafter referred to as Kouvola, is located, is in the process of undergoing structural changes. One of the major industries in the area, the paper industry, is diminishing, and new sources of income are being sought. Developing the tourism business is one of the strategies described in the Master Plan developed by Kouvola Innovation Oy together with the FCG Finnish Consulting Group Oy (FCG Finnish Consulting Group Oy, 2013) by which new sources of growth are sought. Efforts for the development of tourism services and the promotion of Kouvola as a tourism destination have already been made.

There is a strong relationship between the internet and tourism destination promotion. Already in 1998, Buhalis argues that information technology contributes to competitiveness and competitive advantage. It supports globalisation and enables especially small firms to deliver the right product to the right customer at the right price and place, without having to rely on intermediaries. Small firms can so increase their profit margin and enhance their position. In difference to tangible goods, tourism services cannot be displayed or examined before they are purchased, but rely solely on description and representation. Consumers demand significant, exact and timely information to satisfy their needs, all of which is facilitated by the internet. (Buhalis, 1998, 410-411.) Tourism destination websites not only provide possible visitors with information, but also enable the completion of transactions and the maintaining of a relationship with the tourism destination after the purchase. They are therefore a significant link between tourism destinations and possible visitors.

Kouvola as a Finnish tourism destination is not much known on an international scale. Due to the abundance of tourism destinations and websites available to travellers, Kouvola needs to provide a tourism destination website which distinguishes the city as a tourism destination, and attracts and retains site visitors. For doing so, target customer groups and their needs and wants need to be identified.

According to the Master Plan, the main tourist groups visiting Kouvola are coming from Southern Finland, Russia, Germany and the Netherlands. However, the main tourist information website of Kouvola (www.visitkouvola.fi) does not contain a

German language page. Considering the fact that Germany has only been surpassed in 2012 by China for being the country which is spending the most on travelling (UN-WTO, 2013) and in April 2015 was Finland's largest trading partner (Finnish Customs, 2015), a webpage targeted at German tourists should be provided for the promotion of Kouvola as a tourism destination attracting more German tourists to Kouvola.

1.2 Research and development setting

The aim of this research is to increase revenue to Kouvola by attracting German tourists and enticing them to purchase services offered by the local tourism industry.

The research objective is to identify the needs and wants of German tourists in relation to a holiday in Kouvola, as well as attributes and features of a destination marketing website through which German tourists can gain more information about Kouvola, the destinations and activities it offers and services it provides. Also, functions which facilitate conversion will be identified.

The research question is:

How to create an effective website for the promotion of Kouvola as a tourism destination to German tourists?

The sub-questions to this research question are:

- what is the current image of Finland held by German tourists?
- what are the needs and wants of German tourists in relation to a holiday destination?
- how should Kouvola be branded to German tourists?
- what are the attributes of an effective tourism destination website?

This work firstly seeks to identify the elements of effective tourism destination websites which can be used when creating a tourism destination website of Kouvola. It then investigates the applicability of these elements to German tourists and identifies the needs and expectations of German tourists in relation to tourism destination websites in general. By collaborating with German tourists in the development of a list of attributes relevant to the tourism destination website, the website can be optimised to

suit their needs and expectations, and can so serve as an effective promotional chan-nel. Providing an effective tourism destination website will attract German tourists to acquire information about Kouvola and to purchase tourism related services in the ar-ea, thus increasing the number of German tourists and therefore revenue to the area. The results of this research provide a deeper understanding of how to create an effec-tive and contemporary tourism destination website targeted at German tourists, which can be applied to other tourism destinations as well. Finally, the work also deepens the researcher's expertise in tourism destination promotion.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The structure of this thesis is illustrated in Figure 1.

Theoretical framework	Methodology	Key findings and analysis	Conclusion
• German tourism • Kouvola as a tourism destination • Destination promotion • Website effectiveness	• Content analysis: Methods of data collection and analysis	• Summarising findings of content analysis • Categories	• Managerial implications • Suggestions for further research
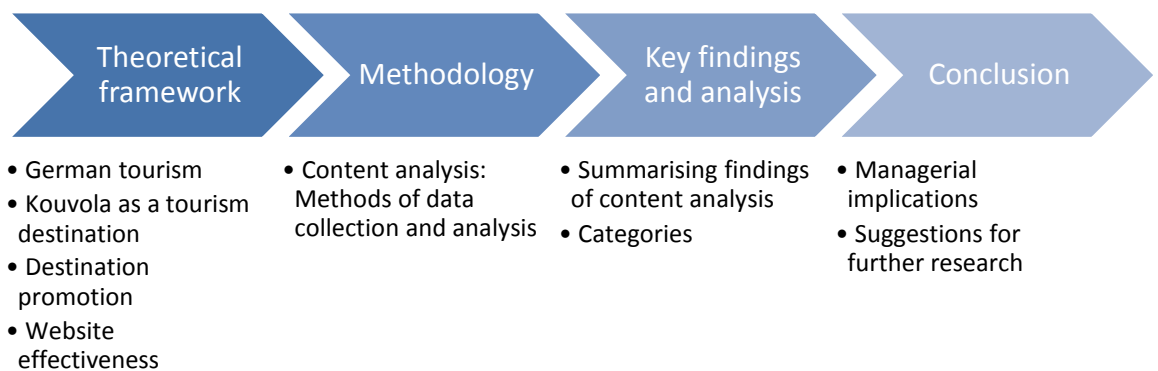
Figure 1. Structure of the thesis

In the following chapter, the theoretical framework of this thesis will be presented. The concepts to be explored are defined by the research question and focus on Ger-man tourism, Kouvola as a tourism destination, destination promotion and website ef-fectiveness.

The methodology as presented subsequently in chapter 4 considers qualitative re-search supported by some quantitative research as the appropriate approach for this study. The research methodology chosen for this research is content analysis. Also, methods for data collection and analysis used to gather the empirical data are de-scribed. The key findings are then presented in chapter 5, analysed and discussed us-ing insight gained from the theoretical framework. Conclusions from this discussion are drawn in chapter 6, which lead to the proposal of managerial implications, an

evaluation of the conducted research, and suggestions for further issues to be researched.

This research is limited to the promotion of Kouvola by means of a tourism destination website and does not consider other promotional channels. As Luna-Nevarez and Hyman (2012, 94) state, websites are "the main interface between a destination and potential tourists" and therefore the most important promotional channel of tourism destinations. The investigation of other promotional channels would compose a research topic on its own.

This thesis also does not aim at developing tourism services in general in Kouvola as a large variety of tourism services is available already. At this stage of the development of Kouvola as a tourism destination, the main focus should be put on promoting the existing products and services. Additional services and products can be developed later on to add to the already existing offerings. The identification of missing products and services would also generate a research topic of its own.

Furthermore, the research will be limited to identifying attributes of an effective tourism destination website, and will not include the development of the actual website itself. The development of an actual website would require professional software, coding and web design skills, which are all out of the scope of the studies of which this thesis is part.

Finally, the research only focuses on German tourists, other German speaking tourists are not included in the target group. The applicability of the research to other German speaking tourists would need to be investigated first as their cultural background may have an influence on their needs and expectations regarding the developed tourism destination website. The research also does not attempt to position Kouvola as a tourism destination in the holiday destination market, as a competitor analysis would generate a research topic itself.

2 MARKETING TOURISM DESTINATIONS THROUGH WEBSITES

Figure 2 illustrates the role of an effective website in the promotion of Kouvola as a tourism destination to attract German tourists.
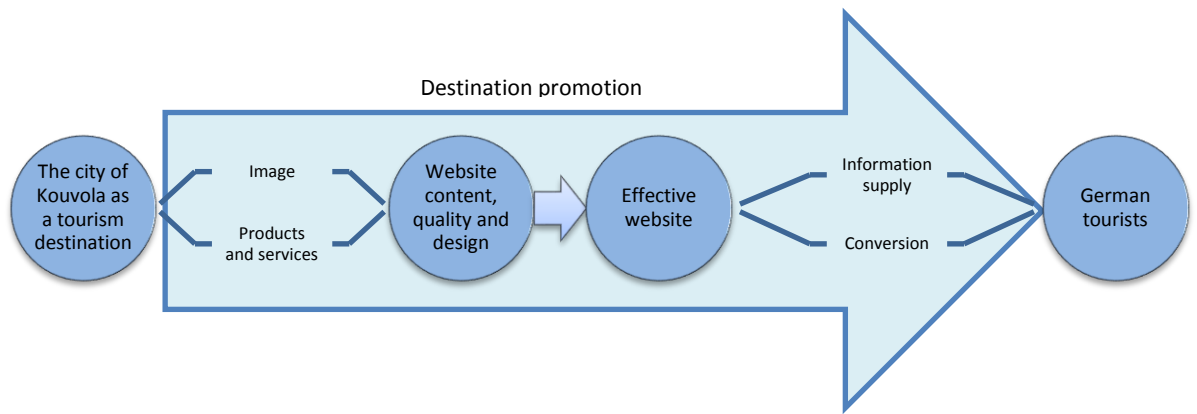
Figure 2. Tourism destination website of Kouvola

The tourism website plays an essential part in attracting foreign tourists as it connects Kouvola with possible visitors from all over the world and therefore also with possible visitors from Germany. The promotion of tourism destinations is a complex issue as the product actually consists of a number of products and services offered by different companies. Additionally, the city needs to position itself by building a brand and thus creating an image of itself. The products and services together with the conveyed image are the fundamentals of the website content, quality and design which in turn relate to the effectiveness of a website. Only when website content, quality and design enhance the overall perception of the tourism destination as well as its products and services, supply the information consumers are looking for and give an opportunity for conversion, German tourists can be enticed to travel to Kouvola.

The theoretical framework of this study comprises a literature review on German tourism including the travel habits of German tourists and their image of Finland. The literature review further examines Kouvola as a tourism destination. Then, the theory on destination promotion in general, as well as its components destination image, destination branding and brand personality is studied. Finally, the components of an effective website, both, from a task-related and from an enjoyment-related point of view are investigated.

2.1 German tourism

The municipality of Kouvola is only starting to develop its tourism industry and has not been a major tourism destination for German visitors so far. To some extent this is due to the fact that German visitors in general choose other Scandinavian countries

over Finland. Figure 3 describes the preference of German tourists for holidays in Scandinavia.
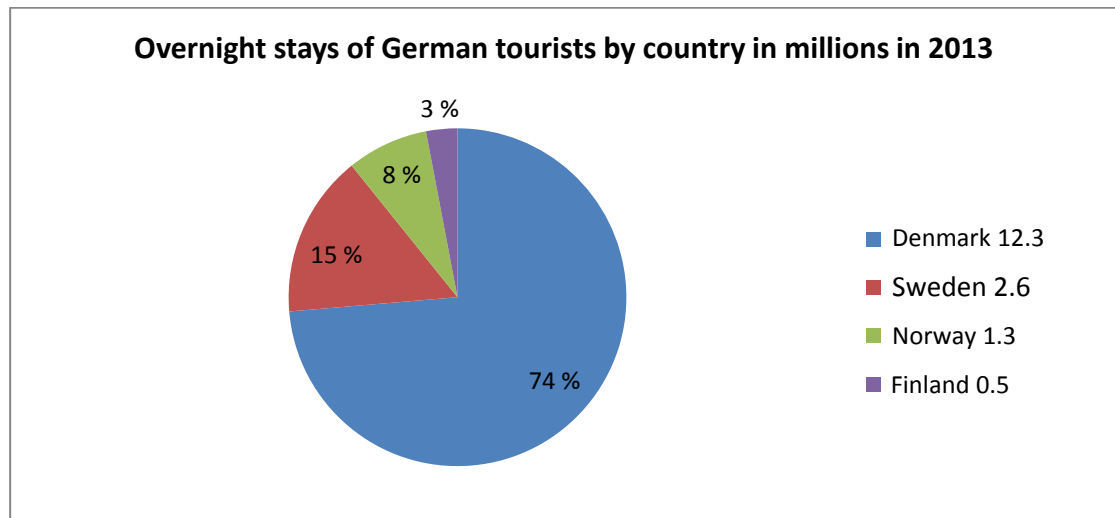
Figure 3.Overnight stays of German tourists by country in 2013 (Federal Foreign Office of Germany, 2015; Statistics Denmark, 2015; Statistics Finland, 2015; Statistics Sweden, 2015)

Denmark is by far the most visited Scandinavian country by German tourists. 74% of all visits were made to Denmark, followed by Sweden and Norway. Only 0.5% of all visits by German tourists were made to Finland. This circumstance is illustrated further in the following chapters.

2.1.1 German travelling habits in general

In an annual survey carried out with more than 7 500 interviewees evaluating German travel habits (Sonntag et al., 2014, 2-5) it is reported that in 2013, about 78% of the population consumed almost 71 million holidays worldwide lasting 5 days or more. Additionally, about 76 million short holidays lasting 2 to 4 days were taken. According to the survey, Germans feel that compared to the previous years, the general economic situation is improving and the personal economic situation is remaining stable with an increase in travelling to be expected in the future. Online booking of these travels were also increasing from 11% in 2005 to 31% in 2013, and 27% of internet users were accessing information about the destination while travelling, often using a smartphone or tablet. Moreover, 36% of internet users poste experiences related to their holidays in social media, blogs, photo or video platforms, or submit comments and ratings to booking portals. (Sonntag et al., 2014, 2-5.) The same survey also dis-

covers that 26% of the population interviewed would be interested in travelling to Scandinavia (Wiegand et al., 2014, n.a.).

2.1.2 German tourists in Finland

Of all the German tourists staying in hotels in the Nordic countries, 18.5% chose Finland as their destination in 2012. In the same year, the number of registered overnight stays in Finland was 534 000 which represented 9.2% of all foreign tourists. Over half of the German tourists, namely 57%, visited Finland for the first time. The main tourist season is from the end of June to the beginning of September with most Germans travelling to Finland in August. The most popular tourism destinations are Helsinki, the coast and archipelago, Lapland and the Lakeland. On average, German tourists stay for 7.3 nights with 40% of the travellers staying only 1 to 3 nights in Finland. This can be explained by the fact that 32% of the German visitors stayed in Finland because of work related reasons which is also shown in the type of accommodation chosen. 54% of the German visitors came to Finland for recreational reasons. The most common types of accommodation used by German visitors are hotels and motels (51%), family and friends (17%) and apartments and cottages (9%). (MEK Matkailun edistämiskeskus, 2013b.) This distribution can be explained by the large amount of work related travel to Finland and better marketing efforts of hotel and motel chains abroad. According to MEK Matkailun edistämiskeskus (2013b), almost half of the German tourists travelling to Finland do so because of either work related reasons (32%) or because they are visiting family or friends (17%), suggesting that these are the main incentives for visiting the country. There is thus room for improving the attractiveness of Finland as a pure holiday destination.

Most German tourists arrive by plane (65%), followed by car or bus via a Baltic Sea ferry (24%), and 11% arrive by car or bus across a land border (MEK Matkailun edistämiskeskus, 2013b).

German tourists to Finland are mainly originated from South and West Germany and they spent an average of 45€/ day and 374€/ stay. A breakdown of this expenditure is presented in Figure 4 (MEK Matkailun edistämiskeskus, 2013b).

Expenditure breakdown

■	Accommodation
■	Restaurants
■	Cafes
■	Shopping
■	other

6 %

31 %

20 %

20 %

23 %
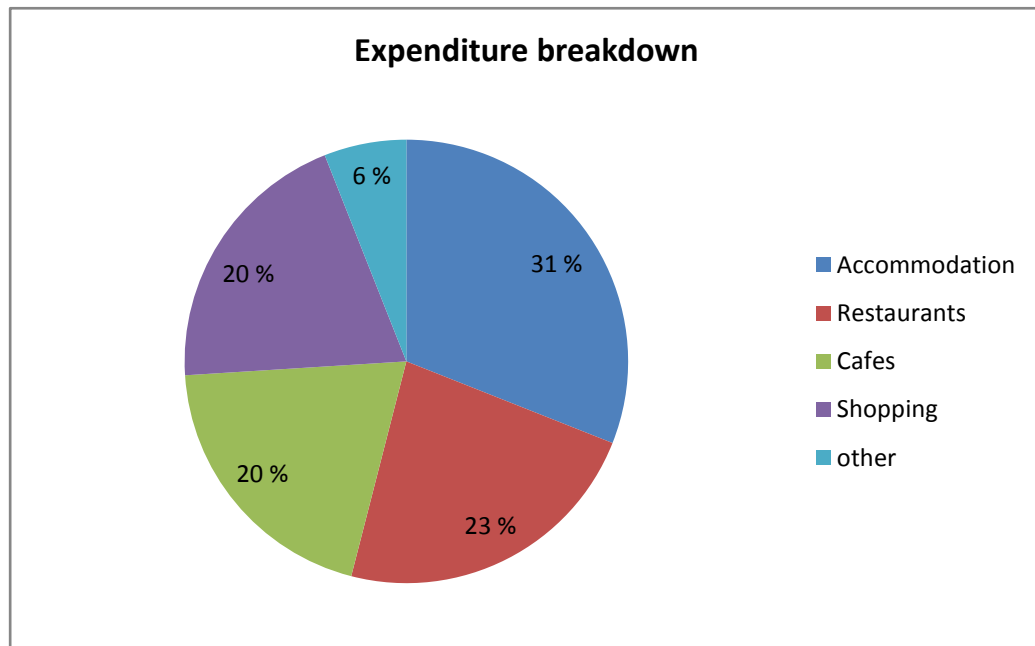
Figure 4. Expenditure breakdown

German tourists in Finland spend most of their holiday funds on accommodation
(31%), followed by restaurants (23%), cafes and shopping (20% each) (MEK Mat-
kailun edistämiskeskus, 2013b).

2.1.3 The image of Finland as a tourism destination

The Finnish Tourism Board (FTB) commissioned a study of the image of Finland held
by Germans in which several prejudices can be identified resulting from a lack of
knowledge of Finland as a tourism destination. These prejudices hinder German tour-
ists to consider Finland in general, as well as Kouvola, to be a possible destination for
their holidays.

Horelli et al. (2011) report in the study, that other Scandinavian countries are better
known to Germans as a result of more aggressive marketing efforts. The image of Fin-
land is that it is an unknown, unrealistically distant, cold and expensive country with
mosquito swarms and a difficult language. In spite of that, favourable images are con-
nected with the Finns themselves. Germans who do travel to Finland, however, often
re-visit the country several times. They appreciate the space, serene nature and possi-
bility to concentrate on oneself, combined with the fact that Finland is a highly devel-
oped country in which everything works. Moreover, Finland's history and manage-
ment of relations with Russia as a neighbouring country is of interest to Germans. The

history is found to be even more interesting than the one of Sweden, which overall surpasses Finland in popularity as a tourism destination. Especially the possibility to spend a family holiday in a cottage without having to face unexpected negative surprises is attractive. The motivation for travelling is largely influenced by the need to get away from everyday life and routines, and to gather new experiences in unfamiliar destinations. Whereas part of German travellers picture Finland as a country in which one can exceptionally well relax from the strains of today's world, another more adventurous part envisages Finland to be an unexciting and dull destination. (Horelli et al., 2011.)

