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**CHINESE TOURISM TO SCANDINAVIA –  
UNDERSTANDING TOURISM DISTRIBUTION**

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Ph.D

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University  
2018



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**Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia –  
Understanding Tourism Distribution**

By Matias Thuen Joergensen

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

March 2017



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Matias Thuen Joergensen



## ABSTRACT

This thesis adopts a novel qualitative approach that provides a deeper understanding of the tourism distribution phenomenon and of China outbound tourism to Scandinavia. Gaps in existing knowledge have been revealed through an extensive review of the literature on tourism distribution and on China outbound tourism. The reviews show that there has been little research, which provides deep understandings of the distribution process for China outbound tourists. Most studies of China outbound tourism focused on tourists in isolation and deployed quantitative methods to understand discrete elements such as motivations or image. These studies often ignored actors other than the tourists themselves and did not consider other influencing relationships and factors. This thesis questions such approaches and proposes that tourism distribution is also affected by enactments, relations and factors, which have little to do with what the individual tourist wants or thinks (s)he wants.

Most of the research on tourism distribution has approached the subject through the concept of distribution channels. This perspective has important implications and limitations. This thesis suggests that the ‘channel approach’ represents one enactment of tourism distribution, which is inadequate when considered in isolation, if the goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. It is argued here that such approaches interpret tourism distribution as a static and linear process, often ignoring important contextual aspects and lacking a clear object of analysis.

This thesis presents an alternative enactment of tourism distribution as a supplement to current understandings, and develops an applicable approach and framework for analysis. The approach and framework is developed through a (critical)



pragmatic integration of elements that have been drawn from Activity Theory and Actor-Network Theory. The tourism distribution phenomenon is interpreted as a dynamic relational process of mediation, which occurs in networks of activity systems, rather than as a linear process of economic exchange.

The proposed approach and framework are used to analyse 52 in-depth interviews with respondents who included Chinese tourists, Chinese intermediaries and Scandinavian suppliers. This analysis results in empirical insights on Chinese tourism to Scandinavia as a phenomenon. More specifically, it provides deep insights into the enactments, relations, actors, practices and factors that shape the distribution network in Chinese tourism to Scandinavia. Based on these findings, conceptual tools are developed that will provide practitioners and researchers with the capacity to characterise specific types of Chinese tourists and understand the various factors that affect them.

The thesis contributes to scholarship through its development and application of a new approach and framework to analyse the phenomenon of tourism distribution. It also contributes concrete empirical insights and tools that may be applicable to practitioners dealing with Chinese tourism to Scandinavia specifically, and to researchers interested in tourism distribution or China outbound tourism in general.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Scope and Research Question.....	3
1.3 Research Objectives and Contributions .....	8
1.4 Structure of the Thesis.....	10
CHAPTER 2: CHINA OUTBOUND TOURISM.....	13
2.1 The History and Politics of China Outbound Tourism .....	13
2.1.1. Chinese Tourism Policy.....	14
2.1.2. The Significance of Policy in China Outbound Tourism .....	20
2.2 China Outbound Tourism - Market Growth .....	21
2.2.1. China Outbound Tourism to Europe and Scandinavia .....	22
2.3 Existing Literature on China Outbound Tourism .....	24
2.3.2. A Critical Assessment of China Outbound Tourism Research.....	27
CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING TOURISM DISTRIBUTION.....	45
3.1 Tourism Distribution .....	45
3.1.1. Definitions - Supplier, Tourist and Intermediary .....	49
3.1.2. Tourism Intermediaries.....	50
3.2 Tourism Distribution from Channels to Networks .....	55
3.3 Choice of Theory .....	61
3.4 Activity Theory.....	65
3.4.1. The Roots.....	67
3.4.2. Structure of Human Activity.....	71
3.5 Conceptual Framework for Tourism Distribution Analysis .....	74
3.6 Actor-Network Theory .....	80
3.6.1. Introduction to Actor-Network Theory .....	82
3.6.2. ‘After ANT’ .....	85
3.7 Actor-Network Theory and Activity Theory.....	92
3.7.1. Similarities and Differences.....	93
3.8 Applying Actor-Network Theory to the Framework .....	98
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	101

4.1 Critical Pragmatism.....	101
4.1.1. Two Types of Critical Pragmatism .....	103
4.1.2. The Philosophy of Critical Pragmatism.....	104
4.1.3. Activity Theory, Actor-Network Theory and Critical Pragmatism .....	106
4.3 Why a Qualitative Approach?.....	109
4.4 Scandinavia as a Destination .....	117
4.5 Data Collection .....	118
4.5.1. Semi-structured Interviews .....	119
4.5.2. Approach to Data Collection.....	123
4.5.3. Validity and Reliability.....	124
4.6 Data Sources .....	125
4.6.1. Tourists .....	126
4.6.2. Intermediaries.....	129
4.6.3. Suppliers .....	133
4.7 Summary of Limitations.....	135
4.8 The Analysis Process .....	135
CHAPTER 5: MULTIPLICITY .....	138
5.1 Professional Enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ .....	138
5.2 Personal Enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ .....	141
5.3 Enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ .....	143
CHAPTER 6: NETWORKS AND RELATIONS.....	145
6.1 Chinese Market Cluster .....	147
6.1.1. Stable Gateways .....	149
6.2 China Travel Industry Cluster.....	150
6.2.1. Powerful Traditional Operators.....	152
6.2.2. Increasingly Powerful OTAs .....	155
6.2.3. Tour Guides/Leaders – Untapped Potential.....	156
6.2.4. Stable Gateways .....	158
6.3 Intra-destination Cluster .....	160
6.3.1. Local Destination Cluster .....	160
6.3.2. National Destination Cluster.....	163
6.3.3. Supra-national (Scandinavian) Destination Cluster .....	168
6.4 Stable Gateways in ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’ .....	174
6.4.1. B2B - Direct Interaction .....	175
6.4.2. B2B - DMCs and DMOs .....	179
6.4.3. B2B and B2C - Marketing .....	185
6.4.4. Chinavia.....	188

6.5 Temporary Gateways in ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’ .....	191
6.5.1. B2B - Workshops .....	191
6.5.2. B2B - Other Events .....	194
6.5.3. B2C - Ad-hoc Marketing Activities .....	195
6.6 Tabulated Summary of Findings – Networks and Relations.....	197
CHAPTER 7: FACTORS .....	201
7.1 Travel Type.....	201
7.1.1. Demographics .....	201
7.1.2. Travel Experience and Market Maturity.....	205
7.1.3. Information (Sources).....	211
7.1.4. Tourist Expectation .....	216
7.1.5. Market Trends .....	217
7.2 Available Products .....	219
7.2.1. Volume .....	219
7.2.2. Demand.....	221
7.2.3. Accessibility.....	225
7.2.4. Intermediaries’ Destination Knowledge .....	228
7.3 Destination Characteristics .....	229
7.3.1. (In)tangible Attractions.....	229
7.3.2. Supply, Capacity and Quality of Accommodation.....	243
7.3.3. Seasonality .....	249
7.3.4. China Readiness .....	251
7.4 Externals .....	255
7.4.1. Scandinavian Price-level.....	255
7.4.2. Economic Climate .....	257
7.4.3. Policy, Legislation and Political Climate .....	259
7.4.4. Safety .....	265
7.5 Relations, Networks and Factors .....	268
7.6 Tabulated Summary of Findings – Factors .....	270
CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION .....	275
8.1 Multiplicity in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ .....	275
8.2 Networks and Relations in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ .....	275
8.3 Factors Affecting ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’ .....	280
8.3.1. Travel Type: Group Package – (semi-)independent.....	281
8.3.2. Available Products: Price/Volume – Experience/Niche.....	291
8.3.3. Destination Characteristics: Geography – Activity.....	300
8.3.4. Externals: Macro – Micro .....	307

8.3.5. A Conceptual Model for Characterisation of Chinese Tourist Types ....	310
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTION AND FUTURE RESEARCH.	312
9.1 Understanding the Tourism Distribution Phenomenon.....	312
9.2 Actors, Relations and Factors Affecting ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’ .	317
9.2.1. Tools Derived from the Thesis.....	326
9.3 Theoretical Contributions .....	328
9.4 Practical/Managerial Contributions .....	329
9.5 Future Research .....	330
APPENDICES.....	333
Appendix 1: Interview Guides.....	333
Intermediaries .....	334
Suppliers .....	336
Tourists .....	338
Appendix 2: Add for Potential Interviewees.....	340
Appendix 3: Activity Systems.....	341
Intermediaries .....	341
Suppliers .....	348
Tourists .....	354
Appendix 4: Interview Data (Online Resources).....	359
REFERENCES .....	360

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Thesis Structure .....	11
Figure 2: Traditional Tourism Distribution Illustration.....	58
Figure 3: An Analytical Framework for International Tourism Distribution Syst.....	59
Figure 4: Mediation .....	69
Figure 5: The General Structure of the Animal Form of Activity.....	71
Figure 6: Structure of Activity in Transition from Animal to Man.....	71
Figure 7: The Structure of Human Activity .....	72
Figure 8: Activity Systems – Tourist, Supplier and Intermediary.....	77
Figure 9: Conceptual Framework for Analysis of Tourism Distribution .....	78
Figure 10: Basic Network Illustration – 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' .....	145
Figure 11: Chinese Market Cluster.....	150
Figure 12: China Travel Industry Cluster .....	151
Figure 13: Stable Gateways between the Chinese Market Cluster and the China ...	159
Figure 14: Local Destination Cluster.....	162
Figure 15: Stable Gateways between the Local Destination Cluster and the Nati...	167
Figure 16: Stable Gateways in the Intra-destination Cluster .....	173
Figure 17: Stable Gateways between the Intra-destination Clusters, the China Tr..	175
Figure 18: Stable Gateways in 'Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia' .....	190
Figure 19: Three tendencies in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' .....	210
Figure 20: 'Special' for Scandinavia .....	242
Figure 21: Factors Affecting 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' .....	268
Figure 22: Spectrum: Group Package Tourism – (Semi-)Independent Tourism .....	283
Figure 23: Chinese Incoming Tourists.....	284
Figure 24: Spectrum: Volume based/Price Focus – Niche Based/Experience Foc..	292
Figure 25: Price vs. Experience Focus – Four Product Categories .....	298
Figure 26: Spectrum: Geography Focus – Activity Focus.....	301
Figure 27: Spectrum: Macro – Micro .....	308
Figure 28: A Conceptual Model for Characterisation of Chinese Tourist Types .....	310



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Nights Stayed by Chinese Tourists .....	24
Table 2: Number of Studies by Research Foci, Outbound Destination and Primary .....	30
Table 3: Authors, Research Foci and Primary Methodological Approach (Quant ....	32
Table 4: Authors, Research Foci and Primary Methodological Approach (Quali .....	33
Table 5: Approaches to Tourism Distribution Research.....	56
Table 6: Basic principles of Activity Theory .....	67
Table 7: Five Current Principles of Activity Theory .....	74
Table 8: Factors Affecting Elements of the Activity Systems for Tourists, Suppli ...	76
Table 9: Translation .....	84
Table 10: Interviewees for Pilot Study .....	123
Table 11: Tourist Interviewees .....	128
Table 12: Intermediary Interviewees .....	130
Table 13: Supplier Interviewees .....	134
Table 14: Broad Enactments of ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’ .....	143
Table 15: Tabulated Summary of Findings – Networks and Relations.....	197
Table 16: Tabulated Summary of Findings – Factors.....	270

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Through the last 25 years, China's outbound tourism has evolved at an impressive pace, from generating virtually no outbound tourism to being the world's major tourism generating country (Guo, Seongseop Kim, & Timothy, 2007). With steady growth rates of around 20% per year from 1991 to 2013 (ETC & UNWTO, 2013), outbound tourism from China reached the 100 million milestone in 2014. The total numbers are heavily affected by semi-domestic tourism to Hong Kong and Macau, but there is still a great interest in the Chinese market from countries around the world. One reason for this is the substantial growth rates reported for incoming tourism, which have matched and sometimes exceeded those of Chinese outbound tourism in recent years (ETC & UNWTO, 2013).

The rising interest in the Chinese market has also reached Scandinavia. Together, the four Scandinavian countries that are the focus of this thesis - Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden have experienced a 21% rise in incoming Chinese tourists over the last five years. This growing interest in the Chinese market is evident in the statements and actions of practitioners, as well as in cooperative transnational campaigns and projects aimed at the Chinese market (See for example "Chinavia website," n.d.; Jørgensen & Ren, 2015; Visit Finland, 2014). If tourist arrivals are the sole consideration, it might seem irrational for the Scandinavian countries to engage in marketing towards the Chinese, since the total numbers are still relatively low. However, interviews with practitioners as well as materials related to the existing products and campaigns illustrate that there is significant interest in the Chinese market from practitioners and policy makers in the Scandinavian countries. The primary

reasons for this are the future potential (due to the rising numbers), the fact that Chinese tourists are becoming increasingly interested in visiting smaller and “different” destinations as they become more affluent travellers and a genuine belief that the Scandinavian countries have something to offer Chinese tourists (Jørgensen & Ren, 2015).

The main goal of most initiatives towards the Chinese market is, in the short term, to develop a better understanding of the Chinese tourists, so they can be catered to; and, in the long term, to attract them to Scandinavia. This thesis builds on the notion that there are two things wrong with the attempts to reach the long-term goal. First, as argued by Jørgensen and Ren (2015), the main focus of the initiatives in Scandinavia have been on gaining predominantly quantifiable information on the Chinese tourists and not on *understanding* them. Second, the short-term goal assumes that researchers know how Chinese tourism distribution works, when, in fact, very little is known about this. Little is known when it comes to in-depth understanding of how the Chinese tourists make the decision to go to Scandinavia, or why they choose not to go. Almost nothing is known about the suppliers and intermediaries involved, and how they directly or indirectly affect Chinese tourism distribution in general and to Scandinavia in particular. The lack of knowledge is witnessed in the limited academic literature on Chinese tourism to Europe (Xiang, 2015), while academic studies of Chinese tourism to Scandinavia specifically, are almost non-existing (Li, McCabe, & Li, 2016).

On a broader level, attempts to understand why Chinese tourists end up in one place instead of another have primarily focussed on studying choice and decision making (Li et al., 2016; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). While such approaches present interesting perspectives, they also imply that tourism distribution is controlled mainly by what the tourist wants. This thesis questions this implication, as it proposes that the

distribution of tourism is also affected by enactments, relations and factors, which have little to do with what the tourist wants or thinks (s)he wants. By approaching the subject from the perspective of tourism distribution, the author hopes to elevate the perspective and provide a method, which allows for deep understandings of the enactments, factors and relations that affect Chinese tourism to Scandinavia and tourism distribution in general.

## **1.2 Scope and Research Question**

In the context of this study, the terms ‘Chinese tourist’ or ‘Chinese tourism’ refer strictly to Chinese leisure tourism, while the term ‘Scandinavia’ refers to the connected territories of Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland (excluding Iceland and Greenland). Explanations for these delimitations can be found in the methods chapter (p. 117 and 126). The aim of this thesis is to create a deep understanding of tourism distribution in general and of distribution of Chinese tourists to Scandinavia specifically. This aim comes as the result of compounded needs for better understanding of China outbound tourism in general (in the European context in particular) and better understanding of tourism distribution.

The need for a new approach, which enables a better understanding of Chinese tourism in general, is demonstrated through an extensive review of all literature on China outbound tourism published between 2003 and 2015. This review suggests four main directions for future research, which this thesis will aim to follow: (1) research on China outbound tourism to Asian destinations should be supplemented with additional studies on destinations outside Asia; (2) alternative (qualitative and mixed) methods that recognize the diversity of Chinese tourists and of the Chinese market should be applied more widely; (3) researchers should not take the importance of culture as a

prerequisite when studying China outbound tourism; (4) future research should recognize that China outbound tourism does not occur in isolation, but rather is a component of wider relational systems, affected by source market related factors and actors, by destinations and by the social world of the tourist and should be investigated as such.

In creating a new approach to better understand tourism distribution, three main actor groups will be considered, namely *tourists*, *suppliers* and *intermediaries*. A review of the existing literature on tourism distribution is conducted, in order to find an approach and a framework that can be used as a basis for the study. The review reveals that tourism distribution has primarily been studied based on what can be regarded as a managerial epistemology, focussing on tourism distribution as something that can be designed and understood through channels. The existing literature, which applies such managerial, structural and economical approaches, can largely be divided into two groups. Those that attempt to illustrate how a specific distribution channel is put together (e.g. King & Choi, 1999; Pan & Laws, 2003; Pearce, Tan, & Schott, 2007; Reid & Pearce, 2008; Sharda & Pearce, 2006); and, those that attempt to illustrate how different types of intermediaries may be connected (e.g. Bitner & Booms, 1982; Buhalis, 2001; Cooper, Wanhill, Fletcher, Gilbert, & Fyall, 2006; Tsaor & Lin, 2014). These studies are valuable in their own right, but most of them consider tourism distribution as a static and linear process, and often ignore important contextual aspects. In other fields of study, where the product is moved to the consumer, the managerial approach may be sufficient. This thesis suggests that in tourism, where tourists are moved to the product, the process is much more complicated and the managerial approach may not suffice on its own. The basic argument is that moving

tourists is not the same as moving product. It is a messier process, influenced to a larger degree by socio-relational, legislative, political, cultural and practical contexts.

In this thesis, the researcher suggests that there are two different enactments of tourism distribution. One that considers tourism distribution as a tool for planning, simplifying and communicating complex distribution processes, and one that considers tourism distribution as a phenomenon. Most existing literature focusses on the first. This thesis focusses on the latter. It builds on the notion that tourism distribution involves negotiation and an ongoing exchange of goods and information among at least three types of actors: tourists, intermediaries and suppliers. Actors that may be connected in many different non-linear ways and are subject to change through the distribution process. This is rarely the focus of, or even recognised in the existing literature. Therefore, the researcher argues that a new approach and framework is needed to analyse tourism distribution. A framework that takes account of tourists, suppliers and intermediaries; is neither linear nor static; considers the context of tourists, suppliers and intermediaries respectively, and finally, demonstrates a clear object of analysis.

Some previous studies have attempted to illustrate, map, make sense of, and/or understand tourism as systems or networks (Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2013; Granovetter, 1985; Jørgensen, 2016; Provan, Veazie, Staten, & Teufel-Shone, 2005; Wasserman & Galaskiewicz, 1994; Webster & Morrison, 2004). The main idea of such network approaches, which is that actors must be understood through their relations to others, is central in this thesis. Because of this, the initial intention was to make a study based on a similar network approach. However, the researcher found that these approaches tend to steer the research toward certain foci, and that the fixed vocabulary

and approaches of the existing literature made it difficult to openly investigate and ultimately to understand tourism distribution as a phenomenon. A reason for this may be the tendency in tourism research to stay within a single discipline. This tendency was described by Echtner and Jamal, (1997), but has since been echoed by other researchers, notably by Hollinshead (2004) and Tse (2011). They argue that this tendency is a problem because tourism research would benefit from cross-disciplinary approaches and theories more grounded in social realities. In this thesis, the researcher aims to understand tourism distribution based on social reality, rather than based on the inherent rules of a certain discipline. A (critical) pragmatic approach is taken, and theoretical tools are chosen based on their usefulness in reaching the goals of the research, not based on their disciplinary links. Consequently, the researcher found it necessary to adopt a new approach and to prepare a new framework for tourism distribution analysis. The structure of the framework is based on Activity Theory, while its application draws on insights from Actor-Network Theory. These approaches are applicable because they allow the researcher to construct a framework that is specific enough to ensure that important elements are considered, and at the same time open and critical enough to allow for things that are messy and do not fit into any predefined category.

Activity Theory provides a conceptual framework for describing and understanding the structure, development, and context of human activity (Kaptelinin, Nardi, & Macaulay, 1999). It has activity systems as the minimum unit of analysis, rather than for example individuals. This basic unit of analysis requires:

“... an intermediate concept - a minimal meaningful context for individual actions ... an activity. Because the context is included in the unit of analysis, the object of our

research is always essentially collective, even if our main interest lies in individual actions.”

(Kuuti 1991 p. 254 in Bratteteig & Gregory, 1999)

An activity system consists of a subject (in this case the tourist, supplier or intermediary), an object (what they want to achieve, in this case ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’), a mediating artefact, instrument or tool (may be both physical and/or psychological) and three contextual factors: the community, the rules (cultural and legislative) and the division of labour (Leont’ev, 1978). The conceptual framework proposed by the researcher views tourism distribution as a process that occurs between activity systems (actors) in networks. Therefore, the researcher must consider both the individual activity systems and the networks in which these systems operate. Inside the activity systems, the tourists, suppliers and intermediaries are each treated as subjects with their own contextual factors. However, they are connected through mediating distribution networks and their common object – in this case ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. The researcher argues that the three groups are each mediated by the two others in reaching their shared object:

- a *tourist* whose object is ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ (to go on holiday) is mediated by intermediaries and suppliers;
- a *supplier* whose object is ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ (to sell their products) is mediated by tourists and intermediaries
- and an *intermediary* whose object is ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ (to sell their products) is mediated by tourists and suppliers.

Ideas are drawn from Actor-Network Theory to make sense of these distribution networks. This involves identifying and investigating stakeholders and their rational, organizational, and individual interests, as well as how translation happens within the



various networks. That is, the process of negotiation, mobilization, representation and displacement among actors, entities, and places. In addition, Actor-Network Theory highlights how the researcher must consider *enactments* as a central part of what is being researched. In this case, the researcher will study the phenomenon of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ by analysing how it is enacted by respectively tourists, suppliers, intermediaries and potentially other actors. This analysis focusses on the relations between the actors involved in the distribution network. The analysis should provide insights on inner workings of the distribution network that shape ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ and provide an overview of specific factors that affect it.

The suggested framework will be tested and developed as part of the analysis process, where qualitative interviews with tourists, suppliers and intermediaries, as well as other available data will be analysed, using the framework. This work will answer the following research questions:

- *What is tourism distribution and how may we better understand it?*
- *Who and what are the important actors, relations and factors affecting distribution of Chinese tourists to Scandinavia?*

### **1.3 Research Objectives and Contributions**

There are two research objectives in this thesis, one academic and one practical/managerial.

The academic objective is to create a conceptual framework that enables new perspectives on, and a deep understanding of tourism distribution. This understanding should go beyond the dominant managerial epistemology and “channel perspective”, and add to the current knowledge on tourism distribution, as well as to knowledge on how tourism distribution may be known.

If the academic objective is reached, this thesis will contribute to scholarship by introducing Activity Theory to the tourism context, and by integrating this approach with the strengths of Actor-Network Theory, which is a new but established approach in tourism studies. Tourism scholars have attempted neither previously and they offer the potential of new and deep insights on tourism distribution. In addition, a new conceptual framework for tourism distribution analysis will be developed and presented as part of the thesis. This framework should contribute to scholarship by providing methodological and conceptual inspiration for other researchers who are interested in reaching a deep understanding of tourism distribution in different contexts. The novel ontological and epistemological approach to the study may also inspire other scholars to approach tourism distribution, or other aspects of research, from alternative angles, which may help develop, deepen and strengthen scholarship in the future.

The practical/managerial objective is to gain a thorough understanding of the distribution process of 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. This includes deep insights into the actors involved in tourism distribution, their relations to the other actors in the distribution network(s) and the factors, that affect their practice and, in turn, 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. Many tourism actors are SMEs or other companies that for different reasons are not actually able to design distribution channels. It is believed that in-depth knowledge about tourism distribution as a practise-based actor-network - a phenomenon, which may be influenced, but not designed, will be valuable to such tourism practitioners. In addition, the researcher hopes to use the results of the thesis to develop practice-oriented tools that allow practitioners as well as researchers to better understand specific aspects of tourism distribution.

If the practical/managerial objective is reached, the thesis will contribute knowledge, insights and tools that may help academics and practitioners in Scandinavia, as well as other similar European destinations, to better understand incoming Chinese tourism. It will also provide insights on Chinese tourism distribution in general. This may be relevant to academics and practitioners who are interested in acquiring a deep perspective on China outbound tourism. The qualitative approach inspired by Activity Theory, Actor-Network Theory and the methodological thoughts of Flyvbjerg (2001; 2012) and Law (2004), among others, should provide knowledge on, and an understanding of Chinese tourism to Scandinavia that has not previously been available.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

The structure of the thesis is visualised (Figure 1) and briefly explained here. The thesis comprises nine chapters as follows:

*Chapter 1: Introduction* presents the study background, the scope of the study and the research questions that are addressed in the thesis. It also reflects on the research objectives and contributions.

*Chapter 2: China Outbound Tourism* presents the existing knowledge about China Outbound Tourism necessary to conduct the study. This includes discussion of the history and politics of China outbound tourism, its current state, and the existing academic literature covering the subject.

*Chapter 3: Understanding Tourism Distribution* discusses the current knowledge on tourism distribution. It reviews the existing literature and presents arguments that a new approach is needed to analyse tourism distribution. It then presents such an approach, by introducing its components one by one. Specifically,

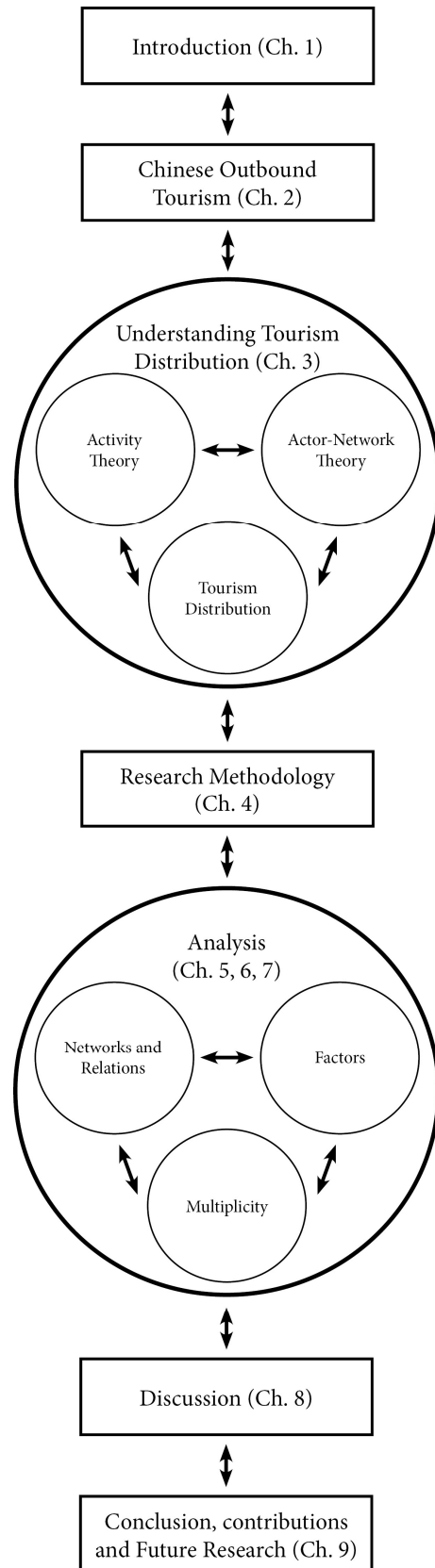
Activity Theory and Actor-Network Theory as well as their specific application are presented, followed by the conceptual framework for the thesis.

*Chapter 4: Research Methodology* outlines the methodology for the thesis. This includes presentation of the ontological and epistemological approach, explanations of the limitations to the study and details on data collection, processing and analysis.

*Chapter 5: Multiplicity* is the first of three analysis chapters. It demonstrates how Actor-Network Theory’s idea of multiplicity is present in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, through the different ways that the various actors enact the phenomenon. Based on this, the two subsequent chapters use these enactments as the outset for the investigation.

*Chapter 6: Networks and Relations* analyses the actor-network that constitutes ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. It presents the network clusters that the interviewees enact, the relations within

Figure 1: Thesis Structure



these clusters and the gateways between them. It then discusses the implications of these enactments, relations and gateways.

*Chapter 7: Factors* presents the various factors and sub-factors that were found to be important to ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. This chapter also presents four analysis tools that were developed based on the analyses.

*Chapter 8: Discussion* discusses the results of the three previous analysis chapters against the existing literature on China outbound tourism. It draws on the thesis data to underpin new findings that emerge as the findings of the previous chapters are discussed against the literature.

*Chapter 9: Conclusion, Contributions and Future Research* summarises the findings of the thesis, as well as the tools derived from the thesis findings. It also discusses the practical/managerial and theoretical implications of the thesis. Suggestions for future research are also presented.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **CHINA OUTBOUND TOURISM**

In many ways, China outbound tourism is different from outbound tourism from most other countries and from western countries in particular. These differences are not only cultural, as some researchers may assume, but also historical, political and practical. The analysis for this thesis will focus on the practices involved in Chinese tourism to Scandinavia. This chapter provides necessary background knowledge on policy, history and legislation relating to China outbound tourism, as well as on the current state of China outbound tourism. It also reviews existing literature on China outbound tourism and points to gaps in the literature that this thesis aims to fill.

#### **2.1 The History and Politics of China Outbound Tourism**

Tsang and Hsu (2011) argue that China's tourism and hospitality industry has undergone three major stages in order to reach its current state. The first stage came with the founding of the People's Republic of China from 1949 to 1978. In this period tourism in China primarily served a political purpose, which was to promote the achievements of Socialist China and to promote international understanding and friendship (S. Huang, 2010; Tsang & Hsu, 2011). The second stage, from 1978 to 1985 began with the adoption of economic reform policy in 1978. This altered the purpose and nature of tourism from strictly political, to also include economical aspirations. It ended with China officially joining the UNWTO in 1983. The third stage from 1986 to the present day witnessed the inclusion of tourism as part of the Seventh Five-year National Plan as a key component for economic and social development. According to Tsang and Hsu (2011):

“This event is a significant benchmark for tourism development in China because the attitude of the central government toward the nature of tourism changed from emphasizing both politics and economics to focusing on economics over politics (Zhang et al., 1999)”

(p. 888)

These historical phases illustrate how tourism in China is in fact a relatively new concept. The tourism authority in China, the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), was established as late as the in early 1980s. “It plays the role of both tourist industry authority auditing the operation of tour operators, hotels and tour education institutions in China and destination image promoter via its overseas branches” (J. X. Ma, Buhalis, & Song, 2003, p. 461). Shortly after the establishment of CNTA, the first outbound tourism from China emerged in 1983, as visits to friends and relatives in Hong Kong and Macau was allowed (Qu & Lam, 1997). A number of important political changes have subsequently shaped Chinese outbound tourism into what it is today.

### **2.1.1. Chinese Tourism Policy**

China’s first administrative legislation in tourism was the travel agency act: Provisional Regulations on the Administration of Travel. It was promulgated by the State Council in 1985 (Huang, 2010). In 1990 permission of some outbound travel to certain Asian countries was given, and this was expanded in 1995 (Guo et al., 2007). After this, the act was revised and renamed to Regulations on the Administration of Travel Agencies in 1996. In this act two types of travel agency were defined: International travel agencies, which could operate inbound, outbound and domestic tourism; and domestic travel agencies, which could only operate domestic tourism (Huang, 2010). With China’s accession to the World Trade Organization in 2000,

further revisions to the act came about in 2001. One of the most important changes was the allowance of foreign travel agencies to establish joint venture travel agencies in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Xian under certain conditions which were gradually softened and finally eliminated in 2005 (Zhang, 2004). Only one condition remained - joint-venture companies were still not allowed to engage in China outbound tourism (Ibid). Outbound tourism was instead controlled through the Approved Destination Status scheme, which was initiated in 1997 and remains today.

#### **2.1.1.1. Approved Destination Status (ADS)**

In 1997, the first self-supported outbound tourism from China was allowed through the ADS Scheme. The purpose of the ADS scheme was to have a control mechanism for domestic travel agencies and international tour operators (Tse, 2011). Under the ADS scheme, certain Chinese operators were selected to arrange, promote and sell travel to specified destinations in collaboration with approved overseas partners who provide arrangements within the destination (Pan & Laws, 2003). This scheme has later been softened, so that it is now possible for Chinese travellers to travel independently, although still only to ADS approved destinations. The Mainland Chinese government has indicated seven guidelines that a country must abide by in order to receive ADS.

- The country should generate outbound tourists to China.
- The country should have favourable political relations with China.
- The country should have attractive and suitable tourism resources and facilities for Chinese travellers.
- Safety should be guaranteed for Chinese travellers, as should freedom from discrimination.
- The country should be easily accessible.
- There should be balance of payments in terms of arrivals and expenditures between the country and China



- The share of tourists from foreign countries to China, along with tourists from China to the ADS countries, should increase reciprocally.

(Guo et al., 2007)

As time went on, more and more countries received ADS status. The first Western countries to receive ADS status was Australia and New Zealand in 1999. Most of the other Western countries were granted ADS status between 2004 and 2006 (Du & Dai, 2005; Keating, 2009). Up until 2016, a total of 140 countries and territories have received ADS (Tourism Australia, 2016) thereby expanding the potential for Chinese outbound tourism immensely. It is expected that the ADS scheme will be progressively loosened and consequently phased out in the future (ETC & UNWTO, 2013).

The fast increase in Chinese tourists resulting from the mentioned policy changes and opening of the market, has also created a number of problems (Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2011). The most prominent being zero-fare tours (Chen, Mak, & Guo, 2011) (also dubbed zero-dollar tours (Arlt, 2006) and zero-commission tours (Zhang, Heung, & Yan, 2009)). Described by Zhang et al. (2009) as a parasitic phenomenon, zero-commission tours are sold to tourists at a price that is the equivalent to, or lower than, the basic expenses of the actual trip. The profit is then generated at the destination through commission by luring, cheating, or even forcing tourists into paying extra expenses and fees or in most cases through shopping (King, Dwyer, & Prideaux, 2006; Zhang et al., 2009). Through such means, the tourist is initially attracted to the cheap price of the tour and then tricked into paying the equivalent of, or in many cases, more than the normal price at the destination. Seemingly acknowledging these problems of malpractice, the Travel Agency Act was once again revised (and renamed to Regulation on Travel Agencies) in 2009. This time the act specifically addresses the issues mentioned, by introducing rules that specify that travel agencies "... should not

solicit tourists through a quoted price below the cost level”; “... not provide any other services than those specified in the contract”; and “... not request tour guides to receive package tour groups without a due fee payment or with a lower-than-cost payment” (Huang, 2010, p. 158). Another change to the 2009 Travel Agency Act, that may affect outbound tourism, was the lowering of entry requirements for establishment of an international travel agency, as the required capital was lowered from RMB 1.5 million to RMB 300,000 (Ibid).

Despite the attempts to minimise or stop the malicious practices through legislation, it seems that the practices persisted after the introduction of the new Travel Agency Act in 2009. Chen et al. (2011) for example highlight how a number of examples of incidents of forced shopping were reported in the media throughout 2010. These incidents spurred continuous and strengthened public debate on the subject in the public media. This debate might have been one of the main reasons behind the introduction of the Tourism Law of the People’s Republic of China in 2013.

#### **2.1.1.2. The Chinese Tourism Law**

The Tourism Law of the People’s Republic of China was passed by the National People's Congress Standing Committee and came into effect from October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013 (CNTA, 2013b). The law specifies the rights of tourists, safety standards, rules for tour operators, as well as guidelines for the handling of complaints. The law has been hailed as a milestone, since it introduces the right of tourists to complain and seek redress for the first time (South China Morning Post, 2013). At the time of writing, academic literature on the law and its effects is still scarce. Only one explorative study based on secondary sources was found (Ma, Qu, Hsiao, & Jin, 2015), while no empirical research has been published. It is therefore premature to say whether the predictions about the laws impacts were correct.

The new tourism law requires travel agencies to sign a contract with tourists and to provide a travel itinerary before the tour as part of this contract (CNTA, 2013b Chapter V, Articles 57 & 59). Important parts of the new tourism law are that the tourist now has the right to require that this contract is followed, that the products and services set forth in the contract are provided and that the information on the tourism products and services they buy are correct (*ibid*, Chapter II, Article 9). There is a whole chapter dedicated to the process of settling disputes between travel agents and tourists (*ibid*, Chapter VIII). Many of the issues of malicious practice highlighted above are also addressed more directly, for example in article 35, which reads as follows:

“Travel agencies are prohibited from organizing tourism activities and luring tourists with unreasonably low prices, or getting illegitimate gains such as rebates by arranging shopping or providing tourism services that requires additional payment. When organizing and receiving tourists, travel agencies shall not designate specific shopping places, or provide tourism services that require additional payment. However, it does not include circumstances where both sides have agreed or the tourists have requested for such arrangements and no influence is caused on the itinerary of other tourists.”

(*ibid*, Chapter IV, Article 35)

In addition, a number of articles meant to give rights to tourist guides, on the one hand, and to remove malicious guiding practices on the other, were also introduced. These state that travel agencies shall sign labour contracts with the tour guides, which include remuneration and social insurance premiums (*ibid*, Article 38) and that tour guides:

“... shall strictly follow the itinerary, shall not alter it or stop the services they are providing without permission or to ask for tips from tourists or lure, cheat, compel or force tourists in a disguised form to make purchases or participate in tourism activities that require additional payment.”

(ibid, Article 41)

As mentioned the new tourism law has been positively received, since it is believed that it will heighten the quality of tourism to and from China and limit malicious business practices (Global Blue Briefings, 2013). However, issues relating to the new law have also been reported. Most notably a drastic rise in prices on trips, accompanied by a drop in tourist numbers was reported as an effect of the effectuation of the law (Forbes, 2014; People's Daily, 2013; Skift, 2013). This was particularly the case in the short-haul package market, where prices have increased by far more than in their long-haul equivalents. According to a report by Global Blue (2013), the price of regular tours to Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia have for example increased on average from EUR 496 to 1,365 (almost triple) per person; whereas tours to Europe increased from EUR 1,613 to 1,985 (20% – 30%). Different sources, however, highlight how these falling numbers should not be taken at face value, since they may be a symptom of a growing preference towards independent tourism and longer stays at each destination, which have been accelerated by the introduction of the tourism law. As pointed out by Wolfgang Arlt, the director of the China Outbound Tourism Research Institute, in an article on Forbes Magazine's website :

“This does not necessarily have to be a negative development, as after all the tourism industry, unlike government officials, is more interested in counting dollars than counting heads and the reductions can be expected to be found for the most part at the lower end of the market.”

(Forbes, 2014)

Global Blue also foresees positive consequences. They highlight that the new law will create more positive experiences for the tourists, which will strengthen their desire for travel (Global Blue Briefings, 2013).

### **2.1.2. The Significance of Policy in China Outbound Tourism**

Looking at the literature on the development of China outbound tourism from its relatively recent infancy until today, one important point stands out - the importance of policy and government. China is one of the few countries in the world that has an outbound tourism policy. One of the reasons for this is that outbound tourism is not just tourism, it is a soft power tool (Tse, 2011). As such, outbound tourism policies have for example been used to revitalise tourism in Thailand after the tsunami in 2004, and to channel funds to the Special Administrative Regions (SAR) of Macau and Hong Kong, by allowing gambling and by introducing the Individual Visitor Scheme (IVS) respectively. Whereas outbound tourism in other markets is primarily market driven, it is evident that, in China, market forces have to accept and react to policies like these as well as the ADS Scheme, the Travel Agency Act and, recently, the Chinese tourism law. These political measures have shaped China outbound tourism and similar ones will probably continue to do so in the future. Because of this, the importance of the legislations and policies that govern the distribution of tourists from China to Scandinavia should not be underestimated and will be taken into account in this study. Huang (2010) suggests that Chinese legislation also affects outbound markets and there are signs that this might be the case with the Chinese tourism law. It for example puts bonds on the overseas guides who handle the tourists. It will be interesting to see whether or how the actors in this study are affected by Chinese legislations and policies. This part of the review also points to a gap in research on China outbound tourism, as almost no academic research on the effects of the Chinese tourism law could be found at the time of writing. Such research should be conducted to provide a better understanding of the effects, positive or negative, of legislation in Chinese tourism and the effect of the law specifically.

## 2.2 China Outbound Tourism - Market Growth

The introduction of the ADS scheme and the consequent inclusion of more and more destinations combined with a relaxation of travel restrictions have produced a huge and ever expanding flow of outbound Chinese tourists to countries all over the world (Cai, Li, & Knutson, 2008). A growing economy and the increasing number of available holidays have also helped this development. Since the 1980s, China's economy has undergone explosive growth to become one of the world's largest (IMF, 2014). According to the The National Bureau of Statistics China, per capita disposable income in China grew by an average of around 10% from 2012 to 2015. From this, a growing middle-upper class with increasing disposable income has emerged, for whom leisure travel is a possibility (Wang & Sheldon, 1995 in Cai, Lehto, & O'leary, 2001). The introduction of the 5-day working week in the mid-nineties (Cai et al., 2008; Zhang and Qu, 1996 in Kau & Lim, 2005), the 11 national holidays in the mid-noughties, as well as the 5 to 15 days of paid annual leave that employees are now entitled to (de Sausmarez, Tao, & McGrath, 2012) also enabled many Chinese to find time to travel for leisure purposes. Together, these factors make China one of the most rapidly expanding outbound tourism producing countries in the world. The most impressive growth rates of around 20% happened between 1991 and 2013 (ETC & UNWTO, 2013) (a rise from 6 million outbound tourists in 1994 to 98.19 million in 2013 (Chiang, 2012; CNTA, 2013a)). While the growth has since fallen to a lower level, it is still expected that China outbound tourism will continue to grow at a healthy pace (around 5%) and from a larger base to reach 150 million outbound tourists in 2020 (CNTA, 2016). A testament to the explosive growth of the Chinese market is how wildly the UNWTO underestimated its growth. In their Tourism 2020 vision for East Asia and Pacific, the UNWTO optimistically estimated that the number of

Chinese outbound tourists would reach 100 million in 2020 (UNWTO, 2001), a milestone, which we now know was reached in 2014. Chinese tourists have also taken the top spot in terms of spending. This happened in 2012 and the lead compared to other countries has grown ever since. In 2013 China extended its lead by US\$26.6 billion compared to the year before, to a record US\$128,6 billion compared to 86.2 billion for the United States which is in the second place (UNWTO, 2014).

There is no sign that the growth of the China outbound market will stop in the near future. The literature reports four important reasons for this. First, it is expected that the aforementioned economic growth and expansion of the middle-upper class will continue for years to come (Lin, Liu, & Song, 2015). Second, although the total number of Chinese people travelling abroad is high, it is still very low relative to the population (Keating & Kriz, 2008). Compared to Japan and the United States, where the proportion of outbound tourists to the total population are respectively 13% and 12%, the proportion of Chinese outbound travellers to the total population is merely 4.3% (CEIC Data, 2011 in Chiang, 2012). Third, the relatively low number of outbound tourists (57.4 million in 2010) compared to the high number of domestic tourists (2.1 billion in 2010) indicates potential for growth of the outbound tourism sector in the future (Chiang, 2012). Fourth, outbound tourism is encouraged by the Chinese government, because it can be used as a way to increase imports without reducing exports (Tse & Hobson, 2008).

### **2.2.1. China Outbound Tourism to Europe and Scandinavia**

“Approved Destination Status” (ADS) was given collectively to all EU member states and members of the Schengen agreement in 2004 (except for the United Kingdom, which received it in 2005). This instantly made China the fastest growing outbound

travel market in Europe, and Chinese outbound travellers to European countries increased nine-fold compared to 2003 (Du & Dai, 2005). The growth continued as the number of Chinese tourists to Europe rose from approximately 1 million in 2000 to approximately 12.5 million in 2016 (ETC & UNWTO, 2013; European Travel Commission, 2016). Despite the high rise, still only 4% to 15% of Chinese outbound tourists went to Europe in recent years<sup>1</sup>. This indicates further potential for Europe in this growing market. The uncertainty in the percentages presented above signifies the general uncertainty researchers must work with, when dealing with numbers on China outbound tourism. The two Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau account for more than half of the Chinese departures (ETC & UNWTO, 2013; CNTA in Lin et al., 2015), although this number has been falling in recent years. On the one hand, this means that if two markets are excluded, the total number of Chinese outbound tourist is much smaller than first indicated. On the other hand, it means that the percentage of “real” Chinese outbound tourists going to European destinations is relatively high and while the total numbers are still relatively high.

The rising numbers of incoming Chinese tourists have also reached Scandinavia in recent years (See Table 1), where the total number of nights stayed by Chinese tourists has risen by an average of 20.9% from year to year from 2010 to 2015.

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<sup>1</sup> These numbers differ highly depending on source. In 2013/2014, the national sources in the receiving countries for example reported 4,4% (ETC & UNWTO, 2013), while CNTA 12% according to (S. Lin, Liu, & Song, 2015). The difference appears because one departure can become numerous arrivals if a tourist travels between places and because of the different ways in which arrivals are measured (ETC & UNWTO, 2013)



Table 1: Nights Stayed by Chinese Tourists

<b>Year/Rise (Percent)</b>	<b>Norway</b>	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Sum</b>
<b>2010</b>	68,133	70,816	111,126	77,540	<b>329,625</b>
<b>% Rise 2010-2011</b>	34.61%	20.18%	31.77%	18.78%	<b>26.34%</b>
<b>2011</b>	91,715	85,110	146,432	92,099	<b>417,367</b>
<b>% Rise 2011-2012</b>	1.98%	34.07%	11.57%	8.64%	<b>14.06%</b>
<b>2012</b>	93,530	114,103	163,377	100,057	<b>473,079</b>
<b>% Rise 2012-2013</b>	73.08%	32.99%	16.47%	26.42%	<b>37.24%</b>
<b>2013</b>	161,878	151,749	190,286	126,495	<b>632,421</b>
<b>% Rise 2013-2014</b>	9.20%	5.87%	6.94%	1.73%	<b>5.93%</b>
<b>2014</b>	176,767	160,650	203,498	128,685	<b>671,614</b>
<b>% Rise 2014-2015</b>	38.44%	18.88%	21.12%	29.24%	<b>26.92%</b>
<b>2015</b>	287,153	198,030	257,978	181,862	<b>927,038</b>
<b>Total % rise</b>	<b>31.46%</b>	<b>22.40%</b>	<b>17.57%</b>	<b>16.96%</b>	<b>22.10%</b>

(Numbers were collected by the researcher from the national statistics bureaus of the respective countries)

So far, this chapter has provided information on the importance of history and politics in China outbound tourism and has presented the current state of China outbound tourism, which is characterised by high growth levels, both in terms of tourist numbers and spending. The chapter highlights why it is worth concentrating on the Chinese market and explains why many destinations around the world are doing so. The importance of politics in Chinese outbound tourism should and will be taken into account in the creation of the conceptual framework as well as in the data collection for the thesis. In the following sections, the existing literature on China outbound tourism will be critically reviewed.

### **2.3 Existing Literature on China Outbound Tourism**

In this section, existing literature on China outbound tourism is reviewed. The section contains two main parts. The first is a broad review of all existing research on China outbound tourism published between 2003 and 2015. The purpose of this part of the review is to critically assess the existing literature and to out gaps and pitfalls within the existing literature, which this thesis will aim to fill or avoid. The second part of the section provides more in-depth perspectives on the topics of demographics,

motivations and expectations in China outbound tourism. These topics have already been well covered in the existing literature. Therefore, this section will summarize the existing knowledge, which will be used for reference when conducting the analysis. An altered version of this review was published in *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing* in 2016 (Jørgensen, Law, & King, 2016).

#### **2.3.1.1. Review Methodology**

The researcher used Scopus to undertake the literature search, because it is the: "... largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature: scientific journals, books and conference proceedings." (Elsevier, n.d.). The findings of the current investigation were crosschecked with Science Direct to ensure that no papers were omitted in the case of journals that are not covered by Scopus. The full range of scholarly English language journals was included in the review, since the literature on China outbound tourism has been published in a variety of journals, and not been confined to three, four or five journals, as has been suggested in previous reviews. The current literature review has shown that geographically specific and targeted journals, notably in the case of *Journal of China Tourism Research* and *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, contain a large share of the published research on China outbound tourism. Instead of limiting the coverage to select journals, the researcher has used the publication date as a boundary, with coverage confined to papers that were published between 2003 and 2015. The year 2003 was selected because this may be viewed as marking the starting point for China outbound tourism in its contemporary form. Though there were earlier milestones in China outbound tourism, such as the granting of approved destinations status (ADS) to Australia and New Zealand in 1999, it was after 2003, when the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) was introduced for Chinese visitors to Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) that China outbound

tourism began to resemble what we know today. The IVS was a response to the decline in tourism arising from the recent SARS outbreak (Law, To, & Goh, 2008). This marked the beginning of an outbound tourism boom from China to neighbouring Asian destinations. Outbound tourism subsequently grew to countries located outside Asia and Oceania, as these countries received ADS from the China government.

A range of search terms was used in the literature review, including combinations of: “China”, “Chinese”, “tourism” and “outbound”. Subsequent tests were carried out using other search words including “travel” and “tour” to see whether any relevant papers were missing from the first round of assessment. It was found that this was not the case. The initial searches were conducted in the summer of 2015, followed by subsequent testing during the spring of 2016. This procedure generated more than 500 results, which were then sorted manually to retain only the studies that concerned China outbound tourism. Most papers that were removed during this process referred to China inbound and domestic tourism or to suppliers working in China. Only peer-reviewed full-length papers were included and the researchers excluded research notes, book reviews and conference reports, leaving a final list of 151 papers. These papers were then read and sorted into four categories, namely: qualitative (27), quantitative (71), mixed methods (8), and secondary (45). Secondary designation was applied to any papers with a peripheral relationship to China. This included studies that drew upon samples of Chinese tourists to analyse general topics such as environmental impacts (e.g. Sun & Pratt, 2014), tourism as a driver for nationalism or diplomacy (e.g. Cheng & Wong, 2014; Tse, 2013), and spatial distribution (e.g. Goh, Li, & Li, 2014). The 45 papers included in the “secondary” category were excluded, leaving 106 papers for subsequent review in the following journals: *Tourism Management* (19); *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* (14);

*Journal of China Tourism Research* (13); *International Journal of Tourism Research* (8); *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing* (8); *Journal of Travel Research* (8); *Journal of Vacation Marketing* (7); *Annals of Tourism Research* (4); *Tourism Analysis* (4); *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing* (3); *Tourism Geographies* (3); *Tourism Planning and Development* (3); *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research* (2); *Tourism Economics* (2); *Current Issues in Tourism* (1); *EuroMed Journal of Business* (1); *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* (1); *International Journal of Technology Management* (1); *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (1); *Service Business* (1); *Tourism Culture and Communication* (1) and *Tourism Management Perspectives* (1).

### **2.3.2. A Critical Assessment of China Outbound Tourism Research**

The scholarly literature on China outbound tourism has paralleled the upward trend of China outbound tourism, going from a virtually non-existent area of interest, to a field that is well covered by tourism scholars. The expanding literature on Chinese tourism generally and on China outbound tourism in particular, has been the subject of various extensive literature reviews (Andreu, Claver, & Quer, 2010; Cai, Li, & Knutson, 2008; Huang & Hsu, 2005, 2008; Huang, Keating, Kriz, & Heung, 2015; Jin & Wang, 2015; Keating & Kriz, 2008; Keating, Huang, Kriz, & Heung, 2015; Leung, Li, Fong, Law, & Lo, 2014; Tsang & Hsu, 2011; Tse, 2015). Though these have covered a variety of China related tourism research issues, relatively few have focussed on China outbound tourism and these have important limitations.

The papers by Andreu et al. (2010), Keating et al. (2015), Huang and Hsu (2008) and Tsang and Hsu (2011) may be considered as meta-studies. These publications primarily focus on contributions under broad categories, on the research methods that have been deployed and on the researcher and university contributors and

less on contributions to knowledge. The identification of the contributors to tourism scholarship in such meta-reviews undoubtedly provide a helpful perspective on advances in the relevant field. However, the emphasis on contributors leave minimal space for critical reflections about what has been contributed by the various papers under review and for informed discussion about future directions based on progressive insights. The research gaps that have been identified in these studies are often confined to what has not yet been done, and rarely comment on the implications for how things have been done. Various recommendations have been provided about the topics that should next be researched, rather than providing guidance about how such topics should be approached.

Some studies have adopted more in-depth approaches. In an epilogue to a recently published special issue of the *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, Huang et al. (2015) conducted a literature review that considered general tendencies within the field. Though the authors presented valid and interesting points, their focus on papers that were published within the specific special issue, meant that the evidence for their conclusions drew upon a narrow base within the literature. Keating et al. (2015) proposed an evolutionary metaphor consisting of a three-stage historical overview of the literature: crawling out (1983–1992), scurrying about (1993–2002), and walking erect (2003–2012). In common with the various meta-studies, such historically focused literature reviews leave little space for critical discussion about the content. Additionally, the scope of the review by Keating et al. (2015), like those of Andreu et al. (2010) and Tsang and Hsu (2011) was confined to a small number of top-tier journals. This precludes important knowledge, since these publications do not necessarily include the most insightful research that has been undertaken on China outbound tourism. Cai et al. (2008) and Keating and Kriz (2008) adopted a somewhat

more in-depth and content-based approach. However, given that China outbound tourism has undergone an accelerated period of change since 2008, regular updating is needed of prevailing perspectives. Tse (2015) and Jin and Wang (2015) have recently contributed relevant, interesting and updated reviews of China outbound tourism and have raised a range of pertinent questions. However, some important points about the current state and future directions for China outbound tourism research have been absent, as will be subsequently elaborated. Finally, it is important to acknowledge the recent publication of the most comprehensive publication on China outbound tourism to date, 'Chinese Outbound Tourism 2.0' by Xiang (2015). This book is a timely analysis of the scope of China outbound tourism, albeit with a specific focus on the "new" Chinese tourist (dubbed 2.0). The editor places particular emphasis on the dissimilarity of this category to the low profit group-based travellers who have provided the subject for most previous studies on China outbound tourism. Though the collection of chapters builds a compelling story, the book makes only brief mention of future research directions and neglects some important gaps and perspectives, which will be covered in this review.

### 2.3.2.1. Research Foci

Table 2: Number of Studies by Research Foci, Outbound Destination and Primary Methodological Approach

<b>Approach:</b>	<b>Quantitative Studies</b>	<b>Qualitative studies</b>	<b>Mixed method studies</b>
<b>Research Focus</b>			
- Motivation	15	7	1
- Attitude	8		2
- Perception	8	2	
- Constraints	2	1	
- Image expectation (incl. branding)	8	7	2
- Culture	11	4	1
- Satisfaction	8	1	
- Service quality	3		
- Decision-making	7		
- Information search/sources	5		
- Behaviour	9	1	
- Loyalty	2		
- Consumption	3	5	
- Forecasting/estimation	5		
- Distribution		1	1
- Discussion papers (based on secondary sources)		2	1
- Focus on young/independent travellers	3	2	1
- Other (incl. demand, familiarity, policy, visa issues and control)	4	1	
<b>Outbound Destination (if any)</b>			
- Asia	30	9	2
- Europe	6	3	0
- USA	5	0	0
- Oceania	7	9	5

A manual inductive thematic analysis was conducted and the results are quantified in Table 2. This table illustrates the dominance of Asian destinations in the various studies of China outbound tourism. The Hong Kong and Macau SARs along with Taiwan are largely accountable for this emphasis, reflective of the travel patterns of Chinese tourists, which are overwhelmingly to Asian destinations and to Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau in particular. However, with the growth of outbound tourism to destinations outside Asia, future research may benefit from a stronger orientation to such destinations. Though relatively small in number, the studies on destinations outside Asia have indicated the shift of Chinese tourist behaviour away from the group package tour model, which has dominated in the studies dealing with travel to Hong

Kong, Macau and Taiwan. A greater emphasis on studies focusing on destinations outside the primary markets may therefore enrich knowledge on China outbound tourism with new and different perspectives.

Tables 3 and 4 provide an overview of the studies sorted by their main topic(s) and methodological approach. Where the coverage of a study extends beyond a single research topic, it may appear in the tables on multiple occasions.



Table 3: Authors, Research Foci and Primary Methodological Approach (Quantitative Studies)

<b>Research Focus</b>	<b>Quantitative Studies</b>
<b>Motivation</b>	(Assiouras, Skourtis, Koniordos, & Giannopoulos, 2014; Chen & Gassner, 2012; Corigliano, 2011; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Huang & Cai, 2015; Hua & Yoo, 2011; Jiang, Scott, Ding, & Zou, 2012; Kim & Prideaux, 2005; King & Gardiner, 2015; Lee, Jeon, & Kim, 2011; Li & Cai, 2012; Li, Wen, & Leung, 2011; Li, Zhang, Xiao, & Chen, 2013; Mohsin, 2008; Park, Lee, & Miller, 2014; Prayag, Cohen, & Yan, 2015; Prayag, Disegna, Cohen, & Yan, 2013; Prideaux, Cave, Thompson, & Sibtain, 2012; Wong & Rosenbaum, 2012; Xiaoyang Yang, Reeh, & Kreisel, 2011; Zeng, Prentice, & King, 2014)
<b>Attitude</b>	(Agrusa, Kim, & Wang, 2011; Chen & Gassner, 2012; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Lam & Hsu, 2004; Liu, Choi, Au, & Hui, 2011; Mohsin, 2008; Packer, Ballantyne, & Hughes, 2014; Sparks & Pan, 2009)
- <b>Perception</b>	(Huang & Hsu, 2009; Lam & Hsu, 2004; Wang & Davidson, 2009; Weifeng, 2005; Xiaoyang Yang et al., 2011; Yu & Ko, 2012; Yun & Joppe, 2011; Zhang & Chow, 2004)
- <b>Constraints</b>	(Chen & Gassner, 2012; Lai, Li, & Harrill, 2013)
<b>Image expectation (incl. branding)</b>	(Assaker, 2014; Chang, 2011; Chen & Lin, 2012; Huang & Cai, 2015; Kim, Guo, & Agrusa, 2005; McCartney, Butler, & Bennett, 2009; Prideaux et al., 2012; Stepchenkova & Li, 2012)
<b>Culture</b>	(Chiang, King, & Nguyen, 2012; Kim & Prideaux, 2005; Lim & Bendle, 2012; Li et al., 2013; Osti, Turner, & King, 2009; Park & Reisinger, 2012; Rittichainuwat, 2011; Van Dijk & Weiler, 2009; Xiaoyang Yang et al., 2011; Ye, Zhang, & Yuen, 2012, 2013)
<b>Satisfaction</b>	(Chen, Chen, & Lee, 2009; Lee et al., 2011; Li, Song, Chen, & Wu, 2012; Lim & Bendle, 2012; Mao & Zhang, 2014; Pan, 2014; Park et al., 2014; Truong & King, 2009; Wang & Davidson, 2009)
- <b>Service quality</b>	(Chen et al., 2009; Chen, Mak, & Li, 2013; Yan, Kong, & Guo, 2013)
<b>Decision-making</b>	(Chen et al., 2009; Choi, Lehto, Morrison, & Jang, 2012; Han, Lee, & Lee, 2011; Kambele, Li, & Zhou, 2015; McCartney et al., 2009; McCartney & Pinto, 2014; Rittichainuwat, 2011)
- <b>Information search/sources</b>	(Soojin Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2008; Kambele et al., 2015; Kim & Prideaux, 2005; Osti et al., 2009; Sparks & Pan, 2009)
<b>Behaviour</b>	(Agrusa et al., 2011; Chen & Lin, 2012; Chiang, 2012; Huang & Tian, 2013; Jang, Yu, & Pearson, 2003; Li & Cai, 2012; Li et al., 2011; Wang, 2004; Zeng et al., 2014)
- <b>Loyalty</b>	(Lee et al., 2011; Mao & Zhang, 2014)
<b>Consumption</b>	(Choi, Heo, & Law, 2015; Liu et al., 2011; Wong, 2013)
<b>Forecasting/estimation</b>	(Chou, Hsieh, & Tseng, 2014; Harrill, Uysal, Burnett, & Zhan, 2010; Lin, Liu, & Song, 2015; Moutinho, Huarng, Yu, & Chen, 2008; Xin Yang, Pan, Evans, & Lv, 2015)
<b>Focus on young/independent travellers</b>	(Jin et al., 2014; King & Gardiner, 2015; Prayag et al., 2015)
<b>Other (incl. demand, familiarity, policy, visa issues and control)</b>	(Chen & Lin, 2012; Han et al., 2011; Su et al., 2012; Yang & Wu, 2014)

Table 4: Authors, Research Foci and Primary Methodological Approach (Qualitative and Mixed Method Studies)

Research Focus	Qualitative studies	Mixed method studies
<b>Motivation</b>	(Chang et al., 2010; Fu et al., 2015; Hsu, Cai, & Wong, 2007; Huang & Hsu, 2005; Li & Ryan, 2014; Wu & Pearce, 2014; Ye, Qiu, & Yuen, 2011)	(Ruhanen, Whitford, & McLennan, 2015)
<b>Attitude</b>		(Chow & Murphy, 2008; Ruhanen et al., 2015)
- <b>Perception</b>	(Huang & Hsu, 2005; Pan, Ting, & Bau, 2014)	(Pearce, Wu, & Chen, 2015)
- <b>Constraints</b>	(Wu, 2015)	
<b>Image expectation (incl. branding)</b>	(Huang & Hsu, 2005; Li et al., 2011; Li et al., 2015; Pan et al., 2014; Song & Hsu, 2013; Sun et al., 2015; Tse & Zhang, 2013)	(Sun, Ryan, & Pan, 2014; Tse & Zhang, 2013)
<b>Culture</b>	(Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2011; Kwek & Lee, 2010, 2015; Li et al., 2011)	(Sun et al., 2014)
<b>Satisfaction</b>	(Li & Ryan, 2014)	
<b>Behaviour</b>	(Wu, 2015)	
<b>Consumption</b>	(Chang et al., 2010, 2011; Kwek & Lee, 2013; Xu & McGehee, 2012; Zhu, Xu, & Jiang, 2015)	
<b>Focus on young/independent travellers</b>	(Ong & du Cros, 2012; Wu & Pearce, 2014)	(Cros & Jingya, 2013)
<b>Distribution</b>	(de Sausmarez et al., 2012)	(Zhang & Murphy, 2009)
<b>Discussion papers (based on secondary sources)</b>	(Ma, Qu, Hsiao, & Jin, 2015; Tse, 2011)	(Arlt, 2013)
<b>Other (incl. demand, familiarity, policy, visa issues and control)</b>	(Fugmann & Aceves, 2013)	

### 2.3.2.2. Discussion – Three Directions for Future Research

In addition to the findings already mentioned (that future studies focussing on China outbound tourism to Asian destinations should be supplemented with additional studies on destinations outside Asia), the preceding critical review and analysis of the literature leads to three broad directions for future research, which will be discussed in the following section.