The study of Horelli et al. concentrates on 13 interviews carried out in the cities of Dusseldorf and Berlin. The FTB points out that despite the fact that Finland in general is not promoted much in Germany, some marketing efforts have been made in the city of Berlin (MEK, Matkailun edistämiskeskus, 2013b, 3). These marketing efforts may influence the image of Finland carried by the interviewees in Horelli et al.'s study, and because of the small number of interviewees, the study may not be representative of the whole German population. As part of this thesis, further empirical research will be carried out in order to explore the image of Finland held by German travellers. The findings of this research will be presented in chapter 4.

2.2 Kouvola as a tourism destination

2.2.1 The city of Kouvola

Kouvola is located in South-East Finland, 134km east of Helsinki and 285km west of St. Petersburg. The Russian border at Vaalimaa is to be reached within a one hour drive by car. Kouvola is a crossroad for road and rail, as the Helsinki-St. Petersburg railway connection, as well as highways 6 and 15, pass through it. The nearest port, the Port of Hamina-Kotka is located about 55km to the South (Fonecta Oy, 2013). Kouvola is home to 87 000 inhabitants and comprises 450 lakes (Kouvola Innovation Oy, Kouvolan Matkailu, 2013). Due to its central location and well connected transportation routes, Kouvola can easily be reached by Finnish as well as foreign tourists. Especially foreign tourists can quickly transfer to Kouvola after having entered the country. They thus benefit from a reduced travel time compared to travelling to other popular Finnish tourism areas such as Lapland or the Lakelands. The good connec-

tions from Kouvola also enable tourists to visit other nearby locations which increase the attractiveness of the city itself.

The river Kymi, which is flowing through Kouvola, is connected by the waterway Väliväylä to Lake Saimaa, the biggest lake in Finland (Kymenlaakson virkistysalueyhdistys ry, n.d.). River Kymi has played an important role in the region as it formed the border between Sweden and Russia after the Treaty of Turku in 1743 and until Finland became autonomous in 1809. It was the location of diverse battles between Sweden and Russia in the 1780's (Kouvolan kaupunki, 2013). Also, several paper mills which play an important role in the region are located along the river Kymi. These locations are proof of past and present life of the Finnish population, and are of interest to both Finnish and foreign tourists.

Kouvola offers a variety of attractions, especially related to experiencing nature, outdoor activities and the local way of life. Kouvola's main tourist attractions include Tykkimäki Amusement and Aqua Park, The National Park Repovesi and Aarnikotka Forest Nature Reserve, Mustila Arboretum and Verla Groundwood and Board Mill which is included in the UNESCO World Heritage list (FCG Finnish Consulting Group, 2013). It also hosts Finland's largest garrison (Puolustusvoimat, The Finnish Defence Forces, 2012). In addition, Kouvola offers a variety of cultural attractions, such as a number of museums and galleries, churches, cinemas, a theatre, the Kymi Sinfonietta orchestra and numerous buildings designed by Finnish architect Alvar Aalto (Kouvola Innovation Oy, Kouvolan Matkailu, 2014).

Kouvola offeres a vast variety of activities satisfying different customer needs. Especially outdoor activities are well organised in Kouvola. Kouvola has a well-developed network of cycling roads and was voted Finnish Cycling City of the Year in 2005 (Pyöräilykuntien verkosto ry, n.d.). It also maintains jogging tracks, several outdoor and indoor swimming pools as well as beaches at lakes and rivers. There are possibilities for hiking, climbing, both indoors and outdoors, canoeing, kayaking, rafting and fishing, and several companies offer cruises on lakes and the river Kymi. There are monthly races at the Kouvola Horse Races and stables around Kouvola offer horseriding lessons. 3 18-hole golf courses and 1 par 3 golf course are located in the municipality of Kouvola. More activities on offer include bowling, paintball, karting, downhill cars and billiards. (Kouvola Innovation Oy, Kouvolan Matkailu, n.d.b.) There is

also a possibility of skydiving and watching airshows at Utti airfield located in Kouvola. Kouvola thus offers a concentration of activities on water, land and air, which is rarely available in one location.

Visitors who do not want to actively participate in sports can also watch different sport events as Kouvola has its own ice-hockey team, soccer teams, Finnish baseball team and basketball team (Kouvola Innovation Oy, Kouvolan Matkailu, n.d.b). All year around, festivals and events are organised throughout the municipality of Kouvola, such as the Pioneer's Festival, the Night of Arts and Night of Fashion and the Days of Magic (Kouvolan Ydinkeskus ry, 2014).

During the winter months, there is a network of maintained Nordic skiing tracks, the slopes at skiing centre Mielakka, snowmobile tracks, possibilities for indoor and outdoor ice skating as well as ice swimming (Kouvola Innovation Oy, Kouvolan Matkailu, n.d.b). These activities are especially interesting to tourists from countries located to the South of Finland which often lack the cold and snow during the winter months. In addition, as Finland is not a well-developed tourism destination, there is an absence of crowdedness which is often the case in more popular winter sport resorts.

Although there are 7700 summer cottages located in the municipality (Tilastokeskus, 2014), only a fraction of these are publically available for rent by tourists (FCG Finnish Consulting Group, 2013, 4). Accommodation is also provided by several hotels, manor houses, farms and camping sites (Kouvola Innovation Oy, Kouvolan Matkailu, n.d.a).

Kouvola offers much diversion to visitors, including nature experiences, a wide variety of sport activities, historical sights and cultural events. The current lack of tourists in Kouvola can so be attributed to the lack of marketing efforts of the available local offerings. The unavailability of cottages, which are mainly desired by tourists spending a holiday in Finland, may, however, pose a problem in the long term if the number of tourists in the region increases. This issue has already been recognised by the city and plans for increasing cottage accommodation have been made.

2.2.2 Tourists visiting Kouvola

In addition to some marketing efforts carried out by the municipality of Kouvola it-
self, the region also benefits from the marketing efforts implemented by the FTB in
general. The current marketing strategy by the FTB focuses on the target markets:
Russia, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Great Britain, France, Italy,
Spain and the emerging markets China, Japan and the USA (MEK Matkailun
edistämiskeskus, n.d.a). The main target markets identified for Kouvola are visitors
from Southern Finland, Russia, Germany and the Netherlands (FCG Finnish Consult-
ing Groups Oy, 2013, 15). Table 1 details the number of overnight stays of visitors to
Kouvola by country of residence in 2014 (MEK Matkailun edistämiskeskus, n.d.a).

Table 1. Number of overnight stays of visitors to Kouvola by country of residence,
2014

Country of residence	No of overnight stays
Finland	121 722
Russia	22 874
Germany	1 692
Sweden	1 433
Great Britain	912
Switzerland	823
France	715
Italy	267
The Netherlands	247
USA	247
Spain	243
China	188
Japan	86
Intia	35
South Korea	19

By far the largest group consists of Finnish visitors. The largest foreign visitor group
includes Russian visitors, followed by German and Swedish visitors.

The visits of German travellers are spread across the year as depicted in Figure 6
(MEK Matkailun edistämiskeskus, n.d.b).
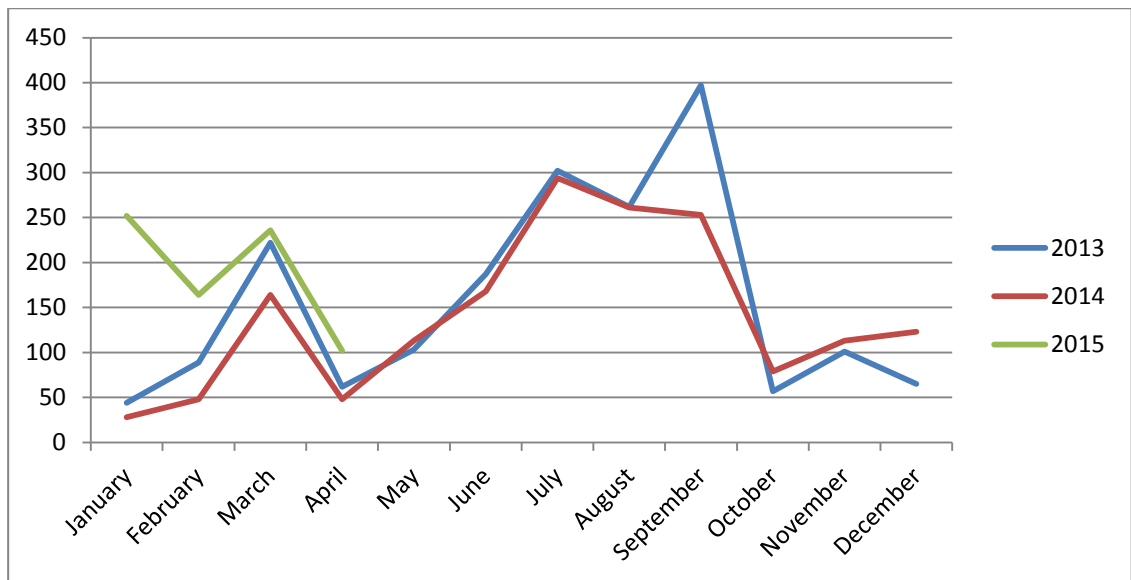
Figure 4. Overnight stays of German visitors in Kouvola 2013-2015

The main travel season for German visitors is March, and June to October. In 2015, there was also a peak in visitor numbers in January.

The tourists visiting Kouvola can be classified into holiday residents, families, shopping tourists, leisure tourists, congress visitors and event visitors. These groups book their visit to Kouvola through tour operators, congress organisers, event organisers or they organise their visit independently. German visitors are mainly composed of leisure tourists, who book their holiday independently or via a tour operator. (FCG Finnish Consulting Group, 2013, 15.)

2.3 Destination promotion

Nowadays, information on tourism destinations is much more readily available and consumers have a much larger variety of destinations to choose from as they have means in form of increased leisure time, disposable income and a developed transportation network available to them. It is therefore important to advantageously position the destination in the minds of the consumers. (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, 37.)

Rodríguez del Bosque et al. (2009, 145) say that promotion is critical for the destination's success and therefore marketers need to focus on communicating a favourable image in the target markets and to evoke positive expectations in the consumers. They continue that tourism services and resources need to be developed in order to satisfy

the positive expectations of the consumers and to generate positive word-of-mouth communication to attract further consumers.

King (2002) adds that customers are no longer passive these days but are actively looking for new experiences often bypassing the traditional distribution channels. Customers are more and more looking for individualised holidays with short booking lead times and the possibility of contacting the suppliers directly. There has been evidence that customers are more independent, involved and differentiating when they plan their holidays, and technology advancements add to the customers' control. The customers' role has shifted from being a static target at which promotional messages are aimed to being in the position to command how and what kind of information they acquire and how they react to it. The author sees the customers as active partners who need to be engaged in the marketing process by providing them with the type of information and experience they want, as they can decide themselves when they access travel information, and when and how they make their travel purchases. Travelling signifies more and more experiencing and fulfilling needs as opposed to merely visiting sights. In King's view, promotion of a destination needs to include the development of a strong brand image, a more direct engagement with the customer, two-way communication and networking with the customer, implementation of mass customisation marketing, emphasis on the holiday experiences and greater facilitation in the conversion process. (King, 2002.)

According to Murphy et al. (2007a, 45), the traditional approach to destination promotion focuses on physical attributes and activity possibilities. Ekinci (2003) builds on this view as illustrated in Figure 6.
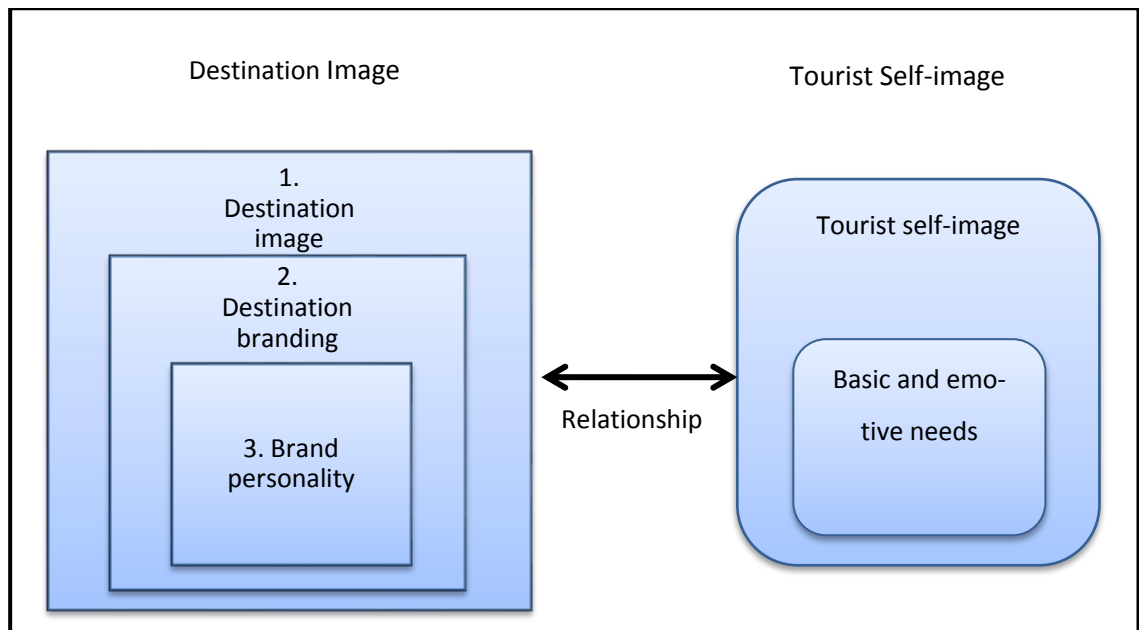
Figure 6. The relationship of destination image and tourist self-image (Ekinci, 2003, 21)

Ekinci (2003) argues that destination promotion consists of three elements in developing an attractive destination image: destination image, destination branding and brand personality, and destination image is linked to consumer self-image through destination branding. The author highlights the satisfaction of tourists' basic and emotional needs through destination branding. (Ekinci, 2003.) This is supported by Caldwell and Freire (2004, 52) who show in their work that tourism destinations satisfy basic and self-actualisation needs by enabling consumers to define their identity through visiting them.

Based on their research, Murphy et al. (2007a, 49) expand Ekinci's model as depicted in Figure 7.
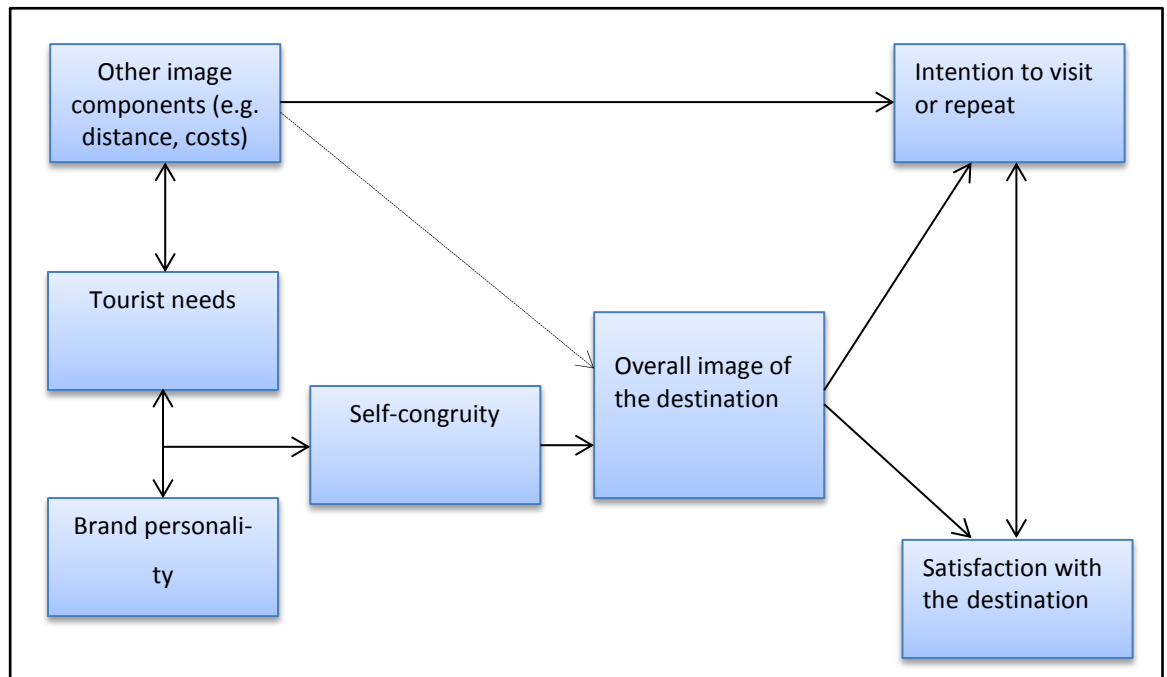
Figure 7. Destination branding and choice process (Murphy et al., 2007a, 49)

In their model, Murphy et al. (2007a, 49) also include the opportunity to travel, and recognise that the satisfaction with the destination depends on whether the image and the experience of the destination correspond. The model proposes that the opportunity to travel combined with the tourist's needs and the perceived brand personality through a match to the tourist's self-concept creates the overall image of and attitude to a destination. This in turn influences the tourist in making the decision to visit and subsequently be satisfied with the destination. (Murphy et al., 2007a, 49.)

The elements of destination image, destination branding and brand personality are core concepts relating to destination promotion as discussed in the academic literature (for example Ahmed, 1996; Blain et al., 2005; Cai, 2002; Caldwell and Freire, 2004¸Chon, 1992; Crompton, 1979a; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Jenkins, 1999; Konecnik and Gartner, 2007; Loda, 2011; Norman and Backman, 2007; Pike, 2009) and will be presented in more detail in the following chapters.

2.3.1 Destination image

When reviewing existing literature dealing with the images of destinations, it becomes clear that the destination image is critical, as possible tourists base their decision to travel to a destination largely on its perceived image (Ahmed, 1996; Jenkins, 1999). According to Crompton (1979a, 18), the definition of destination image is 'the sum of

beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination'. If the attributes of different destinations are equally appealing, possible visitors are likely to choose the destination which least likely generates negative consequences (Ahmed, 1996, 39). Loda (2011, 75) finds that image marketing appears to work with destinations which are less known, as prior knowledge of destinations result in firm impressions which are difficult to change. For Kouvola, being a less known tourism destination on the international scale, a positive image portrayed on the tourism destination website can thus easily be achieved.

An image does not only attract tourists before purchasing, but also increases value and satisfaction during the consumption and re-enforces memories after the consumption (Jenkins, 1999, 2). These beliefs, ideas and impressions therefore also need to be conveyed by the website promoting Kouvola in order to attract tourists.

In her paper, Jenkins (1999, 3) also explores how image is formed. Images of destinations closer in distance tend to be stronger as people have more knowledge about these destinations. People also trust the advice of friends and relatives, as well as guidebooks. Ahmed (1996, 42) describes that the creation of image and resulting consumer behaviour depend on the geographical region in which the consumer lives. These cultural differences have an influence on values, norms, attitudes and preferences. Echtner and Ritchie (2003), find that the image of a tourism destination is not only formed through explicit sources, but is also gathered from a large variety of historical, political, economic and social factors which are part of the destination background knowledge in a more subtle way. The authors continue that it would be helpful to study if these base images are accurate or inaccurate, and favourable or unfavourable, as the promotion of the tourism destination can be effectively adjusted to these images. In the case of Kouvola, this means that the promotional tourism website should also contain elements which address and improve unfavourable and false perceptions of Kouvola and Finland in general. Images of German tourists of Kouvola and Finland so need to be taken into account when planning the content of the webpage.

According to Loda (2011, 71-72), studies on image creation often contain the issue of credibility, which is especially important in tourism, where there is a financial and emotional risk involved. Loda, Norman and Backman (2007, 263) find evidence that publicity is more credible than advertising, also having a more positive influence on

the strength of the message and the intention to purchase. As the promotion of Kouvola by a website implies the conveyance of a certain image of Kouvola, references to public relations information containing a positive message concerning Kouvola should be made.

Chon (1992) relates the image of a destination to the later experience of the destination and finds that a positive image and a positive experience results in a somewhat positive evaluation of the destination, a negative image and a positive experience result in a highly positive evaluation, and finally, a positive image and a negative experience result in a negative evaluation. These findings should also be taking into account when creating an image of Kouvola as the aim is not only to attract first-time visitors, but also to entice them to re-visit the city and to refer it to other people.

In their papers, Jenkins (1999) and Echtner and Ritchie (2003) examine existing research concerned with measuring the attributes of destination image and find that the measurement is a complex issue. Echtner and Ritchie (ibid) depict the components of destination image as shown in Figure 8.

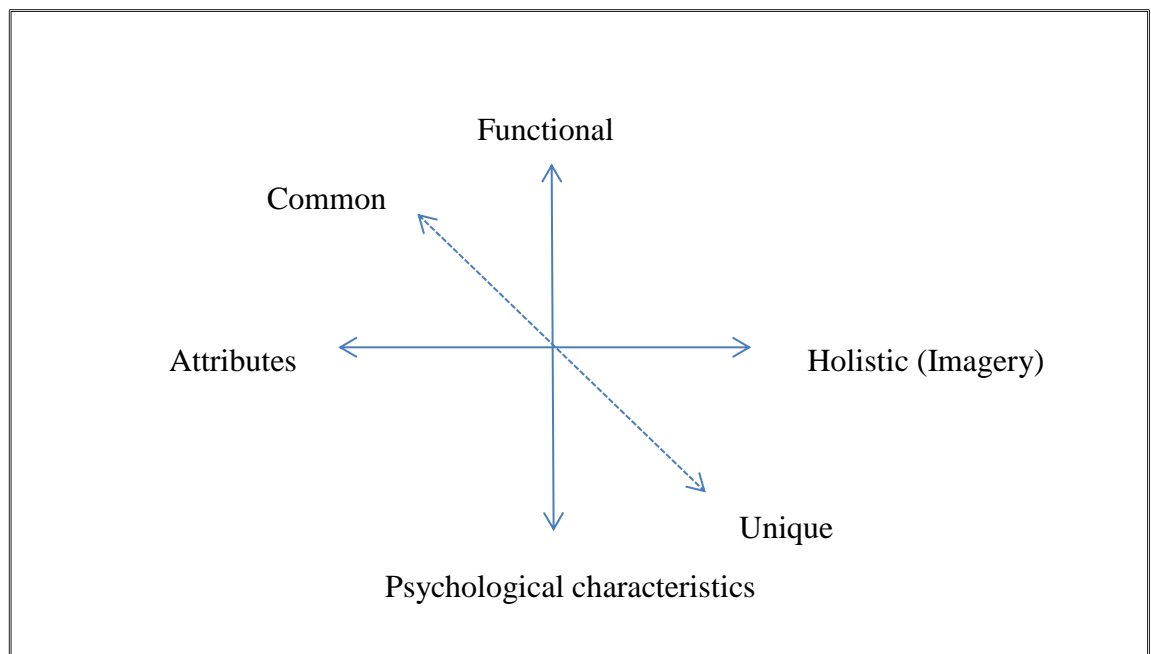Figure 8. The components of destination image (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, 43)

The components are functional (physical) characteristics such as accommodation, transportation and price levels, psychological (abstract) characteristics including quality of service, friendliness and safety, attributes which are specific features of the destination, and holistic impressions or imagery of the destination. These components

are not clearly separate and can overlap, as well as being either common or unique to the destination. (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, 43.)

Echtner and Ritchie (2003, 45) identify various attributes for the measurement of destination image used by different researchers. A summary of these attributes is presented in Figure 9.

Functional

Scenery/ Natural Attractions
Costs/ Price Levels
Climate
Tourist Sites/ Activities
Nightlife and Entertainment
Sports Facilities/ Activities
National Parks/ Wilderness Activities
Local Infrastructure/ Transportation
Architecture/ Buildings
Historic Sites/ Museums
Beaches
Shopping Facilities
Accommodation Facilities
Personal Safety
Hospitality/ Friendliness/ Receptiveness
Different Customs/ Culture
Different Cuisine/ Food and Drink
Restful/ Relaxing

Psychological

Figure 9. Attributes of destination image as adapted from Echtner and Ritchie (2003, 45)

The most important functional attributes identified by Echtner and Ritchie (2003, 45) include scenery, costs and climate, while the most important psychological attributes include hospitality, different culture and different cuisine. It can therefore be assumed that potential foreign tourists considering travelling to Kouvola are looking for information on these before mentioned attributes and so the content of the website promoting Kouvola as a tourism destination should also focus on these elements.

Consumers' perceived image is also influenced by the other consumers present or expected to be present at the tourism destination. (Ahmed, 1996, 40) The present tourism destination website of Kouvola is available in the Finnish, English and Russian lan-

guages and thereby evokes the image of Kouvola as a tourism destination being targeted mainly at Finnish and Russian tourists. However, in reality, also Germans and Dutch people make up an important part of the tourist population (FCG Finnish Consulting Group, 2013). Consumers finding that the website is not available in their language might so feel excluded from the target group, leaving them with a negative image of the destination. Also, the fact alone that the site is not available in more foreign languages gives the impression that Kouvola is not readily developed as a tourism destination.

2.3.2 Destination branding

Cai (2002, 721-722) explains that earlier, the difference between the concepts of destination image and destination branding were not clearly enough distinguished in the literature and therefore call for more clarification. The author points out that the formation of image and branding are not the same despite image formation being central to branding, and that the concept of brand identity as a link is missing completely. Blain et al. (2005) agree that the concept of destination branding is poorly understood and contribute with their research in offering the following refined definition:

> "Destination branding is the set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily *identifies* and *differentiates* a destination; that (2) consistently convey the *expectation* of a memorable travel *experience* that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to *consolidate* and *reinforce* the *emotional connection* between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and *perceived risk*. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer *destination choice*."

Pike (2009, 10) points out that studies have shown that consumers limit their choice of destinations to four plus or minus two destinations when deciding on their holiday destination. Branding is thus an important means of raising consumers' awareness and include a specific destination into the decision making process.

Logos are the most widely utilised brand elements (Pike, 2009, 10) in addition to names, slogans, terms, designs, symbols and packages (Cai, 2002, 722). Further, Konecnik and Gartner (2007, 400) find that a brand can be considered as an identity system, image, legal instrument, company, personality, relationship and added value.

With regard to destinations, the brand name is usually unaltered consisting of the existing and concrete geographical name (Cai, 2002, 722).

There are a number of challenges when branding tourism destinations. Pike (2005, 258-259) acknowledges the fact that tourism destinations have more dimensions than consumer goods and services and brand positioning is therefore more complex. In order to reach the consumers successfully, it is necessary to focus on one or a few brand associations only. While consumer goods are adapted to suit market needs, tourism destinations are already existing and quite rigid as a product, with different market interests of the diverse stakeholders to be taken into account. In addition, it is often difficult to ascertain decision making power when branding a destination because of the variety of stakeholders. The author also stresses the importance of reaching consensus with the community on the brand promise as the support by the local community is vital in fulfilling the brand promise. (Pike, 2005, 258-259.) As Blain et al. (2005, 329) emphasise, even though the brand promise is not a guarantee for visitors, it provides the comfort of more accurately anticipating the upcoming holiday experience. Effective destination branding produces benefits including destination awareness and the creation of demand, customer loyalty, commercial value, a base from which to coordinate private sector efforts, a basis for establishing seamlessness between communication tools and image enhancement wider than tourism (UNWTO, 2007, 45-46).

The UNWTO (2007, 46) also identifies key factors for successful destination branding. First, as destination branding creates an expectation for the consumer by promising certain experiences and values, the actual tourism destination experience needs to match the expectation created beforehand. The brand thus needs to be credible and the destination able to deliver. The tourism destination also needs to implement a branding strategy which differentiates the destination from others instead of mirroring their strategies. An important factor is that a brand needs to convey powerful ideas in order to gain access to the consumers' feelings and perceptions and create meaning to them. (UNWTO, 2007, 46).

Uniqueness is a key element in branding as shown by several authors (Ekinci, 2003; Qu et al. 2011; UNWTO, 2007, 42; Vogt, 2003). According to Ekinci (2003, 22), for example, more and more destinations use branding for the creation of an identity which stresses their product's uniqueness. The UNWTO (2007, 42) emphasises the

importance of finding and promoting a unique selling proposition in a way that existing and potential customers perceive the destination to have unmatched and worthwhile tourism attributes. In the absence of a unique selling proposition, similar products can be combined for the development of a special selling proposition. Destinations which are able to successfully brand themselves, convey considerable emotional meaning, are valuable conversation topics and evoke great expectations with potential customers. (UNWTO, 2007, 42-43.) Vogt (2003, 4) also stresses the importance of focusing on the uniqueness of the tourism destination as opposed to utilising a variety of selling propositions in an effort to widen the customer base.

A useful tool for establishing a destination's brand proposition is the destination brand benefit pyramid (UNWTO, 2007, 49; Vogt, 2003, 2) as depicted in Figure 10.

Brand Essence
6. What is the essential nature and character of the destination?

Brand Values
5. What values does the destination instil?

Brand personality
4. What key traits and characteristics of the destination are communicated by the brand?

Emotional Benefits
3. What psychological rewards or emotional benefits do tourists receive by visiting the destination? How does the tourist feel?

Rational Benefits
2. What benefits to the tourist results from this destination's feature?

Attributes
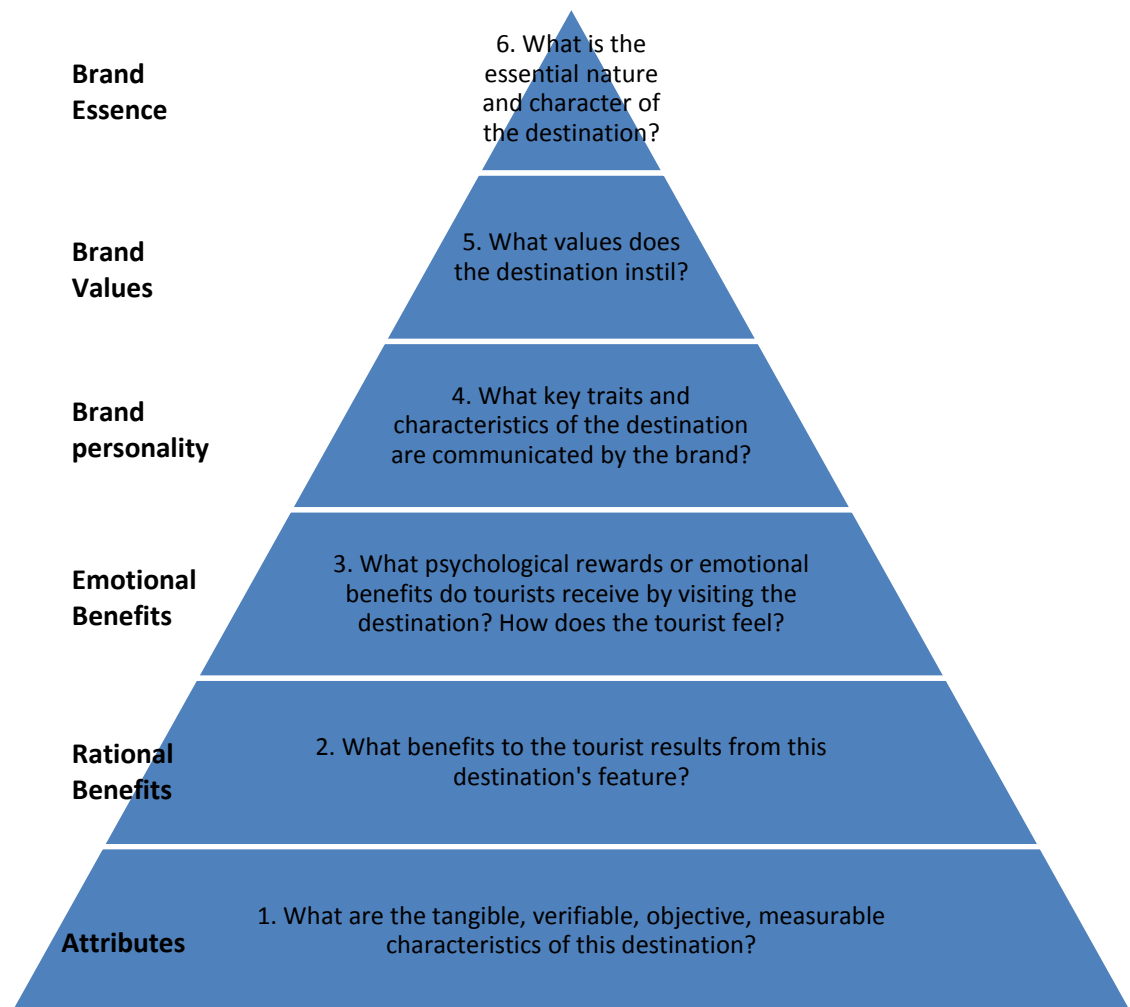1. What are the tangible, verifiable, objective, measurable characteristics of this destination?

Figure 10. The destination brand benefit pyramid (UNWTO, 2007, 49; Vogt, 2003, 2)

The brand benefit pyramid helps to identify consumers' associations with a destination in terms of the consumers' wants compared to the offerings and benefits of the

tourism destination. By asking appropriate questions, the destination's brand proposition can be extracted from the consumers themselves and then be used in the branding strategy.

Pike (2009, 17) stresses that brand positioning should emphasise the one or few distinct attributes which are already perceived positively by the consumers. Consumers of tourism destinations generally have different cultural backgrounds and so may perceive different tourism offerings in different ways. According to Konecnik and Gartner (2007, 417) as well as Caldwell and Freire (2004, 59), it is appropriate to develop different marketing strategies for these different foreign markets as long as they adhere to the destination's brand identity. Caldwell and Freire (ibid) propose to use representational rather than functional attributes in the brand message.

2.3.3 Brand personality

Aaker (1997, 347) defines brand personality as human characteristics related to a brand. Geuens et al. (2009) identify several dimensions of brand personality, namely responsibility, activity, aggressiveness, simplicity and emotionality, each containing personality traits which can be applied to a brand. By measuring a brand against these traits, its personality can be identified.

Using the concept of brand personality for branding destinations, Ekinci (2003, 22) points out that it is the human characteristics of a destination which link the tourists to the destination by matching the destination image with the tourists' self-image. However, Murphy et al. (2007b, 7) find a lack of empirical evidence that tourists recognise brand personality characteristics relating to destinations and differentiate destinations based on these characteristics. In their research, the authors found that a more accurate perception of a destination results from the comparison to a competing destination. Also, they found that brand personalities developed for different destinations often display common traits. This is also the case for German tourists when considering visiting Kouvola or Finland. When contemplating a holiday, travellers compare the destination to other destinations which display similar traits.

Furthermore, Murphy et al. (2007a, 58) argue that a destination depends on more than one market, and thus is possibly employing more than one brand personality. The authors propose further examination of values, personality and emotions related to desti-

nations as well as the relationship between those and the consumer's self-concept (Murphy et al., 2007b, 7). However, for the purpose of this thesis which considers only German visitors, one brand personality is sufficient.

Kaplan et al. (2010, 1292, 1296) support the need for further research on brand personality as, in their opinion, previous studies seem to have flaws, especially as the personality traits identified in previous research are solely positive traits despite the fact that personality traits in general can be negative as well. Nevertheless, as this research work concentrates on positive traits of a destination which can be used in destination image and destination branding, the existing research found in the literature is adequate.

2.4 Website effectiveness

2.4.1 The importance of websites for tourism destinations

There is a strong relationship between the internet and tourism destination promotion. Already in 1998, Buhalis argues that information technology contributes to competitiveness and competitive advantage. It supports globalisation and enables especially small organisations to deliver the right product to the right customer at the right price and place, without having to rely on intermediaries. Small organisations can so increase their profit margin and enhance their position. In difference to tangible goods, tourism services cannot be displayed or examined before they are purchased, but rely solely on description and representation. Consumers demand significant, exact and timely information to satisfy their needs, all of which is facilitated by the internet. (Buhalis, 1998, 410-411.)

It is widely recognised that the internet has become an essential source of information and a distribution channel of travel services and products (Avramovic, 2010; Bonn et al., 1999; Buhalis, 1998; Buhalis and Law, 2008; Ghandour et al., 2010; Law et al., 2004, WTOBC, 1999; UNWTO and ETC, 2008). Avramovic (2010, 1384) identifies five areas in which the internet has changed the marketing of tourism destinations as summarised in Figure 11.
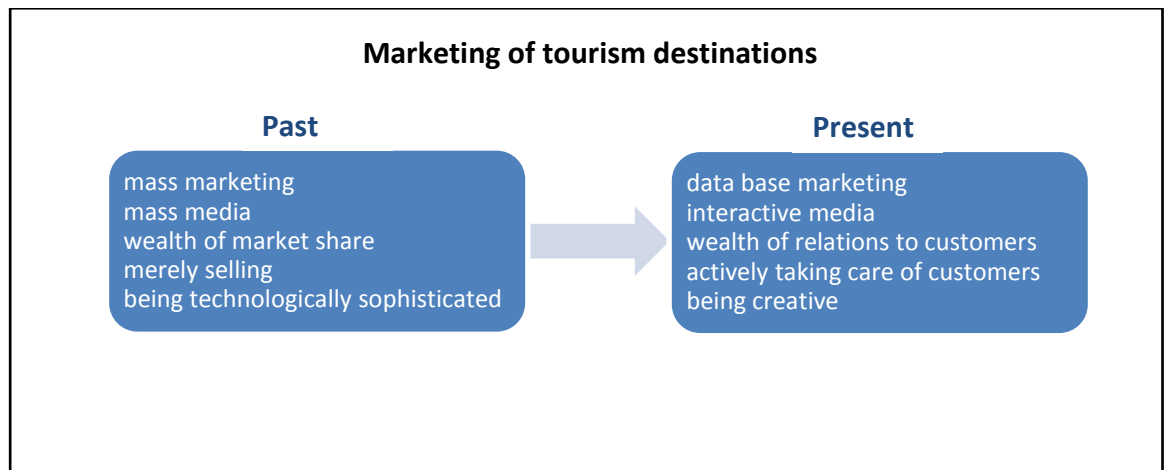
Figure 11. Marketing of tourism destinations (Avramovic, 2010, 1384)

Gathering information about customers and using this information has become more important when marketing tourism destinations. Marketers nowadays engage with customers using creative means, thus creating relationships with customers.