1. The merit of acquiring deep insights through the use of alternative methods and recognizing the diversity of China if researchers are to acquire a true *understanding* of China outbound tourism.
2. The need to question the importance and distinctiveness of Chinese culture in studies of China outbound tourism.

3. An impetus for researchers to study China outbound tourism within a broad socio-relational, legislative, political, cultural and practical context. This should be done with a view to extending consideration beyond the well-trodden investigation of image and motivations.

#### *Understanding China Outbound Tourism and Chinese Tourists*

The review of previous studies has concluded that seventy percent of these may be classified as quantitative. As was evidenced in Table 3 and 4, the main themes were motivations, attitudes, image/expectations, satisfaction, decision-making, behaviours and/or culture. Apart from culture, many of the various investigations on what may be described as “push-pull factors” are problematic. Most of the existing research on China outbound tourism has addressed a small number of core topics using similar methods and theories and replication appears to have been favoured over innovation. In his review of China outbound tourism research, Tse (2015) remarks that “In many ways, the research just keeps reinventing the wheel, without making much reference to other studies examining the same topic areas and contributing to tourism knowledge.” (p. 11). Tse adds:

“It is not conceivable that the study of yet another destination’s image in the mind of Chinese visitors will contribute significantly to the body of tourism knowledge. It is also difficult to argue that the motivational or behavioral study of yet another group of Chinese visitors will contribute much to the in-depth understanding of this important source market” (p. 14).

To address these issues, Tse (2015) suggests that future research should have a stronger focus on source markets, than on destinations and/or tourists. The present researcher agrees with the proposed direction, but note that this addresses only a single aspect of a more widespread issue.

Several of the established research contributors claim to be seeking a deeper or better understanding of China outbound tourism and of the Chinese tourist. However, their chosen methods have been predominantly quantitative and have not achieved their stated objective, even after multiple replications by other scholars using similar methods. The present researcher, like others before him (e.g. Havitz 1994; Henderson and Bedini 1995; Hollinshead 1996b; Riley 1996; Walle 1997 in Riley & Love, 2000), question the prospects for acquiring a deeper understanding of the relevant phenomena through an exclusively quantitative approach. In their overview of all China related research, Leung et al. (2014) quote Dahlstrom, Nygaard, and Crosno (2008), who argued that the maturity of a field of inquiry depends on the breadth and depth of research methods that are being deployed by scholars. Leung et al. (2014) advocate the use of sophisticated quantitative methods in China tourism research and argue that these approaches are becoming more prevalent. Yet, the need is not exclusively for the adoption of advanced statistical methods, but for innovative approaches in general and for studies that apply innovative qualitative and mixed methods approaches in particular. This point is supported by Jin and Wang (2015) who have suggested that future investigations "... could employ creative and innovative data collection techniques, such as the use of online and print media, longitudinal testing, observation, and attentional and biometric data." (p. 5).

The urgency of undertaking more qualitative and mixed methods studies is compounded by the current state of qualitative research on China outbound tourism. In practice, few of these studies are genuinely qualitative. Some authors have placed their qualitative results into categories that are specific or dichotomous to the extent that their nuance - arguably the strength of qualitative research - is lost (e.g. Cros & Jingya, 2013; Tse & Zhang, 2013). This pattern is evident when researchers count the

number of times that certain things are said and then tabulate the results, rather than providing more in-depth representations (e.g. Huang & Hsu, 2005; Lin, Chen, & Park, 2012). The authors of other allegedly qualitative studies perform their analyses using software solutions (Li, Lin, Tsai, & Wang, 2015; Pan, 2014). Such approaches certainly have a place in qualitative analysis by providing researchers with an opportunity to seek out important aspects that may undergo in-depth analysis. However, in the case of China outbound tourism research, the software often forms the sole basis for analysis, and the researchers make no use of the in-depth perspectives attributable to qualitative analysis. Finally, some researchers change their direction along the way and move from the search for an *understanding* of Chinese tourists, to gathering *information about* them. Li et al.'s (2011) study is an example. The authors provide the following statement of limitations: “This study focuses primarily on “what” Chinese tourists’ expectations are. Admittedly, the “why” and “how” questions remain unanswered.” (p. 748).

Tse (2011) proposes two reasons for the current situation. First, tourism researchers tend to approach their task from within the boundaries of their main discipline of training. Second, tourism researchers are often management oriented and approach their topic with a focus on achievable business success “... ignoring such questions as “What, specifically, is tourism?” and “How does tourism happen?”” (p. 494). Tse (2011) also refers to the following quotation from Cohen (1979):

“The complexity and heterogeneity of the field ... suggests that there is no point in searching for the theoretical approach to the study of tourism, just as there is no point in searching for the conceptualization of the tourist. Rather, a pluralistic and even eclectic research strategy is advocated. (p. 31)” (Tse, 2011).

This observation is illustrative of a problem for China outbound tourism scholars - that “the Chinese tourist” is conceived as being a singular entity. The assumption is

tempting for researchers because policymakers and companies are clamouring to attract “the Chinese tourist” and want a suitable recipe that includes the various traits that collectively describe the “Chinese tourist”. Yet, the researcher argues that there is no such thing as “the Chinese tourist” and that the Chinese are not a single homogenous group, since China is both large and highly diverse (Cai et al., 2008; Chen, Bao, & Huang, 2013; Kau & Lim, 2005). King and Tang (2009) have argued that,

“... prevailing orthodoxies do not fully accommodate the complexity of China’s socio-political environment, particularly in view of its vast population with provinces varying from highly to least developed and the sudden liberalization of the rules governing sanctioned consumer behaviour.” (p. 31).

Arlt (2013) has provided a broad distinction, by describing China outbound tourism as happening in a series of “waves”. He argues that the second wave of China outbound tourism is currently underway and is characterized by travellers who are often rich in terms of education, money, and travel experience, but “time poor”. This wave metaphor is somewhat vague and ignores the accompaniment of the second wave by another phenomenon that resembles the first wave – the rapid growth emanating from China’s second tier cities. However, the researcher acknowledges that attempts at a more nuanced perspective on China outbound tourism is a step in the right direction and that some generalization is inevitable. It is suggested that as the China outbound tourism phenomenon continues to advance rapidly, scholars should both be more innovative in their choice of methods and also investigate Chinese tourists as a collection of sub-groups, showing sensitivity towards the many and important distinctions within this huge market.

*Questioning the Importance and Distinctiveness of Chinese Culture*

As is shown in Table 3 and 4, culture is a significant research topic within the field of China outbound tourism. Most researchers have assumed that Chinese tourists are culturally distinct from those who emanate from other countries, particularly in the case of Western countries. The researcher acknowledges that there are undeniable differences between the Chinese and Western cultures. Chinese cultures for example are characterized by a focus on maintaining collective harmony (Fu, Cai & Lento, 2015), on face and on nurturing *guanxi* (networks) (Kwek & Lee, 2010, 2015). These concepts are not prevalent in Western culture. Because of this, researchers have correctly discouraged attempts to transplant the various motivation factors that have arisen from studies conducted on Western respondents tourists to the China context (Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010; Tse, 2011).

Despite the existence of these cultural distinctions between east and west, the researcher will argue that the treatment of culture in studies on China outbound tourism has been problematic and that researchers have tended to overstate their importance. The alleged differences are presented as something unique to China's relationship with other cultures. In practice, however, such differences may be equally applicable to tourists from other source markets who travel to destination cultures that differ from their own. For example, tourists emanating from India, which is another populous and developing Asia-Pacific nation with diverse and unique cultures, may exhibit similar future behaviours, as outbound tourism develops and attracts the attention of industry and policymakers in prospective destinations. These points are well illustrated by Sun et al. (2015) in their study on Chinese tourist perceptions of New Zealand. The researchers drew upon the usual list of established sources that have been repeatedly used as a starting point in culturally focused studies, such as the works of Hofstede,

Lonner, and Berry (1980) and Mok and Defranco (2000). Like many other previous researchers (e.g. Jin et al., 2014; Kwek & Lee, 2010), Sun et al. (2015) expected the perceptions of Chinese tourists to be uniquely different from those of other tourists and attributed this to their unique culture. However, in their conclusions they argue that:

“... if one searches for culturally determined responses, they can be found in the data, but equally the study indicates findings that have much in common with other studies of other tourist groups to New Zealand that come from different cultures.”

(p. 593)

They further argue that there is a need to show awareness that, “... what was true in China even but a short time ago may cease to be true today.” (ibid). Fu et al. (2015) have also noted that as Chinese travellers become increasingly experienced, their “culture” may become less distinct. Some studies have acknowledged this and have encouraged researchers to be cautious about the dangers of over-estimating the importance and uniqueness of Chinese culture. In their analysis of tourism through food, Chang et al. (2010) illustrate the commonality between Chinese and other tourists in preferring local meals as peak touristic experiences, while not compromising on their expectation about a familiar daily “core meal”. Fugmann and Aceves (2013) also illustrated the underlying reasons for preferences that some researchers have attributed to culture. In addressing the oft-mentioned preference of travellers for Chinese food, Fugmann and Aceves (2013) cited an interviewee who stated that “... this pre-conception was implemented purposely among Chinese tourists by the travel agencies, simply because Chinese restaurants can offer cheaper food than European-style restaurants.” (Fugmann & Aceves, 2013, p. 164). The example demonstrates that the symptoms may not reflect some of the more complex underlying realities. Finally, in their study of how Chinese tourists are configured by researchers,



DMOs, tourism consultants and practitioners, Jørgensen and Ren (2015) demonstrate that researchers, consultants and DMOs often make assumptions about cultural differences to make sense of the tourist Other, while practitioners often perceive the Chinese tourist to be ‘just another customer’.

The researcher will argue that such preconceptions often create and then recreate themselves. Many researchers assume that cultural differences are an important factor without proving why this is the case. An example of this is Rittichainuwat's (2011) study of ghosts as a travel barrier. In this study, it is assumed from the beginning that the researcher is dealing with a cultural issue, and that the results of the study relate to culture. However, one can argue that this may be as much a socio-political as a cultural issue. In China, ghosts are associated with corruption and the Chinese government has been known to ban films that contain ghost related content. This illustrates the way in which researchers who are actively pursuing the importance of cultural differences as an influence, may be more likely to confirm their prior assumptions. Various authors have used cultural differences as an explanation when other factors may have been equally valid. This circumstance is well evidenced by the succeeding example, where Li et al. (2011) reach the conclusion that: “Confucian values related to workplace dedication may result in Chinese visitors’ relatively high expectations for service performance as related to food and beverages and accommodations.” (p. 747). The study generated an apparently tangible result – that Chinese visitors have relatively high expectations of service performance. Yet, without any databased evidence, the authors propose a cultural explanation – that high expectations are attributable to Confucianism. Whilst the assumed connection between culture and expectations may conceivably be true, it is unproven and based on an assumption about the importance of culture.

As was previously mentioned, the assumptions that support the alleged importance of culture often originate in studies conducted prior to 2000. Now that a further decade and a half has elapsed, researchers would be well advised to question whether these arguments remain relevant, especially as China outbound tourism was in its infancy prior to 2000. These observations serve as a reminder of the need for greater sensitivity and nuance in studies that make claims about the importance of culture. In addition, researchers should question whether the Chinese are as (uniquely) culturally different as often claimed. In cases where differences are identified, researchers should then ask nuanced questions about how they are different, from whom they are different and about any meanings attributable to the differences.

*China Outbound Tourism is About More than the Chinese Tourist*

In arguing that future research should focus more on the source market than on the tourists, Tse (2015) highlights the importance of cultural, political, social and legislative aspects for the development and direction of China outbound tourism. The present researchers support this sentiment, which has also been endorsed by other prior studies that investigated issues in the source market. King and Tang (2009) found that "... factors in the socio-political environment determine travel choices prior to the influence of conventional travel decision-making processes." (p. 24). Similar points have been made by Fu et al. (2015) and by Fugmann and Aceves (2013), whereas Su et al. (2012) note the importance of legislation. The researcher will argue that the shift in focus from the tourist to the source market is a necessary but insufficient condition. As suggested, the distribution of China outbound tourists from the source market to the destination should be investigated in a wider context. This may be thought of as a relational system, affected by the tourist's social world, the actors and factors in the destination as well as by those prevalent in the source market. The researcher is not

suggesting that all future China outbound tourism research should investigate the full range of factors and actors simultaneously, since this would be impractical and ineffective. It is however proposed that future research should give greater consideration to such relations, should use them as a basis for formulating research designs and should explain how their results fit into the larger context. This calls for novel conceptual approaches and for theory building pertinent to the study of China outbound tourism. It appears that China outbound tourism research has reached a saturation point, where the replication of existing approaches, often emanating from Western contexts, is ceasing to generate new insights. There is a pressing need for more innovative conceptual and theoretical approaches that better reflect the realities of contemporary China outbound tourism. This is particularly so because of the fast changing nature of China outbound tourism and the current and ongoing onslaught of new disruptive technologies within the travel sector.

#### **2.3.2.3. Research Gaps - Implementing Four Directions for Future Research**

The review of existing literature on China outbound tourism has suggested four main directions for future research. These directions were taken into account as this study was designed. This section summarizes the four directions for future research and explains how they will be implemented in the present study.

First, research on China outbound tourism to Asian destinations should be supplemented with additional studies on destinations outside Asia, reflective of the evolving travel patterns of China outbound tourists. This study will acknowledge this gap in its focus on Chinese tourism to Scandinavia.

Second, alternative (qualitative and mixed) methods that recognize the diversity of Chinese tourists and of the Chinese market should be applied more widely. There is an urgent need for additional qualitative and mixed methods studies, both

because quantitative studies have dominated (accounting for 70% of the research on China outbound tourism), and because many existing qualitative studies can barely be described as such. As will be explained further in the methodology (Chapter 4), this study adopts a novel critical qualitative research approach in acknowledgement of this gap.

Third, there is a need to question the importance and distinctiveness of culture in studies of China outbound tourism. If cultural difference is found to be present and important, it is timely to answer nuanced questions about the nature of such differences, including: “how exactly are they different?”, “from whom do they differ?” and “what are the implications of such differences?”. Cultural awareness is no doubt important in China outbound tourism research. However, where such importance is taken as a prerequisite, there is a danger that researchers may present cultural differences as more important and unique than is merited. In this study, culture is included if it is found relevant through an inductive analysis process. This means that culture will be recognized as important if it is found to be so through inductive empirical analysis, on the same level as every other aspect. Its importance will not be taken for granted, and will not be taken as a prerequisite.

Fourth, future researchers should recognize that China outbound tourism does not occur in isolation. It is a component of wider relational systems, affected by source market related factors and actors, by destinations and by the social world of the tourist. China outbound tourism research should therefore be conducted with a greater acknowledgement of its socio-relational, legislative, political, cultural and practical context. In the following chapter, the theoretical approach to this study will be introduced. This approach aims to describe and understand tourism distribution as a relational process affected by a number of factors including those mentioned above. A

second point here is that it is timely to move beyond the prevalent self-contained perspectives that have focussed on domains such as image or motivations, towards studies that better reflect the evolving nature of China outbound tourism. This study recognizes the importance of these existing studies, but also recognizes that another motivation study of group package tourists to Asian destinations will perhaps not add much to knowledge on China outbound tourism. Because of this, the interviews conducted for this study are focused on interviewees and aspects that have not been well covered in the existing research. If information is needed on the more well covered tourist groups or aspects, this information will be collected from the existing literature.

### **CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING TOURISM DISTRIBUTION**

This chapter will discuss the main concepts and ideas that underlie the thesis and the conceptual framework. In the methodology section, it is explained that Critical Pragmatism is the main paradigm underpinning this study (p. 101). This approach means that the approach and framework for this thesis builds on inspiration from a number of different research traditions. Some of these inspirations differ on central points, but it is possible to find common ground between them. The structure of this chapter reflects the process the researcher underwent in developing the conceptual framework.

The chapter begins with a review of the existing literature on tourism distribution. Based on this, it is argued that a new approach is needed. Activity Theory is a main theoretical foundation for the approach and the theory and its foundation is therefore presented. At this point, the main building blocks for the conceptual framework are in place, and the initial framework is presented. Here it is argued that Activity Theory, with its focus on activity systems as the unit of analysis, may be what is needed to understand the role of individual actors in the distribution network, and their mediated relation with other tourism actors. However, Activity Theory does not provide a clear way to analyse, and ultimately understand the relations between different actors involved in distribution of Chinese tourists to Scandinavia. For this reason, Actor-Network Theory is introduced as a tool to investigate and make sense of these network relations.

### 3.1 Tourism Distribution

In the broader literature, distribution have been understood as the process of making a product or service available for consumers, through direct means, or through intermediaries (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2013; Kotler & Keller, 2015). Although it is recognised that distribution channels are "... complex behavioural systems in which people and companies interact to accomplish goals" (Kotler et al., 2013, p. 345), the primary focus in literature as well as in practice is on distribution as happening in distribution (or marketing) channels. Practitioners use these channels to plan and strategize their launch of new products or to improve the distribution of products to their customers. Researchers use "the channel approach" to describe and explain how distribution of products is happening.

This supplier oriented and economically focussed understanding of distribution has also been prevailing in tourism research where tourism distribution and distribution channels have been recognized as important by a number of researchers (e.g. Berné, García-González, García-Uceda, & Múgica, 2015; Buhalis, 2000; Kotler et al., 2013; Lin, Lee, & Chen, 2009; D. G. Pearce & Schott, 2005). A main reason for this is that tourism distribution channels "... can influence consumer behaviour and determine the ability of the industry to respond to consumers' requests efficiently" (Buhalis, 2001, p. 8), meaning that "travel distribution specialists have a far greater power to influence and to direct demand, than their counterparts in other industries do." (ibid, p. 8). Tourism distribution channels have been defined as "... the link between the producers of tourism services and their customers " (Gartner & Bachri, 1994, p. 164). Buhalis (2001) argues that distribution channels have three functions: (1) to provide information, (2) to bundle or combine products together, (3) to establish means

whereby consumers can make and pay for reservations. In tourism, the managerial understanding of tourism distribution as something, which can be designed and happens in channels is also dominating both in practice and in research.

In practice, this is the case, because some managers, attempt to use distribution channels as a way to plan or strategize the delivery of their products. However, it can be argued that this is not possible for most actors in the tourism industry. It is for example almost impossible for the SMEs, who are highly present in tourism, to plan and execute distribution strategies, because they have little control over the distribution process.

For researchers, this approach may also be useful, especially if the research is done from an economically focussed supply perspective. It is for example a useful way to illustrate and make an overview of the distribution process to make it easy for companies to plan a distribution strategy. It is also a good way to describe distribution processes to practitioners, because it is “speaking their language”.

Despite these merits, it can also be argued that this approach is limited in its scope.

First, because tourism distribution is different from distribution in other fields. In other industries, the product is moved to the consumer. In tourism, the tourist is moved to the product. This thesis suggests that the latter is much more complicated. Compared to distribution of products, tourism distribution involves complex and messy processes that are affected to a larger degree by socio-relational, legislative, political, cultural and practical contexts (as argued in the previous literature review).

Second, “the channel approach” carries with it a managerial epistemology, which implies that reality is what managers say it is. That distribution will happen the way that the manager planned it or, at least, that reality happens in a way that can be



described using the managerial understanding of distribution as a linear process happening in channels. The problem here is, as it will be argued further in the pages of this thesis, that tourism distribution in reality, in practice, is too complex and messy, to be understood only as clean and linear.

The argument made here is that tourism distribution is (enacted as) two things. It is a tool to simplify and communicate complex processes, and it is a complex practise, a phenomenon. This literature review of tourism distribution shows that the first understanding has received most of the scholarly attention so far, and argues that the latter should receive more attention if scholars wish to truly *understand* tourism distribution.

Network theorists have shown how actors do not act in isolation, but rather in networks of relations, which affect their behaviour (Granovetter, 1985; Provan, Fish, & Sydow, 2007; Rowley, 1997; Wasserman & Galaskiewicz, 1994; Webster & Morrison, 2004). This alone is reason to challenge and supplement the linear approach to tourism distribution, as the complex relational networks that tourism actors act in, are not linear. Another reason that an alternative approach to the understanding of tourism distribution is needed is that it is currently in a process of change. New technologies are disrupting traditional ways of distributing tourism products and with that, more and more actors are involved in the distribution process, and the process becomes increasingly complex and unstructured. This means that 'the channel' as a representation of tourism distribution becomes increasingly insufficient as technology develops and complicates the distribution process.

Long before online travel agents, crowdfunding and other innovations born of new technologies, Bitner and Booms (1982) studied tourism distribution as a system rather than a channel. They argued that the tourism distribution system consists of tourists, suppliers and three types of intermediaries: tour operators, retail travel agents and specialty channellers. Despite the various technological innovations, this overall perspective still holds today although the complexity of these categories and their internal relations have risen dramatically (Youcheng Wang & Qualls, 2007). In order to undertake research about tourism distribution, tourists, suppliers and intermediaries must therefore all be taken into account on some level.

### **3.1.1. Definitions - Supplier, Tourist and Intermediary**

Tourism suppliers are widely understood as businesses that supply tourism products to consumers (tourists) (e.g. Handfield, Walton, Sroufe, & Melnyk, 2002; Li & Petrick, 2008; Werthner & Klein, 1999; Zhang, Song, & Huang, 2009).

The understanding and definition of ‘tourism’ has been the subject of much debate, particularly as part of a discussion of whether tourism can and should be considered as an industry (e.g. Leiper, 1999; Tremblay, 1998; Wilson, 1998). The same has not been the case for the understanding and definition of a ‘tourist’. UNWTO’s definition of ‘tourist’ is often cited as a clear, contemporary and concise understanding of what a tourist is, and this is the definition used in this thesis:

“A visitor is a traveller taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited. A visitor (domestic, inbound or outbound) is classified as a tourist (or overnight visitor), if his/her trip includes an overnight stay, or as a same-day visitor (or excursionist) otherwise.”

(UNWTO, 2015, *no page number*)

Unlike 'tourist' and 'supplier', 'intermediary' is a rather loose term and the boundaries of what constitutes a tourism intermediary is not just blurry, but also changing. Therefore, the limited existing research on intermediaries in tourism in general and in relation to the Chinese market will be used as an outset to discuss what constitutes a tourism intermediary and how it is defined in the thesis.

### **3.1.2. Tourism Intermediaries**

In contemporary literature, the primary intermediaries are still perceived to be tour operators (inbound and outbound), who act as wholesalers; and travel agents (inbound and outbound), who act as retailers (Buhalis, 2001; Čavlek, 2006; Forstner, 2004; Lin et al., 2009; Pearce, 2008a; Pearce & Schott, 2005; Tsaor & Lin, 2014). Two important points about these actors are noted by the authors: (1) that some actors might be large enough encompass both the tour operator and the travel agency role, (2) that distribution may vary depending on factors such as the segments being served, the product, destination characteristics, market size, market distance and the suppliers' marketing strategies (D. G. Pearce & Schott, 2005; D. G. Pearce & Tan, 2006; D. G. Pearce et al., 2007; Sharda & Pearce, 2006). Although these are argued to be the primary intermediaries, other types of actors are also recognised as important intermediaries in modern literature. Bitner and Booms (1982) dubbed these specialty channellers, examples of these include: Certain accommodation providers, incentive travel firms, meeting and convention planners, DMOs, association executives, tour guides, as well as leisure and corporate buying groups (Buhalis, 2001; Čavlek, 2006; Forstner, 2004; Pearce & Schott, 2005; Reid & Pearce, 2008). Finally, eMediaries also play a very central role in modern tourism distribution and accordingly so in tourism research.

The existence of tourism intermediaries is explained and justified by a number of advantages to producers, consumers and destinations respectively. The main advantages for producers are: (1) that intermediaries can sell in bulk, which transfers risk from the intermediary to the producer (Bastakis, Buhalis, & Butler, 2004; Cooper et al., 2006; Tsaur & Lin, 2014), (2) that intermediaries can reduce promotion costs because it gives single producers the opportunity to focus on the travel trade rather than the end consumer (ibid), (3) that intermediaries may act as coordinators and make long term planning possible (Bastakis et al., 2004; Čavlek, 2006; Cooper et al., 2006), (4) that the financial consistency of bigger intermediaries, in particular, means that they will pay and pay on time, (5) that intermediaries can monitor and uphold quality standards and provide expert knowledge to producers (Bastakis et al., 2004; Cooper et al., 2006). For consumers, the main advantages of intermediaries are according to Cooper et al. (2006) and the ETC (2011): (1) that they can avoid search and transaction costs, (2) that they can gain specialist knowledge, which means that uncertainty of travel is minimised, (3) that intermediaries may offer lower prices, and (4) that intermediaries may offer travel information and overview of different travel choices. The primary advantage of intermediaries for destinations is, according to Cooper et al. (2006), that they can benefit from the international marketing network of the intermediary and all that comes with that, in terms of increased awareness, potential extension of the season and so on.

### **3.1.2.1. eMediaries**

While these advantages still apply to most tourism intermediaries, the arrival of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the Internet has complicated tourism intermediation considerably and enabled new practices from intermediaries, consumers and suppliers. In addition to this, a new breed of intermediaries have come

into existence, the eMediary (Buhalis & Licata, 2002; Cooper et al., 2006; Daniele, 2004; Kracht & Wang, 2010).

“They [eMediaries] have become a crucial partner for service suppliers and an ambivalent co-operator-competitor for brick-and-mortar distributors. These e-intermediaries have lean cost structures, global reach and technologically- enabled economies of scale (large volumes at low transaction costs)”

(Dilts & Prough, 2002 p. 209 in Berne, Garcia-Gonzalez, & Mugica, 2012)

Combined with the power of the Internet, Global Distribution Systems (GDS), Central Reservation Systems (CRS) and eMediaries have made physical contact redundant and consumers increasingly do both product search and booking online (Buhalis & Licata, 2002). These changes have spawned academic discussion of the relevance of traditional tourism intermediaries.

Looking back at the literature dealing with this topic and the current reality of the intermediary market, it becomes clear that the new eMediaries are here to stay and will get bigger, more numerous and more powerful (Daniele, 2004; Dilts & Prough, 2003; Law, Leung, & Wong, 2004; Tse, 2003). Some traditional intermediaries have been forced out of the market, while others have had to change their way of working to embrace the new tools brought in by ICT and the Internet (Čavlek, 2006; Goldmanis, Hortaçsu, Syverson, & Emre, 2010). However, there are also signs that the traditional intermediaries, particularly the ones that know how to take advantage of the new technologies, are still very relevant (Cooper et al., 2006; Hills & Cairncross, 2011; Law et al., 2004). The consistent relevance of traditional travel intermediaries is particularly present in upcoming markets like China.

### 3.1.2.2. Tourism Intermediaries in China

In China, eMediaries led by Ctrip (54.1% market share in second quarter of 2014 according to (iResearch Consulting Group, n.d.)) are thriving. This is particularly the case with the introduction of the new Tourism Law in 2013, since it resulted in better price transparency and product diversity advantages which made offline tourists go online (China Tourism Watch, 2013). Despite this, most Chinese travellers still book their trips offline (ETC & UNWTO, 2012) and it has been suggested that the further the distance of travel, the larger the chance is that the tourist will make use of intermediaries (Pearce, 2008a; Tsaur & Lin, 2014). The penetration rate of online booking was still only 20% in China in 2015 compared to more than 70% in America, 50% in the EU and 30% in India (COTRI, 2016; iResearch Consulting Group, 2014). According to Bogdanovych, Berger, Simoff, and Sierra (2006) travellers prefer booking their international trips from a travel agent rather than booking online, due to the advantages of travel agents in social interaction, expertise and the possibility to save time on search, though they believe it is cheaper to book online. Peng, Xu, and Chen (2013) argue that these might be the main reasons why Chinese tourists turn to the traditional intermediaries instead of their online counterparts. In addition, Visit Britain found that important reasons for the Chinese tourist preference of offline intermediaries came from complicated and misleading visa regulations, lack of language skills, demand for services, and pursuit of better value for money (Visit Britain, 2010).

Other factors that set the Chinese intermediary market apart from others were also found in the literature. According to de Sausmarez, Tao and McGrath (2012), there is no clear distinction between tour operators and travel agents, nor between wholesalers and retailers in China (all travel-related businesses approved by the

government are regarded as “luxingshe”, literally translated “travel agent” (Huang, 2010). In a 2011 report, the European Travel Commission explains how large travel agencies serve several thousands of smaller travel agents, as these are not licensed for outbound travel and rely on big agencies for visa processing and official procedures because of it. They further explain that the travel agencies licensed by China National Tourism Administration, to handle ADS tours normally cooperate with incoming tour operators in the destination countries to design and package the products (ETC, 2011). According to Reid and Pearce (2008), this is particularly the case when dealing with long-haul foreign destinations where differences in language and/or culture may be present. These points illustrate that the structure of tourism distribution systems in China may differ from those prevailing in other contexts and thus render experiences and studies from other markets of little use when dealing with Chinese distribution and intermediaries. This is especially the case when dealing with long-haul destinations with differing languages and cultures, as is the case in this thesis.

### **3.1.2.3. Definition of Tourism Intermediary**

Referring to previous studies, Hills and Cairncross (2011) point out how the roles of tourism intermediaries vary depending on the context, suggesting that “the role of intermediaries is broad and currently undergoing change.” (p. 250). The truth in this perspective is clear from the rest of the literature presented here. Because of this, the researcher chose to work with a relatively broad definition of tourism intermediaries as: *The actors who link producers of tourism services and their customers*. This is inspired by Gartner and Bachri's (1994), definition of the distribution channel as: “... the link between the producers of tourism services and their customers “ (p. 164). It is broad enough to encompass the perspectives from existing literature on tourism distribution and, at the same time, it allows researchers to work with intermediaries as

actors who work in relations with other actors. Something which will prove important when the Activity Theory and Actor-Network Theory based framework is presented.

In addition to this definition, the literature on intermediaries points to four important points, which will be considered in the thesis. (1) eMediaries have become a central part of tourism distribution and cannot be ignored in a study of intermediaries in tourism. (2) Although the rise of eMediaries is present in China, the traditional intermediary still dominates and should be the centre of attention when studying intermediaries in Chinese tourism. (3) Research on intermediaries in Chinese tourism cannot be based solely on experiences from other markets, since the Chinese market differs in a number of important ways. (4) On site intermediaries, such as incoming bureaus, play a major role in outbound Chinese tourism and should not be overlooked.

### **3.2 Tourism Distribution from Channels to Networks**

Aspects of tourism distribution have often been researched within the contexts of inter-organisational relations, resource dependency theory and strategic management (Ford, Wang, & Vestal, 2012). Although such studies provide important insights, the researcher agrees with Ford et al., 2012 in their argument that these approaches do not capture the full scope of tourism distribution networks, as this is not their focus. Studies and frameworks that capture the full scope of tourism distribution are generally missing in the existing literature.

In his extensive review of tourism distribution literature, Pearce (2009) states that existing research on tourism distribution from a suppliers perspective can be divided into five approaches: behavioural, structural, functional, evaluative, and strategic. These approaches are explained briefly in Table 5.



Table 5: Approaches to Tourism Distribution Research (Based on Pearce (2009))

Approach	Explanation
<b>Structural</b>	Focussed on tier-by-tier discussion of distribution channels and the way they are linked. How does the system operate?
<b>Behavioural</b>	Focussed on the behaviour of channel members. Why do the channel members do what they do?
<b>Functional</b>	Focussed on the tasks that is and/or must be performed in the distribution channel.
<b>Strategic</b>	Focussed on strategic approaches to tourism distribution and on channel design.
<b>Evaluative</b>	Focussed on evaluation of distribution strategies

In his discussion of literature that applies the structural approach, Pearce (2009) argues that:

“... comparatively little of the work on tourism distribution explicitly recognizes the wider networks of interdependent firms that make up larger distribution systems in the sense that the basic components of a network are nodes and connections, actors and social ties (Rocks et al.’s 2005). Rather, the work on tourism distribution has generally taken a more structural approach in which researchers have concentrated on a tier-by-tier discussion of direct and indirect distribution channels and the ways in which these are linked (Pearce, 2007a).”

(Pearce, 2009, pp. 314–315)

This critique is echoed in the broader literature on *supply chains*. Kotler et al., (2013) for example argue that:

“The term supply chain may be too limited: It takes a make-and-sell view of the business. A better approach is a value delivery network made up of the company, suppliers, distributors and ultimately costumers...”

(p. 334)

The critique in distribution literature as well as in the wider literature illuminates the mentioned limitations of the structural “channel approach”, which has very often been applied in studies of tourism distribution. Despite the critique, the structural approach still dominates, even in behavioural and functional studies. In the first case, the researchers will for example focus on groups of actors pitted against each other - tour

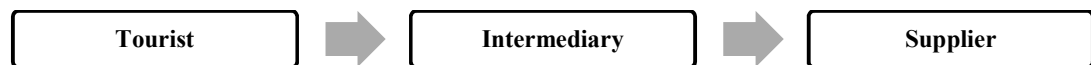
operators and hotels; hotels and other intermediaries; inbound tour operators and suppliers instead of more detailed analysis of the relations between actors in the distribution system. This means that the existing literature on tourism distribution is dominated by studies that are either structural in nature or that support their arguments with a structural model that illustrates one of two things: (1) How a specific distribution channel is put together; or (2) how different types of intermediaries may be connected. The purpose of the first is to show the specifics of the distribution channel in a specific case at a specific point in time, examples of these can be found in King and Choi (1999); Pan and Laws (2003); Pearce et al. (2007); Reid and Pearce (2008) and Sharda and Pearce (2006). The purpose of the latter is to make universal models that illustrate the structure or process of tourism distribution in general, such examples can be found in Bitner and Booms (1982); Buhalis (2001); Cooper et al. (2006) and Tsaor and Lin (2014).

Kracht and Wang (2010) also point to the many diagrammatical depictions of tourism distribution which have been carried out among others by: “Alamdari, 2002; Anckarand Walden, 2000; Bowden, 2007; Buhalis and Licata, 2002; Buhalis and O’Connor, 2005; Chircu and Kauffman, 2000a; Granados et al., 2008; Longhi, 2008; Maet al., 2003; O’Connor and Frew, 2002; Werthner and Klein, 1999” (p. 737). They highlight that the various depictions have contributed to a fuller understanding of tourism distribution, since each of them focus on different aspects. Yet, they also point out that most of these studies have a rather static approach and that they do not consider the historical evolution and progression. As a response to this, Kracht and Wang (2010) explain and illustrate the evolution of tourism distribution through a series of detailed diagrams depicting networks of actors in tourism distribution and their potential relation. Like the other models, this contributes to our understanding of

tourism distribution, as it shows the actors that can potentially be involved in tourism distribution, the potential relations between them and how this has developed over time. However, as is the case with many other such models, it is unclear what the connections mean and no contextual factors, outside the distribution system, are taken into account.

The latter point is important, because it seems to be a general problem in research about tourism distribution. The distribution system is often treated as a vacuum, unaffected by external factors and/or as a closed linear process with a specific beginning and ending. A typical distribution model or illustration will therefore be based on the idea that distribution can be understood a process from supplier through intermediary to tourists, and illustrated as more advanced variations or developments of the same linear model, illustrated in Figure 1.

*Figure 2: Traditional Tourism Distribution Illustration*

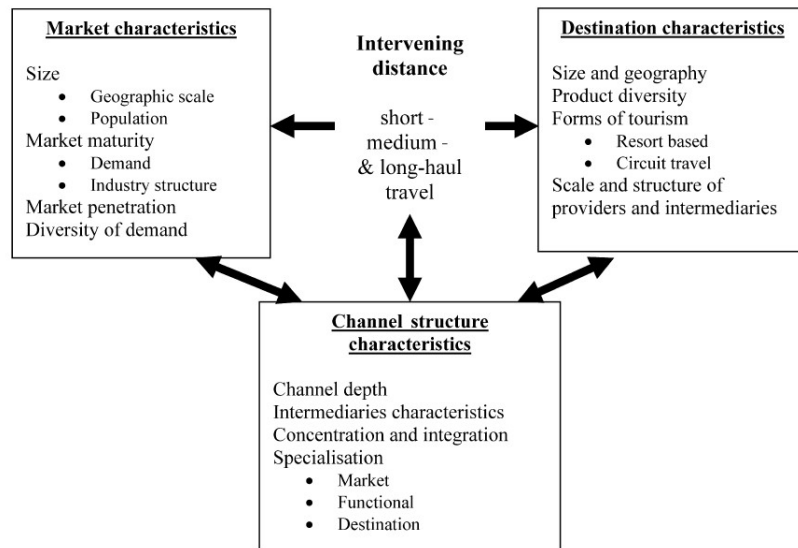


As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, there are good reasons why this is the case. For example, the models are often made with the purpose of illustrating and ultimately communicating something already proven by the respective researchers, or as a way to illustrate a strategic guideline that a business should follow, rather than as a framework to understand and analyse distribution systems.

This is not the first time that attention has been called to linear and static representations of reality in tourism studies. Tse (2011) for example points to this as an issue in studies of Chinese tourism in general. He argues that these are dominated by motivation and market segmentation theories that “... tend to be linear, dichotomous, or two-dimensional for simplicity’s sake and do not answer complex questions.” (pp. 495-496).

Aside from Bitner and Booms (1982), other researchers have approached tourism distribution or aspects of tourism as networks rather than channels. Such attempts have been led by Pearce, who through cooperations with different collaborators has moved from channel focussed approaches (e.g. Pearce & Schott, 2005; Pearce et al., 2007; Reid & Pearce, 2008) towards more network focussed approaches (Pearce, 2008b, 2009). In terms of frameworks for analysis of tourism distribution that are both non-linear and includes contextual aspects only one example was found in the existing literature: Pearce et al.'s (2007) “Analytical Framework for International Tourism Distribution Systems” (Figure 2).

Figure 3: An Analytical Framework for International Tourism Distribution Systems (Pearce et al., 2007 p. 58)



This framework is a useful and a valuable resource in many ways, and may be the best that researchers have in terms of full frameworks for analysis of tourism distribution. It provides a good overview of important factors to take into account when analysing tourism distribution and it combines, systematises and communicates existing knowledge on tourism distribution into a concise framework. However, there are also important limitations to the framework. First, although the framework is more holistic

than other tourism distribution analysis tools, it is still built on the premise that that tourism distribution happens in channels. Second, it is limited because it is made specifically for analysis of international tourism distribution systems, which means that it is focussed on broad structural characteristics. Third, it ignores important contextual aspects, such as cultural and/or legislative rules or policies, which may affect tourism distribution. Fourth, the unit of analysis is somewhat unclear and guidelines are missing in terms of how to do the actual analysis.

Pearce (2009) explains how there is a surprising lack of research on channel design and strategic approaches to the distribution of travel products. He mentions that a reason for this might be that the tourism industry mainly consists of SMEs, which base their actions on ad-hoc decisions and prior experience, rather than on analysis, design and strategy. This may be the case, but this work suggests another reason. Because of the mentioned complexity of the distribution system, tourism distribution cannot only be regarded as a channel or a linear process. Tourism distribution involves negotiation and ongoing exchange of goods and information among tourists, intermediaries and suppliers, who may be connected in many different non-linear ways. Ways that may even change during the distribution process.

In this section, it has been argued that tourism scholars have primarily approached tourism distribution through a managerial epistemology. This has resulted in research that is useful in some ways, but that is also limited by its static nature, linearity, unclear object of analysis, lacking sense of context and/or isolated focus. Based on this, it is argued that there is need for a new way to understand and analyse tourism distribution. Particularly an approach that takes a non-managerial epistemological approach to the study of tourism distribution. Such an approach should take account of tourists,

suppliers and intermediaries; be neither linear nor static; consider the context of tourists, suppliers and intermediaries respectively, and finally, demonstrate a clear object of analysis. In this thesis, such an approach to analysis of tourism distribution is proposed. This approach is based on existing literature on tourism distribution, particularly the work of Pearce (2009), founded in understandings from Activity Theory and inspired by ideas from Actor-Network Theory.

The reason(s) for the research gap(s) described here will be explored further later in this thesis. This includes ontological and epistemological discussions relating to how tourism distribution has been studied in the past, how some approaches are traditionally favoured over others in certain research disciplines, and how the ontological and epistemological approach of the researcher may shape the results of a study (see “After ANT” p. 85; “Actor-Network Theory and Activity Theory, Similarities, Differences and Application” p. 92 and “Why a Qualitative Approach” p. 109 for these discussions and further elaboration on the research gap(s)).

### **3.3 Choice of Theory**

At first the researcher’s intention was to use a more traditional systems or network approach, like The Tourism System (Gunn, 1988; Leiper, 1979, 1990; Mill & Morrison, 2012), Social Network Analysis (SNA) (Baggio et al., 2013; Granovetter, 1985; Provan et al., 2005; Wasserman & Galaskiewicz, 1994; Webster & Morrison, 2004) or a method that utilises both qualitative and quantitative perspectives in the investigation of networks, such as Synergistic Social Network Analysis (SSNA) (Jørgensen, 2016). The more the researcher read about this topic, about the way that tourism distribution is changing with the introduction of new technologies and the more he thought about what was needed to truly understand tourism distribution, the more he realised that such an approach would not be sufficient in this case.

Mill and Morrison's (2012) concept and framework of The Tourism System has many merits. It springs from the idea that tourism should be considered as a system (Leiper, 1979, 1990) based on four interlinked parts:

- Destination: Planning, developing and controlling system;
- Marketing: Strategy, planning, promotion and distribution;
- Demand: The factors influencing the market; and
- Travel: The characteristics of travel.

The main idea of tourism as a complex system fits well with the approach of this thesis. The tourism system approach is strong in terms of creating an overview of the different processes that are involved in tourism in general. In terms of using it as a tool for analysis of tourism distribution however, it falls short on two fronts. First, while the framework provides a good overview of tourism in general, it is in some ways too broad and unfocused as an analysis tool, especially when the focus is on tourism distribution specifically. The reason for this may be that Leiper's (1979) original framework was made to define tourism, not to analyse it, and that Mill and Morrison's (2012) framework was made to explain tourism to students among others, again, not to analyse it. Second, there is no clear object of analysis and the ontological and epistemological basis for the framework is unclear. Where does the analysis start? What methods should be used to develop an understanding? To use a metaphor, one can argue the list of ingredients is there, but the instructions on how to make the dish are missing. As long as these aspects are unclear, the researcher did not see the framework as a fitting analysis tool for this academic research.

SNA and SSNA are also considered as useful approaches. SNA allows researchers to find connections between large numbers of actors and to point to central

actors in the networks, while SSNA allows researchers to gain more in-depth perspectives on the central actors within the networks. Similar to the distribution channel literature mentioned in the previous section, for better or for worse, these approaches have a very specific way of approaching and understanding networks and the relations within them. This includes specific vocabulary and methods that are useful for certain things, but that may also restrain the researcher somewhat. It directs attention to very specific things, such as centrality of certain actors or the density of a given network. The researcher saw this specificity as a weakness for a project like this, which aims to embrace ideas and concepts emerging from the data.

Researchers have described and criticised a tendency within tourism research to stay within a certain discipline (Echtner & Jamal, 1997; Hollinshead (2004); Tse (2011)). They all argue that it is problematic because cross-disciplinary approaches more grounded in social realities would benefit tourism research. The overarching paradigm in this thesis is Critical Pragmatism. The reason for this is that the main goal is to answer the research question(s) in the best way possible. Therefore, the researcher aims to understand tourism distribution by using the tools that best provide such an understanding, and not by following the inherent rules of a certain discipline. Because of this, it was clear to the researcher, that an entirely new approach was needed in order to avoid the remnants of “the channel approach” on the one hand and the fixed vocabulary and approaches of systems and network theory on the other.

The researcher had some experience working with Activity Theory from previous work. It seemed that this approach could provide a structure for the framework, as well as an ontological and epistemological starting point, which worked well with the



pragmatic approach to the thesis. Yet, this was not enough. Some aspects could not be explained or investigated using Activity Theory. A more open and critical approach was needed to allow the researcher to investigate aspects of tourism distribution that could not be investigated in the Activity Theoretical framework. Actor Network Theory was chosen because it is a highly critical approach, but shares important characteristic with traditional network theory perspectives - both argue that actors do not act in isolation, but rather in networks of relations, which affect their behaviour (Granovetter, 1985; Provan et al., 2007; Rowley, 1997; Wasserman & Galaskiewicz, 1994; Webster & Morrison, 2004) and that one must understand the network (relations) to understand the actor. In other words "... stakeholder relationships do not occur in a vacuum of dyadic ties, but rather in a network of influences" (Rowley, 1997, p. 890). Another important aspect of these approaches, compared to the tourism system approach, is that the object of analysis is clear – mediated activity happening in relations between network actors.

In the following, Activity Theory, and how it fits in the context of this thesis will first be explained further. After that, the Activity Theory based conceptual framework, which was developed as part of this study, will be presented and explained. Actor-Network Theory and its role in this thesis and in the conceptual framework will be explained in the section after that. This order may seem puzzling, but was chosen so that readers may first establish an understanding of the structure of the framework (based on Activity Theory) and then understand some of the more critical thoughts behind it (based on Actor-Network Theory).

### 3.4 Activity Theory

Activity theory; CHAT (cultural historical Activity Theory), the cultural-historical theory of activity and socio-cultural psychology are all names for the theoretical, research and practice perspective (Holzman, 2006), which will be presented and discussed in the following sections. Activity Theory, which is the name that will be used in this thesis, was first introduced in the 1920s and 1930s by the founders of the cultural-historical school of Russian psychology: Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Luria (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). It provides a framework for describing and understanding the structure, development, and context of human activity, meaning that it is a descriptive meta-theory, rather than a highly predictive theory (Kaptelinin et al., 1999). There are a number of different reasons that Activity Theory was seen as fit for the development of a conceptual framework for analysis of tourism distribution, these should become clearer as this chapter progresses.

Activity Theory provides conceptual tools to understand networks of activity systems that take the context of individual actors into account, as well as the relations between them (Engeström, 2001). As already argued, the researcher found that such tools had largely been missing in research of tourism distribution thus far. In comparing Activity Theory to other approaches Randall, Harper and Rouncefield (2007) also highlight its "... capacity to deal with interdisciplinary arenas where cognitive presumptions have come to dominate" (p. 95). This thesis argues that the managerial epistemology centred on 'the channel approach' represents such a dominating cognitive presumption in research on tourism distribution. The aim is that Activity Theory may help the researcher to avoid this presumption. Since its introduction, Activity Theory has been developed and applied in a number of different contexts. Including education (Plakitsi, 2013), organisational psychology, cognitive

science, literacy, writing and rhetoric, information technology (human-computer interaction) and geography (Kaptelinin et al., 1999).

Perhaps due to various applications, there is no unified perspective on Activity Theory. Holzman (2006) suggests that there may be more definitions of Activity Theory than there are of postmodernism. However, opposite for example postmodernism, it seems that the many different perspectives are not seen as problematic by the developers and practitioners of Activity Theory. Instead, a quite pragmatic approach where concepts that are found useful are utilised in different settings seems to dominate, while debating of whose understanding is right or wrong is rare (Holzman, 2006). The reason for this may be that there is broad agreement on a conceptual and methodological core, on which the theory builds.

First, there is broad agreement that the human mind emerges, exists, and can only be understood in the context of human interaction with the world. Second, it is agreed that this interaction - activity - is socially and culturally determined (Kaptelinin et al., 1999). This means that the smallest unit of analysis is *the activity*, rather than for example the individual. An activity system consists of a subject (in this case the tourist, supplier or intermediary), an object/motive (what they want to achieve), a mediating artefact, instrument or tool (can be both physical and psychological) and three contextual factors: the community, the rules (cultural and legislative) and the division of labour (Engeström, 1987; Leont'ev, 1978). The basic ideas of Activity Theory are elaborated into a set of five basic principles:

Table 6: Basic principles of Activity Theory

Name	Principle	Explanation	Source(s)
<b>1. Object-Orientedness</b>	Every activity is directed toward something that exists in the world - an object	The understanding of objects is not limited to meta-physical and biological properties. Socially and culturally determined properties are also included	(Kaptelinin et al., 1999; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978)
<b>2. Hierarchical Structure of Activity</b>	Interaction between human beings and the world is organized into three hierarchical levels: activities, actions, and operations	Activities are undertaken in order to fulfil motives. Motives are top-level objectives that are not subordinated to any other objectives. People may or may not be aware of their motives. Actions are goal-directed processes carried out to fulfil a motive. Actions are conscious; people are aware of their goals. Operations are functional subunits of actions, carried out automatically and unconsciously	(Kaptelinin et al., 1999; Leont'ev, 1978)
<b>3. Internalization and Externalization</b>	The ongoing transformation between external and internal is the basis of human activity. Because of this, internal activities cannot be understood without external activities and vice versa	Internalisation happens when external actions are internalised. This provides means to test potential interactions with reality (mental simulations, imaginings, considering alternative plans, and so forth). Externalisation is the opposite. It may often be necessary when an internalized action needs repair, or scaling. It is for example important in cooperation between different people, since thoughts have to be externalised to create common understanding	(Kaptelinin et al., 1999)
<b>4. Mediation</b>	Mediation through tools/instruments (physical or psychological) is central because tools shape the way humans interact with reality	External activities result in internal ones. Tools reflect the experience of other people who tried to solve similar problems before. The use of tools is an evolutionary accumulation and transmission of social knowledge. It influences the nature of external behaviour and the mental functioning of individuals	(Kaptelinin et al., 1999; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978)
<b>5. Development</b>	Human interaction must be analysed in the context of development	Practice is seen as reformed and shaped by historical development. One must understand how tools are used not in trying them out once, but as usage unfolds overtime	(Kaptelinin et al., 1999)

### 3.4.1. The Roots

In the introduction to this section, it was mentioned that Activity Theory has its origins in the Soviet Russian cultural-historical psychology of Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Luria. However, it is important to acknowledge that the thoughts that became Activity Theory as we know it today came from thinking originating in classic German philosophy and

specifically from the writings of Marx and Engels (Plakitsi, 2013). *Perspectives on Activity Theory*, edited by Engeström, Miettinen and Punamäki (1999) is the first volume to make a comprehensive presentation of modern work within Activity Theory. In the introduction to this volume Engeström and Miettinen (1999) use quotes from the works of Marx and Engels to illustrate how their thoughts have inspired the early works in Activity Theory. Marx and Engels argue:

“The chief defect of hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism – which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive of the human activity itself as object activity. (...) He regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-judicial manifestation. (...) The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. (...) The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.”

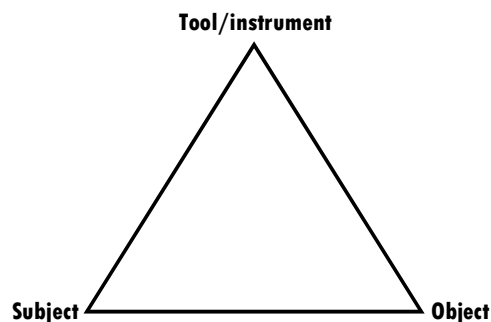
(Marx & Engels, 1968, pp. 659-660 in Engeström & Miettinen, 1999, p. 3)

According to Engeström and Miettinen (1999), this quote presents two points that are central to Activity Theory. First, neither mechanical materialism, nor idealism will do, because the first eliminates human agency, while the latter puts it all in the head and soul of the individual. What is missing is the concept of activity, which transcends the dualism between the individual subject and the objective societal circumstances. Second, the concept of activity opens up a new way to understand change, as

something that is not brought about from above, but something that must be understood through practice.

Lev Vygotsky, is regarded as the founder of Activity Theory (Holzman, 2006). In his work, he focussed on object-oriented actions as the unit of analysis, arguing that humans have moved from nature and the unmediated relation to the world into culture, through mediated activities (See principle 1 in Table 6 p. 67). Meaning that, with time, new cultural artefacts such as language or customs, which maintain and develop the culture, will occur (Cole & Engeström, 1993). With this perspective, Vygotsky introduced the mediating instrument or tool to the subject-object relation, which forms the very basis of Activity Theory: The subject's relation to the world (object) should be understood through the tools that mediate the relation (See principle 4 in Table 6, illustrated in Figure 3) (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

*Figure 4: Mediation*



This understanding is based on two ideas. (1) That mediation with tools is not merely an idea. It proceeds to break down the walls that isolate the individual mind from culture and society. (2) that humans can control their own behaviour, not from the inside, based on biological urges, but from the outside, using and creating artefacts (Plakitsi, 2013). These ideas were revolutionary because they suggested that the individuals could no longer be understood without their cultural means; and that

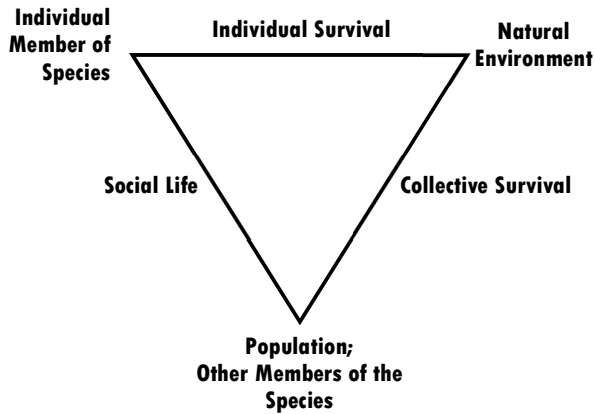
society could no longer be understood without understanding the use and production of artefacts (Engeström, 2001). According to Vygotsky, the mediating tools can be both physical (Technical instruments such as a hammer or a computer) and psychological (Psychological instruments such as language, text or a type of media) (Engeström, 1987; Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2009).

What was not considered in Vygotsky's work was that other human beings and social relations can also mediate between subject and object. This perspective was introduced by Leont'ev, who, inspired by Marx and Engels' thoughts on labour, drew a distinction between collective activity and individual action (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). Distinguishing between the individual activity and collective action, Leont'ev uses the example of a beater with a need for food. He explains how the hunter's activity may be directed towards frightening a herd of animals, thus sending them towards other hunters. However, this result – frightening the game – does not in itself lead to satisfaction. This is because the processes that the activity was aimed at does not coincide with what stimulated it – the motive of the activity. Leont'ev argues: "Processes, the object, and motive of which do not coincide with one another, we shall call "actions". We can, for example, say that the beater's activity is the hunt, and the frightening of the game his action." (Leont'ev, 1981 p. 210 in Engeström & Miettinen, 1999, p. 4). This distinction between activity and action became the basis of Leont'ev's three level model of activity. Which divides collective activity into upper level object-oriented *motive*; middle level individual or group *action*, driven by a goal and bottom level automatic *operations*, driven by conditions and tools at hand (See principle 3 in Table 6, p. 67) (Leont'ev, 1978).

### 3.4.2. Structure of Human Activity

Drawing upon pioneers of Activity Theory, Leont’ev and Lewontin, Engeström (1987) expanded Vygotsky’s subject, object, mediation triangle to include social relations (See Figure 6 p. 72). His model is based on Lewontin’s argument that “... species do not adapt to environments; they construct them.” (Lewontin, 1982, p. 163). Based on this thought we can illustrate ‘*The General Structure of the Animal Form of Activity*’, which shows the connection between organisms and their environments:

Figure 5: *The General Structure of the Animal Form of Activity* (Lewontin 1982, p. 163)



The model consists of three elements: An individual member of a species, the whole population of the species and the natural environment that the species live within (Lewontin, 1982).

Figure 6: *Structure of Activity in Transition from Animal to Man* (Lewontin 1982, p. 160)

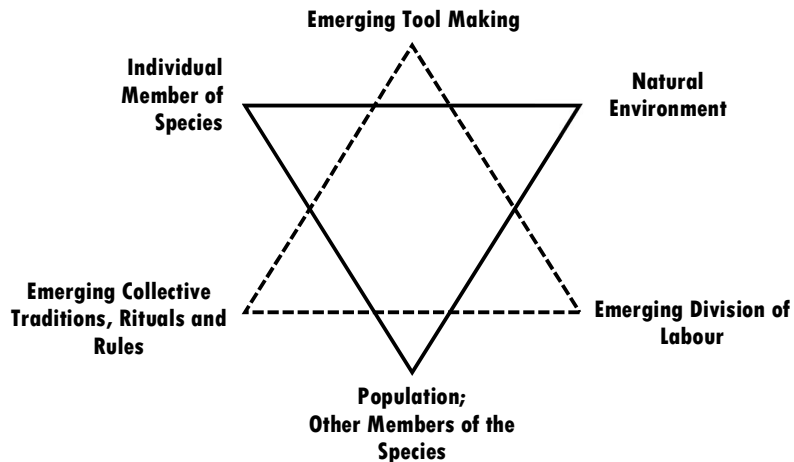
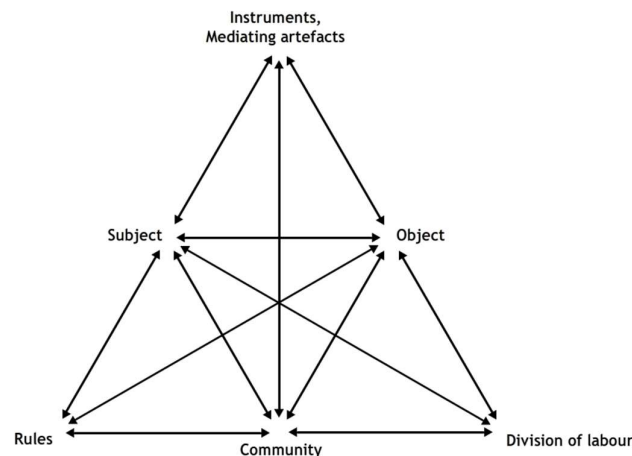




Figure 5 illustrates the transition from animal to human. While the most intelligent species develop, the relation between the individual member of the species and its natural environment develops into emerging tool making. The relation between the individual species member and its population creates collective traditions, rules and rituals. Meanwhile division of labour is emerging from the relations between the environment and the population (Engeström, 1987). When this evolutionary figure is transferred to modern society, the individual member of a species develops into a subject through identity construction. The subject interacts with single objects through psychical and psychological instruments. All subjects interact in a society or community, which on the one hand is controlled by certain rules and on the other hand by a division of labour. When these aspects are seen in relation to each other it can be modelled as the basis of Engeström's 'The Structure of Human Activity' (Figure 6) (Engeström, 1987).