Ghandour et al. (2010, 28) show that a website has the capabilities of being informational, transactional, promotional and providing customer service. The purpose of the website is to increase visibility to existing and potential customers, communicating the organisation's image, increasing brand awareness and enabling customers to use the organisation's products (Ghandour, 2010, 23).

Castañeda et al. (2007, 402-403) find that the internet is an important channel due to its global accessibility, ease of updating, up-to-date information service, interactive communication and customisation possibilities. For the consumer, the benefits are direct communication with the supplier and the possibility to plan and purchase their own travel related services and products at a time and place convenient to them (Buhalis, 1998, 17).

Buhalis and Law (2008, n.a.) find in a study carried out examining 149 published articles, that tourists nowadays are more and more interested in individualised holidays, planned to suit their preferences and schedules. Moreover, tourists grow increasingly impatient with having to deal with delays as they have a ready access to an abundance of information provided by tourism organisations, private enterprises and other consumers. The internet can facilitate and improve the whole consumption experience from searching for information, consuming the destination service, to engaging in post consumption experiences. (Buhalis and Law, 2008, n.a..) The stages of this consump-

tion process have also been identified by the World Tourism Organization and the European Travel Commission (2008, 3) as adapted in Figure 12.
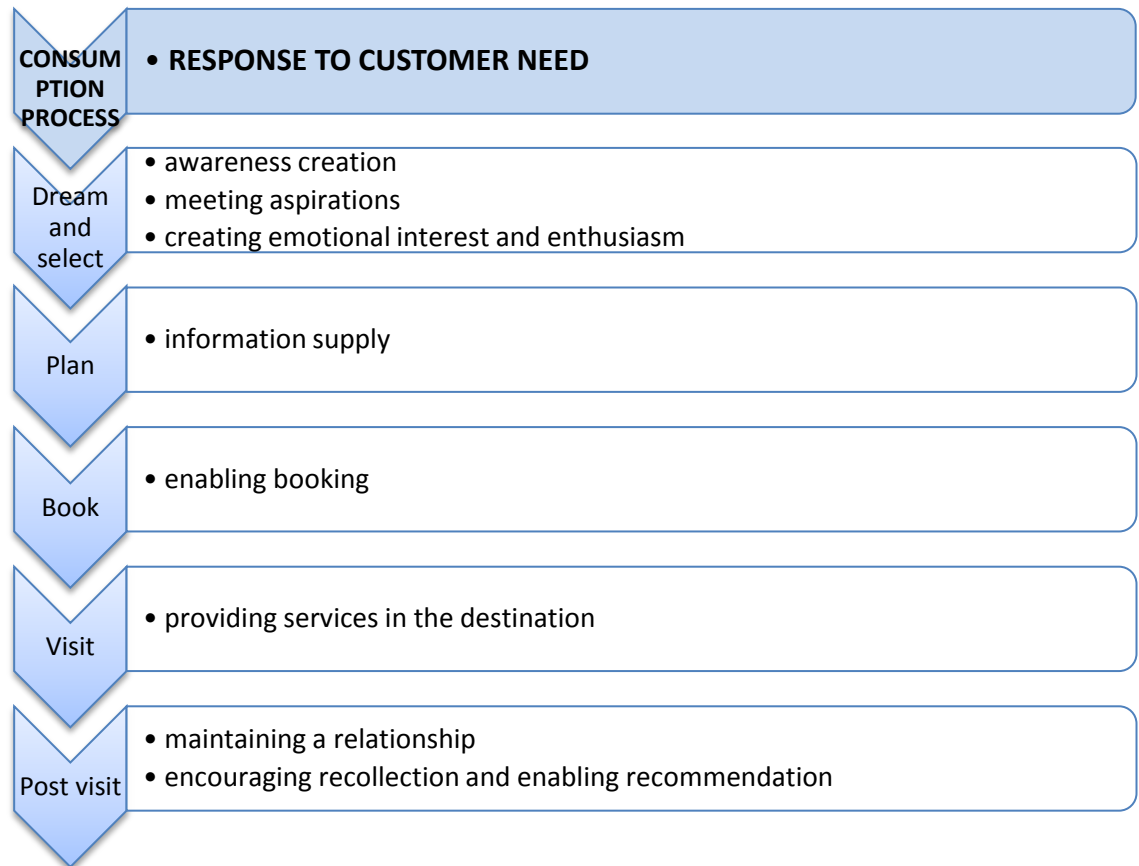

Figure 12. Consumption process and response need (adapted from UNWTO and ETC, 2008, 3)

The consumption process starts with dreaming of a destination and selecting one, followed by planning and booking the visit, visiting the destination and actions related to the post visit. Consumers have different needs in these different stages, all which need to be satisfied by the tourism destination website. (UNWTO and ETC, 2008, 3).

The information a consumer receives concerning a tourism destination needs to be helpful for further planning of the holiday, and so the quality and quantity of information received must have a positive influence on destination satisfaction (Peterson et al., 1997). Buhalis and Law (2008, n.a.) agree that information search via the internet is critical to the purchase decision process as it diminishes uncertainty and perceived risks. The more information is obtained, the better consumers are able to utilise the local service providers, destinations and activities in order to satisfy their needs (Buhalis and Law, 2008, n.a.). In a study on 'The influence of the internet on destination satis-

faction', Castañeda et al. (2007, 414) confirm the importance of the internet in contributing to destination satisfaction in tourists who have not travelled to the destination before and therefore do not have previous experience with the destination. The authors continue to explain that the increased satisfaction can be attributed to the large amount of information which a tourist can use to better plan his or her holiday and so add value to the travel experience. Their research shows that information satisfaction relates to destination satisfaction and thus underlines the need of applying elements to enhance the information satisfaction. These elements are presented in the following section.

2.4.2 Components of an effective website

An explanation for people's use of traditional media is given by the uses and gratifications theory which is summarised into four aspects by McQuail (1983, 82-83):

- Information: learning about pertinent events and circumstances, soliciting advice, satisfying curiosity, educating oneself, achieving certainty and confidence through knowledge
- Personal identity: support of personal values, identifying with others, obtain behavioural examples, learning about oneself
- Integration and social interaction: learning about and identifying with others, being empathetic, feel of belonging, providing grounds for exchange with others, enabling connections to others, fulfilling social roles
- Entertainment: distraction form problems, unwinding, enjoying culture and beauty, spending time, emotional discharge

Hoffmann and Novak (1996) find that traditional marketing approaches differ from interactive marketing, specifically websites, in the way communication and transactions are conducted. The authors argue that a traditional marketing approach employs mass media in one-to-many communication assuming passive consumers, whereas the interactive marketing approach uses many-to-many communication in which consumers have control and actively choose which product provider to approach. Calder et al. (2009, 323) agree that online experiences are more participatory and interactive. Furthermore, they consider the internet to be a more social instrument, as it is used for sharing and communicating. The experience with a website therefore needs to gener-

ate a positive feeling for the user to interact with the website, or more specifically, the service provider.

Researches of website users' experiences have primarily focused on task related issues, such as user friendliness and usefulness of the website (Davis, 1989; Huizingh, 2002; Lii, 2002; Morris-Lee, 2000) which is comparable to McQuails account of the term information in the uses and gratifications theory summarised above. Blythe and Wright (2003, xvi), however, maintain that these issues are too limited in order to describe the experiences of website users and the aspect of enjoyment, which corresponds with the other terms as identified by McQuail in the usage and gratifications theory, should be considered as well. Calder et al. (2009, 322) define the experience with a website as a user's belief about how the website suits his or her life. In their view, a website can be engaging because it is utilitarian, i.e. it provides helpful information, or it is intrinsically enjoyable, i.e. it helps the user to unwind and distracts from daily life. Moreover, the content of a website can generate multiple experiences which are not mutually exclusive, and thus different users can have different experiences with the same website content. Regardless of the type of engagement, Wang (2006, 355) finds in his research that higher engagement results in a higher involvement, recall and believability in the message. Both, utilitarian and enjoyment related aspects of users' experiences are therefore vital in website design and are thus explored in the following sections.

There is an abundance of literature available on utilitarian aspects of users' experiences with websites, how to create an effective website and which components it should contain. Huizingh (2002), for example, explains in his research that the online effectiveness of a company depends on website design and implementation issues. Lii (2005, 42-46, 51) finds that websites attract more visitors and keep the attention of visitors longer if they contain certain elements, and Morris-Lee (2000) identified eight criteria by which the performance of a website are assessed by consumers. These factors and criteria are shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Criteria for website assessment by consumers

Huizingh (2002)	Lii (2005, 42-46, 51)	Morris-Lee (2000, 31-32)
•website content •attractiveness •user friendliness •interactivity •site maintenance	•informativeness •organisation •personalisation •community creation •security •frequent updates •little down-time •quick response to online inquiries	•download time •speed of apprehension •promise of informational value •perceived ease of navigability •clarity of mission •graphic coherence •printability •creative use of medium

In a publication by Glassman (2004, 54), the author identifies ten rules one should obey when creating a company's website. These rules contain:

- conveyance of the company's brand an every page

- adhering to reality with some humility in the message communicated

- knowing the target audience by structuring the website in a way that the most visitors can acquire information in a convenient way

- knowing the difference between content and design

- keeping within the limits of one's own expertise when creating the website

- remembering that visitors decide within three seconds whether they continue reading the website

- using alternative pathways on the website linking the different pages

- investing in the hosting service for quick website loading and usage reports

- avoiding introductory animations

- deciding whether other documents created in the company also need to be adapted and linked to the website.

Castañeda et al. (2007, 415) stresses the importance of preventing information over-load in users which are not very experienced in using the internet. This can be achieved by designing well-structured websites employing search engines which are user-friendly. Moreover, wherever possible, images should be employed rather than text to convey the message as images take fewer cognitive resources to be processed. Castañeda et al., 2007, 415-416.)

Focusing specifically on tourism destination websites, characteristics and features demonstrating good practice can be summarised as shown in Table 4 (WTOBC, 1999, 82-87).

Table 3. Best practice characteristics and features of tourism destination websites (WTOBC, 1999, 82-87)

The Home Page	- as a point of first contact needs to increase consumer interest and knowledge - represents the destination positively - communicates information effectively - provides a considerable amount of information with a simple and clear lay out - includes a list of contents of the site - contains a short description of the tourism destination - incorporates photographs, graphics and a logo or brand - contain complementary features which generate a wide understanding of the contents of the whole website
Appearance	- is interesting, innovative and uncluttered - should be well maintained with current information - breaks up, simplifies and complements text by using different colours, graphics/ symbols, pictures, tables and maps - may employ multimedia in the form of webcams and virtual tours to add more interest as long as performance of the website is not compromised
General information provided	- information about the destination's climate, geography, history, events and activities, telecommunications, public transport and access to the destination - even though the website should contain a large amount of information, it should also provide an effective indexing system for the user to be able to easily select the desired information
Interactivity	- provides the user with an active role in deciding what information to access or to skip - involves the user by providing trip planners (an automatically created itinerary based on criteria selected by the user) and virtual brochures (a type of clipboard to which pages can be saved) - provides bulletin boards, discussion forums, an online reservation service and external links

Site features	- displays enhanced usability - links every page to the home page - displays the list of contents on every page - provides a facility to carry out searches - availability of the web site in different languages

In addition to the before mentioned utilitarian aspects of users' experiences with websites, there are also enjoyment related aspects. Lin et al. (2008, 43) argue that a well-designed website creates more enjoyment in a user than a poorly designed website. Lin and Gregor (2006) identify three elements constituting enjoyment: engagement being described as attention which is focused on an activity, positive affect consisting of pleasure, happiness, contentment or similar feelings, and fulfilment of a need or desire (Lin et al., 2008, 43). According to the authors, a website containing elements which are interesting, pleasing and reward providing, is perceived to be more enjoyable than a website which does not provide these elements. If these elements are achieved, the user will concentrate on the functions and facilities of the website and will benefit from a more enjoyable website experience (Lin et al., 2008, 54). A poorly designed website thus can have a negative affect resulting in low enjoyment of the web experience, which in turn reduces the likelihood of the user to pursue the use of the website.

The literature relating to emotional aspects in customer relationships focuses on the element of engagement (Bowden, 2009; Brodie et al., 2011; Brodie et al. 2013; Calder et al., 2009; Hollebeek, 2011; Wang, 2006), whereby different perspectives of engagement are evident as demonstrated subsequently.

Bowden (2009) proposes that customer engagement entails the constructs calculative and affective commitment, involvement, trust, loyalty and delight. Calculative commitment is concerned with the customer weighing the possibility of making a poor decision against the negative effect of this decision, which is often the case with new customers who base their decisions on mere attributes of the service or product. Affective commitment relates to the emotions which connect a customer to a brand and is evident in customers who have some experience with the service or product. Involvement depends on the degree of which a brand is of importance to the customer. It also encourages commitment and loyalty to a brand. Trust is connected strongly to in-

volvement as trust diminishes the perceived risk in the consumption process. Loyalty is closely linked to commitment, but whereas commitment implies loyalty, loyalty does not imply commitment, as loyal customers may switch to other brands easier than committed customers. Delight can be generated by providing the customer with an unexpected bonus. It is especially useful in attracting and retaining new customers. (Bowden, 2009, 67-71.)

Hollebeek (2011, 565-569) discovers in her research that feelings of immersion, passion and activation are central to customer engagement. More specifically, respondents in her research state that they are engaged with a brand if they are immersed, absorbed or focusing strongly on the brand to the extent that the brand captures the consumers' full attention and they forget their environments and reach a state of relaxation. A brand can also be engaging through the representation of certain values, images or appealing appearance. Passion is achieved when the brand makes the customer feel good, evokes pride, or a sense that one cannot live without the brand. The respondents to the research also state that a brand engages them when it makes them feel special. Activation is obtained when consumers are willing to spend considerable efforts or time in interacting with the brand instead of choosing another. (Hollebeek, 2011, 565-569.) Hollebeek (2011, 556) summarises that customer engagement is connected to customer value and the co-creation thereof, thus focusing on the element of interactivity. Brodie et al. (2011) confirm this finding with their analysis and state that customer engagement is rooted in the theory of marketing relationships and interactive service experiences, more formally expressed as service-dominant logic (Brodie et al., 2011, 253, 257). The authors specify that this perspective "highlights the role of interactive customer experience and cocreated value as the underlying conceptual foundations of CE" (customer engagement) (Brodie et al., 2011, 257). In a later research Brodie et al. (2013, 8) reveal that customers who are engaged are more loyal, satisfied, feel empowered, connected, experience emotional bonding, trust and commitment.

On a more practical level, Calder et al. (2009, 322) find that engagement causes a website user to download its webpages, concentrate on it and recommend it to a friend. Hence, engagement is a prerequisite for usage, affect and reaction to promotion (ibid). Wang (2006, 357) discovers that a driver for engagement can be surprises or novelty. DeValck et al. (2009) give examples of tools which engage customers such as

discussion forums, bulletin boards, chat rooms, social networks, blogs and news-groups.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research approach

This study utilises both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Merriam (2002, 3-4) explains that qualitative research is based on the view that individuals create meaning by interacting with the world and that there are numerous interpretations of reality which vary in time and context. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding specific situations in their context and the interactions occurring in this context (Merriam, 2002, 5). As Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, 17, 196) point out, qualitative research is usually unstructured and explores phenomena involving interpretative techniques. Its main purpose is to gain insight and understand human behaviour in relation to a particular phenomenon of which little is known in advance. Qualitative data also provides contextual information and therefore enables the researcher to better determine the relevance and applicability of the findings. (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, 106.)

Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, 208) propose that qualitative data can be quantified when the frequency of certain occurrences is relevant. Quantitative research is mainly concerned with testing hypotheses (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 206), gathers numeric data, is objective and assumes that there is only one reality (Quinlan, 2011, 286). In this study quantitative data are gathered to verify the applicability of the qualitative data to a larger population.

3.2 Content analysis

As Quinlan (2011, 178-179) suggests, the decision on the methodology in a research is formed by considering the focus of the research, research question and by the type and location of data required for the research. Considering these criteria, content analysis is chosen as the appropriate methodology for this research.

Content analysis is a common method used in analysing media (Quinlan, 2011, 185; Messenger Davies and Mosdell, 2006, 98). It is traditionally used for analysing quan-

titative data, but can also be applied to analysing qualitative data by examining both the explicit and concealed content of the text (Quinlan, 2011, 185; Stokes, 2003, 56). Messenger Davies and Mosdell (2006, 98-99) caution, however, to be careful when making interpretations and not to infer meaning which is not in the text.

This research uses qualitative data collection focusing on latent content. The qualitative approach is chosen as it gives the best insight and understanding of the underlying concepts (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 197). As Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999, 259) explain, latent content consists of pattern content, which concentrates on patterns occurring in the content itself, and projective content, which in turn focuses on interpreting the content. While the foremost aim of content analysis is of inductive nature, i.e. to gather data which is then categorised and abstracted, the aim of this content analysis is of deductive nature, i.e. to investigate the specific meaning of abstract terms.

According to McMillan (2000) the traditional content analysis process can be summarised by 5 steps:

1. Research question and /or hypotheses formulation.
2. Sample selection.
3. Definition of categories for coding.
4. Training of coders, coding of content and reliability checking of the coding.
5. Analysis and interpretation of data.

Applied to web-based data which is also examined during this research, content analysis is a good tool for learning about user's behaviours and preferences, and gives an insight into diverse social trends and communication styles (Kim and Kuljis, 2010, 369). It is a simple and economical way of analysing large quantities of data as the data itself is readily accessible (Kim and Kuljis, 2010, 370; Stokes, 2003, 54). Nevertheless, content analysis may be vulnerable to objectivity and reliability in categorising the data (Stokes, 2003, 58-99)

Herring (in press) argues that while the traditional process view is rather rigorous and narrow, incorporating, for example, a quantitative approach, random sampling and a strict coding of predetermined criteria, new media analysis, such as web content analysis, allows for a somewhat more relaxed approach. The author finds that, in practice,

new media analysis are often exploratory, using non-random sampling and allow for coding categories to arise from the data. This latter approach to content research is also evident in this research. Herring (ibid) proposes a model of web content analysis which depicts the components image analysis, theme analysis, feature analysis, link analysis, exchange analysis, language analysis and leaves room for components which may be identified in the future.

3.3 Research process

Currently, there is little prior research available on how to promote Finnish tourism destinations to German tourists. As Finland is not a major tourism destination for Germans, there is also little knowledge about how German tourists experience Finland and what attracts them to or prevent them from travelling to the country. In addition, current trends in website design which are aimed at increasing the website effectiveness need to be identified as these trends are changing rapidly. The complexity of the topic therefore calls for the examination of several independent elements which, only when combined, answer the research question.

This research starts with testing the motivations for German tourists to travel in general by compiling a questionnaire based on attributes forming destination image gathered from the literature. The questionnaire will also reveal the image currently held of Finland. The findings from the questionnaire help determine which images of Finland need to be addressed and which services and attractions are especially interesting to German tourists. In addition, interviews with Germans who have travelled to Finland and Kouvola will be conducted in order to gain a deeper insight into their travel habits and experiences in the country. These findings form the central content of the website to be created for Kouvola as a tourism destination.

Subsequently, existing tourism destination websites will be analysed in order to gain more insight into the composition of these websites. The attributes in the existing literature are generally very abstract, thus a content analysis will be carried out with existing tourism destination websites in order to identify the specific elements of these websites which contribute to their effectiveness. It enables the researcher to identify specific elements regarding design, content, quality of information and function, and to understand which elements satisfy the needs of site visitors. Additionally, new trends in tourism destination promotion and website design need to be identified. The

examined websites are updated regularly to reflect these current trends and therefore serve as suitable examples. The findings form the basis of the design of the website to be created and will help increase the initial interest of the site visitors.

3.4 Data collection

The data for this research was collected by using an online questionnaire directed at German tourists, interviews with German tourists who had travelled to Kouvola before and existing tourism destination websites. Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, 212) describe that collecting different data or data through different methods, referred to as triangulation, improves judgement on the subject matter. In the present research, the collection of data through different methods was necessary in order to produce a complete description of all issues related to the research and to validate findings of previous research. Triangulation thus is a means of increasing validity and reliability in research (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 213).

Initial empirical data was gathered from an online questionnaire to gain more insight into the motivations for German travellers for choosing their holiday destination and their attitude to Finland as a holiday destination. These issues will be addressed when promoting Kouvola as a tourism destination.

The online questionnaire aimed at finding answers to the research questions:

> Which attributes are important to German tourists when choosing their travel destination?

> What is the general propensity of German tourists to travel to Scandinavian countries and Finland in particular?

> What is the image of Finland held by German tourists?

The questions of the online questionnaire are provided in full in Appendix 1.

The online questionnaire is the appropriate data gathering method when there is a large population to be involved in a research project (Quinlan, 2011, 326) as was the case in this research where the populations consisted of all German travellers. The

questionnaire is an economical way of obtaining information from a large number of people in a relatively short period of time (Messenger Davies and Mosdell, 2006, 36) and enabled the researcher to easily collect information from people scattered in location in Germany. Quinlan (2011, 322) describes the questionnaire as an accurate structured data collection method which ensures that each respondent answers to the same question. The online questionnaire gathers precise quantitative data, but can also be used for qualitative data collection using open-ended questions (ibid). Both, quantitative and qualitative data were collected in this study.

The information was collected from a sample representing the population onto which the findings could then be inferred. A non-probability sample, in particular a convenience sample was chosen, even though valid inferences about a large population could not be made with accuracy (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 139-141) due to the size of the sample. The convenient sample for this research was selected by inviting people to participate in the research by employing social media.

The online questionnaire was completed by 53 respondents, of which 32 persons were male and 21 persons female. The respondents' age ranged from 23 years to 69 years whereby 30.2% of the respondents were 38 years old and 52.8% of the respondents were between 35 and 45 years old.

Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, 121) point out that the design of the questionnaire becomes very important when a structured data collection method is applied to a large number of respondents. In this research, respondents were asked to provide answers to six questions which could be answered in a relatively short time. As respondents were also asked to distribute the link to the online questionnaire further with the aim of increasing the overall number of respondents, a clear and quick to answer questionnaire as suggested by Quinlan (2011, 327) was considered to be of importance.

The demographic section of the questionnaire asking gender and age of the respondent was followed by the actual information section. The online questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative and qualitative data by asking the respondents to provide answers by using a 5-point rating scale, measuring the importance and the satisfaction of given attributes or components. The attributes and components were derived from the literature reviewed as suggested by Quinlan (2011, 337) and in this study, concentrated on destination image. Respondents were also asked to give information on their

travels to all four Scandinavian countries, i.e. Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland by ticking an appropriate box, and to shortly state their associations with Finland in an open-ended question.

The questions were provided sequentially where respondents were able to see only one question at a time, being able to access the following question only after answering the previous one. This was done in order to gain unbiased answers, where following questions could have influenced the respondents' answers to a previous question. All questions were specific, straightforward and the online questionnaire was tested before being published (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 124-125). The questionnaire was available online using Webropol online survey and analysis software from 26 June 2014 until 15 July 2014.

Finally, interviews were conducted to gain a deeper insight into the travel behaviour of German tourists which already have travelled in Finland. The interviews helped to understand with which specific activities German tourists fulfilled their needs and how their image about Finland was influenced by the holiday spent in the country.

The data gathered from the interviews contributed to finding an answer to the research questions:

> What attracts German tourists to travel to Finland? What keeps them from travelling to Finland?

> What kind of information German tourists need before travelling to Kouvola and Finland in general?

A more detailed list of interview questions is available in Appendix 2.

Interviews are considered to be the most suitable data collection method for obtaining opinions and information from other persons. They are especially appropriate for exploratory and inductive inquiries. The interviews conducted for this thesis were semi-structured which allow the respondents to openly discuss behaviours and opinions regarding pre-determined topics. Also, sample size, people to be interviewed and questions were determined before as normally is the case in semi-structured interviews. (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 126.) For this research, three interviews involving five

German tourists were conducted. The persons were chosen on the basis of their previous travels to Kouvola. All interviewees had spent at least three holidays in Kouvola and had also travelled elsewhere in Finland. The interviewees were also known previously to the interviewer which facilitated establishing rapport, enabling the interviewees to openly and honestly respond to the questions posed (Quinlan, 2011, 290). In preparation of the interview, several questions were composed in concordance with the research questions (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 127). As advised by Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, 127), the interview itself took 45 minutes to 1.5 hours depending on whether one or two respondents were participating in the interview at one time. Appointments for the interviews were made beforehand to ensure the reservation of adequate time on behalf of the interviewees.

Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, 131) suggest that at the beginning of each interview, the interviewer should inform of the purpose of the research and the interview, and answer to possible questions posed by the interviewees. This was also the case in this research. All interviewees agreed on recording the interview. One interview involving two interviewees was carried out by telephone, whereas the other interviews were carried out face-to-face.

Data for the content analysis of the websites was collected by examining the three existing tourism destination websites of Copenhagen, Gothenburg and Stockholm. Formulated as a research question which according to McMillan (2000, 81) forms the basis of the content analysis, the study investigated:

> How do successful tourism destination websites achieve the retention of website users and transactions made by website users?

The purpose of this analysis was to produce a list of specific attributes and components used on the websites which provide satisfaction in the consumer process and enhance functionality. The three destination websites of the content analysis were chosen because the cities are all located in Nordic countries and are preferred destinations for German tourists, do not feature famous tourist attractions on the international level which would be the main reason for attracting tourists, and they utilise effective elements which are used in contemporary website design. Additionally, the researcher had no prior experience of the destinations or their tourism destination websites. This was essential as the research examines the websites from a customer-need point of

view as opposed to a product-selling point of view, and this way the researcher was able to assume the role of a potential consumer without bias.

Qualitative data was obtained by critically examining the contents of the websites and investigating how specific attributes and components were implemented on the website. The researcher collected the data presented on the websites by using a coding sheet detailing the different attributes and components (Messenger Davies and Mosdell, 2006, 105-106) identified from the literature review. In this research, the coding sheet was based on aspects of the consumer process, from the selection to the post visit of the destination as well as general functionality of the website, and examined how responses to the consumer needs were achieved by the websites. The coding sheet was a spreadsheet which allowed for both the collection and further analysis of the data. It was considered to be the most suitable tool for this research as it enables the analysis of a relatively small amount of data (Quinlan, 2011, 359-360) and allowed for tabulation.

By using a coding sheet, the research gained more reliability as the search for the same attributes and components on all three websites could be ensured. While examining the websites for the predetermined attributes and components, the researcher also checked for new elements and added them to the coding sheet for cross-reference on all three websites. The use of websites is a modern form of destination promotion which also incorporates social trends. By examining the existing websites for qualitative data, these trends could be identified and used in the creation of an effective tourism destination website of Kouvola.

3.5 Data analysis

In regards to qualitative data, Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, 197) point out that data collection and data analysis may be carried out simultaneously when new questions arise from the analysis of collected data and hence give cause for further data collection. Although this research made use of a combined process of collecting and analysing data, it was carried out systematically so that a complete analysis could be ensured and the risk of selective use of the data could be minimised (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 204).

The process of data analysis was based on Spiggle (1994, 493-496) who distinguishes between seven processes when analysing qualitative data: categorisation, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalisation, integration, iteration, and refutation. The data collected in this research was categorised when being recorded onto the coding sheet. The categorisation took place by recognising a unit of data belonging to a pre-established category as depicted on the coding sheet, or by identifying a new category through a unit of data which was then added to the coding sheet. The categories were then grouped into higher-order conceptual classes by abstraction, recognising the unit of data being part of a larger, more general construct. During the process of data collection, units of data belonging to the same category and related categories were compared for their differences and similarities. By identifying properties of the categories, dimensions were added to them in order to give more depth to the conceptual meanings and to identify relationships among the categories. Moreover, an effort was made in integrating the data in order to recognise relationships and to develop theory. This research also used iteration by which research phases were not conducted sequentially but which allowed for moving back and forth between the phases depending on whether the implemented procedures deemed it necessary. Finally, refutation was accomplished by investigating whether inferences made from the data could be contradicted by the information available. (Spiggle, 1994, 493-496).

The collected data was then interpreted in order to understand underlying meanings and their patterns (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 204). While interpreting, the researcher took guidance from the theory forming the basis of this content analysis, but was careful not to let it dictate the research nor the explanation of the research problem (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 206). It was also assumed that the content analysis produced data which was not rooted in the studied theory and for which explanation was sought by inspecting the data result (ibid).

Analysis of the data gathered through the questionnaire was carried out by first importing the data from the online survey software Webropol to Excel where the data were edited. According to Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, 150), editing ensures a quality standard for the data. At this stage no questions were deemed unnecessary and thus removed, nor were there answers discarded because of completion errors. Editing was restrained to making the data readable by SPSS, except for open-ended question 5, which investigated the image held of Finland. The question was analysed separately as

respondents used different terms for the same aspect, which made an analysis in SPSS impossible. After editing, the data was imported to SPSS for further analysis

Data analysis employed descriptive statistics summarising the data in a sensible way. The analysis began with examining distributions by computing frequencies of all the categories of the variables which allowed for identifying patterns in the given responses. Central tendency of the data of this study was measured on the mode and median level. As Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, 153-154) specify, the mode measures the category which appears most frequently and is therefore the correct measure at the nominal level used for classifications of data. The median measures a position, an observation which is located in the exact middle of a distribution. It is used for rankings and for data at the ordinal level. (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 153-154.)

In this research, the data was analysed by first compiling frequency distribution tables for the closed-ended questions 1 (sex), 2 (age), 3 (motivations for choosing a holiday destination), 4 (conducted holidays and interest in the Scandinavian countries) and 6 (image of Finland). In addition, questions 1 and 2 were measured on the nominal level calculating the mode. Two of the questions, questions 3 and 6, employ a 5-point rating scale and measured data at the ordinal level. For these questions the median was calculated. In spite of question 5 asking for qualitative data using an open-ended question, the answers received were short and often consisted of one word only, which enabled a calculation of the mode after editing the data by combining concepts with the same meaning. Question 4 relating to a prior holiday or interest in the Scandinavian countries served merely as a means of identifying whether there was a general interest in the Scandinavian countries and whether the image of Finland held by the respondent was based on actual experience with the country.

In order to provide a complete description of the distributions, dispersion was measured next. Dispersion measures the variation of the data about the central value. Dispersion is measured as percent distribution for the mode, and as percent distribution, percentiles, or minimum and maximum ranges for the median (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 156-157).

Data collected by the questionnaire was also examined by cross-tabulation, allowing for simultaneous analysis of two or more variables and analysing their relationship (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010, 160).

As Quinlan (2011, 421) explains, there are different approaches to analysing qualitative data as gathered by the interviews in this study. The data gathered through the interviews was analysed using a phenomenological approach, which, according to Lester (1999, 1), allows the exploration of phenomena as experienced by individuals in the situation. A phenomenological approach therefore is concerned with personal perspectives, interpretation and subjectivity, which enable the researcher to comprehend people's actions and motivations (ibid).

Hycner, (1985) identifies several elements of phenomenological analysing interview data which were also applied to the data collected in this study. First, the recorded interviews were transcribed. Then, the interviews were listened to and the transcripts read several times in order to develop a general understanding of the data context. Non-verbal communication, intonations and pauses were included in the data analysis. During this process, the researcher was carefully keeping an open mind as to whatever meanings arise from the data and to identify the units of general meaning without letting the researcher's own interpretations interfere with the data. The aim of this process was to understand the data from the respondent's point of view. However, Hycner (1985, 281) points out that a complete suspension of the researcher's preconceptions is impossible and absolute objectivity cannot be assumed. The transcript was examined thoroughly and with openness for unique and coherent meaning expressed by the respondent, thereby condensing the transcript to the essence of the ideas expressed. Whereas units of general meaning were first delineated regardless of the research question, the next step of delineating concentrated solely on relevant units. In case of ambiguity, the unit of meaning was retained. Redundant units were then eliminated from the list while carefully paying attention to the frequency of occurrence of the units as well as non-verbal and para-linguistic signals which determine the significance of the units. The units of the shortened list were examined for common meanings, and clusters were created before determining one or several central themes of these clusters. Subsequently, a descriptive report was drawn up summarising each individual interview and sent to the interviewees for verification. Necessary corrections were made, and general and individual themes of all the interviews were identified. Finally, the themes were placed back into the overall context and a combined summary of the findings was prepared. (Hycner, 1985, 279-294.)

4 KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The main objective of the empirical research work was, firstly, to determine the needs of German tourists during their holidays and which images need to be generated of Kouvola and Finland in order to make it an attractive destination. The findings thus define the content of the website to be created. Secondly, the research more specifically reveals the preferences of German tourists in relation to the types of environments and activities available in Kouvola. It also uncovers some of the customer needs which are not provided for. In addition, the interviews reveal the information needs of tourists before planning a holiday in Kouvola. The findings of the interviews help determine the unique selling proposition which the city of Kouvola should employ in its branding strategy to German tourists. This unique selling proposition is the content which will be emphasised on the tourism destination website to be developed. Finally, the empirical research helps to examine how the destination websites employ design, content and functionality to serve the customers' needs in the consumption process. This serves as a basis for the development of the destination website for Kouvola as a tool to convey the promotional message.

In this chapter, the findings of the content analyses of the online questionnaire, the interviews and the three websites are combined and categorised considering topics of the consumption process as described in chapter 2.4.1. The topics identified are image, attraction, conversion, creation of additional value and functionality. The three destination websites of Copenhagen (Wonderful Copenhagen, n.d.), Gothenburg (Göteborg & Co, n.d.) and Stockholm (Stockholm Visitors Board, n.d.), are hereafter referred to as VisitCopenhagen, Göteborg and VisitStockholm.

4.1 Image

The notion of image in this context refers to the image held by German tourists of Finland and how it can be addressed, and how image is created by the examined websites.

The questionnaire revealed 35 different concepts which come to the mind of German tourists when thinking of Finland. Some of the concepts were related. For example, respondents had the image of darkness, snow and cold, or culture, Alvar Aalto, national costumes and cathedral. As the purpose of the questionnaire was to gain deeper knowledge of the image held by German tourists, the concepts were not abstracted

further, but recognised individually. 15 of the respondents had visited Finland before, 38 of the respondents had not visited Finland before. The image concepts and percentages of respondents who had and had not travelled to Finland before are represented in Figure 13.
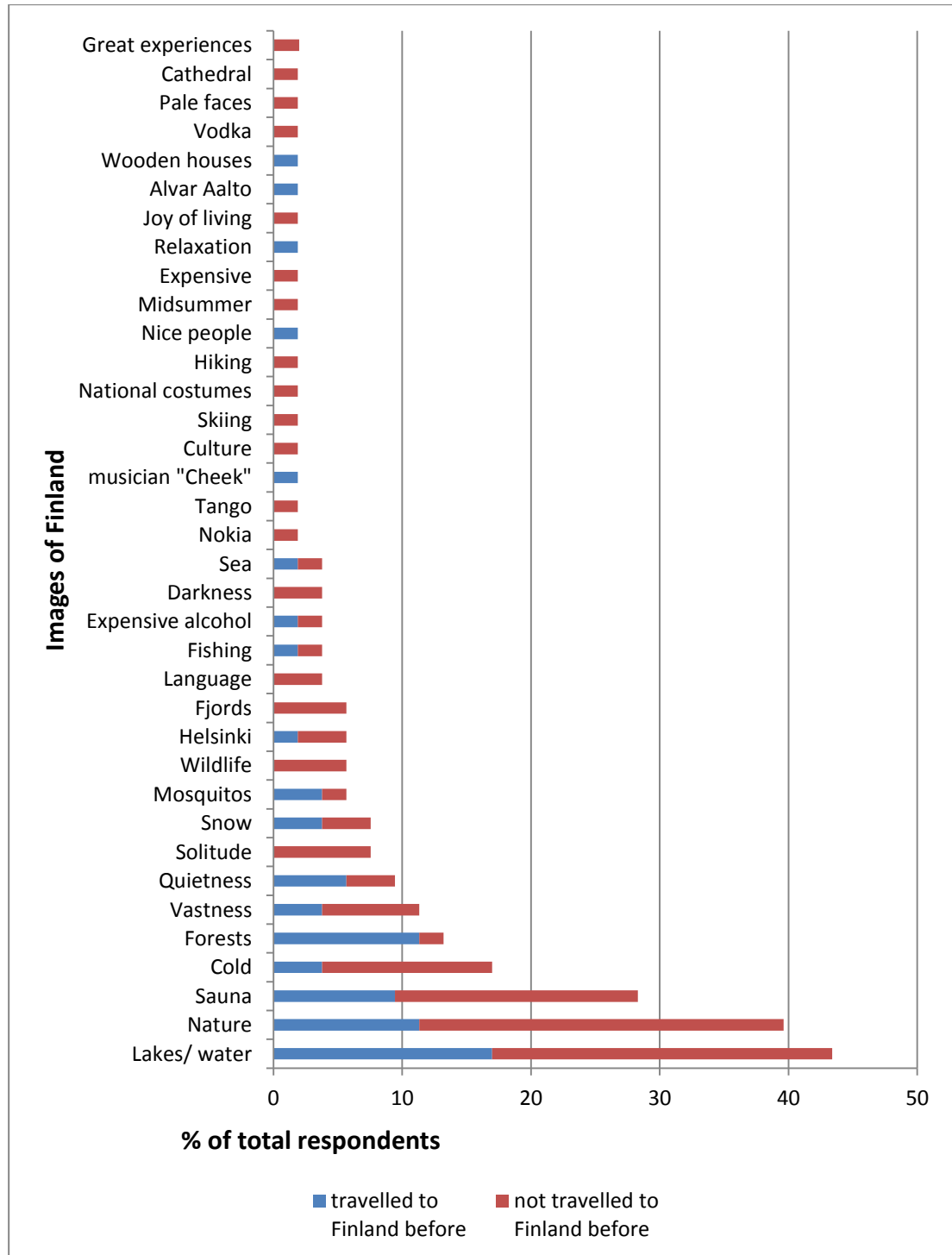

Figure 13. Images held by German tourists

The mode is represented by the image of 'lakes/ water' which is stated by 43% of the respondents. The image is closely followed by 'nature' (39% of the respondents) and

'sauna' (28% of the respondents). Thus, the overall image held by German tourists of Finland includes lakes, nature and sauna.