Figure 7: The Structure of Human Activity (Engeström, 1987 p. 78)



With the introduction of this perspective, the study of activity ceases to be the psychology of an individual and instead becomes the study of interactions between actors, systems of artefacts and other actors in developing institutional settings (Miettinen, 1999). In modern Activity Theory analysis, the *subject* can be either a

single individual or a group/community. Meaning that it can also be an organisation or even a group of organisations with a shared *object*. The *object* is the ‘problem space’ at which the activity is directed. *Instruments/mediating artefacts* refer to the physical or symbolic external or internal tools that are used to mediate the relation between the subject and the object. This relation is simultaneously influenced by explicit and implicit norms or *rules* that regulate actions and interactions, the *community* of actors who share the same object and the *division of labour* between the community members within the given context. Together this creates an activity outcome (Engeström, 1987, 1993; Kuutti, 1996; Plakitsi, 2013). The model can and have been used to illustrate and analyse all kinds of relations within a given activity system. However, Engeström also argues that what he sees as the third generation of Activity Theory (Vygotsky’s notion of object-oriented, mediated action being the first, and Leont’ev’s notion of the activity system being the second) should focus on activity systems interacting with each other (Engeström, 2009). The argument is that activity systems do not exist in a vacuum; they interact with and are affected by a network of other activity systems. They may for example receive rules or instruments from other activity systems. He refers to Ludvigsen and Digernes (2009) who argue that the character of a community is significantly determined by the openness or closedness of its shared object.

The need to focus on interaction between different activity systems is reflected in Engeström’s five principles of current Activity Theory, which builds on the five basic principles of Activity Theory presented in Table 6 (p. 67). These principles are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7: Five Current Principles of Activity Theory (Based on Engeström (1993, 1995, 1999 and 2001))

Name	Principle	Explanation
<b>1. Activity System as unit of analysis</b>	The primary unit of analysis is the collective, mediated and object-oriented activity system, considered networked relation to other activity systems	Goal-directed individual and group actions, as well as automatic operations, are independent but subordinate units of analysis. They can only be understood by being considered as part of the entire activity system
<b>2. Multi-voicedness</b>	An activity system is always influenced by a community	The participants in an activity carry their own diverse histories. The activity system itself carries multiple layers and histories engraved in its artefacts, rules and conventions. Multi-voicedness is multiplied in networks of interacting activity systems
<b>3. Historicity</b>	Activity systems take shape and are transformed over lengthy periods of time and should therefore be understood in the context of their own history	History needs to be studied as the local history of the activity and its objects
<b>4. Contradictions</b>	Contradictions are sources of change and development and must be understood in order to make sense of an activity system.	Contradictions are not the same as problems or conflicts. They are structural tensions within and between activity systems, which accumulated through history. They may generate disturbances but may also spark innovation
<b>5. Expansive cycles</b>	Activity systems move through cycles of qualitative transformations. Expansive transformation is achieved when the object and motive of the activity is reconceptualised to embrace a wider horizon of possibilities than in the previously	As activity system contradictions are aggravated, some individual participants begin to question and deviate from its established norms. This may escalate into collaborative envisioning and collective change efforts

### 3.5 Conceptual Framework for Tourism Distribution Analysis

Engeström (2001) argues that with the third generation of Activity Theory, where multiple activity systems are analysed at once, there is, more than ever, a need for new “... conceptual tools to understand dialogue, multiple perspectives, and networks of interacting activity systems.” (p. 135). As it will be argued in the following section (p. 80), ideas and tools from Actor-Network Theory may be the answer to this need. However, before that, it is necessary to turn to the need presented in this thesis. That is, the need for a new conceptual framework to analyse tourism distribution. Specifically, one that considers tourists, suppliers and intermediaries; is neither linear

nor static; considers the context of tourists, suppliers and intermediaries respectively, and finally, demonstrates a clear object of analysis.

In the following section, perspectives from the existing literature on tourism distribution will be combined with understandings from Activity Theory to make such a conceptual framework. A framework where tourism distribution is analysed as a process of mediation happening in relations between complex activity systems, rather than as a linear process.

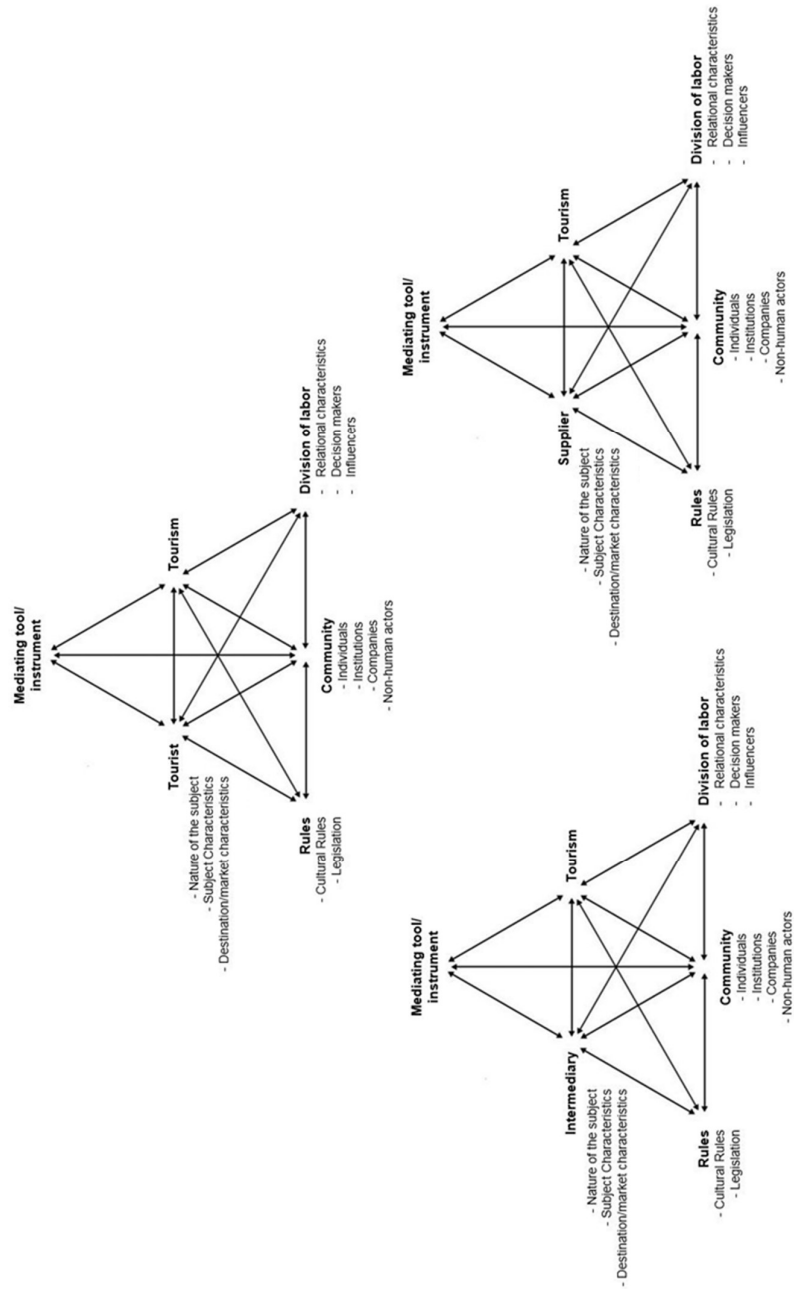
The basic elements of tourism distribution are the *tourist(s)*, the *supplier(s)* and the *intermediary(ies)*. In Activity Theory each of these actors or actor-groups are regarded as subjects in their own activity system. This means that each has its own object, that each of these subject-object relations are mediated by a tool/instrument, and in turn, are affected by their community and the rules and division of labour within the activity system. Based on this tourism distribution can be regarded as an interaction between at least three activity systems. One where the subject is the tourist(s), one where it is the supplier(s) and one where it is the intermediary(ies). Based on current literature on tourism distribution, a number of specific factors that may affect the different elements of each of these activity systems can be defined. These factors and their relation to the different elements in the three activity systems are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Factors Affecting Elements of the Activity Systems for Tourists, Suppliers and Intermediaries

Activity system element	Factor	Question
<b>Subject</b>	Nature of the subject	Is the subject an individual, a company an interest group, a non-human object etc.?
	Subject Characteristics	What characterises the subject?
	Destination/ market characteristics	What are the characteristics (spatial scale, geography, culture) of the source market and destination?
<b>Rules</b>	Explicit Rules	What explicit rules are affecting the activity system (legislation, cultural rules that are made explicit etc.)?
<b>Community</b>	Individuals	What individuals, e.g. friends, relatives are regarded as important parts of the community?
	Institutions	What government or private institutions are regarded as part of the community?
	Companies	What companies are regarded as part of the community?
	Non-human actors	What non-human actors are regarded as part of the community?
<b>Division of labour</b>	Relational characteristics	What characterises the relations between the subject, the mediating artefact/instrument and the community?
	Decision makers	Who are the decision makers in the activity system?
	Influencers	Who are the influencers in the activity system?

On a basic level, it can also be argued that in tourism distribution, the tourist, the supplier and the intermediary share the same object - to create tourism. The motives may be different. The primary motive for an intermediary and a supplier may be to sell their products, while the primary object of the leisure tourist may be to go on holiday, but the object remains the same. Based on this, three activity systems always involved in tourism distribution can be drawn (Figure 7):

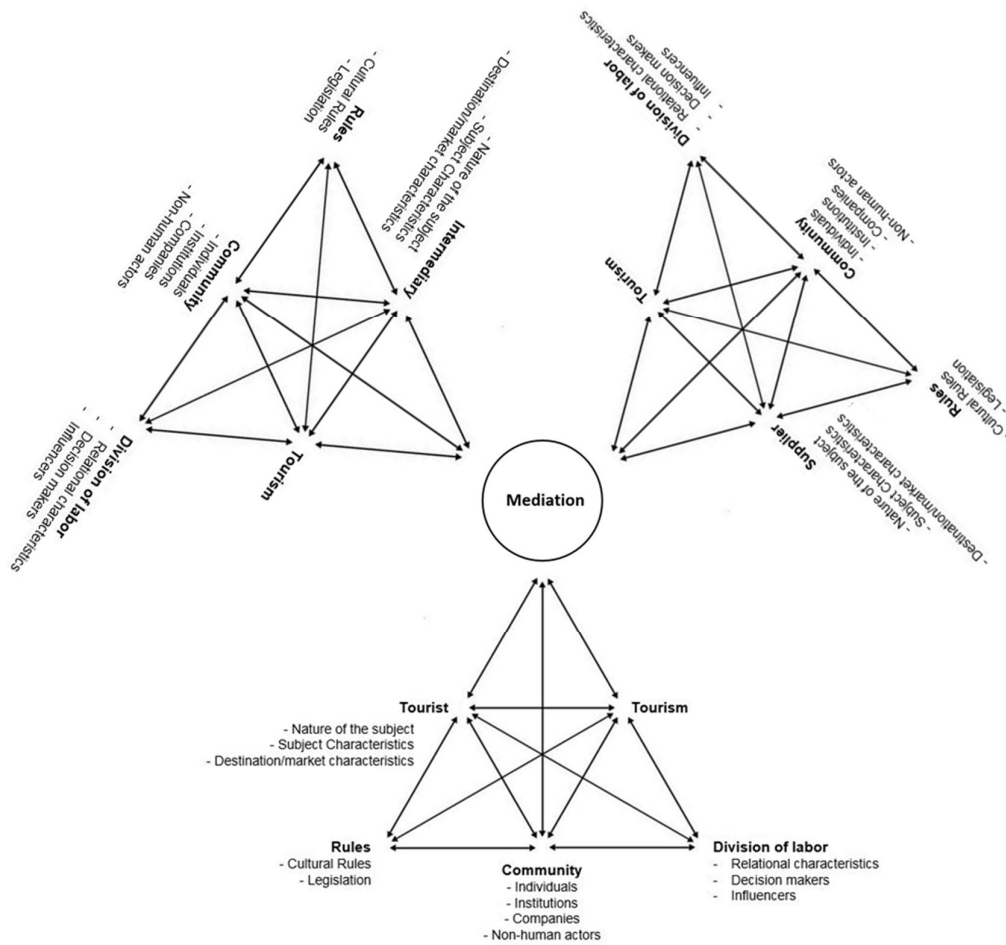
Figure 8: Activity Systems – Tourist, Supplier and Intermediary



Each of the three activity systems represents an element of tourism distribution. If tourism distribution is to occur, they must interact. In addition to the shared object, the main connection between the three activity systems happens through mediation. The relation between the tourist-subject and his or her motive to go on holiday is mediated through different intermediaries and suppliers, as these organisations are what makes

the holiday possible. Similarly, the relation between the supplier-subject and its motive to sell their product is mediated through intermediaries and tourists, while the relation between the intermediary-subject and its motive to sell their project is mediated through suppliers and tourists. In other words, tourism distribution may be regarded as a process of mediation between (at least) these three activity systems. This understanding is the basis for the conceptual framework for analysis of tourism distribution (Figure 8), which is the basis for this thesis.

Figure 9: Conceptual Framework for Analysis of Tourism Distribution



This conceptual framework may be regarded as an alternative to the simple ‘supplier through intermediary to tourist’ model, which was presented earlier (p. 58). It illustrates the simplest form of tourism distribution, involving the same three main

groups – tourist(s), intermediary(ies) and supplier(s). However, this framework includes a number of contextual factors and sees tourism distribution as an ongoing and dynamic process of mediation happening in a network of relations between activity systems, rather than a linear, static and context free process from production to sale. It also recognises that unlike other products, the tourism distribution process may as well be understood as ‘tourist through intermediary to supplier’ as the other way around. Because, in tourism, unlike most other costumer product relations, the costumer goes to the product. Like Pearce et al.'s (2007) framework, this framework can be used to analyse big international tourism distribution systems, yet unlike their model, this one can also be used to analyse and understand distribution based on smaller units or even single tourists, suppliers and or intermediaries.

In order to strengthen the explanation of the framework, the approach taken for the study in this thesis will be briefly explained. It was first necessary to recognise that the unit of analysis is activity systems rather than individual tourists or companies. This means that a certain depth of information on the respondents was needed. Interview questions that would allow the researcher to answer the questions posed in Table 8 were developed to gain this information about the individual actors. An activity system with this information was constructed for each actor (Appendix 3). Based on further analysis, it may be necessary to construct new activity systems to represent groups of actors. Having gathered the necessary information for each activity system, their mediated relationships could then be analysed.

Actor-Network Theory is utilised to gain a better understanding of how to deal with the “mediation mess” in this thesis. This involves looking at the phenomenon (object) of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ as an actor-network; investigating how



the different actors in the network enact ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’; and asking questions about how one can understand the order or lack of order happening in the relations that form the mediation process. In the following, Actor-Network Theory and its application in the thesis and in the framework will be explained further.

### 3.6 Actor-Network Theory

In their reasoning for Actor-Network Theory’s relevance to tourism, Duim et al., (2012) point to Tribe’s (2010) notion that tourism is a fragmented field or a multidisciplinary endeavour, affected by two major force fields, respectively *the business of tourism* and *tourism social science*. They also point out how there have been increasing calls for critical social theory in tourism and suggest that Actor-Network Theory, may answer some of these calls. In what they aim to do and their approaches of doing so Actor-Network Theory and Activity Theory share many foci. Igira and Gregory (2009) for example highlight the following similarities:

“... focus on everyday and historically evolving design, use, and continuous adaptation of artifacts and technologies; critical reflection on the production and reproduction of relations between people, things, and nature; continuous learning and knowledge and potential for transformation through our interactions and practices; an appreciation of the particularities and contingencies of social contexts (...); and design for negotiation between the multiplicities of objects, activities, logics, and systems...”

(p. 447)

These similarities are also some of the main strengths of the approaches. They illustrate why such approaches should be introduced to the field of tourism if equilibrium between *the business of tourism* and *tourism social science* is the aspiration.

In tourism, Actor-Network Theory focusses on how tourism works rather than what it is. Reality is investigated as something done and enacted rather than something observed (Mol, 1999). Van der Duim et al. (2012) describe Actor-Network Theory as a translation device, which "... provides means to move around, make connections and follow relations between seemingly opposed positions or dualisms" (p. 4). This involves asking certain questions such as "... how certain technologies, practices or structures have come about (...), how they are made possible, thanks to what and to whom and finally what the effects are of these workings." (p. 14). In asking such questions, the focus changes from "... pure and stable identity, function, core and essence to more messy relations, enactments, translations, innovations, intervention and (at least provisional) stabilization." (p. 14). Actor-Network Theory may be used as a systematic way to make sense of mess by emphasising and documenting structural and interactional features (Randall et al., 2007), in this case of the mediated relations between the actors involved in tourism distribution. Actor-Network Theory is constantly growing and evolving, which makes it difficult to pin down the important features. Since its origin in the 1980s (Callon, 1985, 1986; Callon & Latour, 1981) it has shifted focus and been subject to criticism, mainly by its original creators, and developed into what is now dubbed 'After ANT' (Law & Hassard, 1999). In the following, an overview of the theory will first be provided, then its differences and similarities with Activity Theory will be discussed, before its use in this thesis will finally be explained.

Actor-Network Theory is seen as a relevant and useful approach to social science studies and the researcher believes that many of the ideas and concepts can help social scientists gain a better understanding of reality(ies). However, this is not an Actor-Network Theory study per se, and for various reasons, which will be

presented in the following, this study will sometimes have to depart from the core of Actor-Network Theory.

### **3.6.1. Introduction to Actor-Network Theory**

Actor-Network Theory is not a theory (Latour, 1999). It does not merit predictability and it does not provide "... a fixed way of approaching the world" (Hitchings, 2003, p. 100). The reason for this is that if it did, it "... would be little better than the reductionist models it sought to replace." (ibid). Actor-Network Theory fundamentally challenges the traditional understanding of actors and acting. An actor's inclusion in a given network is not based on "... a certain ontological status (such as being human)" (Van der Duim et al., 2012, p. 16). Instead, it attempts to explain and interpret social and technological development by integrating human as well as non-human elements into the same conceptual *frame/net*-work (Randall et al., 2007, p. 105). Objects are considered as able to act just as well as humans, and agency is explained as a composition of forces in which action is "... not a property of humans but of an association of actants" (Latour, 1999, p. 182). Actor or actant refers to Greimas' semiotic definition, which is: "... whatever unit of discourse is invested a role" (Callon & Latour, 1981, pp. 301–302). Actors or actants are the nodes within an actor-network and can be both physical and social actors. Society, organizations, agents, and machines are all effects generated in of diverse materials and can all act and be treated as actors in a network (Law, 1992). The understanding of actor-networks as composed of both human and non-human actors is based on the ontological understanding that the natural and social are not pre-existing, but rather constructs that have been separated and divided through a process of purification (Latour, 1993 in Duim et al., 2012). This way, Actor-Network Theory collapses any distinction between the social and the technical, between what is social and what is nature, and between the subject

and the object (Randall et al., 2007). It "... persistently reminds us that the way in which we think about the world is always, to some degree, informed by the capacities and properties of the particular things that surround us in this world." (Hitchings, 2003, p. 102).

The construction of the actor-network, and how it is held together becomes visible, as the researcher gains an understanding of it through different informants. In a tourism context, such informants may be "... strategy papers, brochures and ads, physical structures, food products, clothes, discourses, as well as tourism consumers and producers and local residents" (van der Duim et al., 2012, p. 20). These informants or network-actors have certain interests and in their attempting to align these interests, in a process of translation, they produce the actor-network: "... a network of interests that becomes stable as it is aligned to the technology, achieved through the translation of interests and the enrolment of actors into the network." (Randall et al., 2007, p. 106). Analysis in Actor-Network Theory thus involves "identifying and investigating stakeholders and their rational, organizational, and individual interests" (ibid, p. 108). It incorporates "analysis of documentation, attitudes, relationships, roles, power, and influence " (ibid), and considers communication lines and stakeholder interactions (Randall et al., 2007).

A key concept in Actor-Network Theory is the mentioned process of translation. Callon (1985) defined translation as "the methods by which an actor enrolls others" (p. xvii). Although a more detailed, contemporary and tourism specific understanding is that:

"... translation refers to the process of negotiation, mobilization, representation and displacement among actors, entities, and places. It involves the redefinition of these phenomena so that they are persuaded to behave in accordance with the network

requirements, and these redefinitions are frequently inscribed in the heterogeneous materials that act to consolidate networks.”

(van der Duim, 2007, p. 966 in Van der Duim et al., 2012)

Callon (1986) originally divided translation into four stages: Problematization, interessement, enrolment and mobilization. The four stages are briefly described in Table 9.

*Table 9: Translation*

Stage	Description
Problematization	An actor initiates the process. Then defines identities and interests of other actors consistent with those of the initiating actor. Certain actors position themselves as important resources. These actors define problems and solutions, and establish roles and identities for other actors in the network. As a consequence, these actors position themselves as necessary passage points for problem solution in the network (Callon, 1986; Mähring, Holmström, Keil, & Montealegre, 2004).
Interessement	The initiator attempts to convince other actors that they are in line. This may involve creating of incentives for actors. Successful interessement “confirms (more or less completely) the validity of the problematization and the alliances it implies” (Callon, 1986, pp. 209-10 in Mähring et al., 2004).
Enrolment	This stage occurs if interessement is successful. It involves definition of roles in the actor-network. The initiator(s) will attempt to initiate a set of strategies in order to convince other actors to embrace the ideas of the expanding actor-network (Callon, 1986; Mähring et al., 2004).
Mobilization	Initiators aim to ensure that spokespersons act according to agreement and do not veer from the interests of the initiators. Initiators seek continued support to the underlying ideas from other network actors. The mobilized allies secure stability in the actor network. This stability means that the actor-network and its underlying ideas have become institutionalized and are no longer considered to be controversial (Callon, 1986; Mähring et al., 2004).

At least provisionally stable networks are created through translation. Later Actor-Network Theory studies have pointed out that translation happens in a more fluid manner, similar to the process described by van der Duim (2007) in the quote above. However, Callon’s process provides a good overview of the different stages involved in the fluid translation process. By exploring translation and so-called ‘tactics of translation’ (Steins, Röling, & Edwards, 2000, p. 7 in *ibid*) the researcher may investigate for example:

“... the means by which associations come into existence, how the roles and functions of actors and intermediaries are attributed and stabilized (Murdoch 1997:331) and the methods by which actors form associations with other actors and actor-networks.”

(van der Duim et al., 2012, p. 15)

All of these are aspects that are considered important in this thesis, in order to uncover the relations happening between the different actors participating in distribution of Chinese tourists to Scandinavia.

### **3.6.2. ‘After ANT’**

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, Actor-Network Theory developed and changed in response to various criticism over the years. The biggest critics have been its creators. In 1999, Latour, one of the founders of Actor-Network Theory, stated the following: “... there are four things that do not work with actor-network theory; the word actor, the word network, the word theory and the hyphen! Four nails in the coffin.” (Latour, 1999).

The problem with ‘network’ is, according to Latour that its meaning has changed with the arrival of the internet.

“At the time, the word network, like Deleuze's and Guattari's term rhizome, clearly meant a series of transformations—translations, transductions— which could not be captured by any of the traditional terms of social theory. With the new popularization of the word network, it now means transport without deformation, an instantaneous, unmediated access to every piece of information. That is exactly the opposite of what we meant.”

(Latour, 1999, p. 15)

The problem with ‘actor’ and the hyphen (between ‘actor’ and ‘network’) is according to Latour, that it has reminded sociologists of what he regards as the

agency/structure cliché, which has given way to misuse and thus two types of criticisms. Those related to the ‘actor’ and to the ‘network’.

“The first line of criticism has insisted on the Schumpeterian, male-like, hairy gorilla-like character of ANT; the second line of criticism has focused instead on the dissolution of humanity proposed by ANT into a field of forces where morality, humanity, psychology was absent.”

(Latour, 1999, p. 16)

Latour regards these criticisms as “off target” but admits that the ‘actor-network’ term in and of itself may have invited such reactions. He explains how it has been misunderstood as a representation of social scientists eternal struggle to probe between micro (involving society, norms, values, culture, structure and social context) and macro (culture and structure, norms and values). Instead, he argues, Actor-Network Theory should be seen as:

“... a way of paying attention to these two dissatisfactions [not being able to probe between micro and macro], not again to overcome them or to solve the problem, but to follow them elsewhere and to try to explore the very conditions that make these two opposite disappointments possible.”

(Latour, 1999, p. 17)

Actor-Network Theory does not attempt to probe between micro and macro, the actor and the network, because they are regarded as parts of the same phenomenon:

“Actor and network—if we want to still use those terms—designates two faces of the same phenomenon, like waves and particles, the slow realization that the social is a certain type of circulation that can travel endlessly without ever encountering either the micro-level—there is never an interaction that is not framed—or the macro-level—there are only local summing up which produce either local totalities (‘oligoptica’) or total localities (agencies). (...) ‘Nature’, ‘Society’, ‘Subjectivity’ do not define what the world is like, but what circulates locally and to which one

‘subscribes’ much as we subscribe to cable TV and sewers—including of course the subscription that allows us to say ‘we’ and ‘one’. “

(Latour, 1999, pp. 18–19)

Actor-Network Theory does not ignore the existence of micro and macro actors altogether, but highlights that macro-actors are not necessarily more complex than micro-actors. They can, in some cases, be simpler (Callon & Latour, 1981).

The problem with ‘theory’ is, as it was stated earlier (p. 82), that Actor-Network Theory is not, and does not aim to be, a theory in the form that theory is most often understood – as able to provide predictions. Instead, Latour describes it as:

“... a very crude method to learn from the actors without imposing on them an a priori definition of their world-building capacities.” Or “... simply a way for the social scientists to access sites, a method and not a theory, a way to travel from one spot to the next, from one field site to the next, not an interpretation of what actors do simply glossed in a different more palatable and more universalist language.”

(Latour, 1999, pp. 20–21)

Latour ends this seminal paper in Actor-Network Theory by stating:

“Yes, I think there is life after ANT. Once we have strongly pushed a stake into the heart of the creature safely buried in its coffin—thus abandoning what is so wrong with ANT, that is ‘actor’, ‘network’, ‘theory’ without forgetting the hyphen!—some other creature might emerge, light and beautiful: our future collective achievement.

(Latour, 1999, p. 24)

More than 15 years later, we can safely say that he was right. Actor-Network Theory or ‘After ANT’ is alive and well, and still being used and developed in a number of different contexts. One of them is tourism. As part of this development an important aspect of ‘After ANT’ has emerged, the idea of multiplicity.



### 3.6.2.1. Mess and Multiplicity

According to Actor-Network Theory, reality is not static or structured, it is messy, and it is historically, culturally and materially located. Law and Singleton (2005) argue that it is not possible to know mess in the traditional ways of knowing. That is, the ways of managerialism. "... managerialism becomes a way of making objects fit to be known by social scientists." (Law & Singleton, 2005, p. 333). They argue further that managerialism makes mess: "That which is not clear and distinct, well ordered, is othered. It is constituted as mess, like the plants that are turned into weeds by virtue of the invention of gardening." (ibid, p. 34). So how may we work with or try to understand mess? The answer may be in the way we understand reality. The argument of After ANT is that we have multiple ontologies, multiple enacted realities that exist at the same time and that we must try to understand the world through that lens.

The notion of multiplicity is reminiscent of perspectivalism and constructivism, but is also vastly different in its implications (Mol, 1999).

Perspectivalism is against a monopolistic version of truth, but unlike Actor-Network Theory "... it didn't multiply reality. It multiplied the eyes of the beholders" (Mol, 1999, p. 76). The idea is that objectivity does not exist, because different people bring certain and different skills, habits, histories and preoccupations to the same contexts - different perspectives. This produces "... mutually exclusive perspectives, discrete, existing side by side, in a transparent space. While in the centre the object of the many gazes and glances remains singular, intangible, untouched" (ibid). This belief, in the singular, intangible, untouched reality does not represent the ontological understanding of 'After ANT'.

Constructivism, suggests that alternative constructions of reality might have been possible, but that they have vanished before they became possible. Mol (1999) uses the example of the modern keyboard, bicycle or video system:

“... the alternatives for any currently accepted fact or well diffused artefact were not doomed to lose from the beginning. They got lost somewhere along the way, as a matter of contingency. We might have had another kind of bicycle, keyboard or video system. It just happens that we've come to stick with the ones we've got. (...) There have been might-have-beens, but now they have gone. The losers have lost.”

(p. 76)

This understanding does not fit Actor-Network Theory either, because it also implies that reality, though it may be historically constructed, is something we can observe clinically.

Instead of these metaphors, Mol (1999) argues that we should look at reality through intervention and performance. “These suggest a reality that is *done* and *enacted* rather than observed.” (Mol p. 77, *cursive in original*). Reality is never untouched and can therefore not be observed clinically. It is enacted and manipulated through practice (Law & Singleton, 2005, p. 334). In analysing certain objects, we are not trying to understand attributes or aspects of that object, but different versions of that object. “... multiple forms of reality” (ibid). To illustrate the point, Mol (1999) uses different enactments of anaemia. She explains how at least three different versions of anaemia currently exist in the world, respectively the clinical, the statistical and the pathophysiological. The clinical enactment of anaemia is a series of visible symptoms. The statistical is a number - the haemoglobin level - that deviates from the statistical standard. The pathophysiological is also concerned with the haemoglobin level. However, there are many ways of setting the standard for a normal haemoglobin level

and this enactment is based on the unique individual's necessary level in order to transport oxygen through the body:

“The reality of anaemia takes various forms. These are not perspectives seen by different people—a single person may slide in her work from one performance to another. Neither are they alternative, bygone constructions of which only one has emerged from the past—they emerged at different points in history, but none of them has vanished. So they are different versions, different performances, different realities, that co-exist in the present.”

(ibid, p. 79)

In the context of this thesis, an example of could be ‘the Chinese tourist’. A young Chinese person embarking on her first trip to Europe may enact ‘the Chinese tourist’ as an individual explorer, a Parisian may enact ‘the Chinese tourist’ as a mass tourist, while a politician in a receiving destination may enact ‘the Chinese tourist’ as a number signifying potential income. All these enactments are real, and they simultaneously exist as different things through different enactments.

This does not mean, that the world is composed of an indefinite number fragmented realities – a case of pluralism. “Instead it implies something much more complex. It implies that the different realities *overlap and interfere with one another.*” (Law, 2004, p. 61, cursive in original) in relations that are complex and messy. “We are in a world where bodies, organisations, or machines are more than one and less than many. In a *world* that is more than one and less than many” (ibid p. 62, cursive in original). Law explains that this ontology is combating the dualist choice between singularity and pluralism: “Either there is one, one reality, one ethics, one politics, or there are many. There is nothing in between.” (ibid, p. 63). He continues to present three ways to respond:

“So how do we respond to this? There are three options. It is possible to insist on singularity, and insist that those who do not see it our way are suffering from impaired vision: that their empirical, ethical or political perspective on reality is flawed. To do so is to re-enact Euro-American singularity. Alternatively, it is possible to insist on pluralism, and the essential irreducibility of worlds, of knowledges, of ethical sensibilities, or of political preferences, to one another. This is the relativist response. But there is a third option, or a family of options, in-between. It is possible to observe, in one way very matter-of-factly, that the world, its knowledges, and the various senses of what is right and just, overlap and shade off into one another. That our arguments work, but only partially.”

(ibid, p. 63)

Law summarises the ontological stance described in this section in three points:

“One, it says that realities are being done. Not just knowledges, but realities too. Everywhere. This is enactment. (...) Two, it says that they are complex, non-coherent, uncertain, and in interference with one another. This is difference. And three, it says that if we recognize this and work it right, we can interfere and make a difference. This is the ontological politics.”

(Law, 2004, p. 5)

A consequence of this is that “... method is not, and could never be, innocent or purely technical.” (ibid, p. 143). This understanding has important implications for researchers. First, in how we approach our objects of study, in the methods we use to study them, and through our presence in the practices we aim to understand. Second, in how we understand our own role as researchers, since we are part of the enactment, and thus manipulating the practice that we are studying, as we study it. “For better or worse, we take part in the creation of the world of tourism as we are to know it.” (van der Duim et al., 2012, p. 19).

In this thesis, the aim is to understand tourism distribution. The practice or phenomenon of research is ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. In trying to understand this object, the researcher must look at least to three different enactments or realities of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’: that of the tourist, that of the supplier and that of the intermediary. Yet, this work will probably also reveal other realities or enactments that are part of the practices involved. For example different overlapping enactments of the intermediaries in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, or different enactments of the Chinese tourist, as have been suggested in previous research (Jørgensen & Ren, 2015). In doing so, the researcher must be aware that the object is not fixed. It moves and slips between different practices in different sites and may change shape and name, as it does so (Law, 2004).

### **3.7 Actor-Network Theory and Activity Theory, Similarities, Differences and Application**

Although there are fundamental differences between Actor-Network Theory and Activity Theory, there are also many important similarities and supportive uses of the two approaches. Activity theorists have argued that Actor-Network Theory may be seen as a way to understand the dialog between multiple activity systems (Barab, Hay, & Yamagata-Lynch, 1999; Engeström, 2001; Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2009; Karakus, 2014). This way each node within a network is considered to be an activity system, and Activity Theory is used to reveal the inner contradictions and issues in these systems, while Actor-Network Theory provides an approach to describe and make sense of the relations between the nodes (Karakus, 2014). In the following section, the similarities and differences between the two approaches, and how they will be applied in this thesis, will be explained further.

### 3.7.1. Similarities and Differences

A number of similarities between Actor-Network Theory and Activity Theory were already highlighted in the introduction to ‘Activity Theory’ (p. 65). Summarising these similarities, one can argue that both approaches are focussed on:

- every day and historically evolving design, use, and continuous adaptation of artefacts and technologies;
- critical reflection on the production and reproduction of relations between people, things, and nature;
- continuous learning and knowledge and potential for transformation through our interactions and practices;
- an appreciation of the particularities and contingencies of social contexts; and
- design for negotiation between the multiplicities of objects, activities, logics, and systems.

(Igira & Gregory, 2009, p. 447)

To these, one may add:

- avoidance of monocausal explanations;
- attempts to find a nondualist account of society and nature;
- the significance of material artefacts; and
- studying the concrete networks of actors instead of interrelations between macro- and microscale phenomena.

(Miettinen, 1999, p. 171)

Important basic similarities that may be added to these and highlighted here are the “... shared emphasis on mediation-in-action and mediating artefacts (akin to intermediaries in Actor-Network Theory) in complexes of humans, tools,

communities.” (Bratteteig & Gregory, 1999, p. 179), as well as both approaches’ aspirations to transcend dualisms “... between nature and society, between the subject and the object: how to find a second dimension, an explanatory principle reaching outside the dichotomy.” (p. 175).

Both approaches underline that entities (human or material) gain their identity only through other entities, through relations:

“Man is a biological organism and a cultural being. An artefact is constructed, social, and natural. This contradictory nature is understandable only through their mutual determination through activity; that is, in constant mutual interaction and movement.”

(ibid, p. 175)

Miettinen (1999) points out how both approaches stress that resources for acting are distributed and redistributed between humans, artefacts, and the environment. He also underlines the significance certain objects’ independent activity. According to Randall et al. (2007) this is often a source of misunderstanding in Activity Theory, because the term ‘object’ is read as something material, although it should not be considered as such. In the case of this thesis, the object is for example considered to be the concept of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, which cannot be considered material.

Despite the many similarities and possible supportive uses, Miettinen (1999) also points out that the two approaches have different ways of studying these issues. In terms of the importance of non-human actors, for example: Actor-Network Theory does not divide between subject and object, and considers human and non-human actors to have equal roles in the context and in the network. Activity Theory, on the other hand, considers the non-human objects to have an important role, but a role in relation to human subjects, rather than on the same terms as the human subject (Karakus, 2014). The difference lies in the Activity Theory’s asymmetry between

humans and non-humans, which goes against the basics of Actor-Network Theory, where symmetry between subject and object is assumed (Berg, 1997b in Bratteteig & Gregory, 1999). The difference comes from the basics of each approach. In Activity Theory, the subject-object relation is a historical phenomenon developed through biological and cultural evolution. While Actor-Network Theory bases its ideas on "... a general theory of association of forces, regardless of what they are. Symmetry is sought by describing all entities with the same semiotic vocabulary." (Miettinen, 1999, p. 178). This means that while Actor-Network Theory goes out of its way to create symmetry between subject and object, and human and non-human actors, Activity Theory finds it to be not only meaningful, but necessary, to separate these concepts if one is to understand and analyse how they "... evolve, are determined by each other, and change into one another" (ibid p. 175). Actor-Network Theory's symmetrical perception of human and non-human actors have sparked much debate. In defending this stance, Latour argues that:

"ANT is not the empty claim that objects do things „instead“ of human actors: it simply says that no science of the social can ever begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored– even if this means including „non-human“ elements in observations and reports"

(Latour, 2005, p. 72)

Based on this view, the researcher accepts Miettinen's (1999) argument, that Activity Theory's perspective of subject and object as "... a historically developed and constantly changing relation between man and nature which both are transformed and changed" (ibid p. 190) is compatible with that of Actor-Network Theory, as long as the "... subject or object are not understood as something given, unchangeable, or causally privileged." (ibid).



A “weakness” of Actor-Network Theory is that it has no clear framework to be used in a research context (Hitchings, 2003; Miettinen, 1999). *Weakness* in quotes because Actor-Network Theorists would argue that this is, if not a strength, then a necessity of the approach. Actor-Network Theory can be considered as “... a program of methodological provocations that constantly challenge traditional categories in social sciences, introducing new sets of terms for their reconceptualising.” (Miettinen, 1999, p. 171). Hitchings (2003) writes that if the insights gained through Actor-Network analysis “... were to solidify into a more defined theory, we would begin denying our own negotiation with the complexity of the world.” (p. 100). This perspective is closely related to the idea that the Actor-Network researcher cannot, and must not, have an a priori list of theories in which they try to fit the actor’s behaviour. The reason for this is, according to Latour (2005) that the actors should be allowed to make their own way and decide for themselves what their world is made of. The researcher should “...follow the actors themselves” (p. 12).

It is true that theories and frameworks tend to simplify and solidify reality into static models that do not represent the complexity of reality. The question is, however, if it is at all possible to avoid reductionism altogether. In Actor-Network Theory some actors will, according to Holloway (2000), always be privileged in network construction and Woods (1998) have argued that this constitutes a kind of reductionism in actor network thought (Holloway, 2000; Woods, 1998 in Hitchings, 2003). Even Latour have been argued to forgive theoretical preconceptions as long as it is for the furthering of Actor-Network Theory principles (Dudhwala, n.d.), as he argues that “... sturdy theoretical commitments have to be made and a strong polemical stance has to

be taken so as to forbid the analyst to dictate actors what they should do” (Latour, 1996, p. 9).

Building on the thought that some level reductionism will always persist, arguments can also be made for the usefulness of conceptual frameworks, as long as they are changeable and adaptable to the research findings and do not force the hand of the actor/researcher. Not as direct representations of reality to be followed slavishly, but as pointers or tools to assist researchers and/or practitioners in terms of what to look for and how to reach an understanding of certain phenomenon. To paraphrase an earlier quote, this use of Actor-Network Theory can still be “... a way for the social scientists to access sites, a method and not a theory, a way to travel from one spot to the next, from one field site to the next...” (Latour, 1999, p. 21).

A main goal of this thesis is to create a framework for analysis of tourism distribution. While the researcher understands and appreciates Actor-Network Theory’s ambition not to accept static accounts of the world. He also appreciates the value in frameworks that may guide researchers and practitioners and, importantly, help them communicate their results to others in an understandable and coherent way. This thesis seeks a middle ground by creating a relatively non-static, adaptable framework with awareness of the weaknesses in such frameworks - that is, their simplified and static account of reality. This is possible since the elements of an activity system are not static and do not exist in isolation, but are dynamic and go through continuous interactions with each other (Barab, Barnett, Yamagata-Lynch, Squire, & Keating, 2002). Because of this, the researcher sees the two approaches as compatible.

Miettinen (1999) even argues that Activity Theory can be used to solve certain challenges that Actor-Network Theory is facing, among these is the “... the problem

of structuring the analysis of the network and selecting the relevant elements or actors” (p. 181). A problem, which, in this case, is helped by seeing the network nodes as activity systems, and by starting the network building with the actors found to be most important to tourism distribution in previous literature, that is, the tourists, the intermediaries and the suppliers. This way, the researcher considers the strength in the ways that the two approaches mutually support each other as stronger than the differences between them.

Concluding this section on Actor-Network Theory, and before the application of Actor-Network Theory in the conceptual framework is explained, it is important to reiterate what was mentioned in the beginning of this section. Namely that in this thesis, Actor-Network Theory is seen and used as a relevant and useful approach to social science studies that present ideas and concepts which can help social scientists to gain a better understanding of reality(ies). However, because of the reasons mentioned here - in terms of fundamental differences between Actor-Network Theory and Activity Theory and because of differences in understanding of the usefulness of conceptual frameworks - this study will depart, when necessary, from the core of Actor-Network Theory.

### **3.8 Applying Actor-Network Theory to the Framework**

Returning to the framework (p. 78), we can now summarise how Actor-Network Theory perspectives will be used to make sense of the mediation process. It has been established that mediation happens in the relations between different network actors (activity systems) and that Actor-Network Theory will be used as a way of understanding these networks. It has been shown that the analysis of tourism distribution should also be an analysis of different enactments of the concept of

‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. Specifically, how tourists, suppliers, intermediaries and potentially other actors enact ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. This also involves how the different enactments of for example the Chinese tourist or Scandinavia, affect ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’.

An important point here is that the networks are not pre-existing observable entities. They are simultaneously constructed and affected by the researcher and the actors involved. The analysis of the actor-networks involves identification and investigation of stakeholders and their individual and organizational interests. That is, the process of negotiation, representation, mobilization and displacement among actors, places and entities. Through this, the goal is to uncover the roles and functions of actors in the networks. In this thesis the network construction will start with selected actors representing tourists, intermediaries and suppliers respectively (see “Data Sources” p. 124 for an explanation of how these are chosen), but may expand to involve other human or nonhuman actors as well. When analysing the networks, it is important to be aware that the actors are not only part of the networks, they are also constituted by them, meaning that the actors are reciprocally determining and being determined by the interactions they partake in (Barab et al., 1999).

Apart from these analysis tools, Actor-Network Theory also provides the researcher with certain rules or thoughts that help and affect the analysis process. First, it embraces mess, which in practice means that the researcher should aim not to ignore certain aspects of the data, just because it does not fall within certain categories. This is reflected in the inductive analysis approach where all issues brought up by all actors is taken into account in the analysis. Part of embracing mess is also to regard reality as

multiple, which involves looking at the object as enacted by different actors, rather than perceived by them. Second, it does not a priori distinguish, in terms of importance, between micro and macro actors, as smaller actors may play as important roles as bigger ones in a given network. This is reflected in the choice and treatment of interviewees; as huge cooperations, individual tourists, small suppliers are all included in the analysis on the same level. Third, it highlights the importance of objects. Although this study does not adopt the symmetrical subject-object perspective of Actor-Network Theory, objects are also taken into account as important to the activity systems and the mediation processes and networks that they partake in.

Finally, Actor-Network Theory also has significant methodological contributions, some of which have already been presented. In this thesis, these methodological points will also be taken into account, especially in terms of how the data collection is conducted (this is covered in the methodology section from the following page and forward). But also in the fundamental ontological and epistemological approach to the study, where the thoughts of actor-network theorists' Law (1992, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009; Law & Hassard, 1999; Law & Singleton, 2005) and Mol (1999, 2002) play a significant role.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents the philosophical approach to the thesis and details the data collection process. The study limitations will also be discussed. throughout this chapter as they appear. For example in ‘Why a Qualitative Approach’ (p. 109), where the choice of a qualitative approach is explained through philosophical and practical reasoning. Similarly in ‘Data Collection’ (p. 118), where the more practical limitations relating to the interviewees are presented. Finally, the main limitations are summarised briefly (p. 135).

The methodological approach used in this study is qualitative and inspired by Pragmatism, as well as ideas from Flyvbjerg (drawing from Aristotle, Dreyfus and Foucault among others) and Law (Drawing on Latour and Woolgar among others). Together, the combination of the pragmatic approach and the critical approaches offered by Actor-Network Theory and Activity Theory, the paradigmatic approach to this thesis can be regarded as Critical Pragmatist (Forester, 1993).

This chapter begins with a discussion and explanation of the philosophy of science, before it moves in to the more practical methodological choices, such as thoughts on data collection, data sources and data processing.

### **4.1 Critical Pragmatism**

Although Activity Theory and Actor-Network theory play important methodological roles in this thesis, the researcher’s paradigmatic approach to the study was pragmatic. The researcher believes in the pragmatic idea that the main purpose of methods and philosophy of science, is to aid or constructively challenge the researcher in doing

research and in understanding his or her own role in the research that (s)he is conducting. The decision to make use of certain methodological and theoretical approaches was based on the (critical) pragmatist ideas, which will be presented in this section.

The outset for this study was a quite simple practical problem – a lack of knowledge about how Chinese tourists end up holidaying in Scandinavia. The specific research questions (p. 8) developed from this practical problem. So did the methodology, as the methodological and theoretical tools were selected and developed based on how this problem best could be dealt with. Activity Theory and Actor-Network Theory were chosen because they seemed to work, together, and because they helped the researcher get closer to a solution to the problem and to answering the research questions posed. Because of this, the use of the two main theories – Activity Theory and Actor-Network Theory is by no means purist in this thesis. Elements from the theories are included because they may help engage with the research questions, while other elements are omitted. This is opposite to traditional positivist or post-positivist studies, where the research question is often designed so the methods are able to answer it. It is also opposite traditional Actor-Network Theory studies, where the researcher often accesses a problem as an “ANT-researcher” and therefore puts the methodological approach before the research question (Latour, 2005).

The approach is highly pragmatic, because it is uniquely tailored to the specific problem and research question. At the same time, however, it is perhaps too critical to fit the instrumentalist and technocratic approach, which is often (wrongly) associated with traditional pragmatism. Critical Pragmatism has been suggested as a way to bridge this gap (Rich, Xiang, & Xiao, 2015) and to illustrate that a research project is

applying the more critical readings of pragmatism. In what follows, the researcher will explain this approach and show how it works well with methodological elements inherent to Activity Theory and Actor-Network Theory.

#### **4.1.1. Two Types of Critical Pragmatism**

Ulrich (2007a, 2007b) argues that existing research on Critical Pragmatism can be divided into two strands - societal visions and philosophical efforts. The first strand has mostly been present in the fields of planning theory, and cultural and educational theory. The second strand mainly in social theory and philosophy. In the first strand, Critical Pragmatism stands for a commitment to an open, pluralist society, and can essentially be considered as a project of social change. In this strand Critical Pragmatism can be defined as "... a theory of science that emphasizes the need to apply knowledge to everyday problems based on radical interpretations of liberal and progressive values." (Deegan, 1988, p. 26). In social theory and philosophy, Critical Pragmatism is a philosophical project based on methodological interests. The purpose here is to bring together the traditions of pragmatist and critical thinking. In this strand, Critical Pragmatism can be defined as "... the endeavour to promote a critical understanding and practice of pragmatism." (Ulrich, 2007a). The researcher recognises the importance of application of knowledge to everyday problems, as well as the need to develop and legitimise critical understandings of Pragmatism. Therefore, elements from both these strands are used in this thesis. The societal approach is mostly present in the discussion and explanation of the qualitative approach to the thesis (Why a Qualitative Approach? p. 109). Here, Flyvbjerg, who the researcher regards as a critical pragmatist (although he never claims to be so) is used as a primary source. The philosophical approach will be explained in the following.



#### 4.1.2. The Philosophy of Critical Pragmatism

Critical pragmatism is situated between three research traditions: critical theory, pragmatic thought, and reflective practice (Ulrich, 2007b). There are no clear boundaries between these aspects and therefore no clear boundary between traditional Pragmatism and Critical Pragmatism either (Vannini, 2008, p. 160). The following section explains the aspects from traditional Pragmatism as well as Critical Pragmatism that are relevant to this thesis.

The antifoundational and practice oriented nature of Pragmatism has meant that it is, and have often been perceived as directly opposed to critical theory. The main reason for this is, according to Kadlec (2006), that misreading and misunderstanding of Pragmatism going back to Gramsci, Horkheimer and the Frankfurt school have been reproduced, while conservative proponents of pragmatism like Rorty have gained acclaim:

“Beginning with Gramsci and extending through the Frankfurt School, there has long been a perceived affinity between pragmatism and positivism, which forms the core of critical neo-Marxist rejections of pragmatism. I argue that there is little hope of fully appreciating the critical dimensions of Dewey's pragmatism without first understanding the consequences that have followed from the specious association of pragmatism and positivism.”

(Kadlec, 2006, p. 522)

Although such criticisms have taken a strong hold in some sociological circles, early Pragmatism in fact constituted a sharply critical perspective, even a radical one for the times (Vannini, 2008). Among these radical views was the view of:

“... social reality as being constantly in flux, on knowledge as relative and shaped by multiple and instrumentalist goals, on society as a form of discursive interaction, on

the self as a biographical project free of metaphysical baggage, on science as will to meaning and power, and on methodology as a form of situated inquiry...”

(ibid, p. 160)

All these are views that predate most postmodern and post structural social and cultural criticism and, according to Vannini (2008), influenced philosophers such as Foucault, Derrida, Habermas, Haraway, and Lyotard.

Traditional pragmatism is neither conservative nor progressive but can be used in either direction. As mentioned, Rorty is an example of a rather conservative pragmatist (Rorty, 1995), while Dewey exemplifies a progressive or even critical pragmatist (Hickman, Neubert, & Reich, 2013).

Pragmatism is not positivist nor anti-positivist (Powell, 2001, p. 884 in Pansiri, 2005): “That one can be both fallibilistic *and* antisceptical is perhaps *the* basic insight of American Pragmatism” (Putnam, 1995, p. 21). Pragmatism rejects positivism “... on the grounds that no theory can satisfy its demands (objectivity, falsify-ability, the crucial experiment, etc.)” (Powell, 2001, p. 884 in Pansiri, 2005), and on the grounds that there is no universal truth. It also rejects many proponents of anti-positivism, “... because virtually any theory would satisfy them.” (Powell, 2001, p. 884 in Pansiri, 2005). Dewey argued “... truth is neither discovered, as the absolutists claimed, nor invented, as the relativists claimed. It is instead constructed as a by-product of the process of solving problems.” (Hickman, 2009, p. 14).

The mandate of science is, according to Pragmatism, not finding the truth or reality, but to facilitate human problem solving. It is about gaining the kind of understanding necessary to work with problems as they arise (Powell, 2001 in Pansiri, 2005). Pragmatism believes that ideas are not absolute truths ‘out there’ to be discovered. Ideas are tools that people use to cope with the world (Menand, 2002).

“‘True’ ideas are tools that work; they are instrumental, but their usefulness as instruments is inescapably conditional. A concept that works well for some tasks might not work well for others.” (Snarey & Olson, 2003, p. 92). No principles of truth are absolute; no realities transcend the local conditions under which they emerge (Vannini, 2008), therefore researchers must look to practise in order to work with the (research) problems or questions at hand.

#### **4.1.3. Activity Theory, Actor-Network Theory and Critical Pragmatism**

According to Kadlec (2006), Dewey’s enthusiasm for scientific method is not based on a positivistic desire for objective verification or prediction, nor is it a reductionist adoration of all things given, as his critics have argued. His standpoint is much more critical. Science is a way to release us from a fixed and static conception of the world and open our eyes to a dynamic world that is:

“... always in-the-making, always changing, ever open, and ‘so multiplex and far-reaching’ that it cannot be contained in any cramped metaphysical vision that sets reason over and above the world as it is experienced in everyday life.”

(ibid, p. 534)

Vannini (2008) states that “Pragmatists view social action as the site where multiple realities are created” (160). Reality is not static or objectively observable, it moves and changes and because of this, scientific truth is affected by the actions of the researcher. In the words of Dewey: “... inquiry may lead to different truths in different situations” (Hickman, 2009, p. 12). Critical pragmatists emphasise the construction of reality as a struggle between conflicting discourses and competing definitions of the situation, which emphasises the making and remaking of reality as a political act. These critical aspects of pragmatism are reminiscent of ‘After-ANT’s ideas of ontological politics

and multiplicity, where reality is not only moving and changing, but multiple and actively being enacted (After ANT p. 85).

Activity Theory does not subscribe to positivist paradigms either. It acknowledges the criticism of natural determinism and objective representation put forth by constructivism. However, it cannot be regarded as a constructivist approach either. It is more similar to Pragmatism. The understanding is that individual people's perspectives do not construct society.

“People do not create society, for it always pre-exists them. Rather it is an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions that individuals reproduce or transform. But which would not exist unless they did so.”

(Bhaskar, 1989 in Engeström & Miettinen, 1999)

Society and reality are already made, but it is reproduced and transformed through human practice, which importantly involves creation of tools (psychological or physical) that carry culture on to the next generations. ‘After-ANT’ also subscribes to the idea that there is a world “out-there”, which is created through practice. Law (2004) states that:

“... there is a world out there (...) knowledge and our other activities need to respond to its ‘out-thereness’. It is a world, as I’ve suggested, that is complex and generative. I will argue that we and our methods help to generate it. But the bottom line is very simple: believing something is never enough to make it true”.

(p. 8)

Hence, we are back with one of the common denominators of Activity Theory, Actor-Network Theory, Critical Pragmatism, as well as the arguments of Flyvbjerg (which are presented in the following). That is, the focus on practice, the active role of the researcher in *doing* research and on knowing as something we *do* (Nardi, 1996 in

Randall, Harper, & Rouncefield, 2007). Activity Theorists' Engeström and Miettinen (1999) quote pragmatist Dewey's (1916) understanding of practice:

“It means that knowing is literally something which we do; that analysis is ultimately physical and active; that meanings in their logical quality are standpoints, attitudes and methods of behaving towards fact, and that active experimentation is essential to verifications. (...) The object of knowledge is not something with which thinking sets out; but something with which it ends: something which the processes of inquiry and testing, that constitute thinking, themselves produce. Thus the object of knowledge is practical in the sense that it depends upon a specific kind of practice for its existence”.

(pp. 331, 334)

Other important ontological and epistemological convergences between, Activity Theory, Actor-Network Theory and Critical Pragmatism are: Their rejection of a priori notions of truth (Pansiri, 2005; Putnam, 1995; Snarey & Olson, 2003); their common desire to dispose of dualist and dichotomous divisions between nature and culture, individual and society, science and morality, thought and activity, theory and practice, and, facts and values (Dewey, 1929; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Law, 2002; Putnam, 1995; Snarey & Olson, 2003); and their belief in the notion that individuals do not produce ideas. Ideas are produced through relations, they are social and context dependent.

This thesis subscribes to the basic ideas of (critical) Pragmatism: The goal comes before the means to reach it. The problem and research question(s) come before the method used or the paradigm that underlies the method (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003 in Pansiri, 2005). However, based on the arguments of Critical Pragmatism and Activity Theory, but more clearly by those of ‘After-ANT’, the means also shape the research question and the goal. Therefore, multiplicity

(different enactments of the objects investigated), as well as the agency of the researcher, should be taken into account, when doing pragmatic research and will be so in this thesis (see ‘After ANT’ p. 85 and the following sections of this chapter for more on how this is done).

The following section explains the reason for the choice of a qualitative approach to the thesis. In this section, perspectives from ‘After-ANT’ proponent Law (1999, 2004) are combined with the ideas of Flyvbjerg (2001; Flyvbjerg, Landman, & Schram, 2012), who the researcher regards as a critical pragmatist although he has never claimed to be one.

### **4.3 Why a Qualitative Approach?**

The choice of a qualitative approach builds on perspectives proposed by Bent Flyvbjerg and John Law. These two thinkers have each published works related to philosophy of science and social science methods within roughly the same period between 2001 and 2004. Although they base their works on different source material and never mention or quote each other, the researcher will argue that they are attempting to tackle similar issues from different angles. Namely the problem of how social science research has been and is perceived and conducted today.

Law (2004) and Flyvbjerg (2001) both argue that social science is messy and complex, but that the methods that have been applied to make sense of it do not permit this kind of mess. In contrast, these methods seem to remove the mess and concentrate on what is left, that is “... a set of fairly specific, determinate, and more or less identifiable processes” (Law, 2004, p. 5, *cursive in original*), which, both authors seem to agree, do not resemble reality. Law (2004) writes: “Parts of the world are caught in our ethnographies, our histories and our statistics. But other parts are not, or if they are

then this is because they have been distorted into clarity” (p. 2).” The two authors also agree that there is no definite answer to the challenges that they discuss, but that “... a broader and more generous sense of method...” (ibid, p. 4) is needed. Flyvbjerg is quite specific. He suggests *phronesis* research as a possible starting point for a solution to the problem. *Phronesis*, meaning “... practical wisdom on how to address and act on social problems in a particular context” (Flyvbjerg et al., 2012, p. 1) is based on what Flyvbjerg argues to be the forgotten third of Aristotle’s division of intellectual virtues. The two others being: ‘*techne*’ – technical knowhow and ‘*episteme*’ - universal truth. In his book *Making Social Science Matter* (2001), Flyvbjerg presents this method and explains its development, while his book *Real Social Science* (2012) (co-authored by Landman and Schram) presents a series of cases where the method has been put into use. Law is much more open in his approach and has the unmaking of methodological habits as his main goal. In his book *After Method – Mess in Social Science Research* (2004), he argues that we must unmake the following methodological habits:

“... the desire for certainty; the expectation that we can usually arrive at more of less stable conclusions about the way things really are; the belief that as social scientists we have special insights that allow us to see further than others into certain parts of social reality; and the expectations of generality that are wrapped up in what is often called ‘universalism’.”

(Law, 2004, p. 9)

The following section explains the basic thoughts and ideas of these two thinkers and their predecessors, and how their thoughts play into the fabric of this thesis.

Law (2004) opens his book *After Method – Mess in Social Science Research* with the following question: “... what happens when social science tries to describe things that

are complex, diffuse and messy” (p. 2). The answer is, according to Law (2004) that “... it tends to make a mess of it” (ibid). He argues that the reason for this is that simple clear descriptions do not work if what they are describing is not itself very coherent: “The very attempt to be clear simply increases the mess” (ibid). Almost as an answer to this worry, Flyvbjerg pragmatically argues that social science should be restored to its “... classical position as a practical, intellectual activity aimed at clarifying the problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies, and at contributing to social and political praxis.” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 4). Based on in-depth analysis of scientists and thinkers going back to Plato, Socrates and Aristotle, Flyvbjerg argues that social science has set itself an impossible task when it attempts to emulate natural science and produce predictive theory. He shows how it can be demonstrated that the natural sciences are cumulative and predictive, while the social sciences are not and never have been. He provides four arguments that this is the case: (1) *The pre-paradigmatic argument*: Due to context-dependency, which is unavoidable in social science (unlike natural science), there is no normal-science in social science and there is little reason to believe that there ever will be (based on the thoughts of Rorty). (2) *The hermeneutic-phenomenological argument*: In social science the object is a subject. The study of human activity must be based on people’s self-interpretation. Therefore, studies based on these interpretations can only be as stable as the interpretations themselves (based on the thoughts of Giddens and Garfinkel). (3) *The historical contingency argument*: “How does one determine scientifically what science is?” (ibid, p. 29). Humans constitute the sciences and are their object at the same time. In other words, no science can objectivise the skills, which make it possible (based on the thoughts of Foucault). (4) *The tacit skills argument*: There is a dilemma between the need for context-independence inherent to theory making and the inability of social



science to disregard context, or in the words of Flyvbjerg “Human skills are context dependent and cannot be reduced to rules, whereas a theory must be free of context and have rules.” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 47). Reading Law (2004), it seems that he would to a large extent agree with these arguments. He points out how social scientists are constantly pointing to the fast changing world, where the nature of the person is shifting, and structures are broken, unpredictable and fluid:

“But at the same time, within social science, talk of ‘method’ still tends to summon up a relatively limited repertoire of responses. The collection and manipulation of certain kinds of quantitative data is emblematic for research methods in many kinds of social science including much of sociology, economics, psychology, and human geography. The collection of certain kinds of qualitative materials is iconographic in anthropology, cultural studies, science studies and other parts of sociology and human geography.”