Because of the small sample size, differences in images of persons who had travelled to Finland versus persons who had not travelled to Finland could not be ascertained with accuracy. It is, however, notable, that persons who had travelled to Finland before had the image of 'cold' less often than persons who had not travelled to Finland before. It may be assumed that the actual experience of the Finnish climate has corrected this image. This assumption is supported by the statements of German interviewees who confirmed that Germans have a distorted perception of the Finnish climate where the fear of bad weather and necessary contingency plans demands more unwanted effort on part of the tourist in preparation of the holiday. The negative prior view of the climate affects travelling considerations immensely and should be corrected in order to generate a more accurate image of Finland.

Also, the images of 'forest' and 'quietness' appeared in the answers to the questionnaire from persons who had travelled to Finland before more often than in answers from persons who had not travelled to Finland before. This circumstance may be explained with the amplitude of these elements in Finland, which is only visualised and made conscious when travelling in the country. Whereas the 'vastness' and 'quietness' found in Finland appeal to German tourists, as they can concentrate on themselves and find a connection with nature, which is not possible in densely populated, Germans often are also looking for some adventure or other stimulation. Many German tourists also have the need to return to civilisation from time to time, and to visit nearby towns or sights.

Respondents had split opinions about the occurrence of mosquitos in Finland. While Germans associate Finland with swarms of mosquitos when casually having a conversation about a stay in Finland, only 6% of respondents to the questionnaire mentioned them in their answer. German tourists fear to encounter swarms of mosquitos spoiling their holiday, but few of them admit to it openly in a more formal situation. Interviewees, who had travelled to Finland, confirmed that the occurrence of mosquitos is the same in comparable surroundings in both countries. As most tourists travelling to Finland, however, spend time near lakes and in forests during the warmest summer months, there is a natural higher risk of encountering mosquitos during their holidays.

Pointing out this fact in combination with providing alternative travel times would help tourists in their preparations.

A list of all images reported by at least 8% or 4 respondents is provided in Table 7.

Table 7. Most important images of German tourists

Image	% of respondents
Lakes/ water	43
Nature	39
Sauna	28
Cold	17
Forests	13
Vastness	12
Quietness	10
Solitude	8
Snow	8

The images listed above all relate to elements connected with the natural and quiet environment, all of which are of very limited availability in Germany. The image of 'sauna' represents the original sauna to the mind of the Germans, as the sauna in Germany is usually referred to as the 'Finnish sauna'. The concept of 'sauna', however, differs as saunas in Germany are rarely available at home, but restricted to leisure and wellness facilities. The process of having a sauna in these facilities often implies rigid procedures, such as the pouring of water over heated stones in strict time intervals by so-called sauna masters. The images thus also indicate a degree of personal freedom sought by German tourists.

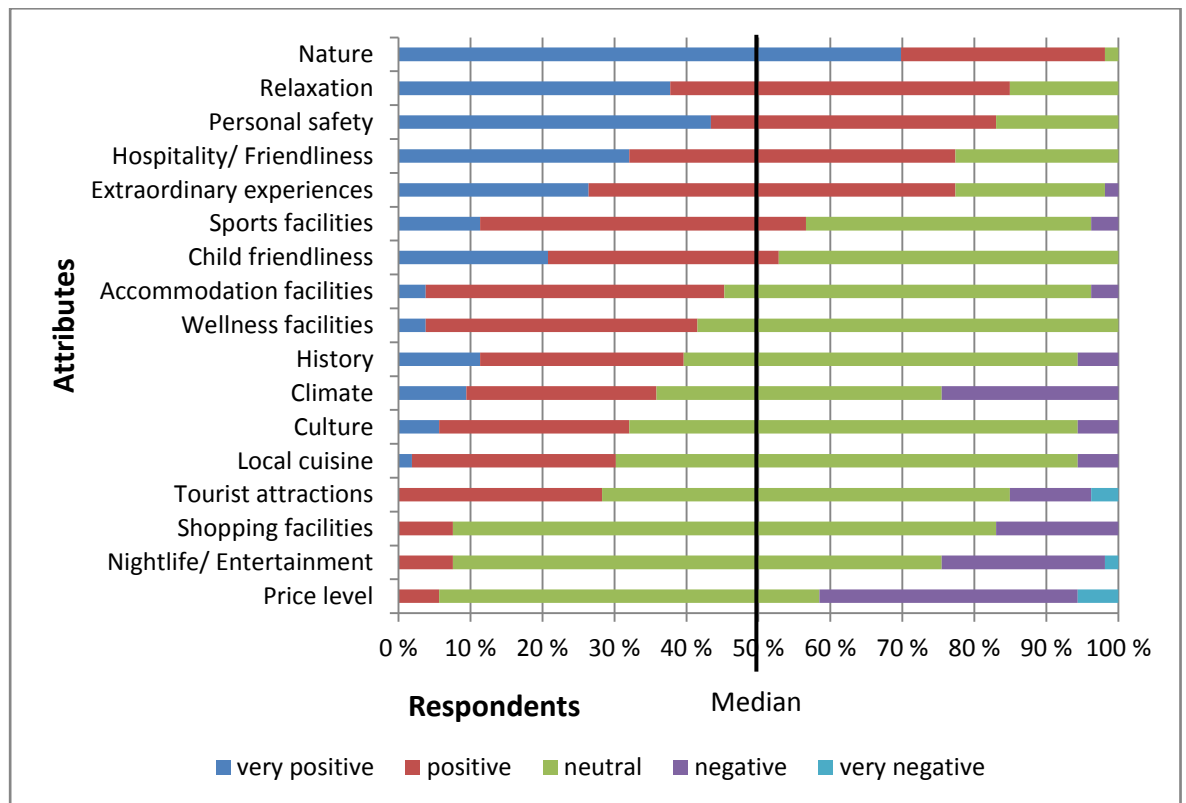The ratings of Finland in relation to specific tourism destination attributes are illustrated in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Evaluation of specific tourism destination attributes

From the results of the online questionnaire, it became evident that in the mind of the Germans, Finland offers a positive image of 'nature', 'relaxation possibilities', 'personal safety', 'extraordinary experiences', 'hospitality', 'sports facilities' and 'child friendliness'. The respondents of the interviews agree that when thinking of Finland as a holiday destination, aspects regarding nature, cottages and lakes come to mind, but foreigners do not think of the high standards of living and infrastructure which includes a very developed network of bicycle roads and other sports facilities which offer many free exercising possibilities. Whereas the Northern location of Finland evokes a picture of people spending a lot of time of the year indoors, possibilities to actively spend time outdoors are well-developed. Facilities were also found to be well-taken care of. Knowledge of the well-developed Finnish infrastructure would thus form a more complete image of Kouvola and increase the availability of activities in the mind of German tourists.

The interviewees also all noted the higher child-friendliness in Finland compared to other European countries. This is represented in the widespread availability of amenities especially targeted at pre-school aged children, such as entertainment facilities and possibilities to provide for the nourishment of babies and toddlers in public plac-

es. The knowledge of small children being well-catered for during a holiday decreases a family's worry and makes a destination more attractive.

According to the questionnaire, negative images are derived from the 'price level' in the country, 'nightlife/ entertainment' and 'shopping facilities'. Germans consider Finland to be an expensive country, more expensive than any other Scandinavian country. This, however, is not the case. In a comparison of the purchase power of the Euro, Finland is found to be less expensive than Sweden, Denmark and Norway (Ziesemer and Lohmann, 2014, 10). Accordingly, and confirmed during the interviews, the price level in Finland is considered to be somewhat lower than expected before travelling to the country. Whereas the accommodation is found to be relatively expensive compared to other European countries, food in supermarkets and restaurants is considered to be of the same level. Furthermore, the questionnaire reveals that German tourists also have a negative image of the 'tourist attractions', 'local cuisine', 'culture', 'historic offerings', 'climate' and 'wellness facilities'. The attribute of 'nature' represents the mode with 70% of the scale variable 'very positive'. The figure also depicts the median which is located in the 'very positive' scale variable for 'nature', and located in the 'positive' scale variable for 'relaxation' and 'personal safety'.

Attributes expressing a degree of positivity are of special interest to this study. These attributes, including the cumulative percentage of respondents expressing positivity, are listed in Table 5 below. Only attributes which received at least 50% positive responses are included in the list.

Table 5. Positive image of specific attributes

Image	% of respondents expressing a positive image
Nature	98
Relaxation	85
Personal safety	83
Hospitality/ friendliness	77
Extraordinary experiences	77
Sports facilities	56
Child friendliness	53

A separate analysis of the responses of persons who had and had not travelled to Finland before resulted in only minor differences. Respondents, who had travelled to Finland before, gave 'personal safety' a higher evaluation than 'relaxation'. These re-

spondents also evaluated 'sports facilities' higher than 'extraordinary experiences'. It can therefore be deducted that these elements exceeded the respondents' expectations when travelling in Finland.

The investigated websites all convey a particular image of the destination through the use of colours, layout and images. The specific city name is displayed where site users look at first on all three websites, namely the top left corner of the web pages. Visit-Stockholm also employs the crown displayed in the logo throughout the website, which helps to remind the site user of the desired destination image. All three websites convey the image of the destination on the homepage, the first page the user sees, by selecting images and information from the sub-pages which support the image to be communicated.

The investigated websites employ white, light grey and blue colours to form a Scandinavian image emphasising clearness and simplicity. They stress a high text/ background contrast and an organised layout which add to a clear and tidy impression of the entire website.

A positive picture of the destination is portrayed by the light colours used for the webpage background, bright and sunny images with smiling people and an uncluttered layout of the webpages which also facilitate apprehension by the user. VisitStockholm also provides most popular, most viewed and most commented rating lists as reference to the site users. These listings convey the interest of other site users and visitors in the destination, act as referrals and give a quick overview over the best offerings of the destination, thus creating a particular image of the destination for the site user.

4.2 Attraction

The concept of attraction in this research includes the attributes to which German tourists are attracted to, indifferent to and deterred from when choosing their holiday destination in general, and attributes of Finland and Kouvola which attract to and deter from a visit. In addition, attributes are identified which create interest and attract site users to remain on a tourism destination website.

Travellers are attracted to a tourism destination based on the individual evaluation of certain attributes related to a destination. An overview of the importance of attributes

to German tourists when choosing their travel destination according to the online questionnaire is given in Figure 15 below.
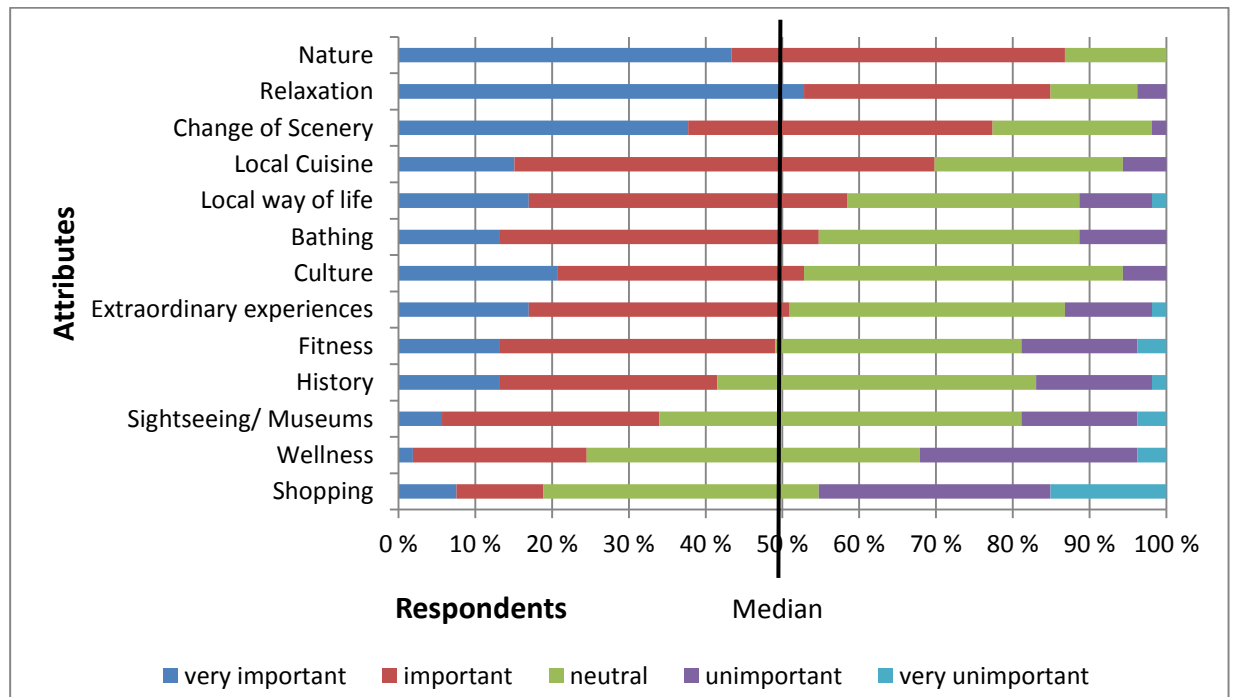

Figure 15. Importance of attributes related to a tourism destination

The responses of the online questionnaire show that Germans who are deciding on their holiday destination evaluate possible destinations on the degree of 'nature', 'relaxation', 'change of scenery', 'local cuisine' and 'local way of life'. More specific and based on the findings of the interviews, German tourists are attracted to Finland by its vastness, Northern landscapes and nature which is known to Germans from films and publications. The local architecture in Kouvola was also found to be of interest, as it proves of the history with Russia and Sweden and carries their influences in everyday Finnish life. Travelling to Finland enables many Germans to learn more also about Russia. German interviewees found most enjoyable the contrast between Finland and Germany, i.e. the calmness and tranquillity in Finland, the absence of masses of people and cars. Also, the calmness of Finnish people themselves was considered to be pleasant. All interviewees also agreed that learning more about the local way of life, past and present, attracts to spend a holiday in Finland, especially as Finland is an unknown country in general. Of special interest are buildings typical of the area, and nearby towns which give a better picture of how Finnish people live in the area. A current trend in Germany is a movement towards organic and 'slow' food which also creates an interest in local Finnish foods such as salmon, reindeer, mushrooms and different berries.

Based on the findings of the online questionnaire, 'bathing', 'culture' and 'extraordinary experiences' are also somewhat important to German tourists. The interviewees found that Finland is an attractive destination particularly for outdoor people who like water sports like canoeing, kayaking, rowing and fishing, or other outdoor activities like hiking, climbing or cycling. Because of the freedom to roam, one can spend a night in a tent almost anywhere, people are welcoming and it is safe. One interviewee pointed out that fishing in Finland does not involve as much bureaucracy as it does in Germany and therefore presents a good opportunity for tourists. The interviewees agreed that simply spending time at a cottage and being able to swim in a lake is a great experience. Lake shores are rare in Germany and usually built-up, with specially destined overcrowded bathing places. While Germans are attracted to spending time in the nature and in cottages, they still want some basic amenities like running water, an indoor toilet and a shower. Nevertheless, cottages of this standard are of limited availability in Kouvola.

German interviewees also felt welcomed by the Finnish people at public events such as the open-air dances and enjoyed the main tourist attractions in the region. They also pointed out the cleanness and tidiness in Finland which promotes a calm and peaceful feeling, where one can relax and enjoy the serenity.

Unimportant offerings in the minds of the respondents to the online questionnaire were 'shopping and wellness facilities', 'history', 'sightseeing/ museums' and 'fitness'. 'Fitness' in this context comprises sport activities which involve more personal effort with the purpose of gaining results. The attribute of facilities for children is disregarded as these kinds of facilities are naturally important to tourists travelling with children.

The illustration also depicts the median, which is located in the 'very important' scale variable of the attribute of 'relaxation', and in the 'important' scale variable of the attributes of 'nature' and 'change of scenery'. Both, 'nature' and 'relaxation' also represent the mode.

Of special interest to this study are the findings for the variables 'very important' and 'important'. Table 6 lists the attributes of motivation including the cumulative percentage of answers expressing a degree of importance to German tourists according to this study.

Table 6. Attributes of motivation in order of importance

Attribute	Cumulative percentage of answers expressing a degree of importance
Nature	86.8
Relaxation	84.9
Change of Scenery	77.4
Local Cuisine	69.8
Local way of life	58.5
Bathing	54.7
Culture	52.8
Extraordinary experiences	50.9
Fitness	48.1
History	41.5
Sightseeing/ Museums	34.0
Wellness	24.5
Shopping	18.9

The degree of importance of the before mentioned attributes to Germans can be explained with the help of the push and pull factors of travel motivations identified in earlier studies (Crompton, J. L., 1979b; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Wilkie, 1994). Iso-Ahola (1982), for example, offers two motivational forces which are crucial in determining an individual's tourism behaviour: the wish to escape familiar environments and the wish to be rewarded psychologically by travelling in a different environment. Germany has a population of 80.5 million people on an area of 357 167.94 km2 (Census data with the position as at 10.04.2014) (Federal Statistical Office and the Statistical Offices of the Länder, 2015). Because of the population density and its consequences, such as busy lifestyles and environments, less nature to be experienced, the lack of lakes and a distant shore line, German tourists display an interest especially in attributes which are contrary to the before mentioned ones. Shopping facilities, wellness, sightseeing and museums are less important as there is a wide choice of these facilities available in Germany.