(Law, 2004, p. 4)

Of the continuing aspiration of social scientists and researchers to conduct normal-science, despite it being impossible, Flyvbjerg argues:

“That the ideal [normal-science] does not work in practice for social science and that there is nothing, which indicates that it ever will is another story. The goal is clear, even though it cannot be achieved. If the normal-scientific ideal were abandoned, we would be without both goals and results, where at present only the results are lacking.”

(ibid, p. 48)

Despite this rather harsh statement, neither Flyvbjerg nor Law disregards quantitative or other methods that attempt to create epistemic knowledge, nor methods that do not include “mess”, completely. On numerous occasions, they highlight the importance of such studies and methods for certain things and for the development of social science as a whole. Law (2004) argues:

“No doubt some things in the world can indeed be made clear and definite. Income distributions, global CO2 emissions, the boundaries of nation states, and terms of trade, these are the kinds of provisionally stable realities that social and natural science deal with more or less effectively. But alongside such phenomena the world is also textured in quite different ways. My argument is that academic methods of inquiry don’t really catch these.”

He continues:

“... the world is not a structure, something we can map with our social science charts. We might think of it, instead as a maelstrom or tide-rip. Imagine that it is filled with currents, eddies, flows, vortices, unpredictable changes, stroems, and with moments of lull and calm. Sometimes and in some locations we can indeed make a chart of what is happening round about us. (...) Certainly there are moments when a chart is useful, when it works, when it helps to make something worthwhile (...) But a great deal of the time this is close to impossible, at least if we stick to conventions of social science mapping.”

(Law, 2004, p. 2 and 7)

What both authors mean to do, is to highlight the fact that considering certain, often quantitative, epistemic ways of acquiring knowledge as better or “more scientific” than other ways, is wrong, and that the dominance of these types of studies is problematic. According to Flyvbjerg, a reason that these methods cannot be considered as “more scientific” is that predictability, which is often highlighted as the advantage of quantitative enquiry and theory building, can never be really predictive, because, as Dreyfus puts it: “... predictions, though often correct, will not be reliable.” (Dreyfus, 1986, p. 8). The reason for this is, according to Law, that some researchers confuse scientific rigour with what he regards as ‘methodological rule-following’. But the fact is that “... methods, their rules, and even more methods’ practices, not only describe

but also help to *produce* the reality that they understand” (Law, 2004, p. 5, cursive in original). The reason for this is that:

“Scientists have a culture. They have beliefs. They have practices. They work, they gossip, and they worry about the future. And, somehow or other, out of their work, their practices and their beliefs, they produce knowledge, scientific knowledge, accounts of reality.”

(Latour & Woolgar, 1986 in Law, 2004 p. 19)

What is perceived as objective rules about reality and ingrained in many of our scientific methods today is thus, according to Latour, Woolgar and Law, subjective statements, where the subjectivity has been forgotten or hidden:

“... as the modalities disappear, so do almost all of the processes in which statements and realities are produced. The largest part of the work that has gone into their production is deleted. In the end, the inscription devices themselves disappear, though those that are most novel are likely to retain a foothold in the ‘methods section’ of scientific papers. But it is the ‘subjective’ and the personal that disappears first.”

(Latour & Woolgar, 1986 in Law, 2004 p. 36)

In similar fashion, Flyvbjerg explains how subjectivism, which is often brought forward as a weakness of qualitative research, is also present in quantitative methods. The difference is that in quantitative enquiry, subjectivism is present in the creation and choice of variables and categories, rather than in the collection of data. In practice, this means that no researcher, no matter what method (s)he uses can be completely objective. A number of other arguments that quantitative research is just as prone to error as qualitative research can be proposed. Flyvbjerg, for example, argues that the inherent distance from the subjects in quantitative studies present a number of potential problems: “Great distance from the object of study and lack of feedback easily lead to

a stultified learning process, which in research can lead to ritual academic blind alleys, where form becomes more important than content.” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 72).

In the previous section on Pragmatism, three examples of exceptions to universal truth were presented (p. 105). The trust in truth as universal, when it is in fact not, is another weakness of quantitative research. The point here is to say that the quantitative methods, which many researchers now consider as rigorous, are only rigorous within a specific framework. A framework that is just as prone to error as any other system of thought. A symptom of this realisation is that a number of well renowned researchers who have been known to criticise for example qualitative case study methods, have changed their mind. Among others, Flyvbjerg quotes Campell, Becker and Eysenck, who have all turned from thinking and arguing that qualitative case study was of no value, to the perspective that these kinds of studies may be just as valuable as quantitative studies. Eysenck writes:

“... sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something”

(Eysenck, 1976, p. 9 in *ibid* p. 75)

Campell writes:

“Qualitative common-sense knowing is not replaced by quantitative knowing... This is not to say that such common-sense naturalistic observation is objective, dependable, or unbiased. But it is all that we have. It is the only route to knowledge – noisy, fallible, and biased through it be.”

(Campell, 1979, p. 191 *Ibid* p. 73)

Based on this, Flyvbjerg argues that qualitative studies should not be considered only as a means to create pilot studies to prepare for the “real” study. It is just as valid a method for theory building, if that is our aim, as any quantitative method, and should

be treated as such. However, since predictability is impossible in social science, theory building is in itself, a lost cause.

The thoughts presented here leave three important points, which act as the backdrop for this thesis and the study behind it. These points may be summarised as follows:

1. Construction of predictive theory should not be the main goal in social science, since context dependency (among other things) make it impossible.
2. Qualitative research can be just as rigorous in social science as quantitative research, since the strengths of quantitative research methods, in terms of reliability, validity and generalisability, are based on subjective rules.
3. The world is messy and should be treated as such. It is necessary to embrace the mess, if researchers wish to approach further understanding of the world.

Chinese tourism to Scandinavia, and particularly the relations between the different actors involved, can be viewed as quite a messy object of research. Through its open and inductive approach, this thesis will attempt to embrace this mess.

It is important to reiterate that the choice of a qualitative methodology was not made because quantitative inquiry is considered valueless. The researcher has previously argued for synergistic approaches that take advantage of the strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods respectively (Jørgensen, 2016) and thus support Flyvbjerg's notion that the two types of science have their own strengths and weaknesses along fundamentally different dimensions. The choice of a qualitative approach was simply made because the in-depth understanding of tourism distribution sought in this study can better be achieved through qualitative inquiry. Theory making is not an aim of this study. However, it intends to develop a conceptual framework, which may help other researchers make sense of the mess that is tourism distribution.

In addition to the three points above, two important methodological points from ‘After-ANT’ (p. 85) should be added:

4. Method is not innocent or purely technical. The researcher’s choices and practice affect the results of the research.
5. Reality is enacted and multiple and should be investigated through this lens.

These last points mean that the researcher should be aware of how the methods chosen affect the results of the research. It also means that the researcher will investigate the object, in this case ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ as enacted through different practices (a more detailed explanation of this is found in ‘After-ANT’ on p. 85).

#### **4.4 Scandinavia as a Destination**

Scandinavia was chosen as the destination for this thesis for a number of reasons. First, it represents one of the new destinations that Chinese tourists visit as they become more experienced travellers. This kind of destination is underrepresented in studies of China outbound tourism. Second, as a Dane, the author has in-depth knowledge of the culture and language of Scandinavia, this insight was useful in the collection of data. Third, the author has connections in the Scandinavian tourism industry who could assist with access to the most relevant respondents. Fourth, the author has been made aware of a need in the Scandinavian tourism industry for knowledge about incoming Chinese tourism. This need ensures that the practical/managerial findings of the study have relevance to industry.

In Chinese language, Scandinavia or Northern Europe is known as Bei Ou, a term that refers to the broad cultural definition of Scandinavia as: Norway, Sweden, Finland Iceland and Denmark (including Greenland) (World Encyclopedia, 2015). In this thesis, this cultural definition is adopted, although it is limited to include the

geographically connected territories of Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland. Ideally, all the territories within the broad definition would have been included in the study, however, there are a number of reasons for this delimitation; these reasons can broadly be divided into reasons pertaining to the travel patterns of Chinese tourists, and practical reasons. The practical reasons were mainly due to the monetary constraints of the project, which meant that the researcher had to prioritise the territories that would be included in the study. The geographical distance of Iceland and Greenland from the rest of Scandinavia was an important reason to exclude these parts from the study. In addition to this, the travel patterns of Chinese tourists also supported this exclusion. By investigating the tours offered by Chinese tour operators and one of the few studies that looked at the travel patterns of Chinese tourists to Scandinavia (Chinavia, Report 2, 2013), the author found that most Chinese tourists (both group tourists and independents) who travel to Scandinavia, combine the some or all of the four countries included. While some tours did include Iceland, a similar number included other countries that would not fall within any definition of Scandinavia, including Russia and Germany. Thus the choice to include only the four connected countries of Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland, was made partly to resemble the combination of countries most commonly offered to Chinese travellers. All of the tourists who were subsequently recruited as interviewees for the study had travelled to different combinations of the four countries included, while none of them had included Iceland or Greenland in their itineraries.

#### **4.5 Data Collection**

The first four chapters in this thesis have demonstrated how the conceptual framework was developed. Among other things, this framework inspired the questions asked in the qualitative semi-structured interviews that form the main data source in the thesis.

Using the framework in this way means that there is a deductive element to the thesis. However, as has been argued in the current and previous chapters, this is a qualitative study, and has a main purpose of letting the collected data speak for itself and ideally affect, change and develop the conceptual framework. By such means, the analysis conducted in the thesis will be inductive. Perspectives, ideas and concepts that fall outside the conceptual framework will be embraced and, if relevant, used to change the framework itself. In practice, this is done by first approaching the data without the framework, to see what themes emerge from the data itself, and then apply the framework afterwards.

In the following section, further explanation of the data used in this thesis will be given. This includes information on the methods used to collect the data, the practicalities surrounding the data collection, and how respondents were chosen.

#### **4.5.1. Semi-structured Interviews**

The main data collection method for this study are in-depth semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; Russel, 2006). All interviews were recorded and transcribed (the sound files and transcriptions for each interview can be found in Appendix 4). Semi-structured interviews were chosen because the researcher believed it to be the optimal possible solution when looking to gain a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon. The qualitative interview allows interviewees to reconstruct their experiences and practices (Seidman, 2005), and provides the researcher with rich perspectives into their world.

Supplementing the interviews with other ethnographic data collection methods, such as observation or participation in the actual practices of the actors under investigation would provide even deeper insights. It would also satisfy the aspirations of Actor-Network Theory to a larger extent, than what this study achieves. However,



this was not possible within the frame of the research. There are two major reasons for this: First, it would require resources that were not available to the researcher. Resources in the form of time, because it would take a long time for the researcher to become immersed in the practice of tourists, suppliers, and intermediaries. It would also require considerable monetary recourses, because the three groups are geographically spread across both China and Scandinavia.

Second, it would require access, which is not available to the researcher either. Researchers have pointed out how apart from being expensive, it can also be difficult to obtain access to companies for academic data collection (de Sausmarez et al., 2012; Paxson, 1995; Pearce et al., 2007). This difficulty is only enforced by the closed business culture in China, which meant that particularly access to Chinese intermediaries was extremely limited. This meant that gaining access to conduct interviews was challenging and further access was regarded as impossible.

Thus, semi-structured interviews alone are not considered as the ideal data collection method for this study, but the best possible method. This also hints at another limitation to study, namely that it was not possible to choose freely who to interview. Compromises were made in terms of choosing interviewees and access as well as willingness to participate played important roles in choosing the interviewees.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at premises requested by the interviewee when possible, otherwise they were conducted using Skype or WeChat Call. Skype and WeChat Call interviews were necessary in some cases, because of the distances between the researcher and the respondents, in others, because some interviewees preferred not to meet in person. The fact that not all interviews were conducted face-to-face may also be regarded as a limitation to the study.

Despite the limitations, the data collection method should create an interactive process where the interviewees provide detailed responses and share experiences and knowledge. According to Maxwell (2004), this kind of interaction allows the researcher to potentially uncover issues that (s)he may not have anticipated. Maxwell (2004) also highlights that qualitative interviews aim to make intensive and individualised conversations with a small purposefully selected group of interviewees. This means that the focus is not on the number of cases generated, but on the individuality of each dialogue and depth of insights gained.

Research interviews have loosely been divided into three types: The structured interview, which mainly produces quantitative data; the unstructured interview, which is often used in ethnographic research; and the semi-structured interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), which is used in this study. The choice of semi-structured interviews was made to strike a balance between two aspirations: (1) to give the researcher the freedom to follow the perspectives of the interviewees and potentially discover unanticipated themes or concerns (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2010; Maxwell, 2004). This leaves out a fully structured approach. (2) To make sure that certain aspects, in this case the aspects represented in the conceptual framework, were covered during the interviews in order to answer the research questions (ibid). This leaves out the unstructured interview approach. Referring to the thoughts on enactments presented in the section on Actor-Network Theory (p. 80), the semi-structured interview is also relevant because, in this type of interview "... the person interviewed is more a participant in meaning making than a conduit from which information is retrieved." (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). Three basic interview guides were designed for the study, one for the tourists,

the suppliers and the intermediaries respectively; these were slightly altered to fit the specifics of each interviewee.

#### **4.5.1.1. Interview Guides**

The interview guides (see Appendix 1) took their departure in the conceptual framework (p. 78), and were based on fundamental thoughts and questions brought up by Flyvbjerg (2001) and Actor-Network Theory. The six categories in the conceptual framework (based on Activity Theory) were used to structure the interview. According to Actor-Network Theory and Flyvbjerg, the questions asked should be concerned with practice and *how*, not only *what* and *why*. This focus was integrated in the interview guides. When possible, ‘how-questions’ were asked about how things were practically done by the respondents, rather than more specified questions about, for example budgets, number of staff etc. In the words of Foucault and Flyvbjerg “... discourse is not life” (Foucault, 1993, p. 235 in Ibid) and therefore questions are asked “... not about codes but about events” (ibid, p. 134). The focus is, in other words, on process in addition to, or sometimes instead of, structure (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 132).

#### **4.5.1.2. Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted in order to test and consequently refine the interview guides and interview approach.

The pilot study consisted of four interviews with representatives of travel agencies/tour operators in Hong Kong. Three of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at locations chosen by the representatives; the last one was conducted via phone, at the request of the interviewee. Each of the face-to-face interviews lasted 40-45 minutes, while the phone interview lasted 20 minutes. The four interviews were conducted in November and December 2014. Table 10 shows the companies and the

representative(s) interviewed. The sound files and transcribed interviews can be found in Appendix 4.

*Table 10: Interviewees for Pilot Study*

<b>Company</b>	<b>Representative</b>
<b>Hong Thai Travel Services Ltd</b>	Director/General Manager
<b>Miramar Travel,</b>	Deputy General Manager
<b>Jetour China</b>	Planning Manager and General Manager
<b>Tourism industry veteran who used to work for companies such as Kuoni and Hong Kong Oriental Travel</b>	Director and Manager

These tests proved that the interview guides and approach worked well, although a number of smaller changes were made to the interview guides in order to make them clearer and the interview process easier for the interviewee.

#### **4.5.2. Approach to Data Collection**

Principles from Actor-Network Theory were utilized in the approach to the thesis data collection. Van der Duim et al. (2012) highlight two central questions relating to data collection, namely: "... where – and from where – the researcher may capture and describe the actor-network?" and "Where does the network start and where does it end?" (p. 21). They explain how the network is not fixed geographically or structurally and how a non-territorial approach in which the workings and shape of the network are not known or taken for granted a priori should be taken:

"The field, be it a tourist destination, an innovation project or the multiple practices of sustainability, is emergent through our research work. At the same time, feedback from the field guides and points on to other places, objects, practices or discourses, that may become further routes of research."

(van der Duim et al., 2012, p. 21)

In the words of Latour (2005), the researcher should "...follow the actors..." (p. 12). As previously mentioned, this is not an Actor-Network Theory study per se. Some a priori idea of which actors that should (at least) be taken into account in the network

construction was present as the researcher needed to include tourists, suppliers and intermediaries to gain insights on the full distribution network. However, attempts were made to have the open approach suggested by Actor-Network Theory and to follow the actors through the network. Tourists were approached indiscriminately. Their perspectives on (company) actors that they had been in contact with in relation to their travels to Scandinavia were used as inspiration when approaching the intermediaries to be included in the data collection. Similarly, inspiration from the interviews with tourists and intermediaries was used in the selection of suppliers for interview.

#### **4.5.3. Validity and Reliability**

Among others, Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Patton (2001) have argued that congruence exists between reliability and validity in qualitative research. “Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability;]” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 p. 316). Therefore, this section will focus on the various verification strategies that were applied to ensure data validity.

In terms of ensuring data validity, this thesis follows Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers (2002) who argued that reliability and validity in qualitative research is ensured through mechanisms that are woven into every step of the inquiry. They explain that validity is ensured by:

“identifying and correcting errors before they are built in to the developing model and before they subvert the analysis. If the principles of qualitative inquiry are followed, the analysis is self-correcting. In other words, qualitative research is iterative rather than linear, so that a good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between design

and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis.”

(p. 17)

It was already explained that the analysis conducted for this thesis uses such an iterative strategy for data analysis. This iterative verification strategy ensured that the data collection process continued until saturation had been reached, as replication began to appear with addition of interviewees. As stated by Morse et al. (2002) “saturating data ensures replication in categories; replication verifies, and ensures comprehension and completeness.” (p. 18). Another strategy that was applied was data triangulation. According to Patton (2001) and Golafshani (2003) triangulation strengthens a study by combining “several kinds of methods or data” (Patton, 2001 p. 247). This study only makes use of triangulation of data, rather than methods. Triangulation was achieved by having various different kinds of actors, including both tourists, intermediaries and suppliers weigh in on the same phenomena. Another strategy to ensure validity was to make the connection between raw data and the findings transparent and available to readers. This was done through frequent use of quotations as the basis for the analysis chapters, and by including transcriptions and sound files as appendix available to readers. Finally, a number of respondents were approached to conduct member checking (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). The member checking was conducted by letting selected interviewees comment on the way their utterings were presented in the findings section.

#### **4.6 Data Sources**

Purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2004; Patton, 2001) was used to select the interviewees. Apart from the ontological and epistemological reasons already mentioned, this sampling method was chosen because the goal of the data collection

was to maximise the depth and richness of the data in order to address the research questions (Kuzel, 1992). Generalisability is not a goal of this research. Instead, the researcher aimed to reach rich, diverse and in-depth perspectives from different sources on the object of study – ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. Because of this, it was not a goal to interview a certain number of actors within specific interviewee categories. The researcher instead aimed to include different types of respondents within the definitions of the three respondent categories – tourists, intermediaries and suppliers – to enrich the data. In the following sub-sections, definitions of the three respondent categories, as well as detailed information on the choice of respondents will be given.

#### **4.6.1. Tourists**

Since the study could only include a limited number of tourist interviewees from a very large pool of potential interviewees, the author set up certain criteria for the interviewees to ensure that the most relevant people were included for interview. The criteria used for the screening of potential interviewees were:

- Must be Mainland Chinese (excluding Special Administrative Regions and Taiwan) and have lived in mainland China within the last 5 years.
- Must have travelled to Scandinavia within the last 5 years.
- A main purpose of the trip to Scandinavia must be leisure (e.g. business tourists and students are not included).

An important intention with the interviews was to get insights on Chinese tourists’ choice of Scandinavia as their travel destination. Students and business travellers were excluded, because the author believed that their main intention to visit would not be personal or based on merits of Scandinavia as a destination, but instead mainly based on their study or business purpose. The exclusion of interviewees who had not lived

in China within the previous five years was made to ensure that the interviewees had a connection to China and were not for example Chinese Americans, who may be more American than Chinese. The author intended to include tourists whose experience in Scandinavia was as recent as possible. A five year criteria was imposed to ensure that all tourists had experienced Scandinavia relatively recently, although 80% of the interviewees had in fact visited Scandinavia within the previous two years.

The choice of tourist interviewees was initially made indiscriminately. The researcher wrote an advertisement (see Appendix 2), which was spread via Chinese social media platforms. The potential interviewees who responded to the advertisement were screened and purposeful sampling (Patton, 2001) was used to select interviewees from these. The aim of the purposeful sampling was to reach a broad representation of different types of tourists in terms of ‘Type of trip’ and ‘Countries visited’. A limitation of this approach was that only people with some command of English were included for interview. It is possible that these interviewees will have more progressive views, as they tend to be young and/or well educated. Only tourists from the more developed South and East coast areas of China responded to the advertisement, and were subsequently chosen as interviewees. This represents another limitation of the tourist sample, as the tourists emanating from these developed areas may have other views than those from other areas of China. The study aimed to limit the effects of these limitations. First, by including tour guides/leaders who could represent the views and experiences of general tourists with no English speaking ability in some regard. Second, through use of data triangulation, which meant that the tourists’ perspectives were considered in relation to other actors’ views on the same topics. Table 11 (next



page) provides an overview of the tourist interviewees. In the analysis, the tourist interviewees will be designated by their number in the table.

Table 11: Tourist Interviewees

Nr.	Type/length of trip	Origin	Countries visited	Travel experience (Outside Greater China)	Interview Method/Place
1	School trip (Group tour), 16 days in Scandinavia	Shanghai	Finland and Sweden	Japan, England	WeChat Call
2	Group Tour, 10 days	Shanghai	All four countries	None	WeChat Call
3	Independent leisure trip, 5 days	Shanghai (now Hong Kong)	Norway	Indonesia and Western Europe	Face to face, Hong Kong
4	Conference and leisure trip, 7 days	Beijing (now Hong Kong)	Finland and Sweden	Taiwan, Thailand and Malaysia	Face to face, Hong Kong
5	Independent leisure trip, 10 days	Beijing	All four countries	Italy, Greece, France, Egypt, Germany and Switzerland	Face to face, Beijing
6	Group Tour, 7 days	Beijing	All four countries	Europe, America, Australia, Egypt, Turkey	WeChat Call
7	Group Tour, 7 days	Beijing	All four countries	Europe, US, Japan, Thailand, Turkey, Australia and New Zealand	WeChat Call
8	Independent leisure trip, 8 days	Beijing	Denmark and Norway	Iceland, France, Italy, Holland, Spain and Greece	WeChat Call
9	Independent leisure trip, 3 days	Beijing	Sweden	Italy, Paris, Germany, Greece	WeChat Call
10	Independent leisure trip, 8 days	Beijing	Finland, Denmark and Sweden	Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Southern Europe (multiple countries)	WeChat Call
11	Independent leisure trip + VFR, 4 days	Guangzhou	Denmark, Norway and Sweden	Western Europe (multiple countries)	WeChat Call
12	Independent leisure trip, 9 days	Dalian/Beijing	Norway	None	Face to face, Hong Kong
13	Group tour, 10 days	Nanjing	All four countries	Western and Central Europe, South Africa and Asia (multiple countries)	WeChat Call
14	Two trips: Trip 1: Independent Leisure, 12 days Trip 2: VFR, 5 days	Shenzhen	Trip 1: Finland, Sweden, Norway Trip 2: Copenhagen	Europe (multiple countries), right after Scandinavia	Face to face, Hong Kong

#### **4.6.2. Intermediaries**

As stated previously, intermediaries in this study are considered as actors who link producers of tourism services and their customers. Based on this definition, the aim was to interview representatives of a number of different intermediaries, including both big and small actors. A mix of convenience sampling and purposeful sampling was applied. The potential interviewees were divided into the following groups: China based outbound tour operators who work with Scandinavia as a destination; Online travel agents (OTAs) who are sending Chinese tourists to Scandinavia; Incoming bureaus who work with incoming tourism from China; Tour leaders/guides who accompany Chinese tourists on their travels to/in Scandinavia; and finally, DMOs or other specialty channellers, who have knowledge about or assist in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’.

An interpreter accompanied the researcher for all interviews with Chinese speaking interviewees, except in cases where the respondent did specifically not require it. However, the interpreter was only actively used in four interviews. For these interviews the researcher transcribed the translations made by the interpreter, hired an outsider to transcribe and translate the Chinese content and then compared the two English versions (the interpreters and the translators). This was done to ensure that the translations had been done correctly, and to retrieve as much content and meaning as possible from the interviews. Table 12 provides an overview of the intermediary interviewees.

Table 12: Intermediary Interviewees

Nr.	Designation	Type of company	Company Name	Representative Role	Information	Interview Method/Place
1	Caissa1_TO/TA	Tour Operator and Travel agent	Caissa Touristic, Hotel Management Dept.	Two representatives: Manager of Hotel Management Dept. and Assistant to the Manager	Big TO/TA in China to Scandinavia	Face to face, Beijing
2	Caissa2_TO/TA	Tour Operator and Travel agent	Caissa Touristic Beijing	Vice President for Beijing Branch	Big TO/TA in China to Scandinavia	Face to face (w. interpreter), Beijing
3	CITS_TO/TA	Tour Operator and Travel agent	CITS (China International Travel Service)	Deputy General Manager, responsible for Outbound Tour Department	Among the biggest TO/TA in China	Face to face, Beijing
4	CYTS_TO/TA	Tour Operator and Travel agent	CYTS (China Youth Travel Service)	Product Expert, Business Manager Europe Travel Center	Among the biggest TO/TA in China	Face to face, Beijing
5	Oriental Nordic_TO/NicheWholesaler	Tour Operator, Niche Travel Agent and Wholesaler	Oriental Nordic OY (Also Office for DFDS Seaways and Silja Line)	Two representatives: Owner and Reservation/operation representative	Niche TO/TA and China office for Scandinavian transport companies DFDS Seaways and Silja Line	Face to face, Beijing
6	NewWorld Travel_TO/TA	Tour Operator and Travel Agent	New World Travel Agency	Manager of outbound business	Smaller TO/TA focussing on Scandinavia	Face to face (w. interpreter), Beijing
7	GrandVision_Wholesaler	Wholesaler	Grand Vision International Travel Service	Europe Director	Wholesaler focusing on Scandinavia	Face to face (w. interpreter), Beijing
8	CBGI_Wholesaler	Wholesaler	China Bamboo Garden International Travel Service	Product Operation Manager - Northern Europe, Eastern Europe, Russia	Wholesaler with focus on Scandinavia	Face to face (w. interpreter), Beijing

Understanding Tourism Distribution

9	Albatros_Niche Wholesaler	Niche Wholesaler	Beijing Albatros Travel	Director	Focused on in-depth travel to Northern Scandinavia (Adventure travel)	Face to face, Beijing
10	Ctrip_OTA	OTA	Ctrip	International Market Manager, International Hotel Department	Biggest Chinese OTA	WeChat Call
11	NordEU_DMC	DMC	NordEU	General Manager	Focused on in-depth travel to Scandinavia	Face to face, Beijing
12	Tumlare_DMC	DMC	Tumlare	Destination Manager Finland	Focussed on travel to Scandinavia	Face to face, Helsinki
13	StopoverFinland_NicheDMC	Niche DMC	Stopover Finland/ Finland Tours	Project Manager	Makes stopover packages for incoming markets, primarily from Asia	Face to face, Helsinki
14	DMC Scandinavia_DMC	DMC and Wholesaler	DMC Scandinavia Incentives	Inbound Tour Consultant	Focussed on Chinese tourism to Scandinavia	Face to face, Beijing
15	STB_DMO	Specialty Channeller (DMO)	Scandinavian Tourism Board (STB)	Chief Representative	Covers Denmark and Norway	Face to face, Beijing
16	VisitSweden_DMO	Specialty Channeller (DMO)	Visit Sweden (China Office)	Travel Trade Manager	Covers Sweden	Face to face, Beijing
17	TourLeader1	Specialty Channeller (Tour Leader 1)	Large Chinese tour operator	Tour Leader	Focused on Chinese tourism to Europe	Face to face, Beijing
18	TourLeader2	Specialty Channeller (Tour Leader 2)	Large Chinese tour operator	Tour Leader	Focused on Chinese tourism to Europe	Face to face, Beijing
19	TourLeader3	Specialty Channeller (Tour Leader 3)	Large Chinese tour operator	Tour Leader	Focused on Chinese tourism to Europe	Face to face, Beijing
20	TourLeader4	Specialty Channeller (Tour Leader 4)	Large Chinese tour operator	Tour Leader	Focused on Chinese tourism to Europe	Face to face, Beijing

21	TourLeader5	Specialty Channeller (Tour Leader 5)	Large Chinese tour operator	Tour Leader	Focused on Chinese tourism to Europe	Face to face, Beijing
22	TourGuide	Specialty Channeller (Scandinav ia Based Tour Guide)	Independent	Tour Guide	Focused on Chinese tourism to Europe	WeChat Call

### **4.6.3. Suppliers**

Suppliers are the actors who supply tourism products to the tourist. Like the intermediaries, the first criterion in choosing the suppliers for interview was whether the interviewed tourists had used them. The second criterion was if the intermediaries mentioned them as cooperation partners. If this was the case and the intermediary was willing to participate, they were included as interviewees. In the cases where it was not possible to interview actors that the tourists had suggested, purposeful sampling was applied. Attempts were made to provide a broad representation of different kinds of actors based on geography and type of business. In terms of geography, six destinations in Scandinavia that are popular among Chinese tourists were selected based on the results of the interviews with tourists and intermediaries. These six destinations were: Greater Copenhagen, Denmark; Funen, Denmark; Helsinki, Finland; Stockholm, Sweden; Oslo, Norway and Sognefjord, Norway. An effort was made to include representatives of DMOs, attractions, accommodation providers and transportation/infrastructure providers in all destinations. Most interviews were conducted in English; the ones that were not were conducted in either Norwegian or Danish and translated by the researcher who is proficient in both these languages.

Table 13: Supplier Interviewees

Nr.	Designation	Type of company	Company Name	Representative Role	Interview Method/Place
1	WOCO/Chinavia_DMO	DMO	Wonderful Copenhagen/Chinavia	Project Manager	Skype (Translated)
2	VisitNorthZealand_DMO	DMO	Visit North Zealand	Marketing Director	Face to face (Translated), Greater Copenhagen, Denmark
3	DestinationFyn_DMO	DMO	Developing Fyn	Marketing Manager	Skype
4	VisitStockholm_DMO	DMO	Visit Stockholm	Marketing Manager	Face to face, Stockholm, Sweden
5	VisitHelsinki_DMO	DMO	Visit Helsinki	Marketing Manager	Face to face, Helsinki, Finland
6	VisitFlam_DMO/Attraction	DMO/Attraction	Visit Flam/Flamsbana	Sales, Marketing and Key Account Manager	Face to face (Translated), Flam, Norway
7	InnovationNorway_DMO	DMO	Innovation Norway	Director of Tourism	Face to face (Translated), Oslo, Norway
8	RestelHotelGroup_Accommodation	Accommodation	Restel (Hotel Group)	Key Account Manager	Face to face, Helsinki, Finland
9	ThonHotels_Accommodation	Accommodation	Thon Hotels (Hotel Group)	Director of International Sales	Face to face, Oslo, Norway
10	NordicChoiceHotels_Accommodation	Accommodation	Nordic Choice Hotels (Hotel Group)	Sales Manager	Face to face, Stockholm, Sweden
11	FretheimHotel_Accommodation	Accommodation	Fretheim Hotel (Single Property)	Director	Face to face, Flam, Norway
12	FirstGrandHotel_Accommodation	Accommodation	First Grand Hotel (Single Property)	General Manager	Face to face (Translated), Funen, Denmark
13	OdenseCity Museums Attraction	Attraction	Odense City Museums	Marketing Coordinator	Face to face, Funen, Denmark
14	EgeskovCastle Attraction	Attraction	Egeskov Castle	CEO	Face to face (Translated), Funen, Denmark
15	VasaMuseet Attraction	Attraction	Vasa Museet	Head of Marketing	Face to face, Stockholm, Sweden
16	TallinkSiljaLine Transport/Attraction	Transport/Attraction	Tallink Silja Line	Sales Manager, International Sales	Face to face, Helsinki, Finland

#### **4.7 Summary of Limitations**

The specific limitations to this study, which have already been described in more depth are briefly summarised here.

First, the study is based exclusively on data gathered through in-depth interviews. Even deeper insights could have been gained through additional data collection, for example, through ethnographic data collection methods, such as observation or active participation. This was not possible within the temporal and monetary confines of the project and because of lack of access.

Second, it was not possible to choose freely who to interview. Because of this, some compromise had to be made in terms of choice of interviewees. Despite this, the researcher managed to include important representatives from all actor groups in the research.

Third, only tourists with English speaking ability were interviewed (this was not the case for suppliers and intermediaries). It is possible that these interviewees will have more progressive views than other tourists, as they may tend to be younger and/or well educated. The study aimed to limit the effects of this limitation, by including tour guides/leaders who could represent the opinions of general tourists in some regard.

Fourth, 13 of the 52 interviews had to be conducted via Skype or WeChat Call rather than face-to-face. Though the researcher managed to collect the needed information through these interviews, there is no doubt that face-to-face interviews would have been preferable.

#### **4.8 The Analysis Process**

This thesis applied the approach and framework presented in the previous chapters to analyse the collected data. Since much of this process is not visible in the analysis



chapters, as these focus on the results gained from the analysis. This section will briefly explain the data processing as well as the analysis process.

Data collection and processing were part of an iterative process in this thesis. The interviews were collected one by one and the activity systems for each actor was analysed separately as they were collected (Appendix 3). The knowledge gained from the first interviews generated an emerging understanding, which in turn informed both the sampling and the questions being asked (Kuzel, 1992). The interviews were recorded and transcribed to keep the nuances and capture informants own language (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). This way, saturation was reached through the process described by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) as well as Kuzel (1992) who wrote: “This iterative process of data collection and analysis eventually leads to a point in the data collection where no new categories or themes emerge. This is referred to as saturation, signalling that data collection is complete.” (p. 317).

In the analysis, the quotes sometimes appear in slightly altered versions to improve readability. However, no changes have been made to the meaning of the quotes and the original quotes can be found in the transcriptions (Appendix 4) for reference.

Manual coding supported by the nVivo software was used to inductively categorise the data (Creswell, 2012). This type of coding is considered when the dataset is reasonable in size (Kozinets, 2009). The focus of the coding was on the meaning of what was said, not counting how many times things were said. In the words of Strauss (1987) the aim was to *fracture* the data, not count it. Therefore use of rich quotations

to support specific points was regarded as an important part of the analysis process (Shenton, 2004).

The coding was first based on categories and themes that inductively emerged from the data. Later these inductive findings were supported by analysis of the relations between actors (activity systems) using the concepts and ideas presented in the conceptual framework. The activity system figures (Appendix 3) were useful in this process as they were used to represent actors and could be moved around to see how different actors related. This part of the analysis revealed stable and unstable parts of the distribution network and different enactments of the network and thus of 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. The process of simultaneously using the categories and themes that inductively emerged from the data in conjunction with analysis using the framework was described by Strauss and Corbin (1990), who argued that "... while coding we are constantly moving between inductive and deductive thinking" (p. 111).

The findings from these analyses were written down in note form, with quotations that supported the various findings. These notes and quotations were then written into the text, which appears in the following three analysis chapters. Efforts were made to communicate the analysis process and findings in a concise way, while also retaining some of the discussions and reflections that went into the analysis process.

After the analysis was written, figures were constructed to visualise the findings. It is important note that the figures in Chapter 6 do not represent the way that the analysis was conducted, but are illustrations to communicate the (relatively) stable and unstable gateways in the actor-network to readers of the thesis.

## **CHAPTER 5: MULTIPLICITY**

This and the following two chapters present the analysis conducted for this thesis. This chapter will first demonstrate how Actor-Network Theory's concept of multiplicity is present in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia', through the different ways that the various actors involved enact the phenomenon. It is suggested that these different enactments should be considered in analysis of tourism distribution. Based on this, the two subsequent chapters use these enactments as the outset to investigate: The distribution network(s) in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia', as well as the relations within these networks (Chapter 6); and the various factors that affect 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' (Chapter 7). In Chapter 8, the results of these analyses are summarised and discussed against the existing literature.

### **5.1 Professional Enactments of 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'**

Most of the interviewed intermediaries and suppliers enacted 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' as 'a business'. Different levels of importance were attributed to the phenomenon, depending on the size and focus of the actors, although all of them considered it a somewhat important part of their business.

The biggest intermediaries regarded 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' as a small but growing part of their business (CITS\_TO/TA; Caissa1\_TO/TA; Ctrip\_OTA and CYTS\_TO/TA). These actors considered Scandinavia as an emerging and relatively untapped market, which represented potential for development of new products and new customer groups. This was similar to some suppliers who primarily enacted 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' as a potential (NordicChoiceHotels\_Accommodation; VisitNorthZealand\_DMO; InnovationNorway\_DMO and Visit

Stockholm\_DMO). Because of the similar enactments, these seemingly different actors, in terms of company type (hotels, TO/TAs, OTAs, DMOs), size, focus and funding model (some were private, some were public) shared many traits in their approach to 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. They were all aware of its potential and attempted to further its future development, but their concrete actions were limited by the fact that it was still merely a potential or a smaller part of their business.

Other actors enacted 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' as a more important part of their business. Some wholesalers and tour operators focussed specifically on Europe and Scandinavia, and therefore considered it an important part of their portfolio (GrandVision\_Wholesaler; CBGI\_Wholesaler and NewWorldTravel\_TO/TA). Other actors had reasons that were more practical. For example, that Chinese groups tourists could fill capacity that would otherwise be left empty (FirstGrandHotel\_Accommodation and ThonHotels\_Accommodation). A large group of suppliers had attractions that were particularly attractive to the Chinese market (EgeskovCastle\_Attraction; Odense BysMuseer\_Attraction; VisitFlam\_DMO; FretheimHotel\_Accommodation; VasaMuseet\_Attraction; TallinkSiljaLine\_Transport/Attraction; DestinationFyn\_DMO and RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation). This may be the reason that these diverse actors shared common traits in their treatment of the Chinese market. Compared to the actors who mainly saw it as a potential, this group was more invested in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. They participated actively in activities directed toward it, and often invested more time, money and energy than what was merited by the current income generated, because they had a strong belief in the potential of Chinese incoming tourism and were already seeing some results.

Finally, some actors exclusively worked with 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' (Oriental Nordic\_TO/NicheWholesaler; DMC Scandinavia\_DMC; NordEU\_DMC;

Albatros\_NicheWholesaler). Naturally, these actors enacted it as the very core of their business and therefore as a necessity for survival.

The national DMOs, the representative from the Chinavia project and to a lesser extend the regional DMOs enacted ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ as a process of mediation, rather than as a business. The interviewees representing the national DMOs explained how their main task was to bridge the connection between suppliers in Scandinavia, the Chinese travel trade and the Chinese market. They were, according to themselves, facilitating a process of translation between these actors, to make them better understand each other:

“... quite often, they don’t understand each other, they don’t know, the people in Scandinavia, they don’t know what the Chinese like. You know. We are just like a bridge, to tell them what you should serve, how do you serve the Chinese people, Chinese tourists. Let them get an understanding. And then we are going to tell the [Chinese] travel agencies, tell the people, the costumers even, ok, what is the real lifestyle. The people’s real lifestyle from Scandinavia. Let them get an interest in that...”

(VisitSweden\_DMO)

An important difference between this enactment and the other professional enactments was that this was process focussed (how to create understanding), while the others were profit focussed. This difference was also reflected in the ways that the actors were evaluated – DMOs, based on their efforts towards solving specific tasks that may be motivated by a number of factors; companies, based on profit or future potential for profit. This difference was well illustrated in the following quote, where a regional DMO representative explained why public money was spent to strengthen ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’:

“Things have to mature, and it makes sense that it is public money that mature the markets and make them ready, then the private companies can take over. (...) That is a model that works well for us. (...) When you enter growth markets you do it for public money. And now we have to find a business model where we say ‘dear private actors (...), this effort has created such and such, if you want us to continue, you have to help finance it.’ And I think they will do that easily.”

(VisitNorthZealand\_DMO)

These different professional enactments illustrate how actors cannot be grouped and generalised solely based on their categorisation as for example a tour operator, travel agent, attraction or wholesaler. The ways that they enact ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ may differ across these groups depending on a number of different factors. Despite these differences, all the mentioned actors can be regarded as having ‘professional enactments’ of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. The interests of the respective companies were front and center, and the different enactments were based on the interests of the company that they represented, rather than on considerations that were more personal. These enactments were different from those of other actors in the distribution network, namely those of tourists, tour guides and tour leaders.

## **5.2 Personal Enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’**

Like the other intermediaries, the tour leaders and tour guides were also interviewed in their professional capacity. However, the interviews showed that these actors’ enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ were more personal than those of the other intermediaries. The tour guides/leaders enacted ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ primarily as ‘a job’, which they had to do. They were much more focussed on personal experience and benefit, than the other intermediary

representatives. They primarily cared about aspects that made their job easier or more satisfying, such as safety, transportation and language capacity of locals. Another primary concern for them was how they could increase their personal income. The following quote from a tour guide provides an example of how personal benefit was prioritised by tour guides/leaders:

“... we get salary from the company, but at the same time we get commission from the shops here in Nordic countries, for example the watch shops. (...) So, for example, if the people from Shanghai, if the whole group they are from Shanghai, normally we say this quality is very low. Because Shanghai is a very big city, the people there they can buy everything in Shanghai. They have been a lot abroad, they have been to many countries, so they know that the guide, they get commission from the shop, so they don't buy. But people from other cities, for example from North of China, normally people who live there, they are not used to go abroad, so maybe this is their first time to go abroad so when the guide says you should buy this, you should buy that, then they buy. (...) almost all the guides, if it is a qualified guide, a guide that has experience guiding for many years, I think we have the same opinion - a good quality group, means that they spend much money.”

(TourGuide)

This quote illustrates how the tour guide enacted ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ as a job that provides potential for personal benefit. This was especially clear because the argument – ‘a good tourist is an inexperienced tourist’ – goes directly against the general opinion of the intermediaries that they work for, which was that the more experienced the tourist was, the better (see *Travel Experience and Market Maturity* p. 205).

The tourists’ enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ can also be broadly categorised as ‘personal’. Yet, they still differed significantly from the enactments of the tour guides/leaders. The tourists generally enacted ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ as an experience. Some tourists focussed on the more tangible aspects of the experience, such as specific sights, nature, and/or architecture. Others focussed on more intangible aspects such as an experience of happiness, calm and tranquillity. Finally, others focussed on a holistic experience that included elements of both these. They for example wanted to experience the beauty, lifestyle and culture of the Nordic countries, which included both tangible and intangible aspects (see (In)tangible Attractions p. 229).

### 5.3 Enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’

Table 14 illustrates the basic enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ presented in this chapter.

Table 14: Broad Enactments of ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’ (CTS)

Professional enactments				Personal enactments				
CTS as a business				CTS as a process of mediation/translation	CTS as a job	CTS as experience		
A potential	Small but growing part of the businesses	Important and growing aspect of the businesses	The basis for survival			Tangible sights (e.g. Nature, Northern Lights, Architecture)	Holistic experience (e.g. lifestyle, beauty, culture)	Intangible experiences (e.g. environment, happiness, calm)

This initial analysis illustrates that ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ is a business, but not just a business. The tour guides/leaders, who are a central part of the execution of the products sold by intermediaries, for example enacted tourism distribution as something personal, with their own interests in mind. It is demonstrated how the various actors enact tourism distribution in different ways, even though they belong to the same actor category. Some actors may even act against the interest of the company



they represent. In some cases, traditional groupings of actors based on their type of business e.g. tour operator, attraction or wholesaler, may thus falsely assume that such actors want similar things, as it is not considered that some tour operators may have more in common with certain suppliers than with other tour operators in their approach to tourism distribution. This initial analysis of the basic enactments of 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' confirm the argument made in Chapter 3 of this thesis - that a deep understanding of tourism distribution cannot be gained solely through a supplier oriented, economically focussed channel approach. The examples illustrate the importance of a multiplicity-based approach, where tourism distribution is investigated through the different enactments that appear as part of the data analysis.

## CHAPTER 6: NETWORKS AND RELATIONS

To gain an overview, a simplified and relatively stable network structure for ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ can be illustrated based on analysis of the interviewed actors and their communities (see Appendix 3 for Activity Systems for each of them).

*Figure 10: Basic Network Illustration – ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’*



This figure visualises the relations between/among actor groups in the distribution network, which were enacted as relatively stable by the actors. Each node represents a cluster of actors based on the ways that they were enacted by the actors outside their own cluster. The ‘China Travel Industry’ and the ‘Chinese Market’ is for example presented as such, because this is how they were enacted by the network actors outside their own cluster. Suppliers primarily enacted companies based in China, whose work was related to travel, as part of a broadly defined group dubbed the ‘China Travel

Industry'. Similarly, they enacted Chinese tourists as part of the 'Chinese Market', which represented a broad group of potential customers. The national tourism DMOs were the only actors who were consistently enacted on their own by the actors in Scandinavia and in China. A primary reason for this was, as have been mentioned and will be further elaborated, that these actors had offices in both Scandinavia and China, and worked to mediate the relation between the clusters on each side. At the destination level, actors outside the local destinations and the destination actors themselves enacted the local actors in the same way. As a group of destination suppliers mediated by a local DMO, which cooperated with the national DMO, who in turn cooperated with the other national DMOs in Scandinavia.

These enactments of the actors as belonging to broad groups rather than as individual actors, is an indicator of the spatial, geographical and structural distance between the actors involved in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. This distance was found to be essential to the ways the network worked. It meant that distant actors were enacted in large units, which amplified the importance of mediating actors in the distribution network.

The actor units were enacted as a number of relatively stable sub-networks, which permanently or temporarily influenced 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. These sub-networks were broadly enacted as three relatively stable clusters: The Intra-destination Cluster (which includes three sub-clusters, as will be explained later), the China Travel Industry Cluster and the Chinese Market Cluster. These network clusters were connected through different gateways. Some of these were enacted as more or less stable and official structures, for example, the connections between the national DMOs and the China Travel Industry as illustrated in Figure 9. Other gateways were enacted as less stable, but no less important. These were temporary and emerged and

disappeared depending on different circumstances. They included workshops, events, marketing initiatives and other ad-hoc activities.

The following analysis will investigate the relations within this actor-network further. Specifically, it will focus on two aspects: (1) it will unfold, explore and explain the main clusters, which were enacted by the network actors, as well as the relations within them. This includes investigation of the ways these affect and change the network, and how they influence 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. Second, it will identify and investigate the relatively stable parts of the network as well as the more unstable temporary gateways between the network clusters, and explain the ways in which these gateways affect 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'.

### **6.1 Chinese Market Cluster**

When the actors were concerned with the specifics of the Chinese Market Cluster, they enacted the members of this cluster as either: potential tourists, who had yet to travel to Scandinavia or even out of China; group package tourists; and (semi-)independent tourists. The specificities of these enactments will be explored further in the following chapter. However, some aspects of how these three groups related to the other actors in the distribution network will be highlighted here.

Tourists emanating from China typically begin as group travellers; gain travel experience and either stay with group travel, or move into more (semi-)independent travel types (see p. 205 for further explanation). Although some actors argued that the recent development in (semi-)independent travel had been at the expense of group travel, they generally agreed that group travel and (semi-)independent travel from China to Scandinavia was rising:

“I think the cake is getting bigger actually. I do think so, and its more holiday travellers, its more people spending their own money to travel rather than a company’s money. That is also more a genuine type of travel.”

(VasaMuseet\_Attraction)

Traditional intermediaries such as tour operators, travel agents and wholesalers were still important in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ (the reason for this is explained later p. 152). Despite the sustained power of these intermediaries, they were experiencing increasing competition from the increase of independent travel and from OTAs. This could be taken as a sign of beginning disintermediation which has been suggested as a tourism trend by a number of researchers (e.g. Law, 2009; Law & Lau, 2005; Tse, 2003). However, the analysis for this thesis did not find this to be the case for ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. Instead, the analysis showed how the traditional operators stayed relevant by increasingly orienting themselves towards new markets within China (in second and third tier cities) and towards new innovative products. Many tourists had already or would soon leave the traditional products or intermediaries in favour of other options. However, the analysis showed few signs that they would move away from intermediaries. Instead it indicated that they would increasingly reorient to other (more customizable) products offered by the same intermediaries; to other intermediaries with stronger and more specific focus on activities or interests; or to OTAs who would allow them to buy certain parts of the product based on their budget and interests. This suggests that some aspects of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ are in a process of reintermediation (McCubbrey, 1999; Novak & Schwabe, 2009; Palmer & McCole, 1999) rather than disintermediation. This means that intermediaries are continually important in the distribution network, and that suppliers in Scandinavia will have to continually work

to improve their relations with intermediaries in China. More so, because Chinese tourists generally do not provide direct feedback to suppliers at the destination:

“We don’t know. It is something that is on my mind. I wonder what they actually think about us, because they are always smiling and friendly, but we don’t know.”

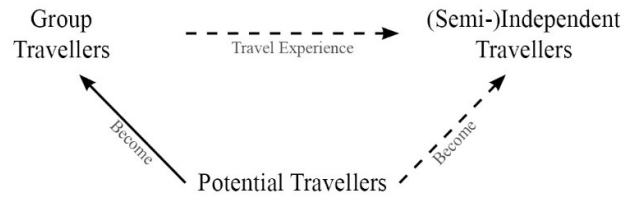
(FirstGrandHotel\_Accommodation)

In a distribution network, the direct relation between a supplier and a tourist is often established when the customer arrives at the suppliers’ premises. This is rarely the case in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, where such a connection may not be established at all. There are various reasons for this, including language difficulties, the fact that Chinese tourists often travel in groups with a guide, and cultural codes, which mean that customers might not complain in order to save face (See the next chapter for elaboration of these issues). This elevates the importance of relations between intermediaries and suppliers in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, because the intermediaries in many cases are the closest suppliers get to first hand feedback or knowledge about tourists’ complaints and preferences.

### **6.1.1. Stable Gateways**

Based on what has been presented, a conceptual model can be drawn for the relatively stable Chinese Market Cluster in the distribution network. It is important to note that while this and the following conceptual figures are meant to illustrate the (relatively) stable parts of the network to the reader, they fail to illustrate the fluid nature of the actor network (see p. 135 for an explanation of how the analysis was conducted):

Figure 11: Chinese Market Cluster



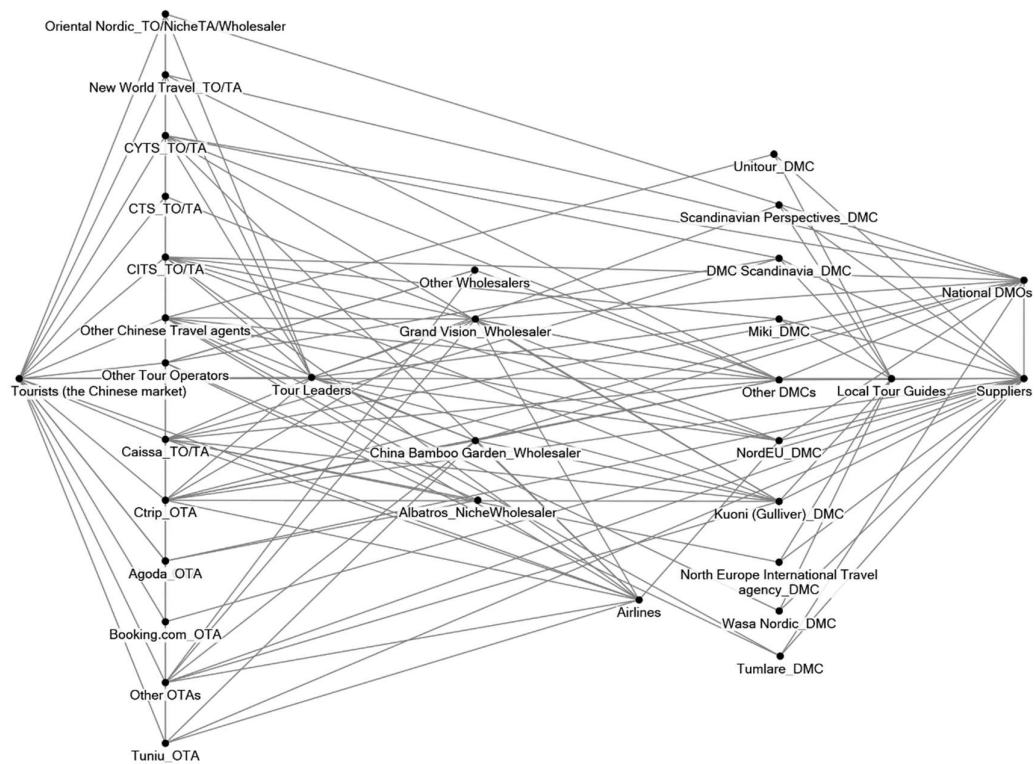
The cluster consists of the three interrelated groups of actors, as they are enacted by the other network actors (potential tourists, group travellers and (semi-)independent travellers). Potential tourists who become tourists to Scandinavia will most often either come as group tourists or gain travel experience as group tourists and then come to Scandinavia as (semi-)independents. As Scandinavia is continually becoming a more popular destination in China and since independent travel is generally increasing in popularity, a small, but increasing number of tourists also come to Scandinavia directly as (semi-)independents.

## 6.2 China Travel Industry Cluster

With its close connection to the Chinese Market, the China Travel Industry represents an important cluster in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. The China Travel Industry consists of a large number of China based tourism actors - primarily tour operators, travel agents, wholesalers, OTAs and DMCs. The idea of the China Travel Industry as an actor in the network may seem incongruous given that so many actors take part in it. However, the interviews showed that in most cases the suppliers in Scandinavia enacted the China Travel Industry as a unit, most likely to make sense of this vast network of actors.

Figure 11 illustrates the actors in the China Travel Industry Cluster that came up during the interviews, as well as some of the ways they relate.

Figure 12: China Travel Industry Cluster (Simplified)



This illustration visualises a small part of the actual network cluster, as only the actors that came up during the interviews are included. In addition, many nodes in the network represent a network cluster on their own, since a number of huge actors that form distribution/actor-networks on their own, dominated the China Travel Industry Cluster. This was particularly the case for the large (partly) state-owned tour operators such as CITS, CTS and CYTS. These companies had widespread networks of sales offices, sub-contractors and partners in overseas destinations as well as numerous sales channels both on- and offline. In explaining a typical purchase of a package tour, an interviewee illustrated this complexity well:

“... if a Chinese tourists ends up in Copenhagen (...). Then it could have been sold some place out in western China. In Xian for example. But it is sold under the CITS's umbrella brand. Then you have a lot of people paying a license to be allowed to use that brand. And then you have one person in CITS, probably here in Beijing, who has



made all the appointments in Scandinavia. He will arrange the hotels. They often use Gulliver, which is the DMC under Kuoni and they make the appointment. He puts up the flights, he buys from Air China or one of the others, and then he sends it out to all the sub brands, license payers, who then put it up in their small offices and sell it.”

(Albatros\_NicheWholesaler)

Inspired by the Scandinavian suppliers’ enactments of actors within the China Travel Industry Cluster, the following sections divide the primary actors within the cluster into four main actor groups that each has important implications for ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’: Traditional Operators, OTAs, Tour Guides/Leaders and China Based DMCs. The three first groups will be explored in this section, while the China Based DMCs will be explored in-depth in the section on Intra-destination Clusters (p. 160) along with their Scandinavian equivalents.

### **6.2.1. Powerful Traditional Operators**

The continuing importance of traditional intermediaries such as travel agents, tour operators and wholesalers mentioned in the literature review (p. 52), was clearly visible when examining the internal relations between the investigated intermediaries. The reason for this importance was that the Chinese market was perceived to be difficult to reach and work with on your own, which increased the importance of cooperation with established actors in the China Travel Industry:

Interviewee: “... if you made a chart of what markets you are interested to work together with (...) China is even higher because the [Scandinavian] industry, they work quite well on their own with the Danish market. (...)”

Interviewer: So in terms of cooperation. China is more relevant, because it is more difficult?

Interviewee: “Yeah, true.”

(VisitStockholm\_DMO)

Four detailed reasons for the continuing importance of the traditional operators in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ were also found through the analysis:

(1) Market reach: as exemplified in the quote from the Albatros representative, the traditional operators had extensive networks of travel agents who were licensed to sell their products all over China. This provided a competitive advantage, especially since the Chinese market was regarded as difficult to navigate and penetrate. A tour operator/travel agent explained:

“... there are a lot of channels for us to sell our product. We have our chain stores. Face to face, and also we have our own website (...) and also we sell our product on Ctrip and Tuniu. And also we have some partners to sell our products.”

(CYTS\_TO/TA)

(2) Visa related issues: A number of actors explained how the fact that Chinese tour operators could assist the tourist in the difficult process of obtaining a Schengen visa provided a competitive advantage (see p. 262 for deeper analysis of visa related issues).

(3) Price competitiveness: Since the traditional operators were already well established in the market, they were highly competitive in terms of price, which was considered a main factor for the mainstream Chinese tourists to Scandinavia (see p. 205 for more on the importance of price).

(4) Need for security: Numerous cases of fraud and fake products combined with a general lack of trust in the system in terms of getting compensation, means that the Chinese public generally has a low level of trust when they buy travel products (see p. 265 for more on safety issues). Such fear was for example reflected in an interview with a group traveller:

Interviewer: “Do you know, if you were to travel on your own. How would you book the tickets and so on?”

Interviewee: “In fact, I only have a general idea of the booking system in China to other countries. Because someone who have travelled abroad before on their own, they told me that I can book hotels or some maybe tickets online on my own. But someone also told me that if I was paying bills in China for the tickets or hotels overseas there may be some security problems for my credit card. So I think maybe I would come to some kind of travel agency for help booking our hotels or tickets...”

(Tourist\_02)

For these reasons, Chinese tourists will often choose a company that they know and trust, when they book their travel. A representative from a wholesaler said about the tourists’ choice of known companies: “...you know that if it is CITS, then you will probably not be ripped of...” (Albatros\_NicheWholesaler).

According to the same actor, these aspects have put particularly the big Chinese tour operators, travel agents and wholesalers in a position of power compared to other actors in the China Travel Industry. He explained about his company’s first entry into the Chinese market:

“Interviewee: In the beginning we tried mass-travel. Just taking the product from Denmark and selling it in China. But it failed catastrophically.”

Interviewer: “Why did it fail?”

“Interviewee: For many reasons. First, we were not competitive. In terms of price. There are a few big operators in China who can pressure the price. (...) they have a network which is established and runs, the margins are low, if you want to enter you need to give credit. Very fast you can have local Chinese who enter, (...) entry to market is very low. So they would quickly be able to step in and fill the small spaces, and their prices will always be better, and the quality is actually also ok. It is often fitted to the Chinese.”

(Albatros\_NicheWholesaler)

Despite the fact that the traditional operators in China remained powerful, they were also being challenged. On the one hand, by the increasing emergence of FIT, on the other by the continuing emergence and development of OTAs, who were gaining power in the marketplace.

### 6.2.2. Increasingly Powerful OTAs

The representative from CITS explained about the increasing competition from OTAs:

“I have to say now is a challenging time for traditional travel agencies like us, because, you know Tuniu and Ctrip. (...) the internet companies like Tuniu, Ctrip, actually they have a big technical web for the sales channels. And you can easily make the room reservations on the internet and easily get the feedback and confirmation.”

(CITS\_OTA)

Convenience and the ease of comparing products were the main reasons that costumers turned to online booking, while service and direct costumer contact was seen as the strength of the traditional companies. All the interviewed traditional operators who conducted business online and offline explained that the main bulk of their tours were still sold offline. A main reason for this was that they could not compete with the few well-established OTAs. The representative from Ctrip (the dominant OTA in China) agreed with this, as she argued:

“At present, I would say, in the China market, we don’t have the most or biggest competitors, because you know that Ctrip already bought Elong.com and just last night we bought or we merged with Qunar. So in the China market, at present, we are the biggest one and not so many competitors.”