Countries offering similar attributes than the ones of Finland are the other Scandinavian countries Norway, Sweden and Denmark. As discovered in the theoretical part of this research, these countries are the closest competitors to Finland as a tourism destination. The results of the question investigating the respondents' prior visits to and interest in Scandinavian countries are depicted in Figure 16.
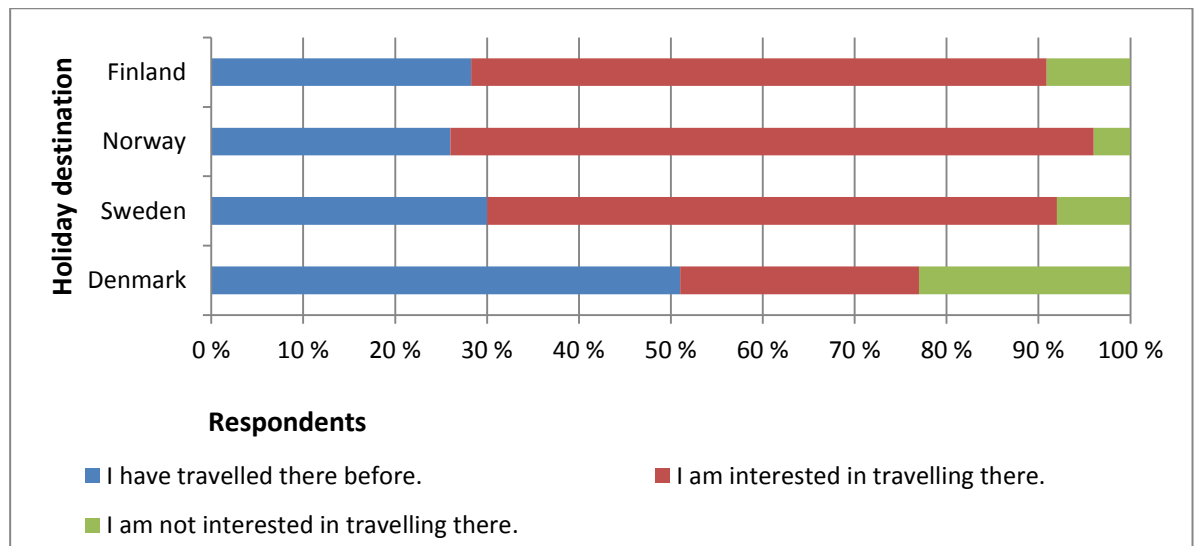
Figure 16. Prior visits to and interest in Scandinavian countries

The relatively large number of respondents having travelled to Finland before can be explained by the fact that questionnaire respondents were asked to forward the link to the online questionnaire to acquaintances for participation in the survey. Because of the nature of the questions, respondents may have chosen to send the link to persons they know had travelled to Finland before. Nonetheless, the results show that there is a general interest in travelling to Finland.

The results of the online questionnaire confirm that from all the Scandinavian countries, Denmark is the most visited one. 51% of all respondents had already spent holidays in the country. Nevertheless, Denmark also represents the mode for the Scandinavian country which is not interesting as a holiday destination. 23% of the respondents feel this way. Norway, Sweden and Finland received similar results for each variable, with 28% of the respondents having visited Finland already, 62% of the respondents being interested in visiting Finland and 9% not being interested in visiting Finland at all.

While the findings of the online questionnaire cannot be generalised to the whole German population, they still show the divided opinion about Denmark as a holiday destination. As is evident from the interviews, Denmark is marketing itself aggressively, and because of its close proximity, many German tourists choose to spend a holiday in the country. On the other hand, a better knowledge of the offerings of the immediate neighbour country also keeps German tourists from visiting it. The country may not offer too much of a change to everyday life as proposed by Iso-Ahola's push and pull factors of travel motivations (1982). According to the interviewees, and un-

like Denmark and Sweden, Finland is not well-known to Germans because of the lack of marketing efforts and therefore lack of personality. Furthermore, active internet users can only find little information about Finland's offerings in the German language. Both geographical and psychological distance, are major reasons for German tourists not to choose Finland as a holiday country. For Finland and Kouvola to be more attractive, they need to offer additional value to German tourists. Kouvola can gain competitive advantage over other destinations in Finland by communicating the variety of activities in the region and providing information in the German language.

On the websites, the awareness creation of the destination and emotional interest in it is facilitated by displaying a large number of images illustrating the contents of the entire site. The websites appeal to a state of mind or benefits the site user aspires to achieve by visiting the destination, such as happiness, relaxation and exploration. Göteborg homepage displays the most interesting places first appealing to the site user to experience the destination. Unusual features of the destination are used to wake the interest of the site user. Emotional interest is also achieved by the use of vibrant colours. Additionally, all three websites make use of top ten listings by the website's editor or by visitors to the destination and the VisitStockholm website gives the destination visitors the possibility to add comments to the different places of interest for other site users to be of use.

Apart from employing numerous images in general on the homepage, all three websites structure their homepage by displaying an almost full screen size and sometimes changing image at the top of the page which catches the attention of the site user immediately. An appealing appearance is also created by using innovative elements such as social media feeds and interactive maps providing additional information. All three websites use images rather than text to give an overview over the different categories of offerings on the sub-pages. Only when accessing an offering, a longer description is displayed including contact information and previous visitors' comments. These comments also add credibility to the offering and enable a personal connection.

4.3 Conversion

The aspect of conversion includes issues which encourage or hinder German tourists from carrying out transactions and booking a holiday in Kouvola, as well as functional issues on websites which allow for conversion by the site user.

It was apparent from the conducted interviews that German tourists are discouraged from booking a holiday in Finland by the relatively high transportation costs to and in their holiday destination. Also, tourists contemplating to travel by own car, are held up by the long distance and resulting length of travel time. Germans usually spend only two weeks of their holiday in the summer months June to August, so they aim at maximising their stay at the destination. There are great differences in prices for airline tickets to Finland depending on the used airline, departure airport in Germany and time of ticket purchase. Tourists who are not monitoring the fluctuations in prices may be deterred from purchasing tickets by the high prices at a specific point in time. Sharing knowledge on the lowest fares and their availability could help tourists to lower the cost of the holiday, making it more attractive to them.

All interviewees also mentioned that renting a camper van for holidays in Europe is popular among German tourists. For this type of holiday, tourists tend to calculate a longer travel time as they plan to visit several destinations, but experience a difficulty in finding companies renting camper vans in Finland. The language problem adds to this difficulty. Even when travelling by own camper van, according to one interviewee, it is difficult to find information on sites to spend the night and freshwater and sewage facilities. The possibilities to undertake roundtrips are therefore limited and not worth the risk travelling in Finland. Additionally, Germans are aware of the large distances between destinations in Finland and think that because of the lower speed limit, travelling the same distance takes more time in Finland than in Germany. They do not consider that there is less traffic in general and traffic jams are virtually non-existent. More information for motorists travelling within Finland and services offered to persons travelling by camper van in Kouvola would increase the attractiveness of the region and facilitate conversion.

Especially families are discouraged from travelling to Finland because of the lack of information and therefore difficulty of planning holidays with children. From the experience of one respondent which is also supported by earlier findings in the literature (Horelli et al., 2011) and the online questionnaire of this study, Germans in general are interested in travelling to Finland, but because it is difficult to find more information on accommodation, sights and prices in general, German tourists eventually do not opt for Finland as their holiday destination and do not convert. One factor contributing to this circumstance is the fact that English is not spoken as widely amongst

Germans as it is amongst Finnish people, and German tourists fear the difficult Finnish language and not being able to communicate in Finland.

On the investigated websites, conversion is facilitated by direct booking tools. For offerings which cannot be booked directly on the website, contact information and a link to the supplier is provided. Considering the aim of providing satisfaction to a possible consumer while using the website, a tool, which enables the booking of all offerings, should be provided with access from every webpage. Site users considering the purchase of services are more likely to do so when tools facilitating the conversion are readily available.

4.4 Creation of additional value

This aspect includes elements which constitute additional value in the mind of German tourists and how additional value can be created by the website promoting Kouvola as a tourism destination.

It became clear from the interviews, that the provision of more information on Kouvola as a tourism destination in the German language constitutes additional value to German tourists. Especially difficult to obtain before and during the stay in Kouvola are maps showing nature tracks, water routes and bicycle road networks. Furthermore, more practical information for tourists concerning, for example, the Finnish culture, the everyman's right or how to acquire fishing permits would be useful. Information on service providers including contact addresses, prices and information of the different languages the service is available in are needed as well. In addition, information on medical services and pharmacies and the languages spoken there are of importance to tourists.

For families, information on activities available for children is considered to be valuable as children easily get bored. In case of poor weather, contingency plans are needed and families therefore tend to choose holiday destinations which offer a large range of activities both indoors and outdoors.

The examined websites offered special sections providing more information about the city itself. VisitCopenhagen furnishes a comprehensive amount of practical information for especially foreign visitors who are not familiar with the country, including

facts and figures, information on geography, currency and public holidays. Providing background information on the destination, including some cultural information, is useful particularly for foreign visitors who do not have prior experience of the destination. Foreign visitors do not need to consult other sources for information which enhances the user's experience with the website and does not create a distraction from the website before conversion.

All three websites also recognise different customer needs by providing information for different target groups such as gays and lesbians, families and students or by grouping information by different themes such as Easter break, organic restaurants or eco-shopping. Catering for different customer target groups facilitates personalised promotion and a stronger connection of the site user to the destination. It also enables site users to access appropriate information faster.

Value can also be created by the website while on location at the destination. All three websites recognised the value of adding google maps to the destinations presented. Göteborg also provides printable versions of the descriptions of each destination or activity and VisitCopenhagen has sections suggesting activities for rainy days or short visits. The provision of a smartphone application is useful for tourists who wish to access the site's information while travelling. All these before mentioned features maintain a connection of the visitor to the website throughout the travel and provide help when unforeseen changes in the travel plans occur.

An effective and simple way of maintaining a relationship with the consumer after the visit of the destination, are by means of social media platforms employed by all three destination websites. The platforms also encourage recollection and enable recommendations of the destination to other potential consumers. Social media is especially effective as it is user generated and does not require much effort by the destination and activity providers. Consumers can be invited to employ social media in competitions.

4.5 Functionality

In this section, the aspect of functionality is restrained to the functionality of the website.

By examining the three websites several elements were identified which contribute to good functionality of the website. In general, the list of contents needs to be well visible with clear and unambiguous categories and looking the same on every page. The list of contents, which is central to finding and accessing information, is placed in relatively large font across the top of every webpage and is so very well visible. The destination websites divide information given on the website into four to six categories. Different categories can be marked by the use of different colours, which helps the user to navigate within the website.

User-friendliness is achieved on all three websites especially by design, through a well-structured and tidy layout which is evident for all three examined websites. Also, the before mentioned elements like different colours for the list of contents, groups of keywords for quicker access and use of images facilitate the use of the websites. Proficient navigability on all three websites is obtained by enabling the user to access each category from every page, and the homepage by clicking on the city logo which is continuously visible. Göteborg also enables access to booking facilities and the social media platforms from each page. In general, elements which combine several functions are effective as they reduce the clutter on the website. These elements are, for example, the use of colours which convey a certain image, feeling and organise information, and social media platforms which raise awareness of the destination, maintain a relationship with the visitor, encourage recollection and recommendation.

The three websites moreover allow the user to be interactive without forcing them to do so. This is achieved by enabling visitors to comment on and rate the destinations and activities, providing video tours and social media postings, initiating competitions and including a chat window through which questions can be sent and answered received in real time. The websites are used creatively by adhering to the current trend of employing social media for connecting to people, creating credibility by users giving advice to other users, and creating awareness and advertisement in general.

The websites follow modern trends in website design by employing a grid layout and card design which facilitates replacement of individual modules, uses intuitive design and favours scrolling over clicking, which reduces the load time and increases user friendliness on mobile devices. The fonts used are clear, the images are of high quality, and site users are invited to interact with the website.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of key findings

The following conclusions can be drawn from the research conducted as part of this thesis.

The research question of this work was *"How to create an effective website for the promotion of the city of Kouvola as a tourism destination to German tourists?"*. The research determines that when creating a tourism destination website, both content and functionality of the website have to be considered while keeping the site user in mind. In order to do so, the site user, i.e. the target tourist group needs to be identified and its needs and wants need to be known. It is vital for a website to evoke immediate interest on the homepage and to clearly address the tourist's needs and wants. The existing image of the destination also needs to be addressed and negative images corrected as only positive expectations result in conversion and positive word-of-mouth promotion. Destination branding helps to create a certain expectation of a destination while differentiating it from other destinations. However, actual experience with the destination needs to match or exceed previous expectations of the destination in order for the tourist to feel satisfied. Tourists evaluate a destination on its brand personality characteristics and how well they match the tourist's self-image. The website needs to facilitate the whole consumption process. It needs to be both functional and enjoyable in order for the tourist to engage with it.

The first sub-question of this research was *"What is the current image of Finland held by German tourists?"*. Most Germans travel to Finland because of work related reasons. Due to the lack of information about Finland and Kouvola, Germans do not regard the country to be a proper holiday destination. This is partly due to the lack of marketing efforts including the availability of information on offerings, but also due to the fact that German tourists who have not visited the country hold several negative images which make visiting the destination unattractive in their mind. Negative images of Finland are derived from the relatively high price level, the cold climate, the absence of good entertainment and shopping facilities, the lack of tourist attractions and uninteresting historic offerings. People who have already visited Kouvola, however, feel that these negative images are unjustified. Positive images, on the other hand are generated by the nature, relaxation possibilities, personal safety and freedom, possibil-

ity for extraordinary experiences and activities, hospitality and child friendliness, all aspects which offer a change to everyday life in Germany.

The second sub-question of the research was *"What are the needs and wants of German tourists in relation to a holiday destination?"*. Germans are generally interested in travelling to Finland, but the lack of information available, especially in the German language, deters tourists from visiting the country. When considering a holiday destination, German tourists are looking for nature and relaxation possibilities, a change of scenery from their everyday environment and the possibility to experience the local cuisine and way of life. Germans also favour the possibility of bathing, cultural offerings and the experience of extraordinary activities. Uninteresting for German tourists are shopping and wellness facilities as these are available in Germany and do not offer much change to everyday life. Museums and history are considered to be uninteresting unless they are related to the local way of life of the destination and enable learning more about the local people.

The third sub-question of the research was *"How should the city of Kouvola be branded to German tourists?"*. Kouvola needs to differentiate itself by employing a limited number of brand elements which are unique to the city. These elements need to evoke strong positive feelings and meaning with the tourists. As German tourists know little about Finland and Finnish cities in general, little competition is perceived between the different cities. The main competition is perceived between Finland and other Scandinavian countries. The brand proposition as extracted from the evaluation of Kouvola by German tourists using the brand benefit pyramid (UNWTO, 2007, 49; Vogt, 2003, 2) therefore not only incorporates elements related to Kouvola but also to Finland in general. The possibility to relax in the nature, experience freedom and serenity in safe and calm surroundings while having the choice of a vast variety of activities, and being able to widen one's horizon by learning something new about a previously unknown country and way of life are worthwhile tourism attributes to German tourists. Relaxation and experiences therefore are the unique selling propositions of Kouvola.

The fourth sub-question of the research was *"What are the attributes of an effective tourism destination website?"*. An effective website has to attract and keep the attention of the site user immediately after the site user has opened the website. It needs to have a clear and uncluttered appearance, be informative, intuitive, user friendly, en-

gaging and interactive. The website needs to facilitate the whole consumption process. An image of and emotional interest in the destination is evoked by the use of colours, font, overall layout and images used on the website as well as the content used. The creation of a particular image and attraction can also be facilitated by user generated content on the website. The tourism destination needs to supply adequate information on the offerings by recognising tourist needs, and enable booking directly on the website. Additionally, services need to be provided which can be accessed during the visit at the destination. In order to facilitate the maintenance of a relationship with the tourist, post-visit services also need to be provided by the website.

5.2 Managerial implications

As Rodríguez del Bosque et al. (2009, 145) determine, promotion is critical for the destination's success and so marketers need to focus on communicating a favourable image in the target markets and to evoke positive expectations in the consumers. Effective communication entails both an appealing content as well as an engaging way of presenting the content. In relation to Kouvola as a tourism destination to be promoted to German tourists, marketers need to understand the needs and wants of Germans as their target customers and then tailor the promotional message to suit these needs and wants. Kouvola with its products and services already fulfils the needs of German tourists, but because there is little knowledge of the city, Germans do not choose Kouvola as their holiday destination. In fact, the overall lack of promotional efforts of Finnish tourism destinations in general could serve as an advantage for Kouvola as the city has less competitors in the eyes of the tourist. It is therefore critical for the city to successfully promote itself as a holiday destination which can satisfy the needs and wants of German tourists.

Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations as to the content and the functionality of the website as a promotional tool can be made. The recommendations are presented according to the topics identified in the empirical research: image, attraction, conversion, creation of additional value and functionality.

5.2.1 Image

Most German tourists travelling to Finland do so for the first time. While the website is aimed at promoting Kouvola, information for travellers who are not familiar with

Finland in general should also be provided in order to enhance the image of the country as a tourism destination. Practical information regarding a stay in Kouvola are important to help visitors lower the barrier of choosing a Finnish holiday destination. Practical information should include information on bank holidays, electricity, currency, acceptance of credit cards, general opening hours, price levels for comparison, medical services, but also on the everyman's right and the Finnish sauna culture. Credibility of the information presented is increased by employing references and links to respected sources. Considering the fact that it is difficult to find information about Finland in the German language, the provision of a wide range of information and services related to a visit in Finland also increases site traffic from users who look for other information than on the city itself. This, in turn, has a positive effect on search engine optimisation thus increasing the promotion of Kouvola as a tourism destination. The provided background information should also include some introduction to the city of Kouvola including geographical information on the location of Kouvola in Finland, facts and figures about the city and a short historical overview of the region so that visitors can form a first impression and can get a sense of Kouvola's overall personality as a tourism destination. Furthermore, visitors are interested in knowing about the local infrastructure such as transportation to Kouvola and nearby cities in Finland and Russia, the availability of an extensive bicycle road network and access to the internet in the city. Providing this type of information enhances the image of the city.

The tourism destination website should focus on stressing features which are perceived in a positive way and improve negative perceptions by providing factual information through which German tourists can correct their previously held image. Negative images concerning the climate can be corrected by providing a current weather forecast and a comparison chart of the annual temperatures of Kouvola compared to some major German cities. In addition, the website should provide a section containing activities which can be engaged in independent of the weather. The negative image of the local cuisine should be corrected by connecting the Finnish cuisine to the 'organic' and 'slow food' trend taking place in Germany. Photographs taken in different situations, locations and seasons should be displayed in order to create an impression of the destination. These photographs should include images depicting different times of the year, personal safety, hospitality, child friendliness and facilities for children, the condition of sports facilities, and the high standard of living and in-

frastructure as these are positive elements which German tourists do not expect. Additionally, the possibility for site users to poste questions or comments about their stay in the city helps other German visitors to form an impression of Kouvola as comments from peer tourists are regarded to be more convincing than information from the marketers of a product or service.

Features which carry positive images are the features which attract German tourists and relate to the unique selling propositions of Kouvola. Lakes, nature and sauna related information should therefore appear on the homepage to re-inforce the image of a Finnish destination, together with more unusual features which are offered by service providers in Kouvola and which oppose the negative image held by some tourists regarding Finland being an uneventful destination. These unusual features also create interest in the site user wanting to explore the destination more. While this thesis proposes a tourism destination website in the German language, translated versions of the webpages should also be added in the languages of the main tourist groups visiting Kouvola presently and being attracted by the marketing efforts of the FTB. The availability of the website in different languages adds to the image of a developed and attractive tourism destination. The appeal of the website and tourism destination to tourist groups other than Germans should be dealt with by aiming the starting page of the different language pages at the specific needs of the targeted tourist group while presenting factual information on other pages in the same manner throughout the entire website.