(Ctrip\_OTA)

The dominance of a few big actors in the offline and online market combined with increasing knowledge about the tourism products and offers in Scandinavia affected

the relation between these companies and their partners in Scandinavia. A representative from one of the national DMOs explained:

“In the past, we could pretty much tell (...) the tour operator what to sell. What their product should be, because at that time they had no experience about the product or the services available in the destinations. (...) But nowadays our influence on the tourist, I mean the China travel trade, their decisions, become weaker. (...) in the past, the tourist board, we had the power. But now the tour operator, they have the power now. This relation used to be a sellers market, but now become a buyers market - we rely on them.”

(STB\_DMO)

He further explained that another reason for this change was that the market was becoming more diversified, which meant that the Scandinavian DMOs no longer had the same understanding of the needs of the Chinese tourist:

“... they [Chinese Travel agents and Tour Operators] know better about what their customer need. We don't know. Because we don't connect directly with the end consumer. So we have to respect, we call it, the travel trade, their expertise. They tell us what they need or what their customers need and then we try to look into in which cases we can meet their requirement.”

(STB\_DMO)

These points illustrate how knowledge of the market was becoming increasingly important as the Chinese market continually diversified. Since the Chinese operators were currently the ones with this knowledge, they were gaining even more power in the distribution network.

### **6.2.3. Tour Guides/Leaders – Untapped Potential**

Tour guides/leaders have in-depth onsite knowledge of the tourists' experiences, and could act as an important bridge between the Chinese Market and the China Travel

Industry Clusters. However, the analysis found that much of this potential was untapped in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. A local tour guide explained that there was almost no relation between her and the TO/TAs she was working for. In fact, she rarely knew who it was: “We just know the person who pay us. So I think many times we don’t know from which company [the tourist come].” (TourGuide). She further explained that the companies were not interested in feedback from her, and therefore she did not focus much on this:

“... the company [Chinese TA/TO], they don’t care what the group thinks about the programme (...) normally in the end of the tour we have this sheet that tourist they sign. Ok, which city is best, which city is not so good. So we just leave this paper to the company. But as a guide, normally we don’t say to the company which part of the programme is good which is not, because it doesn’t help. (...) most of the companies, they don’t care what you are saying. Although they know that the programme is not perfect. But they do their way. (...) They just want to spend as little as they can”

(TourGuide)

Similarly, it was also mentioned that although many tour guides had knowledge about the destinations, which could significantly improve the tours if shared, they were not required to share this kind of knowledge by the company:

“... when I tell them, ok here in Sweden, you know the schools, about the kindergarten about the hospital system, so they are very very interested in this kind of system. Because they think, this is real? You don’t need to save money for your children’s education? You don’t need to save money for one day you will be sick?”

Interviewer: “When you tell them that, is that part of the tour, or is that something that you just tell them, because you think it is interesting?”

Interviewee: “No it is not part of the tour. Every guide they have their own way to do it. Maybe some guide they never talk about this, but for me I am 45 years old, I have my life experience. Myself I have been travelling in many countries all over the world.

So when I come to a new country actually the natural things is not so attractive to me, but I like the civil, you know, I like the cultures. So I would like to know how people live in these countries. So that is why when we take the bus for example from Oslo to Fiord, whole day, you cannot tell them about the Nordic history all day, it is very boring for them.”

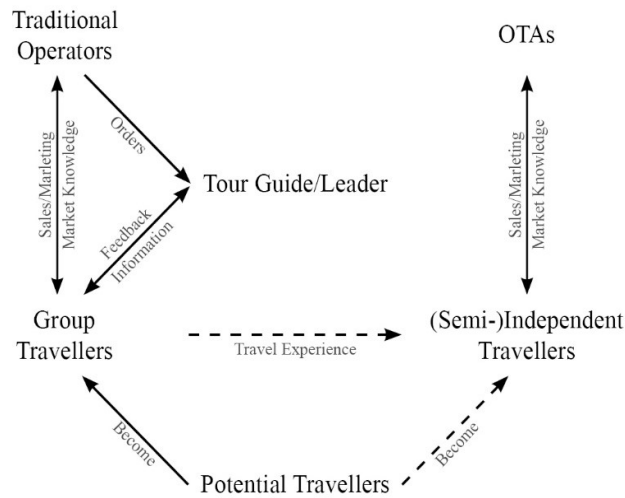
(TourGuide)

When asked whether providing this kind of information was considered part of the tour, all the interviewed tour guides and tour leaders explained that it was not and that the content of the programme was generally very strict. This issue harkens back to the personal enactments of the tour leaders/guides (p. 141). In this individual case, the personal experiences of the tour guide could potentially enrich the experience, because she acted as a broker between the destination and the tourists. However, in many other cases, the tourists would miss this information and the positive experiences that came with it, since the tour operators and travel agents did not take advantage of the relation between the guide and the destination. Together, these examples suggest an untapped potential in the mediating role tour guides could have between local suppliers, tourists and the companies in China.

#### **6.2.4. Stable Gateways**

In Figure 12, the China Travel Industry Cluster has been added to the conceptual model for the Chinese Market cluster. It illustrates the stable gateways between these network clusters.

Figure 13: Stable Gateways between the Chinese Market Cluster and the China Travel Industry Cluster



Group travellers are connected to the traditional operators through various marketing activities and direct sales contact. Similarly, the (semi-)independent travellers are connected to the various OTAs that they use for product inspiration and for purchase of products. The purchase patterns of these tourists provide the operators with important market knowledge about trends and segments within the Chinese market. Through direct interaction with the tourists, tour guides/leaders gather first hand feedback, impressions and experiences from the tourists, as well as from the destinations that they visit. This knowledge rarely reaches the rest of the China Travel Industry Cluster, since the relation between these actors and the companies that employ them is mainly one-way – the tour guides/leaders receive specific orders and carry them out. The analysis generally showed that the Traditional Operators and OTAs did little to collect information and feedback from the tourists. Because of this, most of the consumer knowledge that these actors acquired was based on sales statistics. This could be a limitation as it will tend to reinforce and reproduce current trends rather than discover new ones.



### 6.3 Intra-destination Cluster

Initial analyses showed that the Intra-destination Cluster could be divided into three overlapping clusters: The Local Destination Cluster(s), the National Destination Cluster(s) and the Supra-national (Scandinavian) Destination Cluster.

#### 6.3.1. Local Destination Cluster

At the local level, the contact with the Chinese Market and the China Travel Industry was limited by physical and structural distance. Some privileged actors had direct contact to actors in the China Travel Industry, but this was mainly the case for actors who were part of a chain that worked at the national or supra-national level. The interviewed actors generally espoused awareness that the Chinese market was too big to approach alone and that it was necessary to cooperate to appear stronger and more attractive. “You cannot work alone to attract Chinese tourist. Even though we have the H.C. Andersen museum, even though we have Egeskov. But those two partners also understand if we can join together, the message is more powerful.” (DestinationFyn\_DMO). Therefore, the local destinations applied different strategies to approach the Chinese market in unity. In their mediating capacity, the local DMO’s appeared as the focal point in these collective efforts in all the destinations. These organisations were mainly tasked with three things: To lead marketing efforts, to disseminate knowledge about the Chinese consumers to the destination actors, and to combine products and resources in the destination into coherent product offers.

Although the DMOs were public actors and did not sell any products themselves, it was clear from the interviews that they played a major role in shaping the products and marketing that the Chinese tourists encountered in relation to Scandinavia. One DMO representative explained:

“We don’t sell anything. We don’t sell any products, but we connect people and we connect (...) Chinese companies to local companies and then we do marketing together with the companies.”

(VisitHelsinki\_DMO)

Another DMO representative explained about their responsibility in these matters:

“Sometimes someone calls me up. It could be a hotel that just had a group of Chinese guests. That happened just last week. They said that ‘we cannot handle this if we don’t know more about who they are’, they also had some language difficulties. So I think we have a task in communicating the potential and making them aware that the Chinese are coming. When they get them, and they realise that there are some challenges in handling them, our task is to support them. That is in our 'China ready' effort. “

(WonderfulCopenhagen/Chinavia\_DMO)

The role as a mediator that combines products and represents the destination was particularly important because many destination actors were regarded as too small to be directly involved in efforts toward the Chinese market: “... we have a lot of small companies who are busy running their business here. I see it so that we represent them in China” (VisitHelsinki\_DMO). For these reasons, the local DMOs proved to be an important gateway between suppliers in the local destinations and the rest of the distribution network. Some bigger actors, such as hotel chains and major attractions had some separate efforts toward the Chinese market, but even these were often dependent on (local, national or supra-national) DMOs to perform certain tasks, such as marketing. The representative from Norway’s largest hotel chain for example explained:

“... actually the marketing is done from the Scandinavian tourist board (...) they are actually doing the marketing for us. Except when we go there to speak to the agents and kind of update them on new hotels and things like that.”

(ThonHotels\_Accommodation)

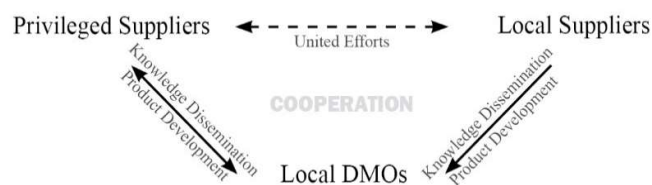
The local destination cluster was characterised by interdependence and strong cooperation between local actors to a degree where a local destination could sometimes be enacted as a single actor in the distribution network. Local suppliers such as accommodation and transportation providers, as well as attractions formed the core of these network clusters. However, only a few of these suppliers had direct access to the rest of the network. Most of them were connected through the local DMOs.

The most important activity happening at the local level in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ was found to be product development, which included combining individual products into coherent product packages. Some destinations also performed direct marketing toward the Chinese market, but this was mostly done in close cooperation with actors at the national or supra-national level.

### 6.3.1.1. Stable Gateways

Figure 13 conceptualises the Local Destination Cluster and the stable gateways between the main actor groups.

Figure 14: Local Destination Cluster



Some local suppliers were privileged in the local destination cluster. Mostly because they were big and powerful, or because they were part of a chain that gave them access to information, resources and exposure outside the local network cluster. Other suppliers, typically smaller and more isolated, had to rely more on the local DMO to gain information and exposure outside the network cluster. In terms of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, both supplier groups generally participated ad-hoc

in various united efforts to become more appealing to the Chinese market. These efforts were typically spearheaded by the local DMOs, who acted as the main gateway to the rest of the distribution network. The Local Destination Cluster was characterised by unity and cooperation, due to the realisation that individual actors could not make it on their own.

### **6.3.2. National Destination Cluster**

At the national level, the DMOs led the effort in all the investigated destinations. The tasks of the national DMO were similar to the local DMOs in terms of leading marketing efforts, spreading knowledge about the Chinese consumers, and combining products and resources into coherent product offers. In most cases, the marketing efforts at the national level resembled business partnerships, where bigger suppliers bought into the national DMOs marketing effort, rather than close cooperation. “We have the full package so to speak. That includes promotion on sales visits and on WeChat, Weibo, places like that. Newsletters, a whole package. (...)” (VisitFlam\_DMO/Attraction). Along with certain supra-national organisations, the national DMOs were also expected to be the “experts” on Chinese tourism and to acquire and disseminate knowledge about the Chinese B2B and B2C market. The following two quotes illustrate how the local DMOs, who represented most of the local actors, would turn to the national DMO or the Chinavia project (see p. 188) for expertise on Chinese tourism:

Interviewer: So basically when you choose that you want to focus on this group or this specific thing, your main inspiration for that is looking at what Visit Finland is doing?

Interviewee: “Yeah, they have the possibility to do the studies. Our budget is so limited. Now it is interesting to get some more information from another source, from this Chinavia study.”

(VisitHelsinki\_DMO)

Interviewer: What do you base your decisions on, we can use the target customer as an example, who decided that is your target?

Interviewee: “In cooperation with Visit Sweden, they have quite a strong BI department (...) Regarding the Chinese market, we go through them a lot, they do some, they have some documents that we use when we decide our strategy. But we also have some other components, its mainly in Chinavia and Visit Sweden, they are experts (...) we have our own analysis department here. But I think we need to, or for us we would like to step up a little bit with China”

(VisitStockholm\_DMO)

Like it was the case with individual companies, there was general agreement among the interviewed actors, that a local destination could not make it on its own when facing the Chinese market. This was a main reason that strong cooperation was also found between local destinations at the national level. Most interviewees agreed that it was difficult to reach the Chinese market alone, because of its size and diversity, both in terms of B2B and B2C:

“... China, it is so big, so I mean of course the people, but also the media power, the social media power, it's crazy! So it's also difficult, (...) not being a native or not being in China, to really understand the media landscape, who to contact (...)”

(VisitStockholm\_DMO)

These difficulties as well as the size of the market meant that it was relatively expensive to reach the Chinese market, which was another reason for cooperation at the national level:

“Actually we have had quite a limited budget for China until last year. So we were only participating, until then we were only participating in the Visit Finland campaigns and, now that the budget has grown a bit, but of course it is still very limited. (...) we have the same target groups as Visit Finland.”

(VisitHelsinki\_DMO)

These challenges were also primary reasons that much of the effort towards the Chinese market was put into B2B initiatives.

At the local level, suppliers were cooperating to a degree where the local destinations could be considered as a united actor in the distribution network. This was not the case at the national level. Although there was cooperation to promote the individual countries towards the Chinese market, there was also significant competition between the local destinations. A representative from the Chinavia project described this approach as:

“...coopetition. (...) that is the plan - that we are together, but we are also doing things separately with our own budgets in the Chinese market. (...) We also share the things, we play with open cards, we share our experiences also in recognition of, if a lot of people come to Helsinki from China, then it is possible that they will also come to Stockholm and Copenhagen and the other places.”

(WOCO/Chinavia\_DMO)

Such a strategy is typical in tourism marketing and development. However, the interviews indicated that the reasons behind the coopetition were not only strategic, but also a result of lacking resources and/or expertise. Some actors explained how they would prefer new tourists, but that it was more doable to try to convince the tour operators, who were already sending Chinese tourists to Scandinavia, to include another night at their destination in the programme:

Interviewer: So for you it is more about getting people who are coming to Scandinavia already, to come to Fyn, more than to get new people to come to Scandinavia?

Interviewee: “Yes, you can say that. It’s both. But the hard work that has to be done, we believe it is easier for us, and more manageable, to make the tour operators that already know Scandinavia aware of a new product. Because Fyn is so small in this

whole picture that if we have to work with some who do not know the North at all, and also have to tell them about Fyn, then they are already focused on the Norwegian mountains and Swedish woods, before we can even open our brochure. But obviously we also try to get new tour operators and they often appear at the workshops in China, where they are invited in.

(EgeskovCastle\_Attraction)

In and of itself, this is not a problem. However, the researcher noted that almost all destinations seemed to apply this strategy. Examples included:

“... it is about making an effort to make them stay in Copenhagen for another day“

(VisitNorthZealand\_DMO)

“So when they are here to tell them that there is more to see. Try to convince the tour operators that they should not only do a day trip to Odense. They should do an overnight.“

(OdenseBysMuseer\_Attraction)

“We would like to extend a little bit their stay, because nowadays they stay only one or two nights.”

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

One may question whether the effort from almost all actors to add another night to the trip is productive, considering that there are limitations to how long a trip can be. In addition, a negative side effect of this approach was that many actors spent considerable energy and resources attempting to convince the national and supra-national tourism organizations as well as DMCs to focus on their destination. Resources that would ideally be spent gaining new ground in the marketplace:

Interviewer: Who do the local regions have to convince, do they have to convince the Chinese directly or do they have to convince Visit Sweden, or?

Interviewee: “I think Visit Sweden. The market in China, it’s too big. It’s like me going there knocking doors (...) that is useless. (...) you need to package your region

and sell through Visit Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, to catch anything. And also to the local DMC and incomings, they have knowledge, but their knowledge is also limited. Or you know they are used to working with their destinations, that they have been doing for a long time.“

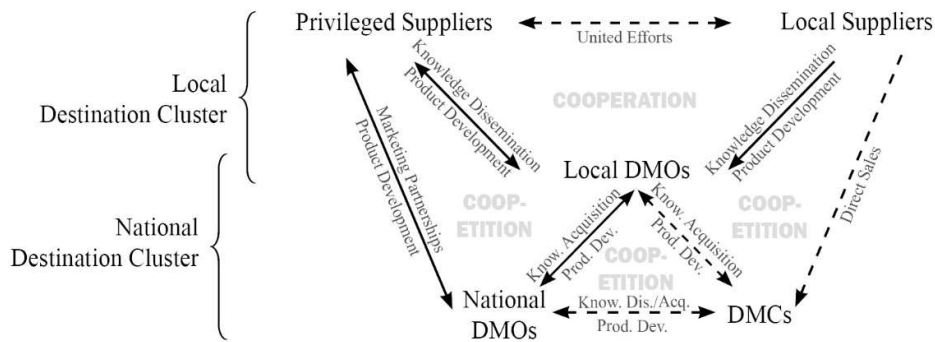
(NordicChoiceHotels\_Accommodation)

This situation highlights some of the challenges in dealing with the Chinese market at the national level. The difficulties in reaching the Chinese market created a need for pooling of resources and strong gatekeepers. Systems to do so had been developed well in the Scandinavian destinations, with the national DMOs at the helm. However, the dependence on gatekeepers also enhanced competition, because destinations had to fight for recognition, not only within the market that they wanted to reach, but also at the national and supra-national level at their own destination.

### 6.3.2.1. Stable Gateways

Figure 14 extends Figure 13 to include the ‘Local Destination Cluster’, the ‘National Destination Cluster’ and the stable gateways between them.

Figure 15: Stable Gateways between the Local Destination Cluster and the National Destination Cluster



The main gateway between the local and national clusters, were the local DMOs who participated at both levels. At the national level, primary activities were led by the national DMOs. These included conjoined marketing efforts and partnerships, acquisition and dissemination of knowledge about the Chinese market, and acting as



the gateway between privileged suppliers, local DMOs (who represent destinations), DMCs, and the rest of the distribution network. The National Destination Cluster was characterised by a combination of cooperation and competition among the actors and destinations, dubbed ‘coopetition’. Most interviewees expressed how their destination could not stand on its own when facing the Chinese market. At the same time, however, they had to position their own destination as unique and attractive compared to the other destinations in the country, in order to gain the favour of DMCs and national DMOs, who were enacted as the gateways to the rest of the distribution network. In addition to the coopetition circle at the centre of the National Destination Cluster (Local DMOs, National DMOs and DMCs), other coopetition circles that permeated the local and national levels also appeared. The privileged suppliers cooperated with DMOs at the local, as well as the national level, to position their destination as attractive. At the same time, they competed internally to gain the favour of these actors over their competitors. In some cases, both privileged and local suppliers sold their products directly to DMCs. In other cases, especially local suppliers needed to “go through” the local DMO or national DMO who package the product, to gain the attention of the DMCs.

### **6.3.3. Supra-national (Scandinavian) Destination Cluster**

Parallels existed between the national and the supra-national level in terms of the challenges of balancing cooperation and competition. The individual actors in each country as well as their DMO representatives agreed that they needed to cooperate to accommodate the needs and travel patterns of most Chinese tourists, who rarely travel to only one country when they go to Scandinavia (This is explained further in *Spectrum: Geography – Activity* p. 301).

“We believe in the development that is happening in China. That the Chinese will have more leisure time, more money and more taste for travel. That has to affect us somehow. I think we have some positions of strength where we can make a difference. We know that most wants to go to Paris first. Thailand and other places, because they are close. So we have some parameters that we cannot compete with. But we think that Scandinavia, the North, together, can become more visible and create a movement up here.”

(EgeskovCastle\_Attraction)

The actors also explained the advantages of marketing their destination and country as part of a broader and more diverse destination - Scandinavia - in the competitive Chinese market:

“... it makes sense to brand ourselves together, as Scandinavia, because then we have more resources. Not only in terms of budget, but also in terms of attraction power, because we have a lot more to offer. (...) all of a sudden we have Santa Claus, the Swedish Skærgaard, Northern lights, in addition to the North Zealand Rivera, The Little Mermaid, and the other things that we have. So it becomes a stronger product.”

(WonderfulCopenhagen/Chinavia\_DMO)

At the same time, the interviewees expressed a need to compete in order to make the Chinese tourists stay longer in their own national destination:

“... we try to make them stay in Finland. But of course also (...) we can of course first explain what you can do in Finland. But then on the other hand, we also need to say that you have good connections to Scandinavia.

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

Generally, the interviews reflected how many actors had not been accustomed to cross border cooperation, but were trying to improve this aspect of their business to meet the needs of the costumers. This was well illustrated in the following example where a

DMC was trying to improve on the lacking cross border cooperation within their organisation:

Interviewer: In your company there is an office for Finland and you take care of Finland and there is an office for Denmark and they take care of Denmark, and they are not connected in any way?

Interviewee: “We are connected, but yes, that is how it is. One country is usually one destination and I am like the destination manager, I manage whatever happens in Finland; that is how it is. But especially for Scandinavia that is regarded as one region for many of the markets and especially the new markets, we try to work together as much as we can. We share information, we have common meetings, we have, well quite recently, but we have started the cooperation to promote Scandinavia as a one towards our sales colleagues. Before it was very much split, but now, the last couple of years we try to do more cooperation...”

(Tumlare\_DMC)

Like the National Destination Cluster, the Supra-national Destination Cluster was characterised by this back and forth between cooperation and competition. At the national level, the competing local destinations were unified by the national DMOs who represented each destination as a whole. This was not the case in the Supra-national Destination Cluster, since no comparable actor existed at this level. Denmark, Sweden and Norway were formerly represented in China under one organisation – the Scandinavian Tourism Board. Sweden had since left this cooperation, so only Denmark and Norway remained. The four countries’ tourism efforts in China were therefore officially represented through three offices in China – Visit Sweden, Visit Finland and the Scandinavian Tourism Board (representing Visit Denmark and Innovation Norway). In the following quotes, two interviewees expressed the

predicament of attempting to represent Scandinavia as a unit without the structures to support it:

“... for us, or for STB [Scandinavian Tourism Board], the most important thing is to create interest for Scandinavia (...). Create an interest and then sell that it is Denmark and Norway. It’s a pity that Sweden withdrew from the cooperation, although it looks like we will have quite a few cooperation projects anyway, because we cannot just market Norway. It will be a long while before we can do that.”

(InnovationNorway\_DMO)

“... when we go to China we do it as a Scandinavian destination. So we do it together with the Danish tourist board, the Norwegian. (...) Unfortunately, we never do anything with Finland, the Finnish tourist board is always on its own; it’s their strategy to be strong on their own. But then of course with the boat connections with Tallink, Silja and Viking Line, they always join the Scandinavian workshops as well because they are so dependent on the costumers. (...) so we cooperate with the Finnish companies, but not with the tourist board. But with the Danish and the Norwegian it is very integrated...”

(VasaMuseet\_Attraction)

The lack of a stable actor at the center of the Supra-national Destination Cluster highlights the importance of well-functioning alternative ways for the destinations to market and operate themselves as part of a unified destination - Scandinavia. Much of this effort relied on ad-hoc projects and temporary gateways, which will be covered later in this chapter (p. 191).

At the supra-national level, the China offices of the four national DMOs were found to be crucial. These offices were working in close cooperation and coordination with their counterparts in their respective Scandinavian countries, but functioned independently and were also in many cases enacted as separate actors. The

representatives of the national DMOs explained the division of labour as quite simple - the China offices should take care of everything happening in China. This included networking and cooperation with the China Travel Industry, operation of activities in China, and acquisition and dissemination of knowledge about the Chinese market to their equivalents in Scandinavia.

“... you can say that all the operations in the Chinese market are done by the office in Beijing and developments of strategies happens in cooperation [with the offices in Scandinavia]. It will often be a suggestion from Beijing that is then discussed on the board meetings.”

(InnovationNorway\_DMO)

The geographical location and ethnic composition of these offices - in China, run by Chinese - was regarded as essential to their function as mediators between the China Travel Industry and the Intra-destination Clusters in Scandinavia. The representative of Innovation Norway continued:

“... you are totally depending on having the Chinese running the operations, because like many other places, network is important, this means that you have to have high quality Chinese staff. You cannot make a push in China by sending out two Danes or two Norwegians (...).”

(InnovationNorway\_DMO)

Some local DMOs with particular interest in the Chinese market also elucidated how they had close cooperation with the DMOs China offices:

“For example STB, one of our very close partners (...) If we, we have an idea. Say next year we want to do some promotion about Fyn and we have the idea, then I will talk to STB, the people who are responsible for the media or PR. Then we (...) do brainstorm together. Maybe they will bring up even more good ideas. When we come to the implementation part, STB will be responsible for collecting the right media. Because they are in China, they are in Beijing and they have been in the business for

10 years. They know exactly what the media is, what we need. However, then I will be responsible for choosing, for fine tuning...”

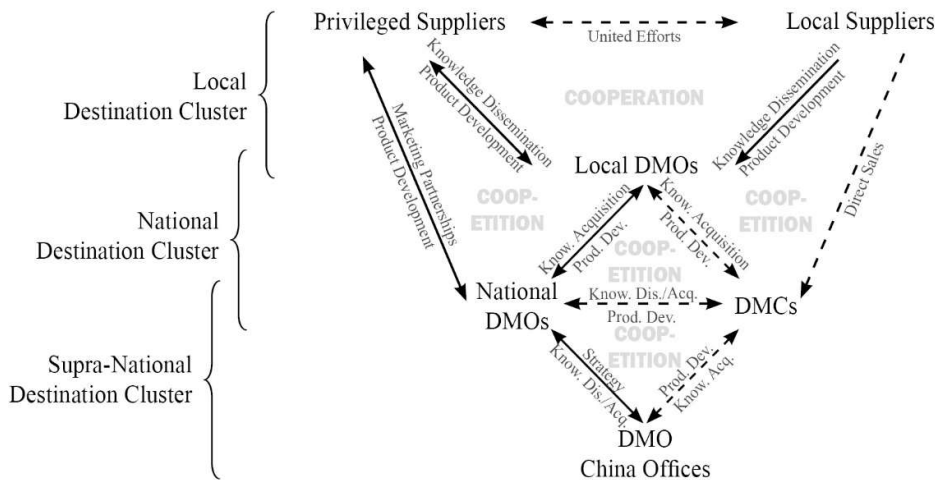
(DestinationFyn\_DMO)

These examples highlight the importance of the China offices of the national DMOs in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, both in terms of B2B and B2C efforts. Because of their geographical location, ethnic composition and closeness to the China Travel Industry, these offices were enacted as individual network actors. They mediated the relation between the Scandinavian Intra-destination Clusters, the China Travel Industry and in some cases the Chinese Market.

### 6.3.3.1. Stable Gateways

Upon adding the Supra-national Destination Cluster to Figure 14, a conceptual model of the full Intra-destination Cluster can be visualised (Figure 15).

Figure 16: Stable Gateways in the Intra-destination Cluster



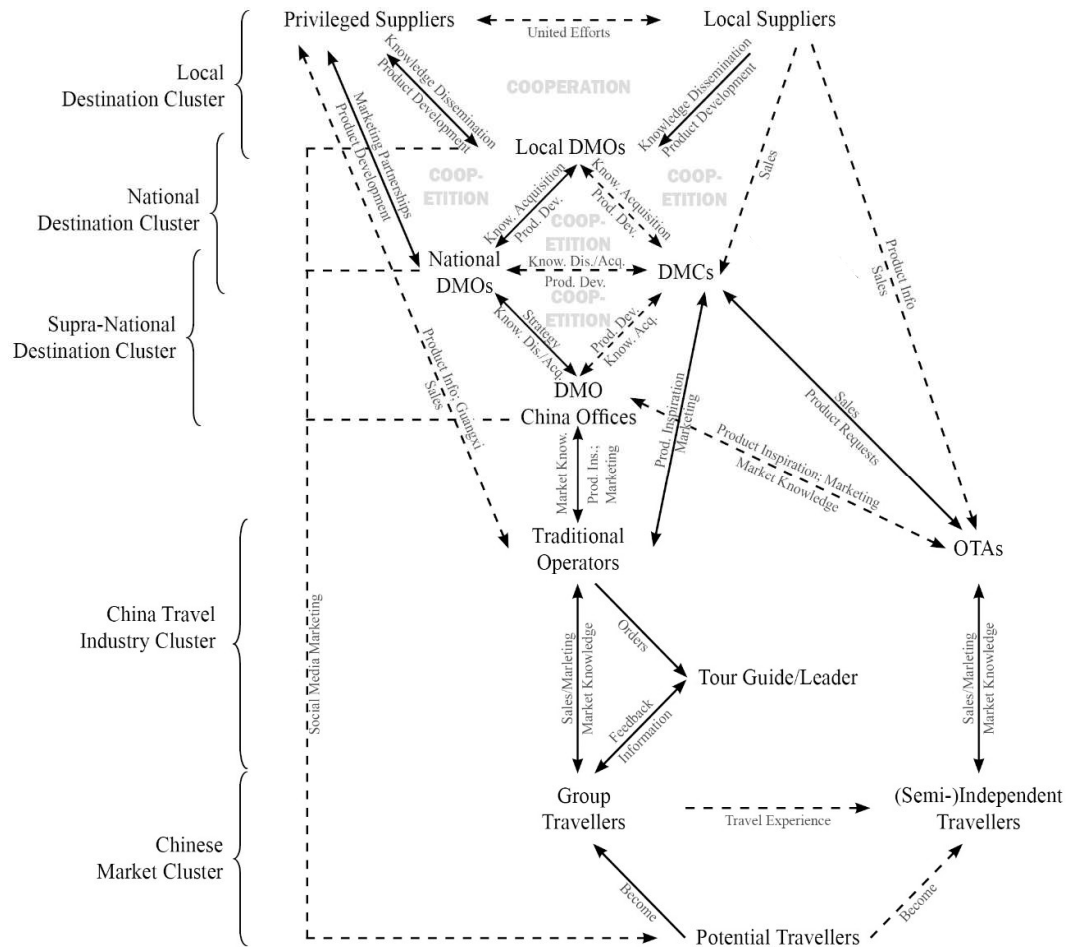
At the supra-national level, the National DMOs and their offices in China were essential. They were part of the same organisation, and cooperated closely on strategic decisions in terms of how to mediate the relation between the Intra-destination Cluster, the China Travel Industry and the Chinese Market cluster, but they worked independently on a day-to-day basis. DMCs also played an important role as mediators

at this level, since these organisations often had close ties with actors in the China Travel Industry. Some were even enacted as part of it, if they were located in China. The National DMOs used their connectedness to gain information about the Chinese market from the DMCs and to influence their itineraries. DMCs used the DMOs knowledge of local destinations in their product development. Like the National Destination Cluster, the Supra-national Destination Cluster was characterised by co-competition. The national DMOs of the four countries were cooperating to make Scandinavia a competitive destination. At the same time, they were competing to make the DMCs and the China Travel Industry include their particular country in their itineraries, and to make individual Chinese tourists go to their countries instead of the others.

#### **6.4 Stable Gateways in ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’**

Figure 16 combines and conceptualises the five network clusters in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, which have been explained so far (the China Travel Industry Cluster, the Chinese Market Cluster and the Intra-destination Clusters - local, national and supra-national). It combines Figure 12 and Figure 15 and adds the stable gateways between. This section will investigate the relations that make up the gateways between these clusters in depth.

Figure 17: Stable Gateways between the Intra-destination Clusters, the China Travel Industry Cluster and the Chinese Market Cluster



### 6.4.1. B2B - Direct Interaction

In terms of gateways between the Intra-destination Clusters and the China Travel Industry Cluster, some privileged suppliers and DMOs were able to bypass the official and stable structures in some cases. In such cases, these actors had direct contact to the traditional operators and to OTAs in the China Travel Industry:

“... the trend now, that we see is that before Chinese travel agencies would go through incoming agencies, they wouldn’t really work directly with suppliers like us, but now we have direct agreements and contracts with some companies based in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Beijing.”

(VasaMuseet\_Attraction)



This change had come as a result of efforts on both the Chinese and the Scandinavian side to better understand the other part and thus to improve relations and cooperation.

The representative from the Vasa Museum explained about the improvements by the China Travel Industry:

“I think the Chinese market on the tour operator’s side or the travel agent side, have really matured a lot. I remember when I started travelling to China, we had to work with interpreters. Shanghai was quite ok, Beijing was really difficult and Guangzhou was impossible, really to communicate and understand. I think this has really changed in just a few years. (...) They know much much more and they come up with ideas to develop their own tours and they really have some people who are very committed to Scandinavia, they don’t just copy what others do and they try to find their own niche and their own segments and market and so on. Its becoming very professional, I would say.”

(VasaMuseet\_Attraction)

A hotel representative reflected on the changes that their business had made to better accommodate the needs of the China Travel Industry:

“[We need] Good dialogue, answer them quickly, they are busy, so if we hesitate, leave the e-mail for tomorrow or something, which unfortunately is very Danish. First, you have time difference, which we have to be aware of, you have to be quick and then there is also good direct dialogue. That they don’t have to contact our sales people, who then contact us, because our sales people might be in Brazil. So if we have to do that each time, even though it is big tours, it is too slow. Sometimes we experience that a request comes in, directly here, to the booking email, because they know the woman who deals with it as the contact is already established, directly in. Could be six groups, a bus full, 28 rooms, spread across a month. Starts in three days and ends at another date. It can be confirmed and passed within half an hour. It is so fast! If we are not there, then someone else is and then they will get it.”

(FirstGrandHotel\_Accommodation)

For some actors, like the ones quoted here, direct contact was important in terms of direct sales. Others had more long-term aspirations, as they wanted to make the tour operators or travel agents include their products in their itineraries. Most also saw direct contact as a necessary aspect in building and maintaining relationships (Guangxi), something which is recognised as important in Chinese business and society in general (Lew & Wong, 2004):

“... for the travel agencies, our main point is to promote our product, not necessarily to gain more contracts, but to explain to them, what is our product, and why our price is like this. It is more to promote our unique selling points to the travel agencies (...) In China you need to spend time with clients. Maybe here in western companies you say here is our product, take it or leave it, but in China it is more, you have to build up the personal connection first and then sell the product. In China selling the product is selling your personality.”

(TallinkSiljaLine\_Transport/Attraction)

Also to deal with them directly, they have to trust you. So its, when you start dealing with them directly, you have to go for dinner with them or something like that. If you say no, then they don't trust you.”

(ThonHotels\_Accommodation)

Despite the improvements, direct contact between suppliers and actors in the China Travel Industry was still regarded as challenging for many actors both in China and in Scandinavia. The more persistent challenges were related to operations, rather than to culture. For some Chinese businesses, Scandinavia as a destination was regarded as too new and complicated:

Interviewee: “... Grand Vision. They tried to go directly, but they didn't manage.”

Interviewer: How come?

Interviewee: “Because it was too complicated, with guides and busses and ferries and.. To put the programme together, it was not a problem to book the hotels and they started to do that, but at the end, they ended up – ‘we cannot do it ourselves’. So they used the incoming bureaus.”

(ThonHotels\_Accommodation)

The Scandinavian suppliers mentioned two main challenges in dealing with the Chinese operators, which, in many cases, made them prefer to deal with the market indirectly, through DMCs: Late payment and late bookings/changes to the programmes.

Interviewee: “I know there are, these big travel agencies in China, they are now trying to get in contact more directly with the local resources, we have seen this growth that they want to get direct contact with us, but I don’t think it is the time yet, probably after five years. (...)”

Interviewer: How come, what is the problem?

Interviewee: “First is the payment, I told you, that is the key point, because we cannot allow two or three months late payment. And then, because, usually these wholesalers like Kuoni, they have a very good system of this cash flow and also service in Chinese.”

(TallinkSiljaLine\_Transport/Attraction)

“... in the Chinese market, it is a bit special. There are a lot of groups, and they book very late.”

(VisitFlam\_DMO/Attraction)

... their booking, the hotels, it is quite, sometimes with really short notice, compared with the others destinations [Markets], it is last minute changes.

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

These issues were main reasons that DMCs were enacted as important stable gateways between the China Travel Industry Cluster and the Intra-destination Clusters.

Generally, the interviews indicated that most suppliers would use direct contact for promotion and knowledge sharing on products, while they would use DMCs for operations. This was well reflected in the following explanation from an interviewee:

Interviewer: Is your contact to the incoming bureaus [DMCs] or directly to the operators?

Interviewee: “Mostly with incoming or with these sub companies to the Chinese tour operators. For example Scanway they have an office in Stockholm and Helsinki. It is primarily those offices we are in contact with in terms of practical matters, booking and such. But in terms of promotion, we have contact when we go abroad, with Scanway in China (...) Same for the others, Caissa and Ctrip and the other big ones. But when we go around China it is mostly marketing and news, we rarely make contracts and such.”

(VisitFlam\_DMO/Attraction)

Direct relations between suppliers in Scandinavia and actors in the China Travel Industry were improving in quantity and quality. However, a number of mainly operational challenges meant that most business was done with DMCs and DMOs as mediators.

#### **6.4.2. B2B - DMCs and DMOs**

At the operational level, DMCs were regarded as the primary mediators in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’:

“There are of course some of the biggest ones [Scandinavian suppliers], who have been in the Chinese market for many years, they probably have some contact directly with China, but most go through incoming operators.”

(InnovationNorway\_DMO)

“Actually, mostly our current cooperation to North Europe we send requests to the DMC, not to the hotel group directly. For this market specifically.”

(Caissa1\_TO/TA)

There were signs of change toward more direct interaction, but this was on the Chinese operators' initiative, rather than the Scandinavian suppliers'. An interviewee explained:

Interviewer: Who do you cooperate with in China, does it normally go through incoming bureaus?

Interviewee: "It's a mix, I think if we go back five years, it was purely incoming, DMCs, but now we have a mix, still tending more to the incoming DMCs than locally. But I think that is also one thing that is changing within a five-year period. I think there will be more and more Chinese operators going directly."

Interviewer: And will that be on their initiative or yours?

Interviewee: "I think that will be more on their initiative than ours, as long as we see that the incoming DMCs are doing a good job and selling our products in a good way, we don't necessarily need to go direct because going direct implies other problems of challenges, like payment. (...) Now it is the DMC having to deal with that. So that is also a decision you need to make. Do we want the direct traffic, can we trust these companies or are they blooming this year and next year not there."

(NordicChoiceHotels\_Accommodation)

DMCs were not only used as a channel to alleviate potential troubles in direct relations.

Many suppliers also used them as experts on the Chinese market:

Interviewer: ... where do you get knowledge about the market and these kind of things?

Interviewee: "Of course we work very closely with, we get very much information through these agencies, because they have been working of course many many years and they are giving some requirements of what people want to do in Finland."

Interviewer: Agencies, such as for example?

Interviewee: “Like Kuoni and all these incoming agencies who have been working many years with Chinese, who has travel agencies or maybe they have Chinese staff already. They have done very much searches, like Visit Finland as well, they have made some kind of investigation for some people who have stayed in Finland.”

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

This role is similar to that of the National DMOs, who were also used as sources for knowledge acquisition and dissemination about the Chinese market in the Scandinavian destinations, as was explained previously.

#### **6.4.2.1. The Influence of DMCs and DMOs on Product Development**

In terms of product design, the normal division of labour was that tour operators, travel agents and/or wholesalers designed the package and the DMC had the direct contact with the suppliers – made bookings etc. The representative from CITS described the process:

Interviewer: So Kuoni is used for the hotel?

Interviewee: “Hotel. Almost everything.”

Interviewer: So for you everything is booked?

Interviewee: “Almost everything.”

Interviewer: And is that Kuoni booking everything?

Interviewee: “Yeah yeah yeah.”

Interviewer So you are basically buying a package from Kuoni and...?

Interviewee: “No no no. We design the package and they do the booking for us.”

(CITS\_TO/TA)

This quote illustrates the importance of the traditional operators in the China Travel Industry in terms of product development, as they were the ones designing the itinerary. This is further exemplified in the following quote, where a Scandinavian

supplier explained how she had to convince the tour operators if she wanted DMCs to change the itinerary:

Interviewer: As a relatively large hotel chain in Norway, can you influence the way that these programmes are made, basically?

Interviewee: “Yes and no. When I start to talk a lot about Charlottenburg for example in Sweden (...) So yes, you can do something, because I trust you and then they go to the operator and say why can't I stay there instead. So for sure.”

Interviewer: So if you want to do it, then you basically have to influence the companies in China [Traditional Operators], then they will go back to the incoming bureaus and require something?

Interviewee: “Yeah.”

Interviewer: So you would do that rather than going directly to the incoming bureaus?

Interviewee: “It's both, you have to do both. (...) But then you can say to the incoming, ok, as I have spoken a lot about this in China, can you include that and we can see its working.”

(ThonHotels\_Accommodation)

The itineraries for all the bigger travel agents and tour operators were found to be very similar, following the same basic path through the four Scandinavian countries (some also included Iceland or Russia), with some variations. These base itineraries had originally been introduced by the DMCs or the Scandinavian DMOs and were gradually developed based on inspiration, primarily from these actors. “Ten years ago, we got to know the first tourist routes from the Tourism Bureaus [Scandinavian National DMOs]” (Grand Vision\_Wholesaler). From the interviews, it seems that these base itineraries were difficult to change, a DMC representative explained:

“... for the ADS groups, our big agents like CYTS, CTS will just send them our programme and, actually most common is that they have already made up a programme and sent to us - just ask for the quotation. If we see something is really

wrong, we may move them around a bit, or if they ask if we got something new or something local, something very interesting for some specific groups, we will let them know. But mostly it is about the same programme for ADS groups.”

(DMC Scandinavia\_DMC)

The fact that the main itineraries were difficult to change was further supported and elaborated by a local tour guide, who explained that the travel agents and tour operators were not interested in feedback, because they were not interested in changing large parts of the itineraries: “... they don’t care what the group thinks about the programme (...) Although they know that the programme is not perfect. (...) They just want to spend as little as they can” (TourGuide). A representative from a Scandinavian supplier even explained that they had considered whether they should start their own tour operator in order to gain influence on the itineraries:

“We have considered whether we should invest and make our own tour operator, because we can see that it is difficult to change the minds of some of the tour operators. When they have done the same tours always that run well, then it is easy, and the costumers are satisfied, then it is difficult to make them add Fyn.”

(EgeskovCastle\_Attraction)

Although the base itineraries were difficult to alter, some aspects of the itineraries were more open to change. The respondents explained how the average length of a typical trip had changed from 8-9 days, focussing only on capitals, to 10-13 days, focussing on additional aspects of the countries. Some interviewees elucidated how increasing diversification of the market and increasing travel experience of the many Chinese tourists also meant that many customers were increasingly asking for something “extra”, “local” or “special” in their programme (this is further investigated in The ‘special’ – Environment and Lifestyle p. 234). These developments meant that there was some potential for change to the base programmes. An important aspect of the



relations between the Intra-destination Clusters and the China Travel Industry Cluster was the ways to influence these changes. Three important sources of product development influence for the China Travel Industry were located:

1. Direct contact with DMCs and Scandinavian DMOs “So sometimes we want to put more aspects, selling points, into our packages, so we can ask the Scandinavian Tourism Board and also tourism board of Sweden and Finland.” (CITS\_TO/TA) “For hotels and coaches, the local travel agencies [DMCs] will help me.” (CYTS\_TO/TA)
2. The Internet (the websites of local, regional and national DMOs were important) “For activities maybe I can do a lot more learning on websites or from the STB [Scandinavian Tourism Board].” (CYTS\_TO/TA)
3. Workshops organised by the national DMOs “Yes, every year when we participate in the Scandinavia workshops we try to find new products for the guests.” (Nord\_EU\_DMC)

Since only few suppliers had direct connections to the China Travel Industry and these connections were limited, the DMCs and the Scandinavian DMOs played important roles in the efforts to inspire and influence the China Travel Industry in their product development.

The different ways to inform and inspire the China Travel Industry were found to be particularly important because many actors in the industry, despite their increasing knowledge, were still found to know relatively little about Scandinavia (See Intermediaries’ Destination Knowledge p. 228 for more on this).

The relations and structures presented here, as well as the lacking knowledge about Scandinavia and about new potential products highlights the importance of DMCs and

DMOs as sources for inspiration, as ambassadors for the Scandinavian suppliers and as primary stable gateways between the Intra-destination Clusters and the China Travel Industry.

#### **6.4.3. B2B and B2C - Marketing**

A number of suppliers maintained that B2B marketing was preferable to B2C marketing in the Chinese market. Particularly, workshop attendance, building direct connections with the China Travel Industry and “famtrips”, where representatives from the China Travel Industry were invited to see/try tourism products in Scandinavia, was mentioned as important. A respondent said about the importance “famtrips”:

“... what we also do very much is we invite, together again with Visit Finland and with ferry companies and activity companies, these famtrips where people come to Finland to see. (...) that is the best way to market, that they can see with their own eyes, this is really like this. (...) When they are impressed their clients will be as well. This is very important. Its expensive and it sometimes takes a lot of time, but its very very effective.”

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

Another respondent said about the continuing importance of B2B marketing:

”I think the marketing still should be B2B, I think the B2C market, (...) if you look at how tourism evolves; charter goes first. After charter it starts opening up other things so, we are still at the charter phase. I would say. Of course things develop much faster today than they used to, so this won’t last for a very long time, but. And we are already seeing Chinese booking direct, but normally they do this through the OTAs who are already there.”

(NordicChoiceHotels\_Accommodation)

Apart from the continuing importance of the traditional operators in Chinese outbound tourism, the main reason for the continuing importance of B2B marketing was that the Chinese market was regarded as too big to approach through traditional B2C marketing:

“... it is a really big and difficult market, which means that running big direct campaigns has been pretty worthless with the budgets that we have. Some consumer actives are done, but they are done in cooperation with the tour operators, mainly.”

(InnovationNorway\_DMO)

The cooperation mentioned here often took the shape of marketing supplements, where Scandinavian actors funded marketing activities conducted by operators in the China Travel Industry. The representative from Destination Fyn explained this concept:

“Take U-tour for example. We have a contract with U-tour, we maybe give them 100.000DKK, then at the same time U-tour will also put equally, the same amount of money or resource equal to this amount of money, to promote this Fyn project. It means U-tour will develop package product, maybe one to five different, depends on their itinerary, how they plan it. That includes at least for instance one overnight in Fyn. Then they will sell this package. Our 100.000 for them is for product development, cooperation and promotion. But then we will not be involved in all this process, we will just need to know, the report back that we get from STB what is the performance of U-tour at the end of the year. Then we will evaluate all of these tour operators (...) do we get the return of investment from it...”

(DestinationFyn\_DMO)

Despite the strong focus on B2B activities, many actors also described a turn toward more B2C marketing. A main reason for this was that social media platforms provided new gateways to interact directly with the Chinese consumers:

“To me there is no doubt that what we are doing now. Focusing on the existing tour operators and the tour operators that we can get in contact with by meeting them in

person, doing workshops, sending them newsletters, making sure they get information and pictures, that is a very important part. The other important part is that we are on social media as much as possible. And that we have people in China who can tell us which platforms are doing well, because social media is really big in China and there are many different platforms. We have to be on the right ones.”

(EgeskovCastle\_Attraction)

In terms of social media marketing, the local and national DMOs were important, since no single actors had the resources or knowhow to do it on their own:

“... social media is very important for them [Chinese FITs]. Visit Finland is doing quite a lot. They have all kinds of competitions and they have all kinds of videos. They have done really a lot. (...) we also try to, we are not very good in that yet. (...) But we just got a new marketing team and we are trying to develop that, so we are in WeChat and the important social media that the Chinese are using.”

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

An important aspect of B2C marketing led by the DMOs was to invite influential journalists and bloggers to travel around Scandinavia and make reports about their travels in traditional media, but increasingly on Chinese social media, which the Scandinavian suppliers found difficult to navigate. One interviewee explained about the efforts of Destination Fyn:

“Last year, there was more on printed media or whatever media, as long as they are big media. But this year, we are more strategically focussed on for example FITs, those key opinion leaders in Chinese social media. For example some of the QLs, travel bloggers, lifestyle bloggers have over 1.6 or 1.5 million followers. Now we are beginning to also put requirement, what is their limited performance, followers and so on. So we can invite them. Otherwise they are not qualified.”

(DestinationFyn\_DMO)

Alleviating the suppliers of some of the challenges in directly facing the Chinese market was also one of the main purposes of the Chinavia project.

#### **6.4.4. Chinavia**

So far, this analysis has been concerned with the relations within and between the relatively stable network-clusters that make-up and enact 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. Despite the challenges mentioned, these clusters and their relations are important because they create the core of 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' as they enact a relatively stable distribution network that actors can navigate. The Chinavia project was created as part of, but also outside these traditional structures. Perhaps this is why it succeeded in becoming an essential stable gateway, which bridged all the five clusters in the distribution network.

Chinavia was developed as a Scandinavian cooperation project and managed by the DMO Wonderful Copenhagen in cooperation with three Scandinavian project partners, Göteborg & co, Stockholm Visitors Board and Helsinki Tourism & Congress Bureau. According to the project holders, the project was initiated as an answer to the increase and potential of Chinese tourism to Scandinavia. The project began in 2012; it aims to gain knowledge about the Chinese tourists, to develop China-ready Scandinavian destinations and to assist Scandinavian stakeholders in marketing toward the Chinese market.

As opposed to all other actors in the Intra-destination Clusters, the Chinavia project was enacted with 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' as its main purpose. It permeates the structures of the presented clusters, and therefore it acted as an important alternative gateway within the distribution network. This was visible in the project's hitherto focus on the local and the supra-national level, paying less attention to the national level (this was changing at the time of data-collection, as the project was

beginning to recruit national DMOs as partners in the project as well). The project created bridges between various actors and DMOs at the local and national level, and assisted these in becoming “China ready” and marketing themselves in China. Specifically, the Scandinavian efforts towards the FIT segment were led by the Chinavia project. The reason for this was that some actors enacted ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ significantly differently than others. As mentioned, most actors enacted Chinese tourism as group package tourism and therefore focussed most of their efforts on B2B relations and marketing. However, the Chinavia project and some of its supporters enacted Chinese tourism primarily as FIT tourism and therefore focussed more of their efforts on B2C relations. This difference in enactments is well evidenced in the following observation made by an interviewee:

Interviewer: In the coming five years, what do you hope for, or what do you strategize for, do you want both an increase in groups and independents or do you want more independents and less groups or the other way around?

Interviewee: “I think there is different voices from Visit Denmark and Wonderful Copenhagen if you ask them this question. Probably Visit Denmark will say definitely the groups, because that is where the volume comes from (...) but from Wonderful Copenhagen’s side, they will say from their statistics or from their research the individual travellers have 40% increase on the group travellers last year, for instance.”

(DestinationFyn\_DMO)

This is not only a case of different preferences. The two groups led by respectively the national DMOs and Chinavia, were working from factually different backgrounds. While the national DMOs argued that B2B should be in focus, because it was dominant in terms of volume, the Chinavia representative explained how this was factually different from their knowledge of China inbound tourism:

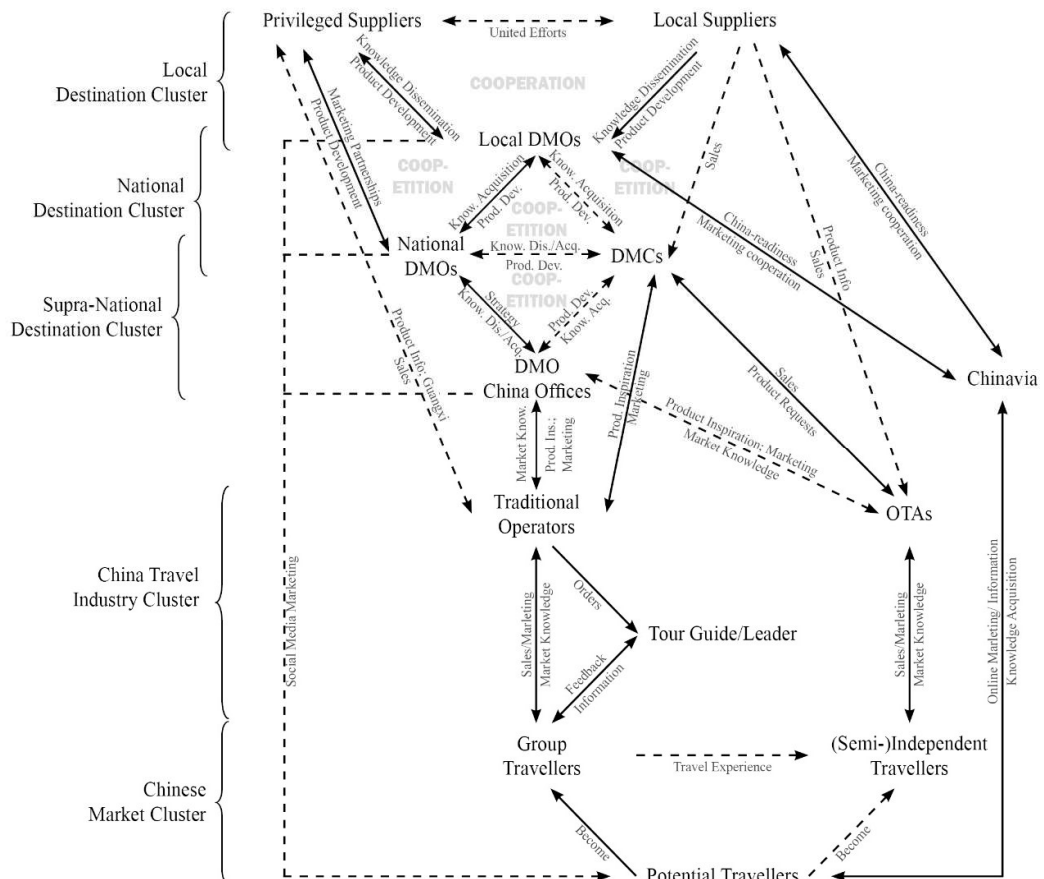
Interviewer: I assume the main part of the tourists that arrive are still group travellers?

Interviewee: “Not really any more. It is a bit difficult to measure. But we can see in the visa numbers that the individual visas have overtaken group visas the year before last. (...)”

(WOCO/Chinavia\_DMO)

Although these vastly different enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ may seem counterfactual and problematic, this was not found to be so in practice. The actors knew and accepted the two enactments and chose to go with one or both of them, depending on their needs. This way, the Chinavia project had, in its relatively short lifespan, added an important alternative gateway, which bridged the Chinese Market cluster, with actors in the Intra-destination Clusters. In Figure 17, the Chinavia Project has been added to the conceptual model to create a final model of the stable gateways in ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’.

Figure 18: Stable Gateways in ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’



## **6.5 Temporary Gateways in ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’**

The former section presented the relatively stable parts of the distribution network; the five network clusters, the relations within them and gateways between them. Over time, these network actors had enacted a system of stable relations that among other things enabled individual actors to access the other network clusters in different ways, allowed for pooling of resources and created a balance between cooperation and competition among interdependent actors with similar interests. Despite these positive aspects, certain challenges remained. A particular challenge was the structural distance between suppliers at the local or national level and the Chinese Travel Trade, and Chinese Market. In addition to the stable gateways, a number of temporary gateways had been enacted to make such contact possible (albeit with temporal and structural limits).

### **6.5.1. B2B - Workshops**

The most important temporary gateway between the Intra-destination Clusters and the China Travel Industry Cluster and one of the most important gateways overall, was yearly workshops arranged by the national DMOs. The purpose of the workshops was to bring Scandinavian suppliers, DMCs and various actors from the China Travel Industry together face-to-face. Visit Finland normally held these workshops on its own, while the Scandinavian Tourism Board (Denmark and Norway) and Visit Sweden did it in cooperation.

The most important function of the workshops was that they enabled the creation of new relations between and within the network clusters, something that rarely happened in the more stable parts of the network. This happened on two levels – among actors



within the local and national clusters and between actors in the Intra-destination Clusters and the China Travel Industry.

As mentioned previously, the actors in the local and national destination clusters generally agreed that it did not make sense to approach the Chinese market alone. This notion seemed even stronger when they physically went to China to promote their company. One respondent explained:

“Yes, yes, I mean it wouldn’t make sense for us to go all the way and then randomly call somebody up (...). When we travel, the whole delegation it’s like the open sandwich, all the components that can make it a really nice trip are present. You have the incoming, you have the DMCs, attractions, transportations, hotels. So they can really go around and create a programme. If we went on our own, just the Vasa Museum, they would probably not even want to meet us (...)”

(VasaMuseet\_Attraction)

At the workshops, the normal relations and structures within and between the Intra-destination Clusters dissolved somewhat. This allowed the individual actors to informally meet and discuss how they could cooperate to make attractive products for the Chinese market:

“This is actually quite a big family this Finnish travel trade, we are going very often the same people from these travel fairs to China. (...) I can explain them [the Chinese Travel Industry representatives], ok if you want to Rovaniemi please visit [name], if you want to go by ferry to Stockholm, please go to [name] and she will explain more about this. So we are really working together.”

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

The temporary disseverment of stable structures and the informal meetings between actors created a sense of unity and cooperation between actors at the local, national and supra-national level, which seemed essential to counter the competitiveness that

normally would exist between the actors. This signalled that in terms of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ the workshops were essential in upholding a reasonable balance between cooperation and competition between the Scandinavian actors.

The workshops were also crucial to the upholding and further development of the more stable relations within the distribution network. Both Scandinavian and Chinese actors expressed how the workshops were one of the only chances to meet potential cooperation partners and establish new relations. The representatives from a local DMO and an attraction for example explained about the importance of the workshops:

“... that is where we believe, with the funds and resources that we have, that we can make the biggest impact. Only in the two years that I have been out there, I can see and I get so many meetings now, because the fact that you are present out there...”

(VisitNorthZealand\_DMO)

Interviewee: “We talk with the tour operators in China directly.”

Interviewer: Do you do that at the workshops?

Interviewee: “Yes”

Interviewer: Is there any other avenue to be in contact with them directly?

Interviewee: “It’s mostly at the workshop, but afterwards when you have friendships, partnerships, then you can deal with them directly. “

(OdenseBysMuseer\_Attraction)

In a similar manner, the representative from Ctrip, who had previously revealed how they had difficulties making connections with suppliers in Scandinavia explained:

“... one good thing that I could see, is that more and more hotels, especially the 4 star and 5 star hotels, they will have the roadshow in China. Maybe it is organised by the tourism bureau, organised by the government, just like the Denmark and the Norway, I think they have the rep office in China.”

(Ctrip\_OTAs)

The importance of the workshops as temporary gateways in the distribution system solidifies the importance of the national DMOs as mediators between the Intra-destination Clusters and the China Travel Industry Cluster. First, because they organise the workshops. Second, because they select which actors from the Chinese travel industry that can participate:

“... the national tourist boards, they will create the workshops and the venues and all the fair, the travel fair and so on, and they will invite and screen travel agencies, so there is sort of a basic good match. We wouldn't really, or necessarily meet travel agencies who doesn't offer trips to Scandinavia, they might be very interested in entering the market and they say ok, we don't offer it to our clients yet, but we are just very interested to see who's here and what's on offer. But there has always been a screening beforehand, so we know that there is a match.”

(VasaMuseet\_Attraction)

Since the suppliers in Scandinavia meet most of their cooperation partners through the workshops, it means that the national DMO to a large extent frame the possible B2B relations in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'.

### **6.5.2. B2B - Other Events**

The interviewees made a significant distinction between the workshops and other types of travel fairs or events. Other types of events were also enacted as less important temporary gateways in the distribution network. After one interviewee explained that their company found the workshops to be very important, but travel fairs to be less so, the interviewer asked him directly about his perception of the difference between the two:

“... a travel fair is really a lot about image, you promote a destination and you get a lot of general requests. You have people who come and say, ok wow Sweden, tell me something about Sweden, or they will say oh Sweden great, I am interested in fishing

trips to the north, and we have no one with us (...) selling fishing trips because it's such a niche. (...) Then you become an ambassador for the whole destination and if we do a Scandinavian stand I will end up talking about the Fjords and I have never seen the fjords, I have never been. So it becomes more like a general image destination boost, rather than effective meetings business to business. And sometimes both is necessary, to have a combination. But in general we tend to do less fairs and more workshops and events connected to workshops.”

(VasaMuseet\_Attraction)

This view reflects the overall opinion of the interviewees well. They attended different travel fairs in Asia, Europe and Scandinavia. These events presented opportunities to make contact, especially to larger corporations such as tour operators or DMCs, but generally, the specific workshops were regarded as more important.

### **6.5.3. B2C - Ad-hoc Marketing Activities**

A variety of marketing cooperations and activities were established ad-hoc. The purpose of these activities was to create avenues for direct communication to the Chinese consumers, to make up for the lack of stable direct marketing relations.

The airlines that operated routes between China and Scandinavia often played major roles in these cooperations and activities. These were seen as mutually beneficial, because suppliers could advertise their products, while the airlines could use the products as reasons to use their service:

“We are doing marketing together and our packages are good for Finnair to show what you can do. On the other hand, the Finnair sales staff in Asia, they are promoting our product. Because we don't have a personal presence in those places and we couldn't afford to put persons, expats working there. So that is the way of cooperation. I think it is win win.”

(StopoverFinland\_NicheDMC)

Other ad-hoc marketing cooperations were not directly related to tourism. These included activities that made use of brands already famous in China. Sometimes more famous than the destination itself. Such brands included Ikea, H&M, Kjeldsen Cookies, and the Danish Author H.C. Andersen:

“... we try to do some cooperation with some Swedish brands that might be popular or famous in China, like Ikea. (...) That is also part of why people get interested in the destination (...) sometimes they know about the brand, but they don't know that it is from Stockholm for example, or from Sweden”

(VisitStockholm\_DMO)

It also involved financial support for movies and TV shows shot in Scandinavia. The latest example of this was a Chinese movie currently under production, which would be filmed partly in the hometown of famous Danish author H.C. Andersen.

**6.6 Tabulated Summary of Findings – Networks and Relations (Table 15)**

Subject	Main findings
<p><b>Broad Network Structure</b> (p. 145)</p>	<p>Chinese tourism to Scandinavia is enacted as three major groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- China Travel Industry</li> <li>- Chinese Market</li> <li>- The Intra-destination Cluster</li> </ul> <p>Broad enactments are an indicator of the spatial, geographical and structural distance between the actors involved in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'.</p> <p>Distant actors were enacted in large units, which amplified the importance of mediating actors in the distribution network.</p> <p>Clusters were connected through gateways, some of which were permanent and stable and some of which were temporary and unstable.</p>
<p><b>Chinese Market Cluster</b> (p. 147)</p>	<p>Consists of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- potential tourists</li> <li>- group package tourists</li> <li>- (semi-)independent tourists</li> </ul> <p>Tourists emanating from China typically begin as group travellers; gain travel experience and either stay with group travel, or move into more (semi-)independent travel types.</p> <p>Traditional intermediaries such as tour operators, travel agents and wholesalers were important in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'.</p> <p>OTAs were also becoming increasingly important.</p> <p>Tourism development did not result in tourists moving away from traditional operators. They instead reorient to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Other (more customizable) products offered by the same intermediaries</li> <li>- Other intermediaries with stronger and more specific focus on activities or interests</li> <li>- OTAs who would allow them to buy certain parts of the product, based on their budget and interests</li> </ul>
<p><b>China Travel Industry Cluster</b> (p. 150)</p>	<p>Consists of tour operators, travel agents, wholesalers, OTAs and DMCs.</p> <p>The actors in the cluster could be divided into four types of actors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traditional Operators</li> <li>- OTAs</li> <li>- Tour Guides/Leaders</li> <li>- China Based DMCs</li> </ul> <p>Despite its massive size and variety of actors, the China Travel Industry was often enacted as a unit by the Scandinavian actors. Most likely to make sense of the vast network of actors.</p> <p>Traditional operators were important because of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Market reach</li> <li>- Visa related issues</li> <li>- Price competitiveness</li> <li>- Chinese tourists' need for security</li> </ul> <p>OTAs were important because of convenience and the ease of comparing products.</p> <p>The Chinese market is diversifying. This increases the importance of market knowledge. The traditional actors and OTAs possessed this knowledge, which gave them an advantage.</p> <p>There was untapped potential in the market knowledge accumulated by tour guides, as the network structures did not enable sharing of this information.</p>

<b>Intra-destination Cluster</b> (p. 160)	<p>Consists of three types of sub-clusters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Local Destination Cluster(s)</li> <li>- The National Destination Cluster(s)</li> <li>- The Supra-national (Scandinavian) Destination Cluster</li> </ul>
- Local Destination Cluster	Contact with the Chinese Market and the China Travel Industry was limited by physical and structural distance.
	Some privileged actors had direct contact to actors in the China Travel Industry. Even these were often dependent on (local, national or supra-national) DMOs to perform certain tasks, such as marketing.
	The Chinese market was too big to approach alone. It was necessary to cooperate to appear stronger and more attractive.
	<p>In their mediating capacity, the local DMO's appeared as the focal point in these collective efforts in all the destinations. They were tasked with three things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To lead marketing efforts</li> <li>- To disseminate knowledge about the Chinese consumers</li> <li>- To combine products and resources in the destination into coherent product offers</li> </ul>
	Local DMOs acted as an important gateway between suppliers in the local destinations and the rest of the distribution network.
	The local destination cluster was characterised by interdependence and strong cooperation between local actors.
- National Destination Cluster(s)	Efforts were led by National DMOs, who had similar tasks to the local DMOs.
	Some marketing efforts resembled business partnerships, where bigger suppliers bought into the national DMOs marketing effort, rather than close cooperation.
	There was strong cooperation between local destinations at the national level, because of agreement that local destinations could not make it on their own when facing the vast and difficult Chinese market.
	There was also significant competition between the local destinations.
	Most destinations wanted more tourists, but saw it as more doable to try to convince tour operators to include another night at their destination in the programme.
	This led to 'coopetition', which meant that many actors spent considerable energy and resources in their attempts to convince the national and supra-national tourism organizations, as well as DMCs to focus on their destination.
- Supra-national Destination Cluster	The national destinations agreed on the advantages of marketing Scandinavia as one destination.
	At the same time, they needed to compete to position their destination within Scandinavia.
	The Supra-national Destination Cluster was characterised by this back and forth between cooperation and competition.
	At the national level, the competing local destinations were unified by the national DMOs, who represented each destination as a whole. This was not the case in the Supra-national Destination Cluster, since no comparable actor existed at this level.
	The lack of a stable actor at the center of the Supra-national Destination Cluster highlights the importance of well-functioning alternative ways for the destinations to market and operate themselves as part of a unified destination - Scandinavia. Much of this effort relied on ad-hoc projects and temporary gateways.
	The China offices of the four national DMOs were crucial to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- networking and cooperation with the China Travel Industry</li> <li>- operation of activities in China</li> <li>- acquisition and dissemination of knowledge about the Chinese market</li> </ul> <p>The geographical location and ethnic composition of these offices - in China, run by Chinese - was essential to their function as mediators between the China Travel Industry and the Intra-destination Clusters in Scandinavia.</p>
<p><b>Stable Gateways</b> (p. 174)</p>	<p>Some privileged suppliers and DMOs were able to bypass the official and stable structures in some cases. This came as a result of efforts on both the Chinese and the Scandinavian side, to better understand the other part and to improve relations and cooperation.</p> <p>Direct contact between Scandinavian suppliers and actors in the China Travel Industry was challenging for many actors both in China and in Scandinavia.</p> <p>The more persistent challenges were related to operations, rather than to culture. The main issues for the Scandinavian suppliers were late payment and late bookings/changes to the programmes.</p> <p>In terms of operations, DMCs were the primary mediators. Many suppliers also used them as experts on the Chinese market.</p> <p>Base itineraries were difficult to change, but some elements were increasingly open to change due to demand. Three important sources of product development influence for the tour operators were located:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- direct contact with DMCs and Scandinavian DMOs</li> <li>- the Internet (the websites of local, regional and national DMOs were important)</li> <li>- workshops organised by the Scandinavian national DMOs</li> </ul> <p>DMCs and the Scandinavian DMOs played important roles in the efforts to inspire and influence the China Travel Industry in their product development. This was particularly important because many Chinese actors still knew relatively little about Scandinavia.</p>
<p>- B2B and B2C - Marketing</p>	<p>A number of suppliers maintained that B2B marketing was preferable to B2C marketing in the Chinese market. Particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- workshop attendance</li> <li>- building direct connections with the China Travel Industry</li> <li>- “famtrips”</li> <li>- Marketing supplements</li> </ul> <p>Despite the focus on B2B activities, a turn toward more B2C marketing was also found. Important aspects were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social media platforms which provided new gateways to interact directly with the Chinese consumers</li> <li>- Invitation of influential journalists and bloggers</li> </ul>
<p>- Chinavia</p>	<p>The Chinavia project was created as part of, but also outside the traditional stable structures. It acted as an essential stable gateway, bridging all the five clusters in the distribution network.</p> <p>The project created bridges between various actors and DMOs at the local and national level, and assisted these in becoming “China ready” and marketing themselves in China.</p> <p>What constituted Chinese incoming tourism was enacted differently by different Scandinavian actors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- most actors enacted Chinese tourism as group package tourism and therefore focussed most of their efforts on B2B relations and marketing</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the Chinavia project and some of its supporters enacted Chinese tourism primarily as FIT tourism and therefore focussed more of their efforts on B2C relations</li> </ul> <p>The Scandinavian efforts towards the FIT segment were led in large part by the Chinavia project.</p>
<p><b>Temporary Gateways</b> (p. 191)</p>	<p>The stable network structures had created a system of stable relations which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- enabled individual actors to access the other network clusters</li> <li>- allowed for pooling of resources</li> <li>- created a balance between cooperation and competition among interdependent actors with similar interests</li> </ul> <p>Despite these positive aspects, certain challenges remained. Among these was the structural distance between suppliers at the local or national level and the Chinese Travel Trade, and Chinese Market. Temporary gateways had been established to deal with these issues.</p> <p>The most important temporary gateway between the Intra-destination Clusters and the China Travel Industry Cluster was the yearly workshops arranged by the national DMOs. They enabled creation of new relations between and within the network clusters, something that rarely happened in the more stable parts of the network. This happened on two levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- among actors within the local and national clusters</li> <li>- between actors in the Intra-destination Clusters and the China Travel Industry</li> </ul> <p>At the workshops, the normal relations and structures within and between the Intra-destination Clusters dissolved, allowing the individual actors to informally meet and discuss how they could cooperate. The temporary disseverment of stable structures created a sense of unity and cooperation between actors at the local, national and supra-national level, which was essential to counter the competitiveness that normally would exist between the actors.</p> <p>The workshops were also crucial to the upholding and further development of the more stable relations within the distribution network.</p> <p>The importance of the workshops as temporary gateways in the distribution system solidifies the importance of the national DMOs as mediators between the Intra-destination Clusters and the China Travel Industry Cluster:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- because they organised the workshops.</li> <li>- because they selected the actors that could participate</li> </ul> <p>Other types of events were considered to be less important than the workshops.</p> <p>Ad-hoc Marketing Activities also acted as important gateways. The purpose of these activities was to create avenues for direct communication to the Chinese consumers, to make up for the lack of stable direct marketing relations.</p>

## **CHAPTER 7:**

### **FACTORS**

The combined effects of the practices and relations within the distribution network described in the previous chapter, creates a number of specific factors that affect ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. Based on thematic analysis, these factors were categorised into four main inter-related factors, each of which contains a number of sub-factors. The four main factors were Travel Type, Available Products, Destination Resources, and Externals. It is important to note the interrelatedness of these four factors. The interrelatedness means that for example Travel Type is affected by the three other main factors, in this case Available Products; Destination Resources and Externals as well its own sub-factors. This chapter simultaneously presents these factors and sub-factors and the analysis that led to their discovery. The analysis concludes with a conceptual model that provides an overview of the factors, this model can be found in Figure 20 (p. 268).

#### **7.1 Travel Type**

The first main factor found in the analysis of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ was the ‘Travel Type’. This factor covers sub-factors that affect the tourist’s choice of travel type. This includes things that relate directly to the tourists, the choices they make and the things that affect their choices.

##### **7.1.1. Demographics**

Previous research has shown that demographic characteristics play an important role when Chinese tourists decide whether, where and how to travel (e.g. Kau & Lim, 2005; Li & Cai, 2009). This notion was supported by the interviews for this thesis. Both tour

operators, wholesalers, DMCs, DMOs, Tour Guides and Tour leaders talked about the significance of certain demographic characteristics. Three demographic characteristics stood out as important for ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’: age, income level and place of origin (in China).

In terms of age and characteristics, the findings were similar to what previous literature reported about China outbound tourists in general. The tourists were relatively young (under 45) (Li and Cai 2009; Latham 2011; Andreu, Claver, and Quer 2013b). However, the respondents also reported a number of variations from this generalisation. One example was variation because of season. When asked about the age of the guests on their typical trips, a local tour guide for example explained:

“It depends on the season, if it is in July and August it is very mixed age. From old people to kids, normally it is families. (...) So one group may be just 5-6 families. But if it is May and June or September, October, they could be from a company, you know.”

(TourGuide)

Some respondents mentioned how things were currently changing. A tour leader for example explained that the age range was broadening:

“It’s changing actually, you know years ago, they are basically like the middle aged, around 30, at least 30-35 to 55, something. But these two years, I see a lot of young people and I also see a lot of older people. So I am really getting much bigger range.”

(TourLeader01)

The increasing age range can be explained by two phenomena currently happening in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. First, the Scandinavian market is getting more known and popular as a first time travel destination, which increases traditional group

package tourists. Second, as Chinese travellers become more experienced, especially younger people increasingly travel to Scandinavia as independents.

The second demographic characteristic highlighted by the respondents, was the income level. Most of the respondents agreed that the income level for Chinese tourists to Scandinavia is relatively high. Mainly because the price of a trip to Scandinavia tended to be more expensive than a similar trip to other places in Europe. One DMC representative simply stated: “All tourist who go to Scandinavia are over middle class, because it is expensive.” (NordEU\_DMC). The higher average income for Chinese tourists to Scandinavia meant that the typical Chinese tourists in Scandinavia were somewhat different from those going to other places (The implications of this will be investigated further in the following pages). Despite the higher average income, there were still major differences in income level between the Chinese incoming tourists. This was reflected in the product choices and behaviours of the visitors. A representative from a hotel chain explained about the differences in income, and how it affected the tour operators’ choice of hotel products:

“... the ones staying out on Gardermoen, they are the budget groups, but those staying at Oslo Fjord in Sandvika, which is closer to city center, they are kind of the mid-level and those staying in city center, that is the high ones. But they are very, most of the Chinese, they want high standard...”

(ThonHotels\_Accommodation)

An additional point related to income was that while Chinese tourists to Scandinavia were increasingly “money rich”, they were continuously “time poor” (Arlt, 2013). This meant that most Chinese tourists were travelling on relatively short trips, which had a significant impact on their style of travel. This was described by the STB representative:

“...we always say that in order to travel, you need to have at least two key elements, one is disposable income. The other one is disposable time for leisure. Nowadays, (...) the economic development in the first tier cities are more advanced, compared to the inland cities of China. That gives the residents in the first tier cities more disposable income. But in general, compared to the other source markets, especially the more mature tourism markets such as European countries, West European or American or Western countries including Denmark. What we lack in the Chinese market is disposable time. That is not changed over night, it has to change gradually.”

(STB\_DMO)

This aligns well with broader research on China outbound tourism which showed similar tendencies among Chinese tourists in general (ibid), and suggests that Chinese tourists to Scandinavia are comparable to Chinese tourists in general in this regard.

The third important sub-factor was place of origin. Some interviewees mentioned this as one of the most important factors in terms of predicting how a group of tourists would behave.

“You cannot say some companies, they have only rich people, no. Some companies they have very, we say, low quality, the quality is very low. Some are very high, so it is very different. But the area, from which area of China, it means very much.”

(TourGuide)

As suggested by previous research (e.g. Guo et al., 2007; Latham, 2011) (See review p. 13), the biggest difference was between the first tier cities primarily on the south east coast of China and the rest of the country. Travellers from the urbanised south east coast tended to be more experienced and exhibit behaviours, which reflected this.

### 7.1.2. Travel Experience and Market Maturity

One of the most important sub-factors in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ was travel experience, which was closely connected to the maturity of the market.

The existing literature on China outbound tourism has often reported on the relative immaturity of the Chinese market. Immaturity has been known as an important reason for many of the particularities of Chinese outbound tourists. For example, that they tend to travel in groups, that they exhibit particular behaviour and that they have specific requirements in terms of language, food and other basic needs (Hoare, Butcher, & O’Brien, 2010; Kau & Lim, 2005; Li et al., 2011; Ooi, 2004; Ryan & Mo, 2002; Youcheng Wang, 2008; Zhao, 2006). Issues similar to these were also reported as challenges by the suppliers in Scandinavia. Some examples of this include:

“Its still a new market as we see it (...) when it comes to their preference, ways to travel, meals they want to have and things they do.”

(Tumlare\_DMC)

“The biggest challenges is with the buffet serving, where we have to make some adjustments, put up signs or explain about how to behave and how much to fill your plate with.”

(NordicChoiceHotels\_Accommodation)

“... there has been some challenges, when they come here. They are kind of messy. So to have Chinese guests together with German guests could be a conflict. Especially during meals. Also they don’t understand the rules about not smoking in the rooms, sometimes it could even be a problem how to use the toilets...”

(ThonHotels\_Accommodation)

To avoid such issues, mature tourists were preferred by most intermediaries, and by suppliers in particular. One supplier explained: “... a first time traveller will need more

assistance and help and so on, where a repeat traveller will be quite like anybody else.” (VasaMuseet\_Attraction). In the analysis of the maturity of Chinese travellers, two important observations were made about the current development of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. First, that the problematic behaviours and requirements for special treatment that have traditionally been affiliated with China outbound tourists in general and to Scandinavia, have diminished significantly in recent years, beckoning maturation of the market. Second, that increasing popularity of Scandinavia as a tourism destination, combined with other factors, means that the number of travellers with little or no travel experience is also rising.

#### **7.1.2.1. Maturation and Changing Behaviours**

According to the interviewees, the changes in behaviour came as a result of two changes: One the one hand, the Chinese market was maturing. On the other hand, efforts were increasingly made by the suppliers in the Scandinavian destinations to better understand and cater to the Chinese guests (this will be explained further in sub-factor ‘China Readiness’ p. 249). These two changes are well illustrated in the following conversation with a hotel representative:

Interviewee: “Seeing growth in the Chinese market is what started our focus. (...) I went to our personnel and said that this year we will make an effort towards the Chinese market. And then I experienced a reaction – ‘no, not Chinese!’ I asked what was up? ‘They put food in the sink, they dry clothes on the TV, they make a mess, and they are noisy’. I thought it cannot be that bad.. So we contacted a consultant who has written books about hospitality. We had her do talks for us about Chinese hospitality and Chinese culture.”

Interviewer: Has the staffs thoughts about Chinese tourists changed?

Interviewee: “Yes, definitely. (...) they can see what very small things can do to inform the Chinese. We also experienced a lot of food waste. That was for example

taking a Danish and putting pickled herring on top - it doesn't taste well. They had no idea about what they were eating. So we translated the whole buffet, and the waste disappeared immediately.”

Interviewer: And they will gladly eat the western breakfast?

Interviewee: “Yes, we are totally over those issues. We can also see from the Chinese, in the few years, it is not a long time that they have been coming here. But they have changed the way that they act, not that it is the same Chinese, but I think they have realized that in Denmark it is not ok to throw food on the floor and so on. They did that a lot in the beginning. They were spitting and throwing food on the floor and so on, and that was what was considered negatively. They don't do that anymore. So there is a lot of things. While we do things to make it easier for them, they have improved their English and the way that they act, so we can better work together.”

(FirstGrandHotel\_Accommodation)

Despite the mentioned difficulties, the interviewees also exhibited awareness that Scandinavia might be better off than other destinations, because they received tourists that were already relatively mature. As mentioned, one reason for this was that Scandinavia was seen as an expensive destination. Another reason was that Scandinavia was not a first tier destination, which meant that most of the Chinese guests were experienced travellers. A respondent from a DMC explained about the maturity of travellers to Scandinavia in general: “Overall I think that Scandinavia is usually never the first place where people go, so the market needs to be somehow matured already, before the people start to go to Scandinavia.” (Tumlare\_DMC). This sentiment was broadly supported among all the interviewees. The CYTS representative said about ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’:

“... European tourism has developed many years in China. So a lot of people maybe have already been to France, Italy, Switzerland. So when they want to go again, they



will choose some different countries. So maybe Scandinavia will be their second or third try...”

(CYTS\_TO/TA)

Travelling as experienced group package tourists or (semi-)independently, the increasingly experienced Chinese tourists described in this section (Emanating from first tier cities; at least middle class; experienced travelling to western countries) reflect a large part of the current ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ and will continue to do so in the future. However, the analysis indicates that a new group of Chinese tourists will increasingly accompany them to Scandinavia.

#### **7.1.2.2. The New Chinese Tourists**

At the time of writing, only a small group of Chinese citizens hold a passport<sup>2</sup>, but the number is increasing and an increasing number of tourists from new parts of the country travel to international destinations. A result of this is that China outbound tourism is becoming increasingly complex, as parallel streams of tourists with little in common travel out of the country. In Scandinavia, this can be observed as the increasingly experienced travellers emanating from first tier cities, are now accompanied by a parallel increasing stream of Chinese tourists, emanating from second and third tier cities, who are travelling to Scandinavia as their first overseas destination. “The last two or three years, there have been more first time travellers.” (TourLeader\_2). An interviewee from Caissa Pacific explained that the main difference between the two groups was their travel experience and the demands that came with this:

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<sup>2</sup> The number varies based on different reports but all estimates are well below 10% of the population

“Experienced tourists have high demands, but they can accept the environment. People who have no experience, they have very high expectation, so the tour leader has to explain that there is no hot water and no free toilet, so they have to know the environment.”

(Caissa2\_TO/TA)

Although the market is increasingly maturing, these tourists still exhibit some of the challenging behaviours already described and therefore require special treatment. Increasing popularity of Scandinavia as a destination and other factors, such as increasing fear of terrorism in other European countries (these factors will be explained further later in the chapter), are among the reasons that Chinese tourists progressively choose to travel to Scandinavia as their first overseas destination. This tendency is well reflected in the following quote:

“The first thing [they think] about Europe is France, Italy, (...) they will go there first. But recently in the last two years I found that a lot of people, they just come to Scandinavia. They have never been to Europe, they just come to Scandinavia, in the last two years its getting more and more. This is quite interesting. (...) “I think it’s like your advertisement in China and also because of the very bad security in France and Italy. Very bad. (...) Sometimes I am curious also, why you come to Scandinavia, not France? They say, ‘why not? This is beautiful, safe, peaceful, relaxed, and I am on holiday, I want to do something relaxed. So France and Italy, too much Chinese tourists, too much theft and steeling, so I would like to come over here.’”

(TourLeader\_01)

The representative of Tallink Silja Line made similar points in explaining why demand for luxury goods is increasing among Chinese tourists on their ferries:

“... it is getting more and more, people who come here for the first time, who haven’t been to western Europe or something. But before, they have been abroad, they have been to US or something. So luxury product was not so popular before, but now it is

getting more. Because a lot of people they come here for the first time abroad, to the Nordic countries, because it's safe and its clean air or cool summer. (...)"

(TallinkSiljaLine\_Transport/Attraction)

The changing travel patterns by first time Chinese travellers described here promises a rise in numbers of inexperienced tourists coming to Scandinavia. This rise will require the Scandinavian tourism industry to acquire and disseminate knowledge on how to cater to inexperienced Chinese tourists.

### 7.1.2.3. Three tendencies in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'

The three simultaneous tendencies described here are visualised in Figure 18.

Figure 19: Three tendencies in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'

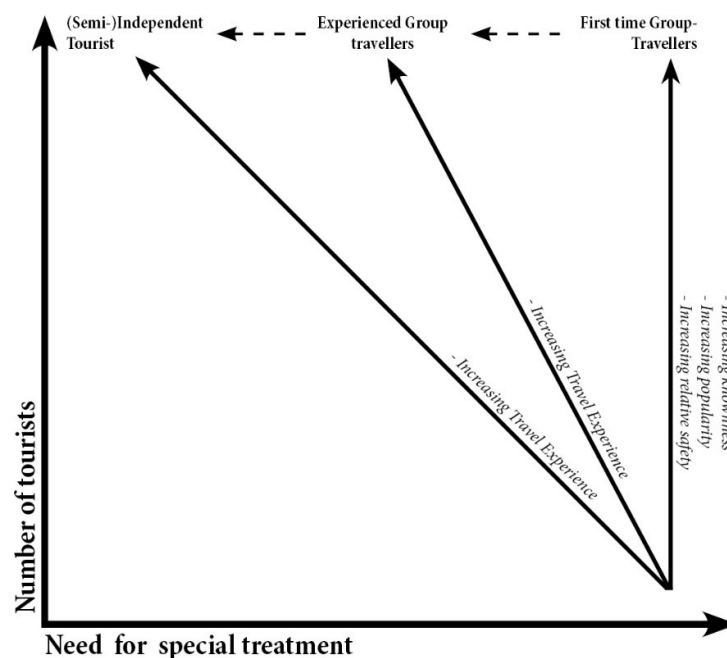


Figure 18 illustrates the simultaneous rise of (semi-)independent tourists who need little or no special treatment; group tourists, who are increasingly maturing and therefore need less special treatment, and first time travellers, who are inexperienced and therefore need a high degree of special treatment. These developments happen simultaneously but also gradually, as some tourists mature and move to(wards) another

category, while others stay at one level or somewhere in-between for longer durations or indefinitely.

These simultaneous tendencies may explain the different enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, which exist among the actors in the Scandinavian destinations. Chinese tourists were enacted differently by different actors, because they are in fact different. Chinese tourism challenges suppliers, as it requires them either to prepare for all three groups (and everything in between) simultaneously, or to choose one group as their focus. Previous research has described these changes as the first, second and third wave of Chinese outbound tourists (See p. 37). Figure 18 provides a first illustration of this tendency. One may also argue that it provides a more precise description of the phenomenon, as it recognises: (1) that the development of Chinese outbound tourism to Scandinavia and in general happens as overlapping and developing movements, where one does not overtake the other, (2) that completely new tourists with no experience constantly emerge from lower tier markets.

### **7.1.3. Information (Sources)**

The third important sub factor under ‘Travel Type’ was the information (sources) that inspire the tourists to choose Scandinavia as their destination and inform their travel choices when they go.

Most interviewees mentioned that Chinese people generally know very little about Scandinavia.

“Most of the places in Scandinavia, actually we are not so familiar with (...) I mean, I am not familiar with most of the scenic spots there. For example, I am familiar with scenic spots in France, in Swiss, but we are not familiar with scenic spots in Scandinavia.”

(Tourist\_13)

“Maybe they will say. ‘I want to go to Scandinavia’. But I don’t think they will know much more than just the four countries.”

(CYTS\_TO/TA)

The lack of knowledge about Scandinavia may be a reason that off- and online word of mouth (WOM) was found to be particularly important as information sources in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ for both group travellers and independents. “It’s very rare that we have a Chinese person who wakes up and says ‘I want to go to Denmark or Greenland, or Sweden, Norway.’ It comes from something.” (Albatros\_NicheWholesaler). When the interviewed tourists were asked why they chose to go to Scandinavia, an important reason was that it had been recommended by friends or family:

Interviewer: Why did you want to go to these countries?

Interviewee: “One of the main reasons is because some of my family member and my friends have been to the Scandinavian countries and they said, they told me a lot about the things they saw during their trip. So it got me interested.”

(Tourist\_10)

Interviewer: Why did you want to go to Norway?

Interviewee: “Because my friend has been there during the winter and he thought it was a great place and because of the snow he cannot go to the, you know some famous places are closed during the winter because of the snow, so we went there in summer again.”

(Tourist\_08)

Online WOM was particularly important for (semi-)independent tourists. These tourists would often use travel websites with user generated content (e.g. <http://www.qyer.com>; [www.mafengwo.cn](http://www.mafengwo.cn)) for inspiration on where to go, as well as

specific searches within the destinations. When asked where his positive image of Scandinavia came from, one respondent for example explained:

Interviewee: “Good question.. I really don’t know. Because I think most people will just accept what they have been told. Maybe some newspapers, magazines and also we have some websites I don’t know whether you have heard about Qyer? (...)”

Interviewer: So that is also one of the places where you got this image?

Interviewee: “Yeah, lots of nice photos.”

(Tourist\_14)

Such sources were mentioned as important tools to find detailed information, used to plan the trip, as well as to find information on the road:

“I read lots of experiences written by former tourists, mostly Chinese tourist (...) I just copy their routes and revise it based on the length of the days. (...) In China we have a forum called Qyer. There are many people sharing their travel experience particularly for outside China.”

(Tourist\_12)

“In China there is a website called Qyer, it’s very famous, so we searched some good places to go, and we decided on our schedule, like which days to go to which place and how can we be transported between the two cities. So we book buses, no we book accommodation first and then book transportation, if it is possible we will buy tickets online for those places.”

(Tourist\_08)

The last quote reflects a general tendency according to the interviewees - most tourists were meticulous in planning and booking the things they could in advance. Even if they were travelling completely independently. “I will do quite a detailed plan, like what day, first day I will go there and I will stay there...” (Tourist\_09). One respondent explained that since she was a backpacker, it was necessary to plan ahead:

“Prior to the two trips, I already planned everything from the transportation to the hotel and also the schedule and stuff, because when you are doing a backpacker, you cannot just randomly go everywhere, you have to be well planned within a limited budget.”

(Tourist\_14)

This goes somewhat against traditional perceptions of backpackers as more free-roaming travellers.

The general lack of knowledge about Scandinavia combined with the need for meticulous planning, means that reliable and detailed destination information is essential in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. This necessity is well reflected in the following quote:

Interviewer: In you choosing where to go, the biggest influence is your friends, as you said, or family or online community...?

Interviewee: “You can say it is like the reputation maybe. If your friends recommend to you (...), but most of it you do the online research. (...) I won’t go to any countries where I cannot get a lot of information. Because if there is a country that I want to go to, but I cannot get much information for it, I might not go. Like Africa, if I cannot find much information, I’m afraid, I’m maybe a little bit scared.”

Interviewer: And you will search information on Qyer?

Interviewee: “Yeah Qyer, I think there are several websites, like Qyer and Mafengwo...”

(Tourist\_05)

The suppliers in Scandinavia were aware of the importance of reliable information about Scandinavia. However, they were challenged in providing this by the language barrier, technical problems and other issues. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Chinavia project acted as an important gateway between suppliers in Scandinavia and potential tourists in China. The representative from the Chinavia project described how

China was in many ways unique in terms of direct communication. The challenges that this uniqueness presented were, according to him, a primary reason for the existence of the Chinavia project.

“The reason why we have this team [Chinavia] and that we have support in all of Scandinavia is that everything we do with the Chinese market is a challenge. Because of all the different platforms they are on (...) those are ones that we don’t use here. Both social media, and the internet should be the same, but you have the great firewall. So, our homepages for example, our homepage effort, we cannot just piggy bag on the existing platforms that we have here. Normally, if we all of a sudden had a million Polacks travelling around in Copenhagen, then we would establish a Polish subsite with lots of information translated from English or Danish. We cannot do that here, because the internet connection is so bad. And because they need other services and they appreciate different things. The things that we have on the websites, they are specifically selected after what the Chinese like to see. So, both in terms of content and platform, and the server as well”

(WOCO/Chinavia\_DMO)

Other initiatives were also taken by the Scandinavian suppliers to meet the potential Chinese tourists at the right platforms. A number of suppliers for example explained how they cooperated with online bloggers and media channels to spread the message about Scandinavia and specific destinations and attractions within:

“... online bloggers and media, they are really doing a very good performance. Because they know how to sell themselves, so when they are in Fyn, when they try to sell themselves, they sell Fyn at the same time. For instance we have a foodie blogger, which we cooperate with...”

(DestinationFyn\_DMO)



The findings provided in this section show how the Chinese tourists' use of and trust in on- and offline WOM, combined with lack of knowledge about Scandinavia and subsequent need for detailed information about the destination(s) has created challenges for suppliers in Scandinavia. These challenges necessitate efforts towards the Chinese market that go beyond merely copying the efforts made towards other markets. The best Scandinavian example of a response to these challenges is the Chinavia project, as it was established in recognition of these challenges and provides concrete tools to solve them.

#### **7.1.4. Tourist Expectation**

The Chinese tourists generally knew little about Scandinavia. A result of the lacking knowledge was that the interviewed tourists generally had moderate expectations and were open minded in their approach to the destinations. In most cases this turned out well, as they came away positively surprised:

“I didn't know a lot about the countries in North Europe. So in fact I didn't expect very much before I travelled there. But when I really arrived there, I just think there is a lot of attractive and interesting things there...”

(Tourist\_02)

Many Chinese tourists to Scandinavia were looking for natural attractions, but came away positively surprised by other things, such as things associated with daily life, environment and lifestyle. This was for example evident in the following quote:

Interviewee: “Frankly speaking, when you talk about. If you name Italy or Spain, I will have a lot of fantasy about all those people's very colourful night experience or whatever. But for the North Europe I think. I don't have much expectation. And I didn't really expect to travel that much to Northern European countries, I just, it happened. I think it is a very good experience.”

Interviewer: So basically no expectations, so you cannot be disappointed?

Interviewee: “Yeah, agreed! Exactly!”

(Tourist\_14)

The tourists with higher expectations were often focussed on the more traditional natural and cultural attractions. Some of them mentioned that these aspects disappointed them, while they were positively surprised by the things they did not expect (These points will be explored further in (In)tangible Attractions p. 229). The findings relating to expectations suggest a positive side to the lack of knowledge about Scandinavia, since some tourists perceived the place as more interesting or mysterious because of it. The lack of knowledge made the tourists more open minded in their expectations, which meant that the Scandinavian destination(s) were often appreciated on their own terms, instead of having to live up to specific expectations.

#### **7.1.5. Market Trends**

The final sub-factor under Travel Type was Market Trends. Many interviewees agreed on certain current trends in China outbound travel and their importance. As already explained, more and more Chinese tourists were becoming experienced travellers. According to the interviewees, this meant that they were increasingly looking for new and different destinations to visit:

“... maybe, at present, more people, they will choose London and Paris. Maybe that is for their first trip to Europe, but for their second trip I don't think they will also choose London and Paris. Maybe they want to enjoy something different. That time, the North Europe will have their hope. I think.”

(Ctrip\_OTA)

“Actually, you know, Chinese tourists, our Chinese clients, are much more experienced travelling. They are looking for something special to experience. Not

something to just watch, look, they want something that is different from where they live, they eat or other scenic spots. Something special or something exciting.”

(Caissal\_TO/TA)

The Chinese tourists were also increasingly going for longer holidays abroad, instead of domestic weekend trips “... there is a trend that most Chinese people they want to have a long holiday. Maybe also abroad.” (Ctrip\_OTA). Combined with increasing income, these trends put Scandinavia in a privileged position, as it is also perceived as a destination that contains many of the aspects that are trendy among Chinese travellers – clean environment and lifestyle among others (See The ‘special’ – Environment and Lifestyle p. 234).

“... in the summer time it [Scandinavia] is very hot! Very hot! Even this summer the increase is like 100% increase. Right now, I’m the agent of the DFDS [Ferry company running routes in between Nordic countries] (...) just the booking of the DFDS, the booking is quite, its a double. Its 200% since last year. So everybody is very happy about that.”

(Oriental Nordic\_TO/NicheWholesaler).

A sign of the increasing popularity, at both independent and group level was that Caissa Pacific was testing the first ever charter flights between China and Scandinavia at the time of interview:

“For this year actually we have a charter flight to Stockholm, and basically the portion for Scandinavia or North Europe is going up. Next year we are having more charter flight.”

(Caissal\_TO/TA)

In summing up the importance of market trends in the Chinese travel sector, the representative of STB explained:

“Demand is the basic drive power for the changes [to itineraries]. For us, we can try to build up new products in advance, we can do commercials and tell people, do this

in Sweden, do this in Denmark (...). Chinese people follow the trend, we [the Chinese] do things everyone does. (...) I think we can help to push the trend, to make new ideas. At least we can put it there for people to know. But it is not us who decides what new things we can do.”

(STB\_DMO)

Here the representative sums up the general sentiment in the interviews, which is that there is only so much actors in Scandinavia can do. In the end the Chinese market is heavily driven by trends and demand for specific things. A positive side of this for destinations in Scandinavia is that many of the traits of Scandinavian destinations seem to align well with the current trends in the Chinese market.

## **7.2 Available Products**

The second main factor found in the analysis of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ was ‘Available Products’. This factor covers sub-factors that decide which products are available to the tourists and affect the character of these products.

### **7.2.1. Volume**

Volume was an important sub-factor affecting the available products in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. Both in terms of group and independent travel, a certain volume is needed to justify the infrastructure necessary for tourism to happen. The suppliers and companies in the China Travel Industry, who worked with group package tourism specifically explained, how they needed a certain volume to operate a market:

“We are a big company (...) We are able to handle the volume, and we also kind of need the volume to be a big player.”

(Tumlare\_DMC)

“... we have to look at whether there are flight connections. Is there tour operators who can lift some volume. Because hunting single Chinese, a segment for extremely rich or something like that, then the volume is too small for us, compared to the work.”

(EgeskovCastle\_Attraction)

In some destinations, the number of Chinese tourists was already high. The representative from Visit Flam for example explained:

“China is very important for us. (...) Early on, in 1999, I was convinced that China would become our biggest and most important market and it is now. If not as big as all of the rest of Asia combined, then very close to it. On the train [the main attraction in the area], I will say that China accounts for 12-13 percent of the total number, and we are talking 100.000 people here. (...) Especially in recent years, we have seen a dramatic rise.”

(VisitFlam\_DMO/Attraction)

In most destinations, the numbers were still low compared to other markets. However, as mentioned in China Outbound Tourism - Market Growth (p. 21) there had been a dramatic rise in the incoming numbers over the last 10 years. The actors in both China and Scandinavia felt this:

“... in total the growth in the past few years has been really, we had for example last year in our company, we had 69% growth from previous years, so it has been really growing, and they say that it still continues this way, so in a couple of years, we need more hotels.”

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

“... in 2014, the number of tourists [their costumers] travelling to North Europe was about 1000, and in 2015 the number was increased to 4000.”

(CBGI\_Wholesaler)

“... we believe that the Chinese market has huge potential. We can also feel it, we can also see, every year. 2014 there was just about 4600 Chinese visits in Fyn. (...) At the

end of 2015 there was 10.000 Chinese visits. So even through the amount, the number is not that huge. However, the growth is huge.“

(DestinationFyn\_DMO)

Most actors stated the strong potential of respectively Scandinavian destinations and the Chinese market, as the primary reason for their interest. This potential was still to a large degree based on traditional group package tourism, where the guests visit the four countries on a relatively short visit. However, some actors mentioned the potential and rising volume as an important reason that they were developing the ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ products further. The volume had reached a point where they could start making more diverse product packages. The other factor that incited the companies to do so was increased demand for in-depth experiences from the Chinese tourists.

### **7.2.2. Demand**

The second sub-factor affecting the Available Products was demand, respectively for Chinese tourists from the suppliers in Scandinavia, and for Scandinavia tourism products from the Chinese tourists.

#### **7.2.2.1. Demand for Scandinavia**

As will be further elaborated in Destination Characteristics (p. 229), Scandinavian destinations were attractive to the Chinese, because they represented something new and different from other (European) destinations. This signified an increasing demand in the Chinese market, for travel products and destinations that were different from the norm, especially among the more experienced travellers. This demand was also reflected in the individual products at the destinations, where the tourists were increasingly demanding more in-depth experiences:

“It used to be, 5 years, a little bit earlier - Nordic four capitals. Not Nordic four countries. [Now] The Chinese spend more time travelling to the Nordic countries, they will no longer only visit the four capitals, they will also travel via cruise from Denmark to Norway for example. It used to be over land (...) it relatively costs a little bit more for the consumer, but they get better services and they save time on travelling. So they can have more quality time to enjoy the sightseeing in the destination. And also now we say the fiords have already become an integrate part of the four countries programme (...) During the winter season, it used to be, there was no, actually you could ignore the business from China to the Nordic during the winter time. But now we say that there is a market need, and growing really rapidly too, during the winter season for the Nordic lights. So, yeah, along with the market becoming more mature, the products are becoming more diversified.”

(STB\_DMO)

The representative of DMC Scandinavia explained the changing behaviour and increasing demand for destinations like Scandinavia:

“I think it is getting easier for you in Scandinavia, because the rich people 15, 10 years ago, they just wanted to go somewhere really glamorous, everything is shining, huge - like France and Vegas. But more and more people who have better incomes, they are well educated, they are seeking somewhere more calm and peaceful. And that is Scandinavia.”

(DMC Scandinavia\_DMC)

This demand shaped the products that were made available to Chinese tourists to Scandinavia: First, by increasing access to areas of the countries that were not otherwise accessible for Chinese group travellers: “... they are moving North, in the wintertime. And that started only two years ago, (...) So that is kind of a new trend (ThonHotels\_Accommodation). Second, by adding deeper experiences to the existing

programmes: “Now they have added many new attractions to the product, like Iceland and Fishing and hiking” (GrandVision\_Wholesaler).

#### **7.2.2.2. Demand for Chinese tourists**

The available products in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ were also affected by the increasing demand for Chinese tourists from Scandinavian suppliers. This demand drove them to cooperate with Chinese partners and develop products tailored to the Chinese market. It has already been explained that primary reasons for the demand was the potential in terms of incoming numbers and the growing interest in Scandinavia from Chinese tourists. In addition to this, main reasons for the demand were the Chinese tourists’ relatively high spending and their travel patterns, which differed from other tourist groups.

When asked why the Chinese market was considered interesting, many suppliers mentioned the expenditure as important:

“... they spend a lot of money. And we can see that for ourselves. So it is very important for the tourism in Fyn.”

(OdenseBysMuseer\_Attraction)

“... retailers have been quick, because they can see that it really makes sense. Was it 57% of all tax free in 2014 or 54%, something like that, that the Chinese accounted for. So, really, retailers they would prefer (...) one person who buys 10 pairs of shoes than 10 other costumers that buy one.”

(WOCO/Chinavia\_DMO)

Others mentioned the fact that the Chinese tourists visit at times, where it was difficult to sell products to their traditional costumers:

“... there is a big part of the leisure market that we are not a part of. Our low season is in the summer months, that is when we have nothing to do. So, for us, when we suddenly have guests who come in droves in the summer period, in busses. They are



low paying guests, but they are paying guests. For us, that is very very interesting. It fills out blanks that we have not been able to fill previously...”

(FirstGrandHotel\_Accommodation)

“... the difference a little bit between Chinese and other nationalities is that they travel throughout the year, so we have quite a high percentage of Chinese visitors throughout the whole year.”

(VasaMuseet\_Attraction)

“I have been here for the last 4-5 years and we see an increasing interest of the Chinese market and of course, especially during the summer months, but we also see that it is the Asian market that is travelling mostly during winter time. (...) Scandinavians you can forget about it, because they are going to the ski resorts. But not necessarily all Asians want that. They want peace and quiet. So we are working on that side of the market as we speak.”

(FretheimHotel\_Accommodation)

For hotels, the fact that the Chinese tourists would happily stay in properties outside city centers, which may otherwise be difficult to fill, was seen as an advantage:

“It’s getting more and more important, because they also use the outside city center hotels, and a lot of markets like Europeans, Americans and also others like Taiwan, they want to stay in the city centres (...) They [the Chinese tourists] are kind of using other hotels than other markets are...”

(ThonHotels\_Accommodation)

“... if they cannot find room in Odense, then they will maybe find room in Slagelse. They are actually much easier to work with in that regard. The Chinese, they are told ‘you will sleep here’, and then they say ‘ok’ and then sleep there. Had you done that in Denmark, said ‘we will sleep in Beijing’ and then it is somewhere outside, we would not have put up with that. But somehow it seems that they are easier to move around.”

(FirstGrandHotel\_Accommodation)

Finally, some respondents mentioned how they could sell things to the Chinese that they could not sell to other markets. The representative from Visit Stockholm explained:

Interviewee: "... the ideas from the office in China are ideas that I would never come up with, some combinations (...) that is interesting with the market, that you really have to understand how to make a nice offer for the Chinese visitors. (...) You can sell Stockholm as a nature, hiking product."

Interviewer: So the definition of nature might a bit different?

Interviewee: "Yeah, exactly!"

(VisitStockholm\_DMO)

These examples suggest that Chinese tourists' differences from other tourists were not only a challenge, as have been suggested earlier, but also an advantage, because their unique preferences presented new opportunities.

### **7.2.3. Accessibility**

The third sub-factor that affected the available products was Accessibility, both in terms of getting from China to Scandinavia, and in terms of getting around in Scandinavia, once the tourists arrived.

#### **7.2.3.1. Getting There**

'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' is completely dependent on flight connections between Scandinavia and China. Especially in Finland (Finnair was the most active Scandinavian airline on China), the interviewed suppliers explained that the primary reason they focussed on China as a market, was the good flight connections:

"Finnair and Visit Finland decided that these countries where Finnair has been rapidly growing and adding destinations, those are the key markets, because they have the

non-stop flights to Helsinki, from which you have 60 destinations in continental Europe and Scandinavia”

(StopoverFinland\_NicheDMC)

In destinations where flight connections were scarce, the interviewees were hoping for an increase, so they could expand their product offer to Chinese tourists:

“Its a pity for Stockholm with the direct flight to China, I mean we only have. We have Beijing - Stockholm with Air China and then we have SAS Hong Kong - Stockholm, but the hub is Helsinki and also Copenhagen.”

(VisitStockholm\_DMO)

Some interviewees explained that the flight connections were perhaps the most important factor when designing new products, and when Chinese operators chose what and where to include in the new programmes:

“In the end it is very often the flight tickets that make the difference. You can give them 200.000DKK more in marketing or not – does not change much. It is more about whether they can get the right flight and the right offer. “

(Albatros\_NicheWholesaler)

The flight routes also influenced specific things in the tour programmes. A representative of a wholesaler for example mentioned that the group sizes were indirectly decided by the airlines: “The basic airline ticket is 40 tickets. Therefore, we normally have 40 people groups” (GrandVision\_Wholesaler).

The examples presented here reflect the importance of accessibility in design of tour products, and general distribution of Chinese tourists to Scandinavia.

### **7.2.3.2. Getting around**

Similarly, the practicalities of getting from place to place within Scandinavia influenced the products to a large degree. Examples of this were that some companies

would sell Finland as a mono destination and the three other countries as a package, because transportation to and from Finland was seen as too difficult and/or expensive:

“... if you handle the group, the main transportation means is the coach, so we take the coach from Denmark to Sweden to Norway is more easy. But you have to take the flight or take the night route to Finland. So, sometimes, we have mono-Finland package. Especially in winter time. “

(CITS\_TO/TA)

Other interviewees explained that transportation was a challenge in Scandinavia, compared to the rest of Europe, because the distances between places were longer. The increasing demand for more experiences as well as dwindling focus on price for some tourists was a blessing in this regard, because it allowed the tour operators to switch long bus rides with more expensive, but also more interesting ferry trips between destinations:

“The four countries are a little far from each other. It is not like other countries in Europe, they have train. But in Scandinavia you have to use car. But next year we will try to use DFDS. Ferries. From Copenhagen to Oslo.”

(Caissa2\_TO/TA)

Finally, accessibility also influenced the type of tourists certain suppliers chose to focus on. Egeskov Castle, which was difficult to access, for example chose only to focus on group tourists, because it was too difficult for independents to get there:

“They like to see Egeskov Castle, but the transportation is not easy, they have to take train first, then change to the bus, then they give up, they just go back to Copenhagen.”

(OdenseBys Museer\_Attraction).

Overall, it was evident from the interviews that Accessibility had a strong effect on the potential for ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ in general, as well as on

the specifics of the travel routes that both independents and group tourists ended up following.

#### **7.2.4. Intermediaries' Destination Knowledge**

The fourth sub-factor affecting the available products was the knowledge the intermediaries had of the products and destinations in Scandinavia. The previous chapter discussed the importance of destination knowledge flowing through the actor network and the section on Travel Type discussed how the tourists' knowledge of the destination(s) affected the travel experience. This section will add a few points regarding the importance of intermediaries' destination knowledge in particular.

The structural, cultural and geographical distance between Scandinavia and China meant that it could be difficult for tour operators and travel agents in China to keep up to date with product developments in Scandinavia. In explaining the relevance of their business, a DMC representative stated "... the agents in China, most of them, they don't know Scandinavia." (NorDEU\_DMC). This was supported by both suppliers and Chinese tour operators. A supplier explained:

"We also have requests from people who are very far away and who have never been here. They do not know the culture and they do not know the attractions, so we also have an investment, which will take some years, but which is ongoing, in getting the tour operators to go here and see it. Because they have no idea."

(EgeskovCastle\_Attraction)

A representative of a Chinese tour operator supported this, as she explained that most of their agents had no experience with the products they were selling:

"... some of our colleagues have been there. But some of them did not go to the Scandinavian countries. (...) we have not been there, so we will not know much about

that. This is difficult. When some guest for example ask, will ask us how this activity will play, we will just tell them what they write in the website.”

(Oriental Nordic\_TO\_Wholesaler)

This lack of knowledge was a primary reason for the frequent use of DMC and DMOs as gateways between the Chinese and Scandinavian actors. In terms of the specific product development, it meant that it was sometimes difficult to change existing programmes and that many actors sold similar products. As mentioned, this was changing somewhat, as Scandinavia became a more popular destination among Chinese tourists, and as the Chinese tourists demanded more variation in the travel itineraries.

### **7.3 Destination Characteristics**

The third main factor in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ is Destination Characteristics. This factor covers sub-factors that relate to the ways in which attractions, accommodation options and certain conditions in Scandinavia affect the distribution process.

#### **7.3.1. (In)tangible Attractions**

The first sub-factor is concerned with the things that make Scandinavia attractive to Chinese tourists. That includes intangible factors as well as traditional attractions. The interviewed tourists expressed how they were drawn to Scandinavia and would consider coming back because of a combination of such aspects. Scandinavia may be considered as unique because the intangible aspects for many tourists were prioritised over the traditional attractions. This was reflected in the following quote:

“... it’s a really different culture from other European countries. (...) You can experience the lifestyle of the Scandinavians and you can see the North, the special

views about the North. (...) I think the first two important parts are the attitude and the lifestyle, and the other thing is the special views. “

(Tourist\_11)

### **7.3.1.1. Traditional Attractions**

Tourists as well as intermediaries articulated that nature was considered as a main draw when choosing Scandinavia as a travel destination.

“The most important thing for the Chinese tourist [travelling to Scandinavia] is natural landscape, both for older and younger people.”

(GrandVision\_Wholesaler)

“I think the nature view of course is very fantastic, they were impressive and I want to travel to Norway again with a more relaxed schedule.“

(Tourist\_12)

“... if I have a choice to go to a place which is beautiful or a place with a lot of famous buildings or something, I will go to the place with beautiful natural views.”

(Tourist\_08)

The main natural attraction in Scandinavia was the fiords in Norway, which were a basic part of the itinerary for all the interviewed tour operators and travel agents “... now we say the fiords has already become an integrated part of the four countries programme during the summer season...” (STB\_DMO). In addition, natural attractions included the winter landscapes of Finland, the Northern Lights, the midnight sun, the long summer days, as well as urban nature, since the capital cities were considered as green with blue sky and close to nature. Various respondents explained how they valued these aspects highly and how they were part of their decision to go to Scandinavia:

“... the main thing I want to see in Europe is the Northern Lights, so I went to Scandinavia and I chose one country, that's Norway, because I heard it's quite good. And that there is a good chance to see the Northern lights in Tromsø.”

(Tourist\_03)

“... there is no night in Nordic countries in summer. (...) That is really fantastic and that is really a unique experience I think.”

(Tourist\_01)

“... the cities facilities are very advanced and then, the view, they have the natural view and also they have the, the developed side also. “

(Tourist\_14)

The attraction of these natural aspects were well known to the interviewed intermediaries and suppliers, who explained their attempts to take advantage of these aspects:

“North Europe has many special things. In the summer the whole day is light. In the winter the night is long. There are more activities they can participate in, climbing mountains, hiking, things like this.”

(CBGI\_Wholesaler)

“The first year we had a pilot project to collect some feedback, actually quite many were saying about the midnight sun, we were surprised, that the most amazing thing they think, during the whole cruise, was the midnight sun.”

(TallinkSiljaLine\_Transport/Attraction)

“... we have urban nature, it is one of our big things in Helsinki. (...) We have 130km of waterfront and over 300 islands and actually we just produced a new map (...) Urban nature map, which we have also in Chinese.”

(VisitHelsinki\_DMO)



Similarly, other highlight attractions were mentioned as important by both tourists and the tourism industry actors. These included the main attractions in the four capital cities, which were mainly monuments, museums, parks and churches.

Although these traditional attractions were revered by some tourists. The interviews revealed that their role might be smaller than expected, when compared to other attractions. While some respondents explained that they liked some of the sights they saw when visiting Scandinavia, others mentioned how they were in some cases disappointed. One respondent for example explained about the Scandinavian capitals: “I just think, as the days went by, I just think that there is a lot of similarities in those cities. (...) I just mean that there is not something very unique or very impressive...” (Tourist\_02). Another respondent said about the Norwegian fiords, which were generally regarded as main attractions in Scandinavia:

“I may have expected too much, because it is very famous. I know and people they know Norway, because of the Fiord. But when I see it, I think we have a lot of it in China. Maybe they are, maybe in reality they are different. But from tourism, they look the same. So it is a little bit disappointing.”

(Tourist\_07)

A local tour guide explained this scenario from her perspective:

“... I think many of them, they are quite disappointed by the, for example Finland and Norway, the Fiord. Because before they come, they read a lot about the Fiord, but when they, after they have taken this ferry in the Fiord, most of them they are disappointed because in China we have almost similar tourist places...”

(TourGuide)

A representative from CYTS also mentioned how certain things like the Northern Lights can also be experienced elsewhere and that this could therefore not be regarded

as special for Scandinavia: "... even for Aurora. They can choose a lot of countries to see it. Canada or Alaska in US. So maybe it's also not a special reason to go to the Scandinavian countries." (CYTS\_TO/TA).

These actors highlighted how the main attractions of Scandinavia were the things that made it different from China, from Europe and the rest of the world. For some, this difference was enacted as a focus on natural attractions rather than on historical ones, for others it was enacted as the intangible things like the environment, the lifestyle and a particular feeling. In the following quotes a tour guide, a tourist and a TO/TA representative explained this difference:

"I think Scandinavia is getting more and more popular in China, because (...) the Chinese tourism started years ago, so a lot of tourists they have been to France, Italy and somewhere. They finished that. Also they realize that it is quite different in Scandinavia. There are less churches, churches they are almost the same. To Chinese, we cannot really see a big difference (...). So they find there is more beautiful nature in Scandinavia. So they have much more relaxing to do, rather than the churches. So they love it a lot."

(TourLeader\_01)

"People say when you go to Denmark, you must go to see the Little Mermaid, but when you go there you are like 'Ohh my god'. This is the only time I have been there and I won't come back again, I have to be here and take a photo! There is soo many people!! I can't even get like a little bit close to the Little Mermaid, so I just take picture, like ok, then I go. I think I am more like to feel the city, to see the people, to feel the culture more than like the site visiting or something."

(Tourist\_05)

"Yeah. And also I also listed some reasons that maybe they want to go. The first is that compared to Western Europe, its new. And also there are more nature views

different from the other parts of Europe. And also very nice environment. And also the good welfare. The social security. The nice design. The good education system. The clean government. All the Chinese people want today in their own life. So maybe they want to see that is how the Scandinavian countries works. How the people live there.”

(CYTS\_TO/TA)

The first part of the final quote reflects many respondents’ enactment of Scandinavia as something new, compared to the rest of (Western) Europe. While this may be regarded as a positive pull factor, there is a chance that it will wear off as more Chinese people travel to Scandinavia. Because of this, the second part of the last quote is more interesting to proponents of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. This part reflects that many (potential) Chinese tourists enact Scandinavia as ‘special’.

### 7.3.1.2. The ‘special’ – Environment and Lifestyle

When asked about the attraction of Scandinavia and Scandinavian destinations, a number of interviewees directly or indirectly described Scandinavia as ‘special’ compared to other, more visited destinations in Europe. Using herself as an example, the young, urban, female representative of Ctrip described the attraction power of Scandinavia:

“... I think for most Chinese costumers, especially for the ones who wants to holiday in the Europe area, in the past they preferred to choose some famous destinations like London, Paris, Italy and other traditional famous destinations, but for young people, especially generations like me. They prefer to spend their holiday in some quiet and beautiful place, some special place.“

(Ctrip\_OTA)

The various elements that made Scandinavia ‘special’ were enacted as pertaining to an overlap between ‘environment’ and ‘lifestyle’.

*Environment*

On many occasions Chinese tourists as well as tour guides, tour operators, travel agents and wholesalers specifically used the word ‘environment’ to describe what they liked about Scandinavia and why the tourists wanted to go there. The term ‘environment’ referred to different elements for different respondents. For most, however, it related to the cleanliness of the natural environment, including air and water quality:

Interviewer: And you said you also enjoyed the environment. What do you mean by that?

Interviewee: “The air quality I think, the air quality”

(Tourist\_13)

“... now the environment in China is not so perfect so we will promote Northern countries by environmental factors.”

(CITS\_TO/TA)

“The advantage is the environment, because it is clean, and different culture.”

(NewWorldTravel\_TO/TA)

For others, architecture and design also acted as important parts of the ‘environment’:

“For me it [the reason to go] was because of interesting architecture there. By BIG...”

(Tourist\_06)

“I think the sights about the sea, and the sights about the architecture really appeal to me.”

(Tourist\_11)

“The design, is attractive for them. Like the facilities, the design facilities. The buildings and some ideas of the design is attractive.”

(GrandVision\_Wholesaler)

Finally, part of the ‘environment’ was also the lack of people in general and the lack of Chinese tourists in particular.

“Not a lot of Chinese people go to North Europe, we only go to Italy or France or Spain. We don’t really go to North Europe, but when I go there you know less tourism, less people. (...) I don’t want to be that kind of mass tourist and I like nature view, I like hiking. So I like some place that I can, I don’t need to meet too many Chinese tourists, like in France”

(Tourist\_12)

This quote illustrates how getting off the beaten track and particularly getting off the track beaten by other Chinese tourists, is increasingly becoming attractive to Chinese tourists.

Safety was also an important part of the attraction of the Scandinavian ‘environment’ (This will be explained further in Safety p. 265).

“So I think Nordic countries are pretty good, it’s safe. Most things are really safe, you don’t worry.”

(Tourist\_05)

Interviewer: Before you booked the trip apart from the price, were there any other things that you felt were important?

Interviewee: “Safety, security and the scenic spots, some world famous scenic spots attracts me very well.”

(Tourist\_13)

Together these different elements created the ‘environment’ that the respondents considered as ‘special’ for Scandinavia, especially when it was combined with the Scandinavian ‘Lifestyle’.

### *Lifestyle*

The attractions most often mentioned by the tourists, were related to ‘lifestyle’. The word itself, as well as a number of elements, which can be considered as related to ‘lifestyle’ were mentioned repeatedly by the interviewed Chinese tourists. ‘Lifestyle’

was often both considered as a reason to go and as the best experience at the destination(s). The following quotes exemplify two tourists' expectations before going to Scandinavia:

Interviewer: Why did you want to go to the Nordic countries?

Interviewee: "I think Nordic countries got a very good reputation among Chinese people. Every time people mention Nordic countries it's like beautiful natural sights and also it is like the peaceful lifestyle, everyone is friendly."

(Tourist\_05)

"... the Scandinavians, you have a very good image in Chinese tourist mind as a very pure and very quiet image. (...) Different from what we, what China or what, I don't know, just unique I think. Represents kind of a spirit that is very liberal, very clean and healthy and eco and environmentally friendly and life quality stuff so..."

(Tourist\_14)

The experience of the 'lifestyle' in Scandinavia was exclusively intangible and was described as a feeling one got by being present in the Scandinavian destinations. This feeling led some tourists to feel that they became a part of the lifestyle for the duration of their trip. These feelings were described well in the following quote:

Interviewer: What was the best experiences during the trip?