The formation of a positive image of Kouvola is supported by the use of appropriate colours, fonts and layout on the website. Adequate colours are light grey, white and blue shades as they mirror the natural colours occurring in Finland, reflect the visual image of Finland held by German tourists and are suitable for colour blind site users. The fonts and layout used should be simple and clear-cut replicating the simplicity, cleanness and sincerity perceived by German tourists in Finland, and employ a high text/ background contrast. A light background colour together with photographs displaying bright and positive images enhance the positive image of the tourism destination.

5.2.2 Attraction

Whereas the website should contain information on all the tourism offerings available in Kouvola, products and services related to the unique selling proposition 'relaxation' and 'experiences' should be emphasised on the homepage of the site to initiate emotional interest. The promotional message should also include a mentioning of the unspoilt nature and the vastness of the forests, as well as the small number of tourists in the region which are attractive to German tourists who face a busy lifestyle and polluted environments at home. The thought of being free from restrictions and being able to concentrate on oneself on a holiday makes Kouvola an appealing destination to them.

The homepage should be structured by an almost full screen size slide containing three changing photographs which comprises images of the unique selling propositions and catch the immediate attention of site users. The large images should be followed by the offerings related to these selling propositions, i.e. the different places of interest and activities in the nature, places of interest associated with the Swedish and Russian history as well as past and present everyday life of local residents. A short introduction of these features should be made on the homepage utilising photographs rather than text for quick apprehension by the site user with links to more detailed descriptions of the features elsewhere on the website. The quality of the images is of utmost importance as the quality of the representation reflects the quality of the tourism destination in the mind of the tourist. Thus, attractive settings should be chosen for the images used, such as sunny and bright backgrounds and smiling people enjoying themselves, in order to achieve a state of mind in site users which reflect the unique selling propositions of 'relaxation' and 'experiences'. In general, the website should contain a large amount of photographs which describe the tourism destination to the customer as even simple concepts like forest or beaches evoke different associations with German tourists compared to Finnish people. Images therefore help foreign tourists to form a more accurate opinion about the destination. The homepage should also contain an 'editor's pick' section presenting some current highlights of the city and an event calendar to create more interest in the site user. Engagement with the site user should also be enhanced by adding interactive features such as a quiz or a game. Furthermore, the display of social media feeds and interactive maps attract site users to interact with and explore the website.

5.2.3 Conversion

The elements necessary for conversion by German tourists are largely equal to the issues which create additional value for the customers, such as the usage of German language and the provision of extensive information. Information on all the offerings of Kouvola should include a description of the product or service, its location and contact details, prices, times of availability and the languages it is available in. Additional ratings and comments of previous customers should be displayed to facilitate the conversion process.

The high transportation cost to Finland discourages from purchasing a holiday in Kouvola, which should be overcome by aiding German tourists to obtain information on different travel alternatives and prices. The tourism destination website should be linked to different shipping lines' and airlines' ticket services, and display the lowest current rates available directly on the destination website. In addition, information on rentable camper vans should be supplied together with locations of freshwater and sewage facilities in the city of Kouvola and the nearby area. Other information for motorists such as speed limits and the availability of gas and biofuel should be presented as well. As the lack of information in general deters German tourists from purchasing a holiday in Kouvola, all information necessary for conversion should be displayed in the German language directly on the website together with direct booking tools and contact details in case questions arise. A continuous engagement with the website increases the prospect of conversion.

As discovered in the theoretical part of this thesis, user engagement is necessary in order to convey the promotional message and create a relationship with the customer. The website should therefore also enable German tourists to conduct purchases of souvenirs related to Kouvola and Finland.

5.2.4 Creation of additional value

In addition to the elements mentioned in the previous section, additional value to the customers should be provided by supplying additional information on the Finnish culture, such as the sauna culture and the everyman's right, and possibility of ordering maps of the city, bicycle road networks, water routes and nature tracks. Moreover, support services such as help for the acquisition of fishing permits and visas to Russia

should be furnished in order to increase value and satisfaction with the tourism desti-
nation website and hinder site users from leaving the website for further investigation
of these issues. As German tourists compare Kouvola to other tourism destinations
which offer certain service standards, the city needs to offer a high level of service in
order to be competitive. As a result, an emphasis on the creation of additional value to
customers is vital for the promotion of Kouvola as a tourism destination.

Additional value should also be created by providing sections for different customer
needs dealing with themes such as Kouvola with children, Kouvola for groups and
Kouvola on a small budget to create personalised promotion of the tourism destination
and a stronger connection to the visitor. Site users are also able to access relevant in-
formation quicker. Furthermore, the different offerings and information should be
printable and well usable on mobile devices for access during the stay in Kouvola. In-
teractive maps should be provided for travellers to organise their stay. Overall, value
should be created by encouraging and maintaining a connection between the visitor
and the tourism destination website. Therefore, the possibility of contacting German
speaking customer service at the tourism destination through the website to help with
arising questions should also be provided. Social media platforms should be added to
the website to encourage interactivity before, during and after the stay in Kouvola.
This user generated content acts as further promotion enables the maintenance of a re-
lationship with the destination and helps to recollect the holiday after the stay.

5.2.5 Functionality

An intuitive design of the website is a pre-requisite for functionality and user friendli-
ness. Therefore, the website needs to be designed from a customer needs and wants
point of view instead of a product point of view. The offerings should be presented
according to their ability of satisfying a need or want instead of merely being product
provider listings. As a result, the offerings should be grouped in a small number of
categories, for example 'See & Do', 'Eat & Drink', 'Accommodation' and 'Good to
know' which, when accessed, allow for further narrowing down of the need and want
and provide access to further sub-groups. Using an intuitive design, large menus,
drop-down listings and large amount of texts should be avoided as they are difficult to
use on touchscreen and mobile devices. Instead, images should be used. Whenever
possible, scrolling should be preferred over clicking in order to reduce the load time

and decrease the number of steps used to access relevant information. Most attractive and interesting offerings should be displayed on the homepage for quick orientation and linked to sub-pages which contain a more detailed description. The layout of the webpages should be clear and uncluttered, using only a limited number of different layouts for the different pages so that the site user can quickly apprehend how to navigate within the website. The homepage, main categories, booking tool and contact information of a customer service providing further help should be accessible from every webpage. Webpages displaying alternatives of offerings should use a grid layout and card design which supports to uncluttered clean perception of the website. Using card design, offerings can easily be replaced if necessary.

5.3 Evaluation of the research

Reliability and validity are dealt with differently depending on whether the research method is qualitative or quantitative.

5.3.1 Reliability and validity in qualitative research

Reliability in qualitative research focuses on the meticulousness of the research where the data are collected in a consistent way, but without using standardised structured approaches (Quinlan, 2011, 307) which was the case in this study.

Morse et al. (2002) maintain that reliability and validity need to be achieved by verifying processes during the research so that possible threats can be identified in time and corrective measures be taken. For these processes investigator perceptiveness, methodological consistency, an analytical attitude, adequacy of sampling, and saturation are of utmost importance (Morse et al., 2002, 17). The content analyses are conducted over several days in order to prevent fatigue in the researcher and to ensure maximum engagement with the subject. The content analyses are carried out from different perspectives, first by coding each item from the coding sheet on each separate website and in each interview, and then by comparing the websites and interviews to each other for the identification of additional information. Reliability in using interviews for data collection in this research is established through sample adequacy by conducting three interviews with a total of five interviewees who have travelled to Kouvola and other locations in Finland several times. The interviewees were thus able to give an adequate account of their experience in Kouvola and Finland in general. The inter-

viewees were chosen on the basis of their ability to give an uninfluenced account of their experiences and opinions. They were known to the researcher before the interviews which enabled establishing rapport and therefore a trusting environment for the interviewees to express their true personal experiences and attitudes as described by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, 316-317). Even though the interviewees are of different age and backgrounds, the accounts of their travelling experiences are similar, leading to saturation of information and so contributing to reliability of the research. The same approach was also chosen for the selection of the websites to be examined. The websites were chosen on the grounds that they all promote Scandinavian cities which do not feature famous tourist attractions on the international level, which would be the main reason for attracting tourists. The researcher had not travelled to these cities before nor visited their tourism destination websites, which was necessary for her to assume the role of a possible site user who is looking for preliminary information and possible conversion through the website. Furthermore, the selected tourism destinations are located in countries which are competing with Finland as a holiday destination when German tourists are considering a holiday in Northern countries.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) advocate the substitution of the terms reliability and validity with the term trustworthiness, comprising aspects which are steered towards an application at the end of the research requiring thorough engagement and observation, audit trails, verifying results with participants and using adequate referential material as was the case in this empirical research. In addition to a thorough preparation for the research on part of the researcher, transcriptions and descriptive reports were issued to provide an audit trail and descriptive reports of the interviews were verified by the interviewees. The findings of the theoretical research described in chapter 2 served as referential material to the empirical research.

Messenger Davies and Mosdell (2006, 105-106) stress the importance of ensuring that the coding of the data is carried out in the same manner. Reliability in this research is achieved by providing precise coding definitions and procedures as laid down in the coding sheet, and monitoring the consistency of the data collection process by implementing the same coding sheet in all three website analyses. A separate coding sheet was used in the interviews. Findings of the research are described with detail in the coding sheet for other researchers to be able to judge the reproducibility.

Validity in the analysis of content is established in a two-step process: the development of the coding scheme and the standard for coded data (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999, 266-270). The authors describe the coding scheme as being prepared by deducting attributes and components from the literature review and clearly defining them into categories. The more developed and useful the coding scheme, the less likely coders will use an own coding scheme, and the better is the effort to achieve consistent results across coders, thus making the coding a more systematic and scientific process. Validity of the empirical research is sought by using a coding scheme which was derived from attributes and components discovered in the literature review, and which were then categorised. In this research, only one coder was conducting the coding, which helped in achieving consistent results when analysing the data and thus adds to validity of the research.

Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999, 268-270) continue that the standard for coded data is the criteria by which codings are compared. Concerning pattern content, the criteria consist of coding rules by which the degree of interpretation of the data is reduced to focus on an exact code for each content situation. With projective content, the authors argue that a standard of subjectivity is accepted as the objective of content analysis is to demonstrate public patterns with which the audience is expected to make own subjective interpretations. The resonance of the results with their own experience is of special value to the audience and adds ecological validity to the research. (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999, 268-270.) Validity in this research is achieved through establishing a coding scheme by reading the transcripts of all three interviews several times and identifying themes emerging from the data. The data collection is completed by one coder only to avoid problems with inter-coder reliability. These themes are then collapsed together while conceptualising new themes. The process is carried out in the same way for all three interviews. Moreover, Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999, 266-270) argue that ecological validity must be present, i.e. the extent of which 'all members of a social community share the same meanings', by recommending that coders should belong to the same social community as the final consumers of the findings of the content analysis. Ecological validity is present as the coder, the interviewees and the final consumers of the findings of the content analysis do all belong to the same cultural community, namely German tourists. Interpretations of the data are thus similar for all three parties. The research utilises the standard of projective content when comparing the codings as mentioned above. The standard adds to validity as the

interpretations made from the data are in resonance with the experience of German tourists, which are the target customers of the website to be created on the basis of this thesis.

5.3.2 Reliability and validity in quantitative research

In quantitative research, reliability refers to the extent to which differences in results using a certain data analysis method result from true differences in data as opposed to circumstances of the analysis (Krippendorff, 1980, 71-72). Krippendorff (1980, 72) distinguishes between three types of reliability in quantitative research: stability, reproducibility and accuracy. Stability refers to the extent of which a method of analysis produces the same results when repeated. Reproducibility measures the degree to which the same content is analysed in different places and conditions, yet producing the same results. Finally, accuracy determines the extent to which a process, i.e. the observer's judgement, complies with a standard. (Krippendorff, 1980, 72.) In this research, stability reliability can be established with constraints. The online questionnaire investigated current motivations of German people for travelling and their image of Finland. These motivations and images may change over time and therefore lead to different research results if repeated at a later point in time. Stability reliability can thus only be established for a limited period of time. This, however, is sufficient for the purpose of this study as the topic is largely influenced by current trends which need to be re-examined within short time intervals. Also, while care was taken in considering the order of the questions in the questionnaire, and respondents were not able to see subsequent questions which could have had an influence on the answer of a previous question, respondents now have this information and may answer the questionnaire differently. Considering the coherent results of the study and the size of the sample, reproducibility reliability can be established for this research. This is supported also by a correspondence of the results of this study to the experience of the researcher, as well as results of earlier similar studies on travel motivations of German travellers and their image of Finland as detected by Horelli et al. in their work "Mielikuvia Suomen matkailumarkkinoista Saksassa (The image of the Finnish travel markets in Germany)". Accuracy reliability is also established as the questions of the questionnaire regarding travel motivations and the image of Finland are based on the attributes which according to Echtner and Ritchie (2003) are used by researchers to measure destination image in various studies.

According to Quinlan (2011, 336), reliability in quantitative research can be improved by using precise items, measuring at the most specific level, measuring only one concept by each item, measuring the same concept by several items, pilot testing the data collection method and expanding on the data collection methods used by other researchers. These measures were also taken in this study. Reliability is improved by posing precise and unambiguous questions which measure only one concept with each question. The concept of the image of Finland held by German travellers is measured by two separate questions, one allowing for the respondent to provide a spontaneous answer and the other one asking for the image held of Finland regarding specific attributes. The questionnaire is also pilot tested to remove ambiguity in the questions. The questionnaire in this study is an extension of a research carried out by Horelli et al. (2011) exploring the image of Finland held by German travellers, with the purpose of verifying whether this image of Finland has remained the same, and whether the image portrayed in the research can be generalised to a larger population.

In addition to reliability, validity also needs to be established. Validity in regards to data collection methods in quantitative research refers to the extent of which chosen data collection methods achieve what they are proposed to achieve (Quinlan, 2011, 335). Validity can be established by different means. Content validity refers to the extent of which a phenomenon under investigation is represented in the data collection instrument used (ibid). Content validity is achieved in this research work by employing the attributes used for measuring destination image as identified in the literature review in gathering date through the online questionnaire.

Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, 81) describe face validity and convergent validity to be means of assessing construct validity. Face validity measures whether the data collection instrument is a reasonable means by which the phenomenon under investigation is measured. Convergent validity refers to the extent of which different measures for measuring the same construct produce comparable results. (ibid.) Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, 83) continue to describe statistical conclusion validity, which refers to an appropriate sample size employed and sensitivity of the study. Also internal and external validity can be assessed. Internal validity is the extent to which reasonable inferences as to the existence of a causal relationship between two variables in the study can be made. Finally, external validity refers to the extent to which the findings of the study can be generalised to a larger population. (ibid.) The data collection instrument,

the online questionnaire, is a reasonable means for gathering the data as it is a good tool for extracting information from a large number of people scattered in location. Hence, face validity can be established. Although the findings of the online questionnaire are not representative of the whole population of German tourists because of the sample size, male/ female ratio and age of the respondents of the online questionnaire, the findings of this research largely support the findings of other researches presented in the literature review of this thesis (see Horelli et al., 2011). Thus, while statistical conclusion validity cannot be established, convergent validity can be established. Internal validity as such cannot be established as the study's purpose is not to investigate the relationship between different variables. Taking into account Iso-Ahola's push and pull factors of travel motivations (1982) as described in chapter 4.2, internal validity can be established as Iso-Ahola's push and pull factors constitute the cause, and the attributes stated by German tourists to be motivational factors when choosing a tourism destination is the effect. Also external validity cannot be established with accuracy as the culture of the respondents, the environment in which they live and lifestyle they lead have a great influence on the responses chosen in the questionnaire.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

Even though a relatively large number of respondents answered the online questionnaire considering the short time frame, a wider study should be conducted in order to receive more responses and to increase the reliability of the findings. The study could also be widened to include a comparison of tourists from other German speaking countries and tourists from Germany.

The subject of this thesis was to develop a website which actively promotes Kouvola as a tourism destination. As Cai (2002) finds in his research, it can be difficult for rural communities to find sufficient drawing power especially with the lack of a distinctive image as is the case with Kouvola. Nevertheless, when combining neighbouring communities in promotional efforts, not only tourism offerings can be increased, but marketing activities can be achieved with greater effectiveness and efficiency (ibid). A subject for further research would therefore be to examine the possibility of co-operation between neighbouring cities and, for example, promoting the area of Kymenlaakso in a combined effort.

While promotional efforts should communicate a positive image of the tourism destination and evoke positive expectations, they should not exceed the offerings of the tourism destination itself as tourists would feel unsatisfied after the visit of the destination. Keeping this issue in mind and while examining the three existing websites of Stockholm, Copenhagen and Goteborg, it became obvious that there are some features which are not supported by the city of Kouvola and which hinder the success of Kouvola becoming a true tourism destination. Some of the more important elements are the lack of cottage accommodation and the absence of a proper destination marketing organisation (DMO). As with all products, marketing efforts should concentrate on emphasising the features which answer to the customer needs and wants whereby the marketing message can be adjusted to different target groups. A DMO thus needs to identify the relevant features and promote them to a certain target group. The importance of a DMO is amplified when considering that the tourism destination website, which offers increased service to its customers, needs to be maintained. These tasks include the compilation of travel packages to be promoted through the website, the immediate provision of information products and services in the customer's language by e-mail, telephone or live chat and the organisation of updating service provider information to be accessible by site users. Also, a content management system (CMS), which allows for updating relevant information by the service providers themselves directly to the website could be useful for the DMO. Therefore, further research on the implementation of a DMO and a (CMS) for Kouvola should be conducted.

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APPENDIX 1

Online Questionnaire

1. Are you: male   [ ]

                         female   [ ]

2. What is your age: _____

3. What are your motivations when deciding on a holiday destination?

	very importan	important	neutral	unimportant	very unimportant
relaxation	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
bathing	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
change of scenery	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
local way of life	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
fitness	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
nature	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
culture	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
history	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
sightseeing/ museums	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
wellness	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
local cuisine	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
shopping	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
extraordinary experiences	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
facilities for children	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

4. How applicable are the following statements? Please tick the appropriate box.

	I have travelled there before.	I am interested in travelling there.	I have no interest in travelling there.
Denmark	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Sweden	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Norway	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Finland	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

5. What are the first things that come to your mind when thinking of Finland?

_____

6. What is your image of Finland concerning the following aspects?

	very positive	positive	neutral	negative	very negative
nature	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
relaxation	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
wellness facilities	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
sports facilities	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
extraordinary experiences	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
tourist attractions	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
nightlife/ entertainment	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
shopping facilities	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
accommodation facilities	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
local cuisine	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
culture	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
history	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
hospitality/ friendliness	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
personal safety	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
child friendliness	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
climate	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
price level	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX 2

Interview questions

1. What attracts German tourists to Finland? What interests you in Finland?

2. From your experience, which factors hinder German tourists to visit Finland?

3. What did you like during your visit in Finland?

4. What information did you need, which weren't available to you before your visit?

5. What surprised you during your visit in Finland?