"I really enjoy the feeling, you get to know another culture, like another lifestyle. You put yourself inside other people, you listen to how the people talk to each other and you see how their daily life is like. We do have differences between the lifestyles and I think the Nordic countries peoples lifestyle is quite the way I like, because you know, I didn't see any fights, arguments or terrible bad things. People are always smiling to each other and they are really nice. I think it is something you can feel when you get inside. It is something like, nothing is happening, but you still feel happy. You feel everything is good, everything is great."

Interviewee: So it is more this kind of feeling that is the best experience than The Little Mermaid or...

Interviewer: “Yeah yeah yeah yeah...”

(Tourist\_05)

A number of intangible elements contributed to the overall feeling that the interviewees described as the ‘lifestyle’ in Scandinavia. First, the local people were important. Like many other destinations, the friendliness of the local people was considered as an important asset and was mentioned by the interviewees, both by repute and by experience:

“The sights were very good, it’s very beautiful there and the people are friendly...”

(Tourist\_03)

“... I think that people there are very gentle and most of the people can speak English. Very nice walking on the street and if I am lost I can ask any people and any people will be very gentle answer me and direct a way to go where I want to go.”

(Tourist\_09)

A more unique and important attribute of Scandinavia compared to other destinations was that the tourists also took enjoyment from observing the local people, who they perceived to be happy and enjoying life. This was already described in some of the quotes above and is further exemplified in the following quote:

Interviewer: If you have to compare your trip to Northern Europe to your many other trips around Europe. Is it better or worse, or how is it different?

Interviewee: “Generally, I think it is better, because it is not very populated and its clean everywhere and I can see from my point of view that people enjoy living there. So I think generally its better.”

(Tourist\_10)

Part of enjoying life in Scandinavia was, according to some tourists, the slower and more relaxed pace of life, that they could see and experience:

Interviewee: “When you walk on the street, you can see the people, they are very nice, even the strangers, they smile to you and they ask you if you need any favour and they enjoy helping others and that is not like that in China. (...) The living rapid is much slower than in China (...) I'm not saying the speed of working, but the living rapid, yes.”

Interviewer: So to you it was more the environment, the way people acted that was the highlight more than any sightseeing?

Interviewee: “Yes, because the sights are not that good. Because lots of places they have good views around the world, no matter in China or in other countries. So actually the view is not the thing that attracts me first.”

(Tourist\_07)

This interviewee brings up the fact that traditional attractions in Scandinavia do not necessary stand out, compared to other places. However, some interviewees even mentioned the fact that Scandinavia had few traditional attractions as an advantage, because it created a more relaxing travel pace:

“We wanted a relaxing trip and then we choose the city [Stockholm]. If we plan to go like Hong Kong or Italy then it is not a relaxing trip for us. We will see a lot of places, like Rome, Milan, Venice, things like that.”

(Tourist\_09)

Interviewer: Why was the trip relaxed, was that because of the schedule?

Interviewee: “Yes, because of the schedule, but also because, I think in Paris there were a lot of places that you have to go and see and shopping to do, in America, shopping. (...) But in Scandinavia you can see the nature and have some time to visit the museum and stay 1 hour in the museum...”

(Tourist\_06)



Some of the interviewed tour guides and representatives of tour operators/travel agents explained that part of the ‘lifestyle’, which the tourists were interested in, was also the social system and welfare system in Scandinavia:

Interviewer: And what are they [the tourists] talking about when they talk about Scandinavia?

Interviewee: “Welfare!”

Interviewer: So the welfare system is actually an important factor?

Interviewee: “Yes, the natural, the natural things like the forest, like the lakes, like the beach. I do believe that there are much more places in the world, more beautiful than Scandinavia. But the welfare. I mean Scandinavia is very unique in the world.”

(TourGuide)

“They are interested in your society, and your social welfare.”

(Caissa2\_TO/TA)

The representative from CYTS explained how Chinese travellers were increasingly interested in learning from their travels, and that seeing societies that function in ways that they would like China to function, was part of this trend:

Interviewer: When you are telling me that one of the reasons they want to go is because of the clean environment and the social security system, good education system. How do you know that from the costumer? Do they tell you?

Interviewee: “... it’s a kind of trend, I think in Chinese peoples’ mind. That they want to look for some good things to learn, to experience, to see. Maybe they will know, ‘maybe we should live like them’. Not a specific demand. I want to go to see some social security or like that. Maybe they will have a desire for it.”

(CYTS\_TO/TA)

As reflected in the previous few quotes, the interest in ‘lifestyle’ was not exclusive to independent tourists, but also held by group package tourists. The tourism businesses were aware this, however, this was not reflected strongly in the itineraries or

marketing, which were still focussed on traditional attractions. When asked whether the companies required tour guides to explain things relating to the lifestyle to the tourists, a local tour guide explained:

Interviewee: “They like [the Chinese tourists], when I told them, ok here in Sweden, you know the schools, about the kindergarten about the hospital system, so they are very very interested in this kind of system.”

Interviewer: When you tell them that, is that part of the tour, or is that something that you just tell them, because you think it is interesting?

Interviewee: “No it is not part of the tour. Every guide they have their own way to do it. Maybe some guides, they never talk about this...”

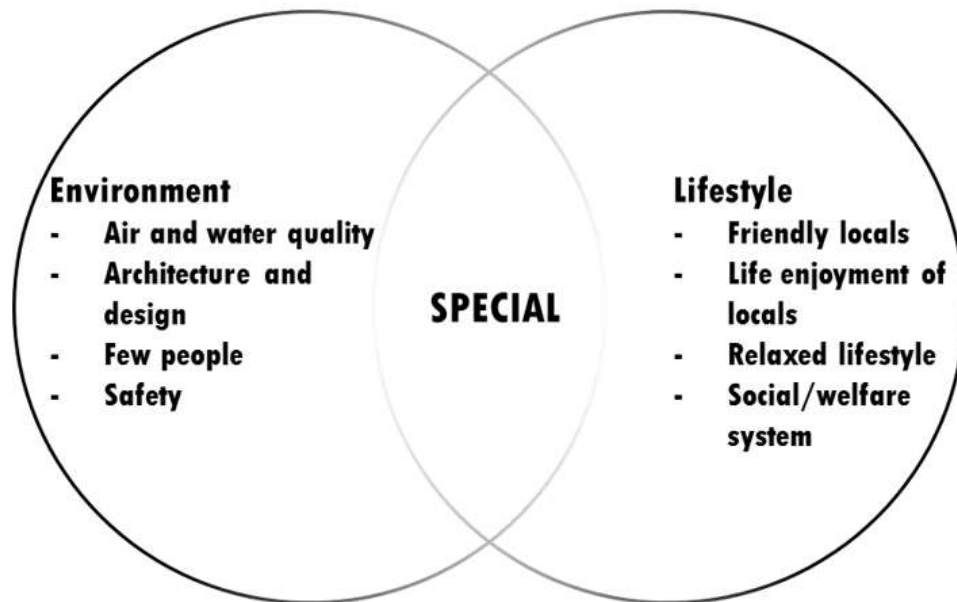
(TourGuide)

Considering the fact that many of the interviewed actors with professional enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ were aware of the preference for these ‘special’ attractions, it is somewhat puzzling why such elements were not an integrated part of the programmes. Especially when considering, that it requires little investment to make the guides inform tourists about such aspects during the trip. An explanation could be the disconnection between the companies in the China Travel Industry and the guides that work for them, which was reported in the previous analysis chapter.

*The combined ‘special’*

Figure 19 illustrates the various tangible and intangible elements that contributed to the enactments of Scandinavia as ‘special’.

Figure 20: 'Special' for Scandinavia



When asked to reflect on the overall experience when visiting Scandinavia, both tourists and tour guides (who represented the general views of the group travellers they serviced, as well as their own perspective) brought up combined elements from ‘environment’ and ‘lifestyle’ as the most important aspects:

“For me, what I remember most is the lifestyle and the local people of the Scandinavian countries (...) the people they don’t have much pressure, from social. And they are enjoying their life there. That is what I like the most. And also, the environment is very good. Especially the air.”

(Tourist\_07)

“I think in my groups, I think 95 or 97 percent of people they are quite interested, they feel very good. Not only the scenery, but the most important is the attitude for life. I mean for the local people, like in Scandinavia take everything easy, not so hurry, no so rush like the Chinese. We have very high social pressures and too many people, so I have asked many times from my people when they finish the trips in Scandinavia. What do you think the part, you like very much? (...) what makes you think it is so

interesting or that you like it very much. They said blue sky, fresh air and very quiet place, nice people, smiling people.”

(TourLeader\_04)

“They [the Chinese tourists] basically tell me every day, they repeat a lot, ‘this is so beautiful here’. They love your peaceful environment, like society and also love the nature, your air your water, never polluted. And also the local people there, that is the thing I love a lot, the local people there in Scandinavia. For me, I travel through Europe, I work in different countries, sometimes I guide them through. Scandinavian people are so trustable. So trustable, when you settle with someone on something, it is settled. That is wonderful for us.”

Interviewer: So it is actually more about the environment, the broader things, than the specific sight or church or castle?

Interviewee: “Yes, the tourists are more interested in your nature and your society, and the feeling of your countries, it is totally different from the West and the South.”

(TourLeader\_01)

The enactment of Scandinavia as a ‘special’ place because of the combination of ‘environment’ and ‘lifestyle’, by group travellers, as well as independents, presents a significant difference from other destinations in Europe, where tourists have traditionally been more focussed on traditional sightseeing. These individual elements as well as the overall feeling they create, is worth noting, because it is an important part of what makes Scandinavia stand out, what makes Chinese tourists want to visit, and of the positive experiences, they take home. On all these levels, this enactment and the elements that contributed to it had a strong influence on ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’.

### **7.3.2. Supply, Capacity and Quality of Accommodation**

The second sub-factor contributing to the overall destination characteristics of Scandinavia relates to the available accommodation in Scandinavia. Specifically, it focusses on the supply, quality and capacity of accommodation.

Most of the interviewed actors agreed that Chinese tourists and thus Chinese tour operators have high demands in terms of hotel standards. The reason for this was that they were used to relatively high standards in China:

“... normally, Chinese people, they like four star hotels and quite good, high standard, cause they are of course used to have a high standard...”

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

“... if it is listed as a three star hotel, Chinese people would expect something like this [gestures towards the hotel room that we are in], but in Europe generally it is a lot smaller, rooms and beds and everything...”

(DMC Scandinavia\_DMC)

As elaborated earlier, advantages of Chinese tourists were that they often stayed in hotels outside the city centre and that they came in periods where other tourists did not. Disadvantages included their demand for low rates. The choice to stay outside city centres was in most cases made by tour operators, who wanted to combine the simultaneous demands for low rates and high standard. Both the Chinese tour operators and the hoteliers in Scandinavia explained the challenges they had met in aligning these demands. On one side, the representative of a tour operator for example explained that they saw four-star hotels as medium level in Scandinavia and that they used booking.com to locate 4-star hotels: “Most hotels in Scandinavia, we will choose 4-star. (...) In booking.com, we will find hotels for four star or if some groups they do not have so much money, then we will choose 3-star hotels. (...) Most is 4 star - medium level.” (Oriental Nordic\_TO/NicheWholesaler).

On the other side, a representative for Nordic Choice Hotels, one of the largest hotel chains in Scandinavia, explained that they do not use the star system, which was a challenge when dealing with the Chinese tour operators:

“... that is a challenge with the Chinese, they are very star focused, for the Comfort chain, we have decided for the OTA and so on, will be branded as a three star, however, many of the properties are four star (...) Then they say - no we cannot use it. (...) they check the websites, they go out on the OTA, Tripadvisor, wherever and they see ‘ok here it says four stars, ok’, but if it says three, they cannot. That is also a peculiar thing about the Chinese, they want four star, but they want to pay two or one star price.”

(NordicChoiceHotels\_Accommodation)

The same representative mentioned the booking patterns of the Chinese operators as a challenge:

“... they want the prices in advance, but they still try to get lower price and they try to get last minute bookings in, for groups, which is not very common in other markets. Normally they book far in advance. We have the Germans, they book one, five, two years in advance sometimes. And they don’t change. Where the Chinese, they can be looking for rooms for next week for a group of 50 or two groups. So that is different. It’s good, at the same time it’s a challenge, because it’s hard to plan for that and then we get, we need to say no too many times in my opinion. Which creates a bad.. They are used to it probably, but we prefer saying yes.”

(NordicChoiceHotels\_Accommodation)

As explained previously, the independent tourists would make use of OTAs to find their hotels. The representative from Ctrip explained what she prioritised when she recruited new hotels to their website:

“I will first, (...) we are close partners with booking.com. (...) So I could see the data report, to let me see, ok which hotel already have a quite good production. Then I will

want to change this hotel to our direct partnership hotel. This is the first thing. The second one is about the location. Which commercial area and which location is preferred by our Chinese costumers. Like the railway station, and near the shopping mall, near the famous tourist attractions. This is the things I will think about when I try to contact some hotels. The third one is the price, I think. From my side I could see most of the Chinese costumers will prefer to stay in 4 star hotels. Especially for Europe area, also for North Europe. (...) half of the costumers will choose to stay in the 4 star hotel. So, yeah, the 4 star hotel will be my first, will be my priority hotels that I try to contact. The last, but important, is the quality and the brand of these hotels.“

(Ctrip\_OTA)

From this, it is evident that OTAs share the traditional operators' preference for four-star hotels. This indicates that group tourists and independents share preferences on this issue as well. The major difference between the two was that the OTAs (who have both group and independent costumers) had a stronger focus on location, while the traditional operators focussed on price. This aligns well with the spectrum presented in the previous section between price/volume and experience/niche (p. 292).

### **7.3.2.1. Capacity**

When asked about challenges in working with the Scandinavian market, most of the traditional operators mentioned lack of capacity as a major challenge:

“The travel season is a little bit short because of the weather. So it means in the summer, sometimes the coach is not so cheap and it is not easy to get some resources, I mean accommodation, overnight cruise or something like that, you have to pay more for it.”

(CITS\_TO/TA)

“During the summer the hotels lack capacity, so Kuoni may change the hotels...”

(GrandVision\_Wholesaler)

“Icehotel, we will just try to sell it next year. Maybe if we cast a lot of money in TV commercials and papers, internet, everyone wants to do that. The thing is, if we got the capacity to match the demand? So if you push too much, I think many of the places in Scandinavia, they are not ready to take this huge number of visitors at once.”

(DMC Scandinavia\_DMC)

The suppliers in Scandinavia also recognised this issue:

“... it is actually now starting to be a problem to have the space, because they always require twin rooms and as it is in Scandinavia, we don't have twin rooms only in the hotels and if they cannot take that, its, its getting to be a problem to find the space for them.”

(ThonHotels\_Accommodation)

Some suppliers did not see it as a problem that capacity was lacking, but particularly the bigger chains saw it as a challenge for themselves as well:

“... we need more hotels and anyhow we are not able to take all the groups. So, it is a little bit scary what will happen in the future, because if they don't get more flight seats, more hotel capacity, they might change the routes, because it's not always obvious that they are staying in Finland. So, it's a little bit challenging. But let's see how it goes. We are also of course willing to invest in more hotels.”

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

The representative from CYTS explained that they prioritised price over location, because it was difficult to communicate the advantages of a good location compared to the advantage of a lower price. He also elaborated how capacity affected this, because the low capacity often meant that they could not choose the hotel they wanted:

Interviewer: Do you think if you raised the price a bit and give a better hotel, would they be more satisfied?

Interviewee: “Yes sure, but, when they choose the product, maybe they cannot see what kind of hotels, maybe we just say it is four star hotel. It is quite difficult to



describe that maybe our product is maybe 2000 Yuan more than the other product. But it is all four star. I cannot say that it is 10 kilometre maybe nearer than that hotel. There is also a technical difficulty for us. (...) We cannot choose which hotel I want to.”

Interviewer: Because of occupancy?

Interviewee: “Yes”

(CYTS\_TO/TA)

This example reflects how capacity issues often were the root or part of the reason for other challenges in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. A hotel representative for example explained that the reason why some tourists might be disappointed with their experience in the Fiord area could be that they did not actually stay there:

“What operators sell as a fjord hotel is very odd. It could be Geilo, and they call it Fjord area. And that is in the mountain area. So I can see that some of the clients can be disappointed, because it is not space enough in the fjord area, there’s not enough hotels. (...) it’s the incoming operator that kind of says its fjord-area, but it is really not.”

(ThonHotels\_Accomodation)

Different actors agreed that apart from extending capacity, which might be challenging because it is a seasonal issue, spreading tourists to more diverse destinations in Scandinavia could be part of a solution to the capacity issues. “... that is why they should maybe go a bit further up and further south, where you have the capacity (...) To have some Chinese there as well. But I think the marketing from the start was very fiord focused.” (ThonHotels\_Accomodation).

This section presents examples of how tourism distribution and in this case ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ is not designed or planned by the actors involved. Many of the decisions made by the actors and consequently the products available to the

tourists, come as the result of reactions to challenges related to supply, capacity and quality of products, rather than from open choices.

### 7.3.3. Seasonality

The third sub-factor under destination characteristics was seasonality. This factor covers the different challenges and opportunities that appeared as the result of the seasonality of Scandinavian destinations.

Although many actors mentioned it as an advantage that Chinese tourists generally travel all year, most would still arrive in the summer months:

“... it’s quite. How to say. Seasonable for the Chinese clients. All the persons are focusing on the summertime, in wintertime and autumn time, it’s quite little.”

(CYTS\_TO/TA)

“... we used to focus a lot on the summer, now we focus on winter, because summer sells itself.”

(FretheimHotel\_Accommodation)

The seasonality was part of the reason for the capacity issues described in the previous section:

“... they [hotels] could do quite good business in October, November or March, April. But then it is a problem with the city hotels, because they have their high season during that period. So then it is hard to get rooms in cities like Oslo, Bergen.”

(ThonHotels\_Accommodation)

The two main seasons in Scandinavia are the summer and the winter season. Generally, the tourists would go to the destinations in the north during winter and to the capital cities and surrounding areas in the south during summer. According to the representative from Tumlare, the reason for this was that the destinations had mistakenly, marketed these areas as respectively summer and winter destinations:

“... it has a lot to do with countries sales and marketing strategy overall in tourism. That lately, for the last 20 years, Visit Finland has been marketing Lapland as a winter destination mostly. And summer, that used to be the key season really, was kind of forgotten. And now, we know and of course we work together with them and so on. Trying to boost the summer, because for the players in tourism overall it would be essential to have business year round, not only for three four months. So I think it has to do with many different things. (...) The midnight sun could easily also be a nice product. But it has not been developed in the same way.”

(Tumlare\_DMC)

This issue was echoed by other respondents who were working to make tourists go north in summer and south in winter, and generally to travel year round:

“What we need is full year products, because Lapland is there 365 days a year (...) After the winter season there is a huge drop and some of the holders they need to close down because there is practically nobody (...) and then the summer of course is another season with the midnight sun and summer activities, but still there would be space for new costumers. (...) Now we try to make it vice versa. (...) We encourage the people to come to southern Finland on the dark months. We are trying to build up the programme so it is attractive to experience the darkness, so it can be also a positive thing.”

(StopoverFinland\_NicheDMC)

Some actors also elucidated how the different seasons attracted different kinds of tourists. The summer products and tourists were generally more generic and covered a larger geographical area during their visit, while the tourists visiting in wintertime came for deeper experiences and typically stayed in the same destinations for longer.

“Summer products are somehow different needs, different segments, partially as well. Then the winter is Northern lights, its experience. Difficult to say why, partly its different segments, and maybe there is enough to see in one country, they do consider

Scandinavian summer as one destination somehow, and then winter is totally different.”

(Tumlare\_DMC)

In terms of the visitors’ profile, the winter tourists often came from southern China, and came because they were not used to snow:

“... the winter products, I think it is more popular in the southern China. Because everyone wants to see something different. So in Beijing, the wintertime, not so fast seller as in south China.”

(CYTS\_TO/TA)

Overall, the actors with professional enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ agreed that seasonality affected their business significantly.

#### **7.3.4. China Readiness**

The concept of China Readiness has been used to discuss and describe how companies and destinations make specific changes to accommodate China inbound tourists (Jørgensen & Ren, 2015). China Readiness, the fourth sub-factor under Destination Characteristics, considers the degree to which the companies and destinations in Scandinavia had made such changes.

Generally, the bigger actors in Scandinavia, who had been dealing with Chinese group tourists for some time recognised the special needs of the Chinese tourists and adhered to them in the ways that they were able to or found reasonable:

“... we have started, this year, a China Ready Programme, concept in our hotels, (...) where we offer services for Chinese clients. So we have, for example, Chinese TV channels, we have welcome package when they come, we have information in Chinese, some signs and security information in Chinese, we have made breakfast for them, so they can find some familiar things, like their congee porridge and a selection

of different types of tea, and also this hot water is available everywhere, because they need to have this hot water (...). We also had education for our staff, so that they know how to treat Chinese people and a little bit (...) language. That's horrible to learn, but they can say 'Ni Hao' and these kinds of things.”

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

“Of course, they want the twin beds, they want water boiler, they want slippers. Those are things that we can do, those are not a problem. That is where we tweak a little bit, because it is normally not always in the standard equipment in the room. But of course we cater that to our client, so those are things we do different. And in some places we try to put up some signs in Chinese or some information, but they normally have a tour guide with them, who can explain things, and they are good at managing the group, normally.”

(NordicChoiceHotels\_Accommodation)

Most challenges appeared with smaller actors who had less experience with Chinese tourists or who were not particularly interested in China as a market. The latter were often niche actors with limited product offers, such as boutique hotels who did not need Chinese tourists. The ones, who were interested, but lacked experience, relied on the DMOs to educate them about the needs of Chinese tourists. The DMOs had taken this task upon themselves. They saw it as important to educate local actors about Chinese tourism, and make them “China ready”. This effort was, in most cases, led by inspiration from the Chinavia project:

“We have a destination development effort targeted towards Chinese guests. (...) there is the website, which is the first step if you had some Chinese tourists and you search for it, you might end up on our site, where there are different tools. Concrete tools like a small parlour for example (...). We have divided them into segments, both hotels, restaurants, attractions and retailers, where they can get tips, tricks and concrete tools to work with. There is for example also a sign bank for hotels (...). In addition we also

have China ready crash courses (...) courses of around 3 hours for different industries...”

(WOCO/Chinavia\_DMO)

“... the cultural differences and the communication gaps are still there. Especially now when there is a growth in Chinese visitors on Fyn. So that is why we, last year, we have held China ready crash courses (...) for some of our partners. Some of them think its good some of them think it is too basic. Because we have also different level of partners. Some of them are dealing with the Chinese for many years, and some of them are just beginning to deal with the Chinese.”

(DestinationFyn\_DMO)

“... we are addressing the practical issues already. Like last year we had this course for, how to cater for Chinese tourists, in hotels, different services. I think, quite many are trying to already do things better, have better service for Chinese.”

(VisitHelsinki\_DMO)

Apart from these changes to the product offer in hotels, the actors also agreed that experience products needed to be changed to accommodate the needs of Chinese travellers. The representatives from CYTS and China Bamboo Garden International for example explained that some good experience products were not good for Chinese guests, because they were too challenging:

“There are a lot of good experiences, or itineraries or activities that are very good but not so good for Chinese clients. Because for example some outdoor activities, some hiking, some fishing, some skiing. Many Chinese clients are not quite good at them. So I just add a little activities to my itineraries.”

(CYTS\_TO/TA)

“It is challenging for them, because they organize climbing mountain activities in the Fiord, it will take 10 hours. The Chinese tourists are not as healthy as the locals, so

they cannot spend 10 hours climbing mountains, so the company, they will not organize many airlines tickets for these kinds of trips.”

(CBGI\_Wholesaler)

To meet this challenge, the DMOs attempted to help the Scandinavian suppliers understand the needs of the Chinese tourists:

“... we will examine their products. Their services. To tell them whether there is a market need in China, whether your product, services fit, are suitable for the market. Or your products have to be innovated, or have to be improved in order to get business from China. Or if your product is so advanced, that the Chinese market is not ready yet.”

(STB\_DMO)

Finally, part of making Scandinavia “China ready” was to educate the operators and thus the tourists in China about what they could and should expect from a visit to Scandinavia. This was done by the DMOs, who acted as mediators between the Scandinavian suppliers and the Chinese operators, and by the tour guides, who acted on their own initiative:

“... its also communication with the tour operators, they have to adjust their expectations as well. (...) Sometimes the tour operators still expect. For instance if they bring a VIP group, they expect VIP treatment. But the culture is not like that. You don't get VIP treatment on Egeskov just because you are a rich Chinese. (...) We will try to educate our partners and learn Chinese culture. But at the same time we will also have to educate the tour operators, that this is what you can expect when you go to our partner.”

(DestinationFyn\_DMO)

“... that is part of the job for us, I think, for the tour leader. You need to guide them to experience and know these places. For example, in my group, there were quite a lot of young people or middle aged people, when they join the group they will tell me, I

would like to do shopping in Scandinavia for Gucci for Louis Vitton for something like this. I say, sorry you came to the wrong place. Because for Scandinavian people, that is not what they are most interested in (...). So what you came here for, one part is for the history, the other part is for the natural scenery.”

(TourLeader04)

The issues related to China readiness could not be considered as factors that decided whether a Chinese tourist would visit Scandinavia in the first place. Rather, these elements helped improve the experience for the tourists at the destination(s). The analysis also showed that it did affect whether a tour operator would choose a certain supplier or perhaps even a destination. In addition, the significance of word-of-mouth as a factor affecting ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ also gives importance to China readiness, as the experience a tourists has will affect whether they will recommend the destination to others.

#### **7.4 Externals**

The fourth main factor in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ concern the outside or external aspects that directly or indirectly affect ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. This factor is therefore dubbed Externals..

##### **7.4.1. Scandinavian Price-level**

The first sub-factor under Externals was the price-level in Scandinavia. As elucidated earlier (p. 292), price was a main factor for Chinese tourists and thus for Chinese tour operators and vice versa. The price-level in Scandinavia is relatively high compared to other places in Europe: “The hotels, coach and salary of the driver's price is higher than other places.” (GrandVision\_Wholesaler). This affected almost every aspect of



‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. As already explained, the price level affected the type of tourists who visited Scandinavia, as they were of higher income levels on average. For group tours, the high price-level affected all aspects of the tour, such as the choice of coach company:

“It’s quite hard I would say because Chinese group arrangers they need really the best price, which is kind of hard in Scandinavia, so, we try different ways to get it cheaper. The busses from Estonia.”

(DMC Scandinavia\_DMC)

The hotels and places the tourists stayed:

“... they want the higher standard, but they don’t want to pay for it (...) that is actually why a lot of groups end up in Gardamoen area, not only with us but also with other chains. A lot of Chinese out there.”

(ThonHotels\_Accommodation)

The choice of Chinese tour leaders instead of local tour guides with more in-depth knowledge about the destination(s) and attraction(s):

“... they bring guides that they found themselves, because they are cheap, who have no idea (...), because they avoid, the educated competent guide, as they don’t want to pay for it. We experience things like that all the time, that they don’t understand that labour costs money in Europe. (...) That affects the quality and we are sad about that, but we cannot really control it, other than telling them that we are dissatisfied...”

(EgeskovCastle\_Attraction)

Even the size of the smaller, more customised groups were affected: “... we have small groups but you know because the cost in your countries is very high. So usually we will persuade people to collect together at least maybe 15 or 20 people (...) Otherwise the profit should be very limited.” (CITS\_TO/TA)

The price-level in Scandinavia also affected the independent tourists. Some for example explained that they changed their normal travel practices because of it; others that they rarely had local food as a result:

Interviewer: Would you say that the way you travelled in terms of the type of accommodation and your budget and so on, was that the same for Norway and Denmark as it was for the other countries [in Europe]?

Interviewee: “No, because Nordic countries are much more expensive, so we will choose like cheaper accommodation or cheaper transportation.”

(Tourist\_08)

“... generally the price for everything is expensive and for the restaurant generally. If I have a dinner it is more than 100 or 200 crowns, and the food. To be candid, it's not so delicious. But it's so expensive!”

(Tourist\_11)

All these aspects affected the tourists' experience and 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' as they generally decreased the quality of the overall product and forced both group and individual tourists to make choices that they might not otherwise have made.

#### **7.4.2. Economic Climate**

The second sub-factor under External was the economic climate between the countries. The economic climate in a host market affects the exchange rates and the disposable income of its citizens and thus their opportunities for travel (Song, Witt, & Li, 2008). This was also visible in the case of 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. The improving economic climate of China was a primary reason for the increasing outbound tourism in general and to Scandinavia in particular (see China Outbound Tourism - Market Growth p. 21). In turn, this increase was a primary reason for the

Scandinavian suppliers' interest in the market, as this was based on its potential and the tourists' purchasing power:

“For the Chinese guests I see a lot of changes in the ways they act, in the ways they dress, its more modern. (...) They increasingly come with children, participate in activities. There is also a rise in individuals, who rent a car. They bring a guide. Of course its people who have money.”

(VisitFlam\_DMO/Attraction)

The fact that ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ is somewhat dependent on continuous growth in the Chinese economy could be considered a weakness in the market. Especially considering the recent slowdown in the growth of the Chinese economy (Trading Economics, 2016). However, it seemed that the interviewed actors did not worry much about this, as they perceived the Chinese middle class to already be of a big enough size to make the market attractive:

“... the slowdown will be on produce, state owned companies etc. but spending, specifically on hobbies, will not suffer much under that I think. Because the middle class is so economically sound, the house is paid for, the income is stabile, so it will still grow. And many of them are willing to spend money on travel. It is a travel hungry people, you can say, they are very interested in what is happening outside China. (...) Plus, it is also an important social factor. The element of self development, that you also have in western culture is also present in China.”

(Albatros\_NicheWholesaler)

The same actor also argued that the strengthening of the Chinese Renminbi made up for some of the lost growth, because the Chinese can get more for their money when they travel abroad.

### 7.4.3. Policy, Legislation and Political Climate

The third important sub-factor under Externals was the effects of the general political climate between Scandinavian destinations and China, as well as more specific policy and legislation on ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’.

#### 7.4.3.1. The Effects of Policy and Legislation

The policies and legislation that most respondents mentioned as important were those relating to president Xi Jinping’s anticorruption campaign. The campaign started after the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress in 2012 and had since enforced, updated and added to existing legislation to combat bribery and corruption in China (Junfeng Chang, Gan, & Zhao, 2015). A number of interviewees explained how the campaign had forced them to change the focus of their company entirely. One interviewee explained:

“Before our company only focused on business travel - when Chinese government travel to Scandinavia to have meetings with different companies or city hall. Before it was things like that. (...) But now that is very difficult, because China has very tight rules about that kind of group travel outside China. (...) we have been forced to change our focus to leisure groups.”

(NordEU\_DMC)

Another interviewee supported this view and added that the increase in Chinese families travelling (semi-)independently was a main reason that their company had been able to stay afloat, as it has allowed them to pivot their business towards this market:

“The government regulations. I think, yes, that is the more serious problem, and it is really like the earthquake of the travelling market, the tourist market. (...) It is a lucky thing that a lot of Chinese families some middle and rich people, they will not join the ADS groups.”

(Oriental Nordic\_TO/NicheWholesaler)

According to some interviewees, the corruption laws had also rubbed off on the general conduct of private companies, who were attempting to avoid blatant extravagance: "... now we got harder and harder controls on the government visit and stuff like that. Even the big companies, they try to reduce the cost. All the expensive things, so we do have less profit on that of course." (DMC Scandinavian\_DMC).

The tour leaders also felt the effects of the corruption law. One of them explained that: "... before 2013, most groups, they are from companies, they are businessmen and they are governors from China. But since 2013, less and less, this kind of people, but more and more normal people." (TourGuide).

Another example of general legislation affecting outbound tourism was the Chinese labour law. A DMO respondent highlighted such issues, he stated that:

"... the central government has already reinforced the policy or the law that says that employees are entitled to paid holidays. However, even though it has been in the labour law in China for many years, this term has no teeth, that is why a lot of private companies or local organizations, they do not offer paid leave for their full-time employees. That is why the government is trying to reinforce this in the law, in order to give more, try to push the market a bit. So that people have the time, and also the money to travel around."

(STB\_DMO)

These examples illustrate how policy and legislation not directly related to tourism may have a substantial impact on 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'.

Interestingly, the policies and legislation most often mentioned in the existing literature - the ADS scheme and the Tourism Law of the People's Republic of China

(see Chinese Tourism Policy p. 14), were not given much lib service by the interviewees.

For ADS, it seemed that it was now regarded more as an integrated condition, than a piece of legislation. Perhaps because of that, it was not regarded as a challenge. This was evident in the ways that the respondents had adopted the term to describe a certain kind of group package tourist: "... we got involved in some of the ADS groups, for the common Chinese people." (DMC Scandinavian\_DMC). "It is a lucky thing that a lot of Chinese families some middle and rich people, they will not join the ADS groups." (Oriental Nordic\_TO/NicheWholesaler). Although the interviewees did not mention it directly as a challenge, it was clear from the interviews that the ADS scheme had a very strong impact on 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia', since the tour operators had to follow specific rules in order to operate. These rules might for example be part of the reason that the traditional operators in China were still dominating, as international companies were not allowed to operate tours on their own: "... we are not allowed to make direct for leisure groups. We can only do it as local arrangements. So the guests come from the big travel agencies in China" (NordeU\_DMC).

As mentioned in the literature review (p. 17), The Tourism Law of the People's Republic of China was hailed as a game changer in various media and by academics. However, this law was not mentioned as important by the interviewees. As also noted in the literature review, the impact of the Chinese tourism law was stronger in short haul destinations, than in their long haul equivalents. This may be a reason why the law seemed to have little impact on the interviewees.

This study indicates that the corruption law, which has not received much attention in tourism research, was more impactful on 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' than the

Tourism Law of the People's Republic of China, which has received much attention. This draws attention to the importance of understanding how general policy and legislation outside the realm of tourism has direct effects on tourism distribution.

#### 7.4.3.2. Visa Issues

As it is the case for travel between many destinations, visa related issues also impacted 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. Many actors mentioned that getting a visa to travel to Scandinavia could be difficult. First because potential travellers personally had to go to one of the relatively few visa offices in China to get it:

"The challenges are not on the local services or local things. It is in here. It is hard to get the visa, because only Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou have visa offices. Therefore, tourists have to fly there to apply. This is a challenge."

(GrandVision\_Wholesaler)

Second, the requirements to get the visa were seen as harsh. One tourist for example gave the difficulties in obtaining a visa as a main reason that he might not go back to Scandinavia, even though he wanted to:

"... I do wish I can travel back. But the thing is. I do not have time. The second thing is I have to apply for the visa. Every time the thing comes to visa, it is like, maybe not.. And also the money. (...) You still need to hand in your application with the certification of your working status and also your banking information, all the transactions in the recent three months and they have to be translated to English. And after that I think also certifications. Application fees and many many documents. Your working status, the company has to show that you have the holiday starting from one day to another date and during this time period you are an employee of my company. And also the business license, you know every time you have to go to the company's like business license, some kind of thing that the company won't like to give to you. So not all the company want you to apply the visa under your name."

(Tourist\_05)

This quote illustrates some of the difficulties in obtaining the visa. A major obstacle for this particular tourist was the fact that it required his company to provide documents that they did not like to deliver. From this, it is worth noting that some visa related issues have far-reaching consequences that may not be immediately visible, when the rules are put into place. Generally, visa related issues were regarded as troublesome, but as something, which it was difficult to change.

#### **7.4.3.3. The Effects of Political Climate**

The study reveals that in addition to official policy and legislation, ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ was also affected by the political climate between the countries. The interviewees explained how unofficial politically motivated decrees or appeals issued by the Chinese government affected their work. The interviews highlighted various examples of this. The most prominent example resulted from the issuance of the Nobel Peace Prize to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo in 2010. According to both Scandinavian and Chinese interviewees, this resulted in unofficial pleas from the government to limit tourism to Norway:

Interviewee: “It is an intense political issue between China and Norway. (...) Maybe some kind of government or something will say they do not want the Chinese to go to this country, but we still do the product. So, every year maybe we will have a special period for doing the product under the table. (...) The government will not forbid the clients to go there, they will forbid us. So maybe the clients cannot search the products on the website or the advertisements.”

Interviewer: So they have to come to you in person or via telephone?

Interviewee: “Yes, yes, (...) but it won’t influence the market. It won’t”

(CYTS\_TO/TA)

Another respondent explained:



Interviewee: “Because Norway gave the Nobel Prize, the Chinese government ask the company not to add Norway to their trips. But it is just in private. Not public. So it has not influenced very much. We were recommended to do it, but we did not.”

Interviewer: Did any companies change because of this?

Interviewee: “Maybe some companies changed, but ours did not.”

(CBGI\_Wholesaler)

The representative from Innovation Norway explained how being part of a bigger Scandinavian destination had helped in this regard. On a practical level, because tourists could apply for visa in other countries and then go to Norway. In terms of marketing, because they could sell themselves under the Scandinavian umbrella and thus avoid some of the sanctions:

“... we are in a special situation because of the Nobel Peace Prize, there is a political situation between Norway and China, which have produced challenges, so for us it has been good to have focused on Northern Europe.”

(InnovationNorway\_DMO)

Although the specific sanctions towards Norway was lifted at the time of writing (after 6 years), this finding still illustrates the potential importance of the political climate between Scandinavia and China. It suggests a vulnerability in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, but the presented example also shows how companies and destinations may overcome such difficulties. The representative from Visit Flam in Norway explained that they had not suffered from these issues:

“No, there was a lot of focus on it for a time, while we were in China. ‘Now it will be very difficult’ and so on. But we do not see any effect. The Chinese are very good at getting around things like that - money talks.”

(VisitFlam\_DMO/Attraction)

The representative of Visit Norway supported this. He argued:

“It is a bit special because many of the tour operators and especially the big tour operators, they are fully or partly state-owned but they do sell trips to Norway. I think it is because they are pragmatic. They know it would be more difficult to sell trips to Scandinavia if Norway is not part of the package. (...) There has been a couple of dips when they have gotten very strict orders not to sell, but then it quickly normalizes after that.”

(InnovationNorway\_DMO)

Overall, the analysis of policy, legislation and political climate show that these aspects may significantly influence ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ and that they are difficult to control or change by the actors involved. However, it also shows that in many cases the parties involved have been able to find ways to overcome the difficulties presented to them and that both the Chinese and Scandinavian actors have been interested in finding ways to do so.

#### **7.4.4. Safety**

Safety and security are regarded as some of the most important factors in China outbound tourism in general (Becken, 2003; Kim et al., 2005; Li et al., 2011; Sparks & Pan, 2009; Yu & Weiler, 2001). This was also the case in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. The fourth and final sub-factor under Externals was safety and security at the Scandinavian destinations.

According to both Scandinavian and Chinese actors, Chinese tourists generally considered Scandinavia as a safe destination:

“They perceive Scandinavia to be very safe. That means for example South Africa has difficulties because they think it is unsafe, Africa is unsafe in general, the middle-east is unsafe, also India to some degree, southern Europe also a bit, France a bit. But

Denmark, Sweden, Norway seems like a safe place to be. Now we have had some problems in Copenhagen with people stealing, but it is not muggings.”

(Albatros\_NicheWholesaler)

The point that was made most by different interviewees was that Scandinavia was safe compared to other Western European countries. This was described by a tour leader in the following quote:

Interviewer: With your experience. What would you say that the biggest difference is between taking a group to Scandinavia and taking one to Western Europe or Eastern Europe?

Interviewee: “I think compared with Western Europe it is a little easier. First, the security is better even recently we do have some problem, some pickpocket or something, like the immigrants to Scandinavia, making the situation a little worse. But generally speaking Scandinavia is much safer than Paris or Italy...”

(TourLeader\_04)

In addition to the general feeling of safety from crime, a number of actors mentioned that Scandinavia felt relatively safer, compared to other Western European destinations, because the tourists perceived the risk of terrorism to be slighter. In explaining that she actually preferred to go to other countries in Western Europe, a tourist interviewee for example stated: “I think it is good to travel there [Western Europe including France and Spain], but the terrorism. Maybe Nordic countries are better now.” (Tourist\_06). The three representatives from large hotel chains all supported this, as they explained that they had seen increased bookings as the result of the terror incidents in other parts of Europe:

“Due to the terrorist attacks and so forth, in what they call Europe, people are coming to Scandinavian and the Nordics instead, we have seen a shift there, just recently.”

(NordicChoiceHotels\_Accommodation)

“I also think that a lot of agents in China, they have made tours to Scandinavia instead of Europe, because of these terror things happening as well. So, I think that some of the increase is due to that. Because Scandinavia is safe and they don’t want to go to France or Belgium, because that we can also see, because we have hotels in Bruxelles, that the trip [occupancy] is really really bad!”

(ThonHotels\_Accommodation)

These quotes reflect how Chinese tourists and tour operators in some instances do not perceive Scandinavia to be part of what they regard as Europe or even Western Europe. When probed, the respondent from Restel Hotel Group specifically explained that this was the case:

Interviewer: So, so far, knock on wood, the things that has been happening south of here, has given you more...

Interviewee: “More [guests], yeah, that is it.”

Interviewer: Because I imagine one of two things would happen. Either you are seen as part of Europe...

Interviewee: “Yeah”

Interviewer: And they stay away...

Interviewee: “Yeah”

Interviewer: Or they still want to go...?

Interviewee: “Yeah, some of them they don’t really understand that there is a 1000 km between Nice and Helsinki, so they think that Europe is.. But some really understand that when you go North.. So Scandinavia in general have a quite good rumour for security at the moment. But of course you never know what will happen in the future.”

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

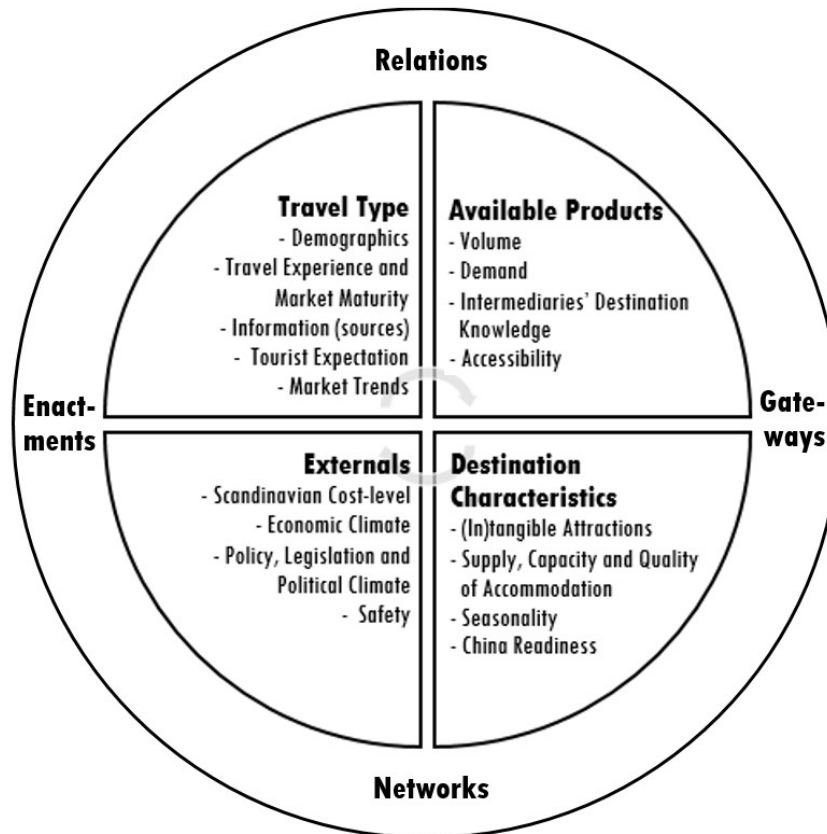
The final comment by the interviewee highlights the fragility of the current advantages that Scandinavia may draw from not having experienced larger acts of terrorism. Similarly, more incidents of theft may also make the Scandinavian destinations seem

more unsafe, although the fact that the tourists perceive safety relatively to other destinations in Europe indicates that this might not change in the near future.

### 7.5 Relations, Networks and Factors Affecting ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’

The previous chapter explained how ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ is affected by various relations, gateways and enactments that appear within the distribution network(s). This chapter has laid out the specific factors and sub-factors that affect ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. In combining the results of these analyses, a conceptual model, which illustrates the different aspects that affect ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, can be drawn (Figure 20).

Figure 21: Factors Affecting ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’



The figure provides an overview of the four interrelated main factors and corresponding sub-factors that affect 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' and reminds that these factors are dependent on the actor-network(s) that they exist within, the relations and gateways that shape these networks, and the different ways that 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' is enacted by the various actors. This model and the analysis that substantiates it is the first of its kind for 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. For practitioners and researchers with interest in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia', it offers unique insights, as well as a tool that illustrates the different aspects they need to focus on, if they wish to better understand and/or engage with the phenomenon. On a broader level, the model and the analysis, is a step towards a better understanding of China outbound tourism in specific contexts and of tourism distribution in general. The model can also be regarded as the first step towards a model that provides an overview of the important factors in China outbound tourism. In order to develop into such a universal model, it will have to undergo further scrutiny. This would ideally consist of comparison with other qualitative studies in other cases to expand and deepen the content, and subsequent quantitative testing to ensure its validity.

## 7.6 Tabulated Summary of Findings – Factors (Table 16)

Subject	Main Findings
<b>Travel Type (p. 201)</b>	
- Demographics	<p>Three demographic characteristics stood out as important for ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- age</li> <li>- income level</li> <li>- place of origin (in China)</li> </ul> <p>Tourists were generally young (under 45). The age range was widening, as Scandinavia was becoming better known as a travel destination.</p> <p>The income level for Chinese tourists to Scandinavia was relatively high. Mainly because the price of a trip to Scandinavia tended to be more expensive than a similar trip to other places in Europe</p> <p>The higher average income for Chinese tourists to Scandinavia meant that the typical Chinese tourists in Scandinavia were somewhat different from those going to other places in Europe. Like China outbound tourists in general, Chinese tourists to Scandinavia were “money rich”, but “time poor”.</p> <p>Some regarded tourists’ place of origin as the most important factor in predicting Chinese tourists’ behaviour. The most significant difference was between tourists from the first tier cities primarily on the south east coast of China and those from the rest of the country.</p>
- Travel Experience and Market Maturity	<p>Known behaviours related to market immaturity of China outbound tourists, were also present in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. These included tendency to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- travel in groups</li> <li>- exhibit particular behaviour</li> <li>- have specific requirements in terms of language, food and other basic needs</li> </ul> <p>Most intermediaries and suppliers preferred mature tourists to avoid such issues. Chinese tourists to Scandinavia were considered more mature on average than those to other destinations. The reasons for this were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The price-level in Scandinavia, which meant that only more affluent travellers could afford to go</li> <li>- That Scandinavia was not a first tier destination, which meant that most guests were relatively experienced travellers</li> </ul> <p>This type of traveller was increasingly accompanied by a parallel stream of Chinese tourists, emanating from second and third tier cities, who were travelling to Scandinavia as their first overseas destination. Although the market is increasingly maturing, these new tourists still exhibited some of the challenging behaviours already described and therefore required special treatment.</p> <p>When combined, these simultaneous movements could be summarized as three tendencies in China outbound tourism and Chinese tourism to Scandinavia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the rise of (semi-)independent tourists who need little or no special treatment;</li> <li>- the rise of group tourists, who are increasingly maturing and therefore need less special treatment</li> <li>- the rise of first time travellers, who are inexperienced and therefore need a high degree of special treatment</li> </ul>
- Information (Sources)	Chinese people generally know little about Scandinavia. This may be a reason that off- and online word of mouth (WOM) was

	<p>found to be particularly important as information sources in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ for both group travellers and independents.</p> <p>Online WOM inspiration and information primarily came from travel websites that promoted user generated content. Reliable and detailed information was important because the tourists found meticulous planning to be an important aspect of any trip abroad.</p> <p>Scandinavian suppliers were challenged in supplying such information because of the language barrier and technical issues. The Chinavia project was important because of its ability to provide such information.</p> <p>Cooperation with famous bloggers and celebrities was applied in order to indirectly provide information and impressions of Scandinavia via online channels.</p>
- Tourist Expectation	<p>The lacking knowledge about Scandinavia meant that the tourists generally had moderate expectations and were open minded in their approach to the Scandinavian destination(s).</p> <p>Many tourists were looking for natural attractions, but came away positively surprised by other things, such as things associated with daily life, environment and lifestyle.</p>
- Market Trends	<p>Many interviewees agreed on current trends in China outbound travel and their importance. These trends included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Search for novel destinations, because of increasing travel experience</li> <li>- Longer holidays abroad instead of domestic weekend trips</li> <li>- Search for self-development, which included search for lifestyle oriented travel</li> <li>- Search for clean environment to contrast the current environmental situation in China</li> </ul> <p>The reliance on trends in the market meant that many things were out of the suppliers and marketers control. A positive side of this for destinations in Scandinavia was that many of the traits of Scandinavian destinations aligned well with the current trends in the Chinese market.</p>
<b>Available Products (p. 219)</b>	
- Volume	<p>In terms of both group and independent travel, a certain volume was needed to justify the infrastructure necessary for tourism to happen.</p> <p>In some destinations, the number of Chinese tourists was already high. In most destinations, however, the numbers were still relatively low compared to other markets.</p> <p>The relatively low numbers were made up by the huge perceived potential in the Chinese market, by the Scandinavian suppliers and Chinese intermediaries.</p>
- Demand	<p>Demand was an important factor on two levels in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- demand for Scandinavia (or similar destinations) among Chinese tourists.</li> <li>- demand for Chinese tourists among Scandinavian destinations</li> </ul> <p>In addition to the potential numbers and spending of Chinese tourists, the demand was driven by other factors exclusive to Chinese tourists, these included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- that they visited at times, where it was difficult to sell products to traditional costumers</li> <li>- that they stayed in properties outside city centres</li> <li>- that they viewed tourism products differently than other costumers, which meant that Scandinavian cities could for example be sold as nature destinations</li> </ul>



- Accessibility	<p>Infrastructure such as flight connections to and from China was found to be important to the availability and design of products and packages. So was the internal Scandinavian infrastructure.</p> <p>Transportation was as challenge in Scandinavia, because of the distances between destinations as well as the price-level. Growing focus on experiences over price among tourists and to some degree intermediaries, as a result, meant that operators increasingly switched coach transport with faster or more experiential transportation options.</p> <p>Accessibility was a major factor when suppliers chose which tourists to focus on. Less accessible attractions would for example tend to focus more on independent travellers.</p>
- Intermediaries' Destination Knowledge	<p>The structural, cultural and geographical distance between Scandinavia and China meant that it was difficult for tour operators and travel agents in China to keep up to date with product developments in Scandinavia.</p> <p>The lack of knowledge was a primary reason for the frequent use of DMC and DMOs as gateways between the Chinese and Scandinavian actors.</p> <p>In terms of product development, the lack of knowledge meant that it was difficult to change existing programmes and that many actors sold similar products. This was changing somewhat, as Scandinavia became a more popular destination among Chinese tourists, and as the Chinese tourists demanded more variation in the travel itineraries.</p>
<b>Destination Characteristics (p. 229)</b>	
- (In)tangible Attractions	<p>Nature was considered as a main draw when choosing Scandinavia as a travel destination. Other traditional highlight attractions were also mentioned as important by both tourists and tourism industry actors.</p> <p>Some actors highlighted how the main attractions of Scandinavia were the things that made it different from China, from Europe and the rest of the world. Some respondents were satisfied with these sights after their visit, others were in some cases disappointed.</p> <p>Although the traditional attractions were revered by some tourists, their role might be smaller than expected, when compared to other certain alternative attractions.</p> <p>A number of interviewees directly or indirectly described Scandinavia as 'special' compared to other, more visited destinations in Europe. What made Scandinavia 'special' was the overlap between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'Environment', which included clean air and water, lack of crowds, architecture and perceived safety</li> <li>- 'Lifestyle', which included perceived friendliness and life enjoyment of locals, perceived relaxed lifestyle, and good social welfare systems</li> </ul> <p>The attractiveness of Scandinavia because of this blend of 'environment' and 'lifestyle' is significantly different from other destinations in Europe, where traditional sightseeing have been the main draw.</p>
- Supply, Capacity and Quality of Accommodation	<p>Chinese tourists and thus Chinese tour operators had high demands in terms of hotel standards. These demands did not align with their expectations in terms of price. Both the Chinese tour operators and the hoteliers in Scandinavia explained the challenges in aligning these demands.</p> <p>The compromise in aligning these demands was that Chinese tour operators often chose hotels outside the city centres. This was seen as a benefit by some hotel suppliers, who otherwise had difficulties selling rooms in such hotels.</p>

	<p>Capacity was a major challenge in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. Low capacity meant that tour operators could not choose the hotel they wanted, which, in turn meant that some tourists were disappointed.</p> <p>Many of the decisions made by the actors involved in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ were not made freely. Rather, they were reactions or compromises to challenges related to supply, capacity and quality of products.</p>
- Seasonality	<p>The fact that Chinese tourists generally travel all year was mentioned as an advantage. Despite this, most would still arrive in the summer months. This was part of the reason for the capacity issues described above.</p> <p>The two main seasons in Scandinavia were summer and winter. Generally, the Chinese tourists would go to the destinations in the north during winter and to the capital cities and surrounding areas in the south during summer.</p> <p>The different seasons also attracted different tourists. The summer products and tourists were generally more generic and covered a larger geographical area during their visit, while the tourists visiting in winter time came for deeper experiences and typically stayed in the same destinations for longer.</p> <p>Some Scandinavian suppliers were attempting to turn these tendencies to combat the capacity issues.</p>
- China Readiness	<p>Generally, the bigger actors in Scandinavia, who had been dealing with Chinese group tourists for some time recognised the special needs of the Chinese tourists and adhered to them in the ways that they were able to or found reasonable.</p> <p>Most challenges appeared with smaller actors who had less experience with Chinese tourists or who were not particularly interested in China as a market.</p> <p>The ones, who were interested, but lacked experience, relied on the DMOs to educate them about the needs of Chinese tourists. This effort was, in most cases, led by inspiration from the Chinavia project.</p> <p>Apart from smaller changes to signage and hotel facilities, knowledge about the preference and ability of the average Chinese tourist was also important in order to be “China ready”. Some good experience products were for example not good for Chinese guests, because they were too challenging.</p> <p>Another part of making Scandinavia “China ready” was to educate the operators and consequently prepare the tourists in China about what they could and should expect from a visit to Scandinavia.</p> <p>The issues related to China readiness were not directly decisive in when a tourists chose whether to go to Scandinavia. Despite this, they were still important because of the significance of word-of-mouth as a factor affecting ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’.</p>
<b>Externals (p. 255)</b>	
- Scandinavian Price-level	<p>Price was a main factor for Chinese tourists and thus for Chinese tour operators and vice versa. The price-level in Scandinavia was relatively high compared to other places in Europe. This affected almost every aspect of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, for groups as well as for independents, the affected aspects included choice of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- transportation</li> <li>- Chinese tour leaders instead of local guides</li> <li>- the size of tour groups</li> <li>- food (some mentioned that they avoided local food because of the price)</li> </ul>

- Economic Climate	The improving economic climate of China was a primary reason for the increasing outbound tourism in general and to Scandinavia in particular. In turn, this increase was a primary reason for the Scandinavian suppliers' interest in the market, as this was based on its potential and the tourists' purchasing power.
- Policy, Legislation and Political Climate	The policies and legislation that most respondents mentioned as important were those relating to president Xi Jinping's anticorruption campaign. This had forced some companies to drastically change the way they conducted business, and others to close.
	The policies and legislation most often mentioned in the existing literature - the ADS scheme and the Tourism Law of the People's Republic of China, were not pointed out as important by the interviewees.
	<p>Visa issues were particularly important to independents in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. The interviewees considered the visa process as difficult:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- because potential travellers personally had to go to one of the relatively few visa offices in China to get it</li> <li>- because the requirements to get the visa were seen as harsh</li> </ul>
	Unofficial politically motivated decrees or appeals issued by the Chinese government also affected 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' to some degree.
- Safety	Safety and security were regarded as some of the most important factors in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. This was a benefit because Scandinavia was considered as a safe destination by the Chinese tourists and intermediaries.
	Scandinavia was considered as safe from crime and also as relatively safe from terrorism, compared to other Western European destinations.
	The current advantages that Scandinavia may draw from not having experienced larger acts of terrorism are naturally fragile. Similarly, more incidents of theft may also make the Scandinavian destinations seem more unsafe. However, the fact that the tourists perceived safety relatively to other destinations in Europe indicates that this might not change in the near future.

## **CHAPTER 8:**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter summarises and discusses the findings presented in the three previous analysis chapters (Chapter 5, 6 and 7).

#### **8.1 Multiplicity in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’**

The initial analysis presented in Chapter 5 focussed on the basic enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. This analysis confirmed the argument made in the literature review (Chapter 3) of this thesis, namely that a deep understanding of tourism distribution cannot be gained solely through a supplier oriented, economically focussed channel approach. The examples displayed the importance of a multiplicity-based approach, where tourism distribution is investigated through the different enactments that appear as part of the data analysis. This insight was carried over to the second part of the analysis, which investigated the networks and relations involved in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’.

#### **8.2 Networks and Relations in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’**

Chapter 6 provided explanation and analysis of the distribution network that shape ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. It found that the network was enacted as three relatively stable clusters, in which actors shared common practices, challenges and/or traits – the Chinese Market Cluster, the China Travel Industry Cluster and the Intra-destination Cluster. Relations within these clusters were identified and investigated in depth; so were the gateways that connected them.

Despite current trends in other markets (Law, 2009; Law & Lau, 2005; Tse, 2003), the analysis found that traditional operators were still crucial in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. This finding aligns well with previous studies of China outbound tourism to other destinations (Cooper et al., 2006; Hills & Cairncross, 2011; Law et al., 2004). It indicates that Scandinavia is similar to other destinations in this regard and that traditional operators continue to be important in China outbound tourism. The findings also showed that online intermediaries are central and increasing in importance, due to the rise of FIT in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. This also reflected the findings in the broader literature on China outbound tourism (Daniele, 2004; Dilts & Prough, 2003; Law, Leung, & Wong, 2004; Tse, 2003). Reasons for the continuing importance of traditional operators and OTAs in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ were: their extensive reach into a market that was regarded as difficult to navigate and penetrate; visa related issues; price competitiveness; Chinese tourists’ need for security and lack of trust; and increasing need for diversification of products, which empowers the actors that know most about the tourists and the market. The last point was particularly important in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, because the market was perceived as difficult to grasp and penetrate.

Market knowledge appeared as one of the most important commodities flowing between actors in the network. Based on the general development in China outbound tourism, it is likely that this knowledge will only become more important and valuable, as the Chinese market develops and diversifies further as predicted by previous literature (Arlt, 2013; Chen, Li, Zhang, & Hu, 2016).

DMOs and DMCs played important roles in the network. They were enacted as mediators between the Scandinavian suppliers and the China Travel Industry. An important part of this role was to acquire and disseminate knowledge about the Chinese

market to the Scandinavian suppliers. Similarly, they were also expected to inform the China Travel Industry about product developments in the Scandinavian destinations. A potential problem in the way market knowledge was acquired and disseminated within this structure, was that most of the market knowledge coming from the traditional operators and DMCs was based on sales numbers. This information only evaluates the performance of things that already exist, which creates a risk that reproduction of “safe” products is preferred over invention or innovation of new ones. A practice, which was described as present and problematic by some interviewees.

Apart from knowledge, the relations within and between the network clusters took many different forms. Examples included direct cooperation on product development or marketing efforts, as well as more one-sided marketing or sales relations. The many-faceted ways that the various actors related within the distribution network, as well as the many aspects apart from money that connected them, reflect one of the things often ignored in the economically focussed approaches to tourism distribution, mentioned in the literature review (e.g. Buhalis, 2000; Kotler et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2009).

Because of the size of the Chinese market and the many difficulties in accessing it, actor cooperation across local, national and supra-national destinations was regarded as essential. Strong gatekeepers between network clusters were needed to match the powerful traditional operators. In the case of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, this created high dependency on DMOs and DMCs as mediators and in turn created structural distance between Scandinavian suppliers and actors in the China Travel Industry. Challenges in direct contact between Scandinavian suppliers and Chinese intermediaries were main reasons for the importance of mediating actors in the

distribution network. The more persistent challenges were related to operations, rather than to culture, which existing literature has often given as a main challenge in studies of China outbound tourism (Jin et al., 2014; Kwek & Lee, 2010; Mok & Defranco, 2000; Sun et al., 2015). Such operational challenges included vastly different working patterns, which resulted in late payments and last minute changes.

A negative consequence of the reliance on DMOs and DMCs was that many actors spent considerable effort gaining the favour of these actors, which could have been used to gain new ground in the marketplace. It also created increasing competition at the destinations. Together, the focus on cooperation combined with competition created network clusters that were fuelled by cooptation. This can be seen as a healthy way to cooperate, while forcing actors to stay alert (Kylanen & Mariani, 2012; Kylänen & Rusko, 2011; Youcheng Wang & Krakover, 2008). However, some challenges also appeared. Cooptation meant that the suppliers were organised in some of their efforts, but at the same time “betting on the same horse”, as many efforts were not organised. A concrete example of this was that almost all local destinations were basing their effort on gaining the “the extra night” from the tourists who already visited, although it was obvious that the potential number of extra nights pr. tourist was limited and that only some (few) actors would win out in the end.

The inclusion of non-human actors in the network revealed that a primary actor in the distribution network were the yearly workshops held by the national DMOs. These events opened temporary gateways between the network clusters and helped enhance and strengthen relations within the Intra-destination Clusters. Concretely, these workshops were essential in building cooperative relations between actors in the local and national destinations. It offered them a common goal and a venue and to share

ideas and develop shared products. The temporary gateways that the workshops created were also essential to the relations in the more stable parts of the distribution network. This was one of the few venues where Scandinavian suppliers and actors from the China Travel Industry could meet to form and nurture relations. The national DMOs arranged the workshop and selected which Chinese companies that could participate. Because of this, the national DMOs to a large extent framed the possible B2B relations in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'.

Combined with limited resources, the difficulties in reaching the Chinese market and the strong traditional operators meant that many actors (the national DMOs in particular), focussed most of their marketing on B2B efforts. At the same time, some actors, led by the Chinavia project, focussed more on B2C efforts. A main reason for these differing foci was conflicting enactments of the type of tourists that constitute 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. Some could produce evidence that group package tourists were the major group, while others could do the same for FITs. These differing enactments presented an interesting example of multiplicity (Law, 2004; Mol, 2002), as the different actors were working in factually different realities. Although it was interesting to note how something as simple and as important as the basic travel type of Chinese tourists was up for debate, the conflicting enactments did not create conflict in the distribution network. Instead, the national DMOs, which represented the group package tourist enactment, was used by actors who needed help in this regard, or kept this as their focus, while the actors who thought or needed the opposite, turned to the Chinavia project.



The fact that strong traditional operators played such important roles in the distribution network also meant that many aspects of the tourist decision making process, which are often ascribed to the needs or motivations of the tourist (see Table 3 and Table 4, in the literature review p. 33), were not actually decided by them or their motivations in the case of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. “It should also be noted that the ones who come here, they have not chosen our hotel. It is the tour operators who have chosen for them.” (FirstGrandHotel\_Accommodation). Instead, they were highly affected by the profit driven motivations of the traditional operators. This structure goes a long way in explaining some of the important factors in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, which were investigated in Chapter 7 – for example the strong focus on price. It also supports the argument made in the literature review for this thesis (p. 24); that motivation studies that investigate the needs and motivations of individual tourists only reveal a fragment of the possible factors that may affect the tourism distribution phenomenon.

### **8.3 Factors Affecting ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’**

Chapter 7 presented the specific factors and sub-factors that affect ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ according to the analysis. Four main factors with corresponding sub-factors were presented, while some broader points about the nature of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ were also laid out. The four main factors were: Travel Type, Available Products, Destination Characteristics and Externals. In this section, these four main factors and sub-factors and their effects on China outbound tourism will be discussed further. First, an initial discussion is conducted for each main factor, in each instance, this is followed by a discussion of the ways that these main factors and their sub-factors are connected to the ways that Chinese tourists travel. Specifically, this is done through introduction of four spectres that enable researchers and practitioners to distinguish

between different Chinese tourist types on four different levels that correspond with the main factors:

- Travel Type: Group Package – (semi-)independent
- Available Products: Price/Volume - Experience/Niche
- Destination Characteristics: Geography – Activity
- Externals: Macro – Micro

Finally, a conceptual model for analysis of Chinese tourist types that combines these spectres, is presented. New quotes from the data as well as references to previous research are used to underpin the insights and subsequent findings that arose through this part of the discussion.

### **8.3.1. Travel Type: Group Package – (semi-)independent**

The most important sub-factor affecting the Travel Type of Chinese tourists was Travel Experience and Market Maturity. This sub-factor was particularly important because it had strong influence on the three other main factors. It affected the tourist's preferences in terms of products, their behaviour at the destination and their focus in terms of external factors. This finding aligns well with previous research, which have also pointed to the important relation between travel experience, market maturity and other aspects, such as behaviour and decision making (e.g. Agrusa et al., 2011; Chen & Lin, 2012; Huang & Tian, 2013; Zeng et al., 2014). However, the results also indicated that Chinese tourists to Scandinavia differed from those to other parts of Europe, as they were generally more experienced travellers. Information (sources) and Tourist Expectation also affected the Travel Type of the tourists. In terms of information sources, the findings supported existing literature, as it showed that on- and/or offline WOM was a major factor (Chen, Dwyer, & Firth, 2015; Wang, 2014). The findings also showed that the incoming tourists had relatively low expectations when visiting Scandinavia. This had both positive and negative outcomes, since the

lack of knowledge acted as a barrier for some and as a point of attraction for others. Finally, Market Trends were also found to be an important sub-factor affecting Travel Type. This presented challenges because such trends are difficult to control, but also potential, because many of the traits of Scandinavian destinations (e.g. novelty, cleanliness, and lifestyle) aligned well with some of the current trends in the Chinese market.

An additional important finding was that the rise in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ could be understood as three simultaneous tendencies (Figure 18 p. 210): A rise in (semi-)independent tourists, with little need for special treatment; in group tourists, who are increasingly maturing and therefore need less special treatment; and in first time travellers, who are inexperienced, and therefore, need a high degree of special treatment. These simultaneous developments explain the differing enactments of Chinese tourists by the suppliers in Scandinavia, since the actors were often talking about or working with different things, when they worked with China outbound tourism. Considering the general numbers for China outbound tourism (ETC & UNWTO, 2013; European Travel Commission, 2016), it can be argued that these developments are not specific to Scandinavia, but are present for China outbound tourism in general. The presented model (Figure 18) offers researchers and practitioners the first illustration of these tendencies, as well as a more updated description of the phenomenon than what previous research has presented, for example through the wave metaphor (Arlt, 2013).

#### **8.3.1.1. Spectrum: Group Package – (Semi-)independent**

Along with the other three main factors, the Travel Type (p. 201) directly affects the way Chinese tourists travel to Scandinavia, and whether they travel at all. In existing literature, Chinese tourists have generally been divided into two major groups with

their own distinctive features: Group package tourists and independent tourists (e.g. Prayag et al., 2013; Xiang, 2013). This division has also been applied somewhat in this thesis, because it presents a useful way to distinguish between Chinese tourists with considerably different traits. In reality, this is a simplification, which does not reflect the heterogeneous nature of China outbound tourists. This thesis suggests that Group package tourists and (semi-)independent tourists may be regarded as the extremes on a spectrum that contain many other forms of travel as well.

*Figure 22: Spectrum: Group Package Tourism – (Semi-)Independent Tourism*

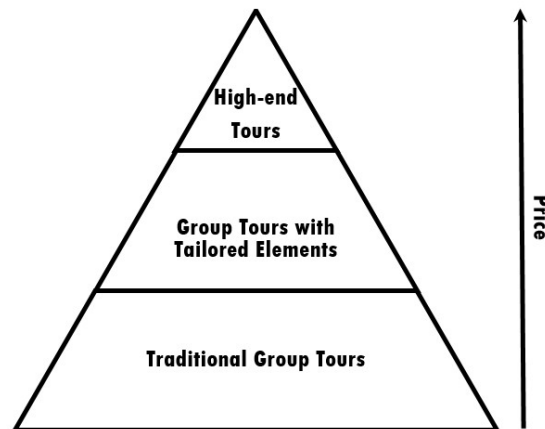


The five sub-factors under Travel Type: Demographics, Travel Experience and Market Maturity, Information Sources, Expectations and Market trends, influence where tourists' appear on this spectrum. This section will consider these five sub-factors as the travel types involved in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' are discussed based on the spectrum.

### *Group Package Tourism*

Chinese outbound tourists have generally been characterised as group tourists travelling on similar itineraries and exhibiting certain behaviours that require special treatment (e.g. Chang, 2007; Chinavia, Report 2, 2013; Jin & Sparks, 2017; Li & Cai, 2009; Xie & Li, 2009). This characterisation still holds true for a large number of travellers in general and to Scandinavia specifically. However, the findings have shown how variations between tourists who fit this description are increasing, and how progressively more group tourists travel to fewer and/or more diverse destinations within Scandinavia. Current group travel to Scandinavia can be simplified as three levels of a triangle (Figure 22).

Figure 23: Chinese Incoming Tourists



The traditional four country group tours are still dominating. Group tours with more tailored elements are growing in popularity, as tourists increasingly require something special on their trip. This means that the line between these two categories is blurring. Finally, the very high-end, customised tours represent a much smaller but considerable and important group of travellers.

In addition, these tourist flows are now supplemented with parallel movements (as illustrated in Figure 18 p. 210). Some tourists who used to fit the description above are now moving along the spectrum (Figure 21) as they are coming back as more experienced travellers with different needs. New tourists emerge who may require even more special treatment. Other new tourists emerge from first tier cities, who are travelling (semi-)independently. Some of them experienced travellers, while others may have little experience travelling outside China. In addition to these changes, the data revealed a considerable and rising (semi-)independent market in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’.

#### *Rising Independent Market*

In line with the general development in China outbound tourism (Arlt & Deng-Westphal, 2017), ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ had also seen a significant rise in

the (semi-)independent market. The term (semi-)independent is used because independent travellers from China are not necessarily completely independent (ibid).

The representative from STB explained:

“ ... no matter whether they are first tier cities customers or relatively immature developing costumers from developing markets in China, the majority of them are still preferring to travel with tour operators. Even though nowadays we saw an emergence of FIT (...). There is no absolute FIT in China, but semi-FIT, so at least one or two elements is arranged by an agency.”

(STB\_DMO)

A reason for this is that (semi-)independent Chinese tourists will often travel in small family groups, where it might be beneficial to buy certain elements of the trip from a tour operator. This was also the case in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’:

“FIT is not only individual one person or two person. It is small groups. 5-7 persons we still call that, it is like the FIT. (...) Because I can give them very close service.”

(Oriental Nordic\_TO/NicheWholesaler)

“They don’t travel *alone* alone. When we have them, they are groups of typically 8. Two families and some children or something.”

(FirstGrandHotel\_Accomodation)

The benefits associated with buying certain elements from tour operators were found to be ease of booking and better price transparency. Both of these elements have been reported as important in a broader context as well, since Chinese tourists to Europe are generally concerned about how to get around and value for money (Arlt & Deng-Westphal, 2017).

Independent travellers who did not travel in groups would also often chose to buy certain elements of the trip from an on- or offline tour operator. The Ctrip representative explained about (semi-)independent Chinese travellers:

“... more young people will choose to do things on their own. That is also the reason why Ctrip not only offer the service, which is the tour package or tour group. Now we also offer the products, which are maybe air ticket and then the hotel, we will sell these things together. Excluding the tour guide and the other service. Or we only offer the hotel to them. This was a choice which is decided by our costumer.”

(Ctrip\_OTA)

Some reasons that Chinese tourists chose to buy certain elements of the trip from on- or offline operators have already been elucidated in Chapters 6 and 7. These included low level of trust, high need for safety, which has led to reintermediation, and the extensive planning, which characterises most Chinese travellers.

Language issues have often been reported as important to outbound tourists' from China (Ooi 2004; Kau & Lim 2005; Ryan & Mo 2002). This was also the case in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' where the interviewees mentioned that most (semi-)independent travellers were younger people, because of their language abilities: “... most of the younger people, they love to go there by themselves, I mean for the 20+. Because they are well educated, they know the language, very easy.” (VisitSweden\_DMO).

The interviewed tourists also mentioned avoiding the hectic itineraries of group tours, and being able to prioritise based on their own needs and interests, as main reasons to travel (semi-)independently:

Interviewee: “I never go for group tour!”

Interviewer: Why not?

Interviewee: “I think the schedule is very tight. I like, if I go someplace I like to spend more time in the city or in the town and watching, see here and there. But in group

tour, they are just very superficial, looking around and then you go to the bus and get delivered to another place. It is not interesting.”

(Tourist\_04)

“I really love the style, to travel alone, because no one can affect your travel plan. And I think, my style is to spend more money on the food and looking something and spend less and less money on hostel or hotel. And you know sometimes I can be crazy and I can just take a sleeping bag and sleep anywhere. Maybe in airport or something.”

(Tourist\_11)

Most of the interviewed suppliers welcomed the rise in (semi-)independent travel as they regarded these tourists as easier to deal with, and the market as more lucrative:

“I mean we do see increased individual travel, I must say. I also think that they, sort of, blend in more, with our general audience. They are more, they can make it on their own throughout the museum and throughout town and so on. And they don't demand or we don't need to supply extra information. They just know the routines, they know what to do, and they leave, and their are happy...”

(VasaMuseet\_Attraction)

“... we actually would like to get more of these individuals, because of course it is more profitable, because we can't take all the groups because they are low rate. So we have to balance this, so it's very good this group travel for basic level occupancy, but we need to have more, also a little bit higher. So we are now actually looking more to online and individuals who are coming”

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

Whilst many actors were eager to see more incoming independents, as the last quote suggests, especially larger hotels were also dependent on group travel to cover basic occupancy. The representative from Nordic Choice hotels explained some of the advantages of group travellers vs. independents:



“Of course, if they start booking individually online, that is of course very interesting. Because that is where everyone is going. But we still need the groups. Groups will always have their function. But the FIT is a different kind of setup in every sense. Because the groups they are fixed prices and long term and much planning and whereas the FITs is a dynamic world, it is easier to manage in that way.”

(NordicChoiceHotels\_Accommodation)

The rise of independent travel among Chinese tourists to Scandinavia was no secret to the suppliers. In fact, the representative from STB explained that they were challenged because the suppliers expected this development to be further advanced than it actually was:

“We do not need to explain them [the local partners in Scandinavia] that now the market has become more diversified and apart from group we also have semi-FIT or FITs. What we need to do, is that their expectation for FIT is too high. They think wow, the market has become FIT already. No! It takes time. (...) They think ‘oh tomorrow we do not need to work with the travel trade, Chinese travel trade anymore. We just need to do B2C and we just need to promote online and then costumers will walk in’. No, that is not the case.”

(STB\_DMO)

The examples presented here show that group package tourism and (semi-)independent tourism to Scandinavia took many different forms, depending on the five sub-factors under Travel Type. These examples illustrate some of the different tourists and tourist types that can be found along the spectrum between group package tourism and (semi-)independent tourism to Scandinavia. In addition to these variances, other intricacies were also located along the spectrum.

*Intricacies of the Group Package Tourist - (Semi-)independent Spectrum*

Some of the examples already presented, as well as other utterings from the interviewees, showed that the position of a tourist on the spectrum was not static. One tourist could appear at different places for different trips. Tourists also moved along the spectrum, as they became more experienced travellers, or as they changed their behaviour for other reasons. Examples of these scenarios were given in the following two quotes:

“... when I travel with my family, I prefer to travel with tour groups, when I travel with friends, I prefer to go there alone, I mean by ourselves.”

(Tourist\_07)

“Chinese tourists, especially those top level, for the first time they go with groups, travel many different cities or countries just to see what they have and for second time, third time they are planning something very special, to stay longer in one destination to experience local activities, which are much deeper.”

(Caissal\_TO/TA)

The existing literature has highlighted how alternative tourism segments are emerging and changing the nature of China outbound tourism in general. Most of these studies have focussed specifically on Chinese cruise tourists (e.g. Fan & Hsu, 2014; Hang, Ma, & Liu, 2010) and Chinese students studying abroad (e.g. Chen et al., 2015; Huang & Tian, 2013; King & Gardiner, 2015). A number of similar alternative tourist types also appeared in the case of Scandinavia. These included increasing numbers of cruise tourists who may consider the cruise itself as the main attraction: “We have a lot of cruise passengers we can really see that the Asian market affects the cruise industry.” (VisitStockholm\_DMO). School trips where learning was an important part of the trip:

“... the summer school they call it, children from 8 - 16, they will come for summer school and stay here some days. (...) they are crazy about this destination because it is safe, its clean, its Andersen, they think it is a lot of things to experience for children.“

(OdenseBysMuseer\_Attraction)

Backpackers who exhibited behaviours more similar to European tourists were also increasing. This group often consisted in exchange students who took advantage of their time in Europe to travel around. The STB representative said about this group:

“We already saw that pure FIT, or backpackers especially the young generations to visit Denmark or visit Norway. But who are they? They are not from Mainland China, they are students studying in Europe. So for them, definitely it is easy, they have credit card which is acceptable in the EU countries. It is easy for them to apply visa in Germany, they probably do not need, because of Schengen visa and they also, the flight ticket for them to go to Denmark and Norway is much easier if they go with budget airlines, book. (...) but that is really a niche. And that is not our main target, because our main target is mainland China, the people who are from China.”

(STB\_DMO)

While this view is true, the existing research has alluded to the importance of this tourist group (e.g. Chen et al., 2015; Huang & Tian, 2013; King & Gardiner, 2015). Increasing numbers of Chinese tourists study abroad and an increasing segment of mainland Chinese tourists will have had these kinds of experiences when they go to Scandinavia for holiday in the future. Therefore, this group may present a look into the future of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. That said, the analysis indicates that although (semi-)independent travel is on the rise. ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ will not instantly be transformed from group tourism to independent tourism, and become an exclusive FIT market within the near future. As have been shown in this section, the development is sporadic, and it overlaps and parallels with other

developments, such as the rise in first time travellers from second and third tier markets (Figure 19: Three tendencies in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' p. 210).

### **8.3.2. Available Products: Price/Volume – Experience/Niche**

In terms of Available Products, a deciding sub-factor was the existing and potential Volume of incoming tourists. In the case of 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia', the numbers were relatively low in many places (Table 1 p. 24), but the perceived potential was enough to engage both suppliers and intermediaries to develop products for the Chinese market. Demand was also an important sub-factor affecting the available products in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. Demand for new destinations like Scandinavia was high in China, and demand for Chinese tourists was high in Scandinavia. The latter was heightened further, as suppliers in Scandinavia were continually discovering advantages of Chinese tourists compared to other source markets, other than sheer numbers. This suggested that the uniqueness of Chinese tourists was not only a challenge in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia', but also an advantage. This finding adds to existing knowledge on China outbound tourism, by pointing to other advantages of China outbound tourism than sheer numbers and spending, which are often reported as the only attractions of the market (e.g. China Daily, 2016; Chinese Tourists Agency, 2017).

Accessibility and Intermediaries' Destination Knowledge were also found to be important sub-factors influencing Available Products in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. Most existing studies of image and prior knowledge in China outbound tourism have been concerned specifically with the tourists' views (e.g. Assaker, 2014; Chang, 2011; Kim et al., 2005; McCartney et al., 2009; Prideaux et al., 2012; Stepchenkova & Li, 2012). The findings of this thesis suggest that intermediaries' image and knowledge of a destination also plays an important role in the distribution

process, and that it should therefore receive more attention in studies of China outbound tourism.

### 8.3.2.1. Spectrum: Price/Volume – Experience/Niche

The analysis of the four sub-factors under Available Products (Volume, Demand, Accessibility and Intermediaries' Destination Knowledge) has shown how travel products in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' may take many different forms depending on specific circumstances. This thesis suggests that tourists who prefer these different products may be regarded on a spectrum ranging from preference for products that are volume based and price focussed, to products that are niche based and experience focussed.

*Figure 24: Spectrum: Volume based/Price Focus – Niche Based/Experience Focus*



The four sub-factors under Available Products as well as the other main factors influence where tourists' appear on this spectrum. This section will consider these four sub-factors as the Available Products in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' are discussed based on the spectrum.

Some actors argued that (semi-)independent travel was overtaking group tourism in some areas. Despite this, incoming tourism to Scandinavia in general, was still dominated by group tourists doing a more or less standard four-country programme.

The STB representative explained:

"I think that in general the four Nordic countries is still the volume generator. That is because, you are right, the whole cake is big (...) We say there used to be only the first wave, the business from the first tier cities, right. But now, we see some product differentiations or niche markets, the market becomes relatively more diversified in

the first tier cities, but we still have big volume from the second and third tier cities, they still go for the Nordic four countries, that is, we call it the second and third waves.”

(STB\_DMO)

This description largely represents the views of Arlt (2013) on China outbound tourism in general. Other interviewees supported this view, as they explained that the standard programme was still the bestseller:

“... it is still the Scandinavia tour they are interested in, like very short visits, just the accommodation and the Chinese meals and the sightseeing tour and shopping time.”

(Tumlare\_DMC)

“The most common ones are Nordic 4 countries, or Nordic 4 plus Russia. From China that is the most common ones.”

(DMC Scandinavia\_DMC)

For the actors who worked with these tourists, volume and price was essential. Especially the respondents who represented bigger hotels felt this and explained how the Chinese operators were extremely price sensitive:

“... the rate is the main thing, because they expect to have very low rate for lunch and dinner, because there are so many Chinese restaurants here in Finland as well, and normally they have very low prices for lunch and dinner”

(RestelHotelGroup\_Accommodation)

“... Chinese, they are pushing the rates, they are really really really pushing the rates down to the bottom line. And it doesn't matter if it is a big operator like Kuoni or if it is a small Chinese agents that comes directly with a request. They also want cheap cheap cheaper rates, so if you give them the high rates perhaps they won't take it.”

(ThonHotels\_Accommodation)

The similar programmes created price sensitivity, because this was the only distinctive feature between the similar products. In addition, the many intermediaries involved in

the creation of these trips, who each needed to make their margins also raised the price and created pressure on suppliers to lower their prices. The representative from Innovation Norway explained:

“... the incoming operators have pressed the price quite significantly from the suppliers. We have also seen that has been quite a lot of intermediaries. From the Chinese person going to his travel agency, then there is an outgoing and an incoming, there is quite a few links who all needs their part of the payment, so when you arrive at the Norwegian suppliers then the price has often been pressed significantly.”

(InnovationNorway\_DMO)

The relatively cheap, standardized four country tours represent the very left of the spectrum in Figure 23. For many Chinese tourists, this would be their experience of Scandinavia. The representative from CYTS explained:

Interviewer: Do you have more people choosing the two country or one country package compared to earlier?

Interviewee: “No, its quite a small part. Most the clients will choose the four countries. ‘I will go there once and I will go to the four countries.’”

(CYTS\_TO/TA)

Although the standard four-country product was still popular, the increasing demand for better experiences in the Chinese market meant two things: First, that the standard programmes at the very left of the spectrum had changed to be more expensive and experience based than they used to be:

“... in the very beginning people who went to the Nordic countries, is 8 days for four countries, including the transportation, I mean the flight. So, it only takes you 6 nights for four countries. And now, the main package of CITS is 10 to 11 days, so it means 8-9 nights in the packages. So we have more time. “

(CITS\_TO/TA)

Second, that other types of experience-focussed group tours and tourists appeared along the spectrum. Some tourists were willing to pay more to increase the quality of their experience when travelling with a group. The representative of DMC Scandinavia explained about their group travellers:

“... if you have a higher price, but a really special programme that you can only do in Scandinavia, people will still go. (...) there are people who can just afford a foreign trip, maybe every five years. So, for those of course, somewhere important, well-known, that is for them. There is the people in the middle, they have travelled to the European continent, America, so maybe next time maybe it's Scandinavia, as long as the price is not that scary, they will go. But for those very high income people, for them it is the experience.”

(DMC Scandinavia)

Travellers who were focussed on experiences, often within a specific niche, similar to the ones mentioned in the end of the above quote, occupy the other extreme of the spectrum. These travellers were mostly independents, or affluent group travellers on highly customised trips, in some cases to places that individuals could not go. The representative from Ctrip explained about their costumers' expectations for Scandinavia:

“The things our costumers want are quite different. If they want to go to London. (...) Maybe just a quite simple reason, they want to go shopping or they want to see the view of Big Ben. But for the North Europe area. These costumers always have a high level. They want to enjoy some different things, or some new things in their life, so I need to try to find, what is the special things for this hotel. What is the most attractive thing, compared with all the other hotels in Europe. “

(Ctrip\_OTA)



The STB representative explained that group travellers and therefore tour operators also increasingly focussed on niche products in order to distinguish themselves and to compete:

“... the market is becoming more and more competitive. The tour operators they are also competing with each other. So in order to survive and in order to be different, a lot of tour operators are really starting to specialize in niche-markets. (...) for example riding tours, fishing tours, or hunting tours even. Even though it is quite niche, but niche sometimes means profitable.”

(STB\_DMO)

The representative of niche wholesaler Albatros provided some insights into the niche travel market in China. He explained that the big Chinese tour operators had “travel clubs” to sell their niche tours, because more prestige was attached to a travel club than to a known travel agency like CITS:

Interviewee: “Often it is people who have something in common, a club, it is almost always clubs who do this. Many Chinese travel agencies are schizophrenic in the sense that they won’t admit they are travel agencies. They will always say that they are a travel club. And all the big brands have already made travel clubs for example CYTS who you will visit probably have their luxury brand. And I believe that they will probably very soon also make an outdoor brand. So, CYTS are schizophrenic in the sense that they will not admit they are CYTS, they will make a new brand, a sub brand.

Interviewer: And that is because there is negative stigma around using them?

Interviewee: “Yes, no one with money will use them, because you connect them with those 4 countries in 10 days, low price”

(Albatros\_NicheWholesaler)

In arguing that group travel would not disappear in the future, but perhaps change somewhat, the representative from Wonderful Copenhagen predicted that group travel would increasingly be used for this kind of travel in the future:

“I think in the future, group travel will be used more by Chinese tourists to reach destinations that you cannot reach on your own, that you do not have resources or the inclination to plan by yourself. It takes a lot of time to do that. So to get experiences that you would not be able to get on your own.”

(WOCO/Chinavia\_DMO)

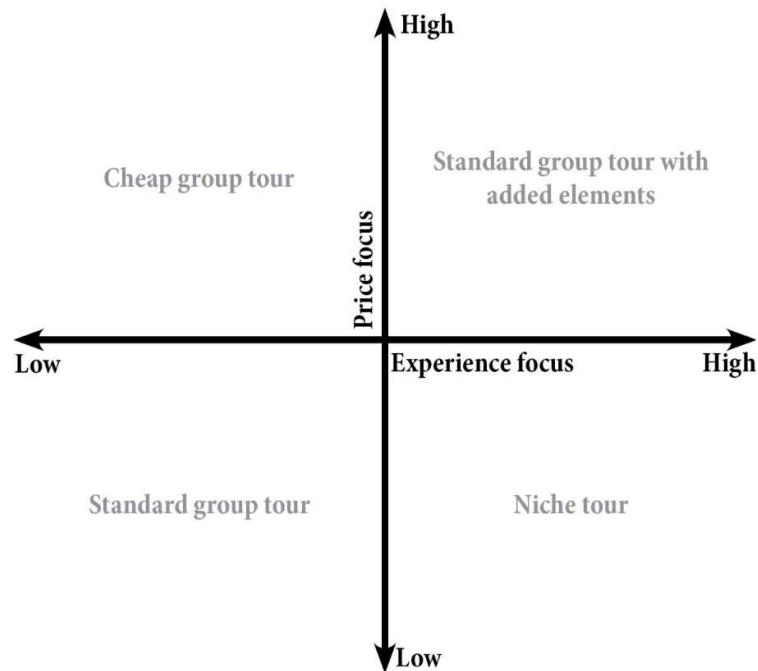
Between the extremes on the spectrum, various other products and opportunities also appeared. Standard tours that included some in-depth aspects have already been described. Niche tours for tourists with a more moderate budget were also increasing. For example, family or nature trips that focussed more on one country:

“... this year Odense is very popular and Legoland. Some groups, they stay in Denmark more than 5 days or 4-5 days. They visit Odense and Legoland. Most of them are families. We also have some groups, deep visits, to Norway, to the fiords.”

(NordEU\_DMC)

Based on what has been presented in this section, as well as on the existing literature on group tours in China outbound tourism (e.g. Janet Chang et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2011; de Sausmarez et al., 2012; Jin et al., 2014), the available products in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ can be considered as negotiations between price and experience foci. For package tours, the results of such negotiations can be categorised into four broad groups, as illustrated in Figure 24.

Figure 25: Price vs. Experience Focus – Four Product Categories



Cheap group tours appear at the very left of the spectrum in Figure 23. These tours typically make use of coaches for all transportation, only visit capitals, and do so in a relatively short amount of time. In Scandinavia, this kind of tour was disappearing in favour of what was now regarded as the standard group tour. Standard group tours were less price focussed, as they focus more on comfort and experiences. However, they were still a relatively cheap option where experiences were often neglected to keep prices low. These types of tours often made use of faster or more experiential transportation forms, such as planes and ferries, rather than coaches. In Scandinavia, they also typically included some elements outside the big cities and had slightly more time for the visit(s). The rising demand for deeper experiences among Chinese tourists had created a product category of standard tours with added experimental elements. This came at a higher price, but was still a cheap option compared to highly tailored niche tours. It was meant for those who focus on both experiences and price. Finally, niche tours appeared at the other end of the spectrum (Figure 23), as an option for travellers for whom price was a smaller issue and the experience was central.

Except for the cheap group tours, increase was reported in all the product categories, as new tourists emerged from new markets and existing tourists became more experienced and demanded more experiences from their travels (see Figure 19: Three tendencies in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia', p. 210). The fact that many interviewees reported a move away from the very cheap tours indicated a slow but steady rise in quality in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' at all levels. When compared to the results of a recent study on China outbound tourism to Europe (Arlt & Deng-Westphal, 2017), it seems that this may be a reflection of a broader trend in China outbound tourism. A tourist described how she as a common person observed this change:

“I think both of them [Group travel and independent travel] have developed. Tour groups (...). Like 10 or 15 years ago, we cannot find a very large range of tours. You only had eating and visiting. But now, you have different kinds of tourism. You have theme, like skiing, like sport, they have different choice of hotels and airlines and they have more tourism companies now, compared to the past. And travelling independently, it is also about hotels and airlines, you have lots of routes like from Beijing to New York, to San Francisco, London, you have different choice of air companies, and you have more convenient ways to book your hotels. Like Booking.com or Ctrip and you have more ways to get the information you want.“

(Tourist\_07)

The second spectrum distinguished between price/volume focus and niche/experience focus. The discussion and analysis conducted in relation to this spectrum illustrated how all product categories had increased except the very cheap group tours. This indicated a slow but steady rise in quality in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' at all levels, which mirrors the broader developments in China outbound tourism.

### 8.3.3. Destination Characteristics: Geography – Activity

A deciding sub-factor under Destination Characteristics was (In)tangible Attractions. Like most destinations (Fountain, Espiner, & Xie, 2010; Hua & Yoo, 2011; Li et al., 2011; Park et al., 2014), traditional attractions such as heritage and cultural sights were important pull factors for incoming Chinese tourists. However, other attractions were found to be at least as important in the case of Scandinavia. Scandinavia was enacted as a ‘special’ place by many actors, due to its unique blend of ‘environment’ and ‘lifestyle’. This was different from other European destinations, where especially group tourists have traditionally been more focussed on traditional sightseeing (Andreu et al., 2013; Corigliano, 2011). Based on this knowledge, destination marketers in Scandinavia may want to base more of their marketing effort on the attributes, which make Scandinavia unique and ‘special’.

Supply, Capacity and Quality of Accommodation was found to be another important sub-factor under Destination Characterises. The analysis related to this factor revealed and solidified how tourism distribution and in this case ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ is not designed or planned by the actors involved, as tourism distribution literature often imply (e.g. Buhalis, 2000; Kotler et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2009). Instead, the analysis showed that many of the decisions made by the actors and consequently the products available to the tourists, came as the result of reactions to challenges related to Supply, Capacity and Quality, rather than from open choices or design decisions.

Seasonality and China Readiness were also confirmed as important sub-factors. China Readiness affected the tourists’ experience at the destination, but did not act as a pull factor in its own right. However, it could have an in-direct influence, as it might affect the tourists’ willingness to recommend the destination to others. This

was particularly relevant because on- and offline word-of-mouth was found to be the most important information source for Chinese tourists to Scandinavia.

### 8.3.3.1. Spectrum: Geography – Activity

The four sub-factors under the main factor Destination Characteristics were: (In)tangible Attractions; Supply, Capacity and Quality of Accommodation; Seasonality and China Readiness. These factors may influence how tourists and companies approach Scandinavia as a destination. Do they consider all of Scandinavia as one destination, to be visited in a limited amount of time, at a specific time of the year? Do they consider Scandinavia as a number of different destinations, each of which should be given their own time? Or do they not focus on destinations, but on specific activities that tourists can engage in, as they visit? The analysis indicated that one could answer both yes and no to all these questions in the case of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. Some tourists were looking for the highlights and attempting to visit as many places as possible, while others were more focussed on specific activities. Existing studies, on Europe as a whole or on specific places in Scandinavia has shown similar results (Arlt & Deng-Westphal, 2017; Chinavia, Report 2, 2013; Visit Finland, 2014). Therefore, this thesis suggests that the way tourists and companies approach (Scandinavian) destinations may be regarded on a spectrum between focus on Geography and Activities (Figure 25).

*Figure 26: Spectrum: Geography Focus – Activity Focus*



The four sub-factors under Destination Characteristics, as well as the other three main factors influence where tourists’ appear on this spectrum. This section will consider these four sub-factors as the effects of Destination Characteristics on ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ are discussed based on the spectrum.

*Focus on Geography*

Most of the company representatives agreed that individual countries or destinations should not be marketed on their own in China:

“... Sweden can be one single destination, not there yet. For now we do promote the whole Scandinavia, whole area you know, because for most of the itineraries, the agencies, they all have four country or three country, maybe some of them they have like two countries in Scandinavia...”

(VisitSweden\_DMO)

There were a number of reasons for this. Among these, that the countries are relatively small, that they are somewhat similar, and that it is standard to sell a number of destinations together for long haul group travellers from China in general. These points were reflected in the following three quotes:

“... the four countries are a bit small. So the Chinese tourists want to go see the four countries as one package. For their first trip they seldom go to just one country.”

(GrandVision\_Wholesaler)

“These countries in Chinese travellers’ minds are similar. So I have to say it frankly. We have such packages including only mono Denmark, Norway. But it does not sell so good. So we mainly have combined tours.”

(CITS\_TO/TA)

“... the Chinese people when they want to have a Europe holiday in North Europe area, they will not only choose one city or one country. They will go there together, I think. Because for most the Chinese people they don’t have that much chance to travel around Europe every year.”

(VisitFlam\_DMO/Attraction)

The tourists who viewed Scandinavia as one destination and visited a number of different places within a relatively short period can be said to have a focus on geography. They wanted to visit a certain area of the map and cover as much as

possible in the (limited) time that they had. This focus was common in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, as this was the approach of most tour operators, who carried the main volume. These tour operators argued that their products were designed to fit the needs of the Chinese tourists. Based on this, it can be argued that Chinese tourists to Scandinavia generally had a geographical focus. This aligns well with the broader literature on China outbound tourism, which has argued that although tourists are maturing and getting new preferences, the main bulk still go for the fast-paced group tours (Arlt & Deng-Westphal, 2017; Jin & Sparks, 2017; Li & Cai, 2009; Xie & Li, 2009). However, other aspects indicated that at least for some, this was not the case. These tourists were increasingly activity focused and were willing to sacrifice some geographical coverage to spend more time in fewer places. This was the case for some group tourists, but more so for (semi-)independent tourists. Because of this, most of the Scandinavian interviewees preferred to market both Scandinavia as a whole, and their own individual countries and destinations:

“I still think that Scandinavia for a big segment and for many markets can easily be marketed as one destination. But I would still like to somehow have space for Finland, myself and the rest of the countries to market their own special segments themselves. And I do not see why they could not do that even when doing a common workshop or something, because we all have our own strengths.“

(Tumlare\_DMC)

“Of course the main thing is still group travel, multiple destinations, all of Scandinavia in 10 days and so on and just one or two days, or three days in Stockholm and then on to the next destination. But we also see a little bit of mono destination travelling and they do repeat visits...”

(VasaMuseet\_Attraction)



To answer the needs of the activity focussed tourists, some company representatives suggested that marketing and management of Scandinavian destinations should be more activity based.

*Focus on Activities*

At the other end of the spectrum are tourists and actors who focus on activities rather than geography. As mentioned, most actors agreed that Chinese tourists were increasingly focussed on activities when they travelled. Some asked for smaller activities, which acted as part of a longer trip; others had activities as the main reason to travel. These two examples are illustrated in the following quotes:

“... Chinese people, they go to other countries, not only to see something good. This view or these oceans or these mountains, no, they like to do some activities. They started now, I think from last year, they try to enjoy that. Join the activities.”

(VisitSweden\_DMO)

Interviewee: “The tourists do not specifically want to go to Scandinavia. They for example want to climb mountains. And then we will suggest this product. The tourist will choose the product, depending on their needs.”

Interviewer: So their choice is more focused on the activities than the geography?

Interviewee: “Yes”

(CBGI\_Wholesaler)

The tourists who were solely focussed on activities were often more affluent travellers, travelling on customised tours, or (semi-)independent travellers:

“... a lot of Chinese families some middle and rich people, they will not join the ADS groups. They want to organize some limited groups, by themselves. Like two or three families together or several families together. Or some kind of special itineraries, for example the photographers and fishing and golf teams groups, sales groups, or weddings.”

(Oriental Nordic\_TO/NicheWholesaler)

The representative from Albatros, a company that made its living from customised activity based tours, argued that activity based tours should be the focus of the tourism products to a much larger degree than what was currently the case:

“What Scandinavia should be connected through is activities. Making self-drive tours up the coast in Norway. Sailing trips. While in Denmark you could have more family oriented activities. But always have activities as the focus. So not Scandinavia as one place, but as one activity.”

(Albatros\_NicheWholesaler)

This argument is supported in a recent study of Chinese tourism to Europe as a whole, where the authors concluded that: “Many Chinese outbound travellers are not starting their decision-making process by asking ‘What can I do in the European country X?’ but by asking ‘Where do I find good conditions to follow my hobby in Europe?’ (Arlt & Deng-Westphal, 2017, p. 43).

A number of tourists and products that accommodated specific needs of various groups appeared between the extreme ends of the spectrum. As mentioned in ‘China Readiness’ (p. 251), many Chinese tourists, group tourists in particular, required activities that were beyond the ordinary, but that were not too demanding or difficult. Other tourists, (semi-)independents in particular, exhibited behaviours and needs that were similar to every other traveller. These needs were increasingly diversifying, thus creating new tourist groups and products along the spectrum.

Leaning towards the geography end of the spectrum were tours and tourists that wanted to visit all four countries, but were also focussed on activities:

Interviewee: “I did some tour this year in, I think in June, it is quite interesting, you can call it like a deep tour. We spend more time in Scandinavia, in Sweden. We go to

some small village, we go to some island, we take the bicycle, like cyclist. Very interesting, people like it. They like it very much.”

(TourLeader\_04)

Further along the spectrum towards the activity focus were tours that required more from the tourists. For example, longer transportation to get to unique places or activities that were physically demanding:

“We always just go to the two of them [the fiords]. But this year we take a more expensive group, we do three and we spent more time in Norway. And take long long long way trip on the bus, but they think it is very good, they think it is different. (...) They are the high quality tourists, and they are experienced tourists, so they can understand why it takes such a long time to go there, so it has good feedback. (...) We went to there [show Preikestolen on her phone], its the first time, in our company, this is the first time. People think it is very very very good. We have to take three or four hours to climb the hill, but it is good. So maybe next year we will have other groups to there.”

(TourLeaderCaissa03\_Specialty Channeller)

The third spectrum points to a movement towards a stronger activity focus as (Semi-)independent tourists require more activities and tour operators are beginning to incorporate more activity elements into even the cheaper tours. Recent publications indicate that this finding may represent part of a larger trend in China outbound tourism (Arlt & Deng-Westphal, 2017; Jin & Sparks, 2017; Xiang, 2015). Based on this, it is suggested that suppliers and marketers consider a stronger focus on activities rather than geography in their marketing and product development efforts to answer this emerging trend.

#### **8.3.4. Externals: Macro – Micro**

Finally, different sub-factors under Externals were also found to have important impacts on ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. The high Price-Level in Scandinavia presented a challenge and affected most aspects of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ negatively. However, it also had positive impacts. The high price level for example meant that the incoming travellers to Scandinavia, were generally of a higher income level than Chinese travellers to other parts of Europe. The more affluent travellers tended to spend more money at the destination, and to be more experienced travellers. In turn, the travel experience meant that many of the issues that have been reported as relating to inexperienced Chinese travellers (Hua, 2014; Jinliang & Hong, 2013; Jocuns, de Saint-Georges, Chonmahatrakul, & Angkapanichkit, 2015; Loi & Pearce, 2015; Wenwu, 2014) were less present in the Scandinavian case. Since no previous studies have been conducted on the income differences between Chinese travellers to various European countries, it was not possible to verify these findings beyond the case. Future research could explore such differences and their consequences further.

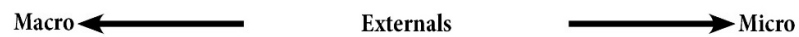
Policy and Legislation has been reported as key to the development of China outbound tourism in general (Huang, 2010; Mak, 2013; Tse, 2011). The findings indicate that this was also the case in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, where these aspects influenced tourists and tourism intermediaries in particular. It was noted, that the policies and legislation, which have most often been mentioned and discussed in academic and mainstream literature, such as the ADS scheme and the Tourism Law of the People’s Republic of China (e.g. Du & Dai, 2005; Forbes, 2014; Guo et al., 2007; Keating, 2009; Ma et al., 2015; Pan & Laws, 2003; People’s Daily, 2013; Skift, 2013; Tse, 2011), were less important, when compared to general legislation, such as the anti-corruption campaign.

Generally, these four sub-factors represent conditions that it may be difficult for tourism actors to change. However, the analyses showed that in many cases actors in Scandinavian and China had been creative and adaptable in finding ways to navigate or overcome the challenges that these factors presented.

#### 8.3.4.1. Spectrum: Macro – Micro

It can be argued, that some tourists are more affected by what may be dubbed as Macro Factors, while others are more affected by Micro Factors. Similar to the preceding sections, it is suggested that these two aspects may be considered as the extremes on each end of a spectrum; ranging from tourists, who are affected mostly by macro factors, to those who are affected mostly by micro factors (Figure 26):

*Figure 27: Spectrum: Macro – Micro*



The analysis of the sub-factors under Externals (Scandinavian price-level; Economic Climate in China; Policy, Legislation and Political Climate; and Safety), the other main factors, as well as the existing literature shows that all tourists are somewhat affected by macro factors, such as the ones described in Chapter 7 (Tse & Hobson, 2008; Tse, 2013). However, it can be argued, that some tourists are more affected by these factors than others.

Specifically, the tourists who travelled using tour operators were for example more affected by policy and legislation, because they were not only subject to tourism policies, but also indirectly to company policies. Similarly, tourists who were price focussed were more affected by exchange rates and the price level in the destination countries, than those who were not. Finally, tourists, who focussed is on geography rather than activities, were less affected by micro factors such as local laws or legislation about specific activities.

On the other hand, tourists who travelled independently or travelled on customised activity based tours were less affected by macro factors. Instead, these tourists were more affected by micro factors, such as local laws, rules or customs at the specific destination(s) they visited. The differences along this spectrum were well encapsulated in the following quote from the representative of Albatros:

“The standard situation with the CITS guy who packs with Gulliver will never change. It will just keep growing. For that macro economical tendencies have more influence. Exchange rates, prices in Denmark; the general development is that the richer the middle class gets, the bigger the chance that they will buy these trips. So I think the volume is probably affected a lot by the economy and particularly by how the exchange rate fluctuates and how the inflation is; if it keeps growing things will get cheaper abroad. (...) On the other hand, the small markets, the ones we do, the specialized things. They are not affected much by the macro aspects. That it is more about how good you are at doing your stuff.“

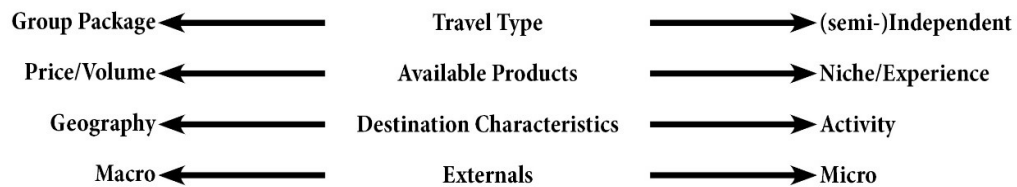
(Albatros\_NicheWholesaler)

The fourth and final spectrum distinguishes between focus on macro and micro factors. Although all tourists are affected by macro factors, tourists who travel with tour operators are more affected by these factors than those who do not, as they are indirectly affected by macro factors that concern companies, for example specific company legislation. On the other hand, tourists who travel independently are more affected by micro factors, such as local rules or customs, as these actors were in more direct contact with the local environments. In recognition of the importance of such factors and considering the limited literature that deals with these issues (Tse, 2015), this thesis calls for future studies to investigate such micro and macro factors and the relations between them to deepen scholarly knowledge on the subject.

### 8.3.5. A Conceptual Model for Characterisation of Chinese Tourist Types

The analysis of Travel Type illustrated that China outbound tourists' are indeed not homogenous, as suggested in the literature review (p. 24). The point of this thesis is not to characterise Chinese tourists in general; in fact, it has been explicated, why it does not make sense to attempt to do so. Instead, this thesis suggests that individual practitioners and/or researchers consider the type of Chinese tourists they are interested in on four different spectrums that correspond with the four main factors presented in Chapter 7 and summarised in this discussion chapter. When considered together, these four spectrums can be used as a model (Figure 27) that enables practitioners and researchers to better consider the type of Chinese tourists' they are dealing with, want to attract, or to understand.

Figure 28: A Conceptual Model for Characterisation of Chinese Tourist Types



The extreme left and right of the model resembles the established groupings of Chinese outbound tourists into:

- Group package tourists: Focus on price (operators focus on volume); want to visit as many places as possible in a short amount of time; sensitive to macro factors, such as fluctuations in exchange rates
- (Semi-)independent tourists: Interested in niche experiences, and specific activities; sensitive to micro factors, such as local laws or customs

The model supports existing literature which makes a broad distinction between group tourists and (semi-)independent tourists (e.g. Jin & Sparks, 2017; Prayag et al., 2013; Xiang, 2015). It also highlights that many tourist types appear along the spectrums

between these extremes. It is suggested, that many “typical” groups of Chinese tourists can be understood as occupying a vertical space covering an area on all four spectrums, while less typical tourist groups may not follow such a pattern. By considering the tourists that one is working with or interested in on these four spectres (ideally in conjunction with the factors presented in the Chapter 7 and summarised in Figure 21 p. 268), researchers and practitioners may be more specific about what kind of Chinese tourists they are interested in. In doing so, they may avoid homogenous perceptions and treatment of China outbound tourists.



## **CHAPTER 9:**

### **CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This chapter concludes the thesis by summarising the major findings presented in the previous chapters. The two research questions are initially addressed, then the theoretical and managerial contributions of the thesis are discussed. Finally, recommendations for further research are given.

#### **9.1 Understanding the Tourism Distribution Phenomenon**

The purpose of this thesis was to gain a deeper understanding of tourism distribution in general and of Chinese tourism to Scandinavia specifically. Through extensive reviews of existing literature on tourism distribution and on China outbound tourism, gaps were located within the existing literature. Little research has been found that provides deeper understandings of the distribution process for China outbound tourists, especially in the European context. Most existing studies have focussed on tourists in isolation and have primarily applied quantitative methods to understand specific discrete factors such as motivations or image. Often such studies ignored other actors, relations and factors that might influence China outbound tourism; it has for example been commonplace to ignore the important roles of suppliers and intermediaries. This thesis questioned such approaches and proposed that tourism distribution is also affected by enactments, relations and factors, which have little to do with what the isolated tourist wants or thinks (s)he wants.

The review of the China outbound tourism literature over the period 2003 to 2015 generated four prospective research directions. These were essential elements of the

study methodology. First, attention was called to the benefits of supplementing existing research of China outbound tourism to Asia with further studies on destinations outside Asia, to better reflect evolving China outbound travel patterns. This thesis has provided such a supplement through its particular focus on Chinese tourism to Scandinavia.

Second, it was suggested that future research should apply alternative (qualitative and mixed) methods that recognize the diversity of Chinese tourists and of the Chinese market. This thesis has responded to this need by developing and applying a novel qualitative approach and framework for analysis of 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'.

Third, the review revealed the problematic aspects of research that assumes the importance of culture as a determinant in studies of China outbound tourism. With its inductive approach, this study did not place culture in a position of particular importance *a priori*. It was found that culture is indeed an important element of Chinese tourist 'differences'. However, the results also showed that this was only one of various factors, and that it did not stand out relative to other (primarily practical) factors and sub-factors influencing 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'.

Fourth, the review suggested that researchers should recognize that China outbound tourism does not occur in isolation, but rather as a component of wider relational systems, affected by source market related factors and actors, by destinations and by the social world of the tourist. The study acknowledged this need by introducing a methodological and theoretical approach based on Critical Pragmatism. The chosen approach combined aspects from Activity Theory and Actor-Network Theory to create a framework that acknowledges the practical realities of 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. Namely, that China outbound tourism happens in relational

networks highly affected by socio-relational, legislative, political, cultural and practical contexts.

The review of the tourism distribution literature revealed how the phenomenon has been primarily studied using a managerial epistemology. Because of this, the existing literature has often treated tourists as products that move through the distribution system, and has treated tourism distribution as something that can be designed and understood solely through distribution channels. The researcher has argued, that notwithstanding the merit of these studies, the insights that they produce are insufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Many of them consider tourism distribution as static and linear processes and ignore important contextual aspects that appear when tourists are moved to the product, rather than *vice versa*.

Based on the literature review, this thesis has suggested the existence of (at least) two different enactments of tourism distribution. The first considers tourism distribution as a tool for planning, simplifying and communicating complex distribution processes, the other considers tourism distribution as practices or phenomena. Whilst most of the existing literature has focussed on the former, this thesis focusses on the latter. By approaching tourism distribution in this way, it became evident that the participants (actors) may connect in many different non-linear ways and are subject to change through the distribution process. To address this deficiency, the researcher has suggested that a new approach and framework is needed to understand and analyse the tourism distribution phenomenon. This involves a framework that takes account of tourists, suppliers and intermediaries; is neither linear nor static; considers the context of tourists, suppliers and intermediaries respectively,

and finally, demonstrates a clear object of analysis. This thesis has developed such a framework (Figure 8 p. 78) based on a critical pragmatist approach, where theoretical tools were chosen based on their utility towards the research goals.

The structure of the framework is based on Activity Theory, while its application draws on insights from Actor-Network Theory. These approaches were chosen, because they allowed the researcher to construct a framework that was specific enough to ensure that important elements were considered, and at the same time open and critical enough to allow for things that were messy and did not fit into any predefined category. In this framework, tourism distribution is considered as a process of mediation, happening in dynamic relational networks of complex activity systems, rather than as a linear process. Single actors are investigated as activity systems with inner contradictions and Actor-Network Theory provides approaches to describe and make sense of the relations and contradictions between these actors/systems. The approach proposes a frame that can be used to analyse tourism distribution, around the central question of how tourists, intermediaries and suppliers each enact tourism distribution. It also encourages researchers to take an open approach where mess and multiplicity are embraced, rather than rejected. The analysis and subsequent results of this thesis have proven the utility of the framework, although it would benefit from additional scrutiny from future researchers.

In addition to the gaps in the literature that have been mentioned, the thesis located three significant methodological deficiencies - respectively an ontological, epistemological and methodological gap.

The ontological gap came from the primarily singular (post)-positivistic ontology that dominates studies of tourism distribution. A multiplicity approach was

suggested as a possible alternative and it was demonstrated how this could provide additional insights.

The epistemological gap materialised in the current managerial and reductionist approaches favoured in the prevailing studies of tourism distribution. Ways to embrace mess were suggested as alternatives to such approaches. The analysis conducted for this thesis, which included actors of all types and sizes, and focussed on results inductively derived from the data, rather than on predefined categories, show how such approaches may work in practice.

Finally, the methodological gap came from the limitations of current approaches to the analysis of tourism distribution. These include their static and isolated nature, linearity, unclear object of analysis and lacking sense of context. As already mentioned, the framework developed for this thesis provides a concrete alternative to such approaches.

The conclusions that have been presented so far answer the first research question posed in this thesis: what is tourism distribution and how may we better understand it? As has already been explained, tourism distribution may be enacted in different ways by different actors. This thesis has demonstrated how a single enactment of tourism distribution has dominated (tourism) research - as a static and isolated process happening in distribution channels. This enactment has merits in its ability to visualise and explain complex processes; however, it also has important limitations. This thesis suggests that the enactment of tourism distribution as a phenomenon provides an alternative approach that allows more in-depth investigations of the tourism distribution phenomenon. When enacted as such, tourism distribution appears as a process of mediation, happening in dynamic relational networks of complex activity

systems, rather than as a linear process of economic exchange. This understanding challenges researchers to approach tourism distribution in ways that recognise such complexity. The present thesis has suggested an approach and a framework that allow them to do so.

## **9.2 Actors, Relations and Factors Affecting ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’**

The second part of the thesis and, in turn, the conclusion, will answer the second research question posed in the introduction: who and what are the important actors, relations and factors affecting the distribution of Chinese tourists to Scandinavia?

The first part of the analysis investigated the basic enactments of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. This analysis highlighted the importance of a multiplicity-based approach, which recognises that ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ is not just one thing or practice, but is instead enacted as a variety of things and practices by the actors. Some of these differing enactments had important implications. For example, it has been demonstrated that some actors behave in ways that are contrary to the interests of the company that they represent. The tour guides/leaders enacted tourism distribution as something personal, with their own interests in mind, even if they were expected to represent the professional enactments of the company.

Another prominent example of differing enactments was that some Scandinavian actors (the national DMOs in particular) enacted Chinese tourists as group package tourists, while others enacted them as independents. Recognising the multiplicity approach to this thesis, the interesting aspect was that this was not based on two different perspectives, but on two factually different realities. Some could produce evidence that group package tourists were the major group, while others could do the same for independents. Although it was interesting to note how something as

simple and as important, as the basic way in which Chinese tourists travel was a topic for debate, the conflicting enactments did not create visible conflict in the distribution network. Instead, the actors with interest in the group package segment seemed to stick with the actors who represented this reality, while the actors who were interested in independents did the opposite. This example demonstrated that conflicting enactments do not necessarily lead to conflict. However, there may be a risk that some actors are misled or confused because of these differing enactments of the typical Chinese tourist to Scandinavia.

The second part of the analysis investigated the distribution networks that shape 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. It found that because of the spatial, geographical and structural distance between the actors involved in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia', the network actors often enacted each other as part of broad actor groups, rather than as individual businesses. These groups were enacted as three relatively stable clusters, in which actors shared common practices, challenges and/or traits – the Chinese Market Cluster, the China Travel Industry Cluster and the Intra-destination Cluster (which in turn consisted of the Local Destination Cluster, the National Destination Cluster and the Supra-national Destination Cluster). The researcher identified and investigated relations within these clusters in depth, along with the gateways appeared between them.

This analysis found that despite current trends in other markets, traditional operators were still crucial in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. Similarly, online intermediaries were also central and increasing in importance due to the rise of Chinese FITs. It was shown how the importance of these intermediaries meant that many aspects of the tourist decision making process, which are often ascribed to the needs

or motivations of the tourist, were not actually decided by them or their motivations in the case of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. Instead, they were highly affected by the profit driven motivations of the various intermediaries. This supports the researcher’s earlier argument; that one cannot understand tourism distribution through an isolated investigation of for example tourist motivations or decision making. Since many important decisions about the ways that tourist travel were not made by tourists, but by other actors in the distribution network.

Similarly, the analysis showed that economic exchange was not the only important commodity flowing between actors within the network, as previous researchers have often presumed. Market knowledge was among the most important commodities flowing between actors in the network. It is believed that this knowledge will become progressively more important and valuable as the Chinese market further develops and diversifies.

The structural distance between actors in the Scandinavian Intra-destination Cluster and the China Travel Industry amplified the importance of mediating actors in the distribution network. DMOs and DMCs played essential roles as mediators. The acquisition and dissemination of knowledge about the Chinese market was central to these roles, as well as informing the China Travel Industry about product developments in Scandinavian destinations. A potential problem arising from the way market knowledge was acquired and disseminated within this structure, was that most market insights emanating from traditional operators and DMCs were based on volume of sales. Since this information only evaluated the performance of existing initiatives, there is a risk that the reproduction of “safe” products will be preferred over invention or innovation.



Apart from knowledge, the relations within and between the network clusters took many forms. Examples include direct cooperation on product development or marketing efforts, and one-sided marketing or sales relations.

Actor cooperation across local, national and supra-national destinations was regarded as essential, mainly because of the size and perceived complexity of the Chinese market. Strong gatekeepers were needed to match the power of traditional operators. This need for coordination created further dependency on DMOs and DMCs as mediators, as these actors possessed knowledge, insights and access to the Chinese market that was absent amongst the local actors. Dependency on DMCs in particular was enhanced by challenges in direct contact between Scandinavian suppliers and Chinese intermediaries. The more persistent challenges related to operations, rather than to cultural difference between tourists and destinations, which has often been proposed as the main challenge in studies of China outbound tourism. Such operational challenges included vastly different working patterns, which for example resulted in late payments and last minute changes.

While DMO and DMCs were necessary as mediators, the long established dependency on these actors also meant that they enforced the structural distance between Scandinavian suppliers and actors in the China Travel Industry. For good or bad, it was now necessary for suppliers to “go through” such actors to reach the Chinese market in many cases. Because of this, the important role of DMCs and DMOs in the distribution network can be considered as both a strength and a weakness. A negative side effect of the reliance on DMOs and DMCs was that it forced actors in the Intra-destination Cluster(s) to compete for the favour of the DMCs and DMOs. This created a combination of cooperation and competition – dubbed cooptation – within the Intra-Destination Clusters. Although cooptation can be regarded as a

healthy way to cooperate while being forced to stay alert, it also meant that actors had to spend considerable resources allocated to their China effort in Scandinavia instead of in the actual market. Finally, it meant that many actors ended up “betting on the same horse”, as many efforts were not organised. Almost all local destinations were for example basing their effort on gaining the “the extra night” from the Chinese tourists. This is problematic because the potential in “the extra night” is limited and only some (few) actors will win out in the end, as tourists/tour operators can only add a limited number of nights to their schedules.

The researcher also located temporary gateways and relations within the network. The most prominent and important amongst these were the yearly workshops organised by the national DMOs. These workshops opened temporary gateways between the network clusters and enhanced and strengthened relations within the Intra-Destination Clusters. They were essential for building cooperative relations between actors in the local and national destinations, as they offered a platform where Scandinavian businesses met the China Travel Industry as a unit, and where they could share ideas and develop shared products. Other events and ad-hoc marketing activities also acted as important temporary gateways in the distribution network.

Chapter 7 investigated the factors affecting ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. This analysis summarised the various factors into four main factors with corresponding sub-factors. The four main factors were: Travel Type, Available Products, Destination Characteristics and Externals.

The most important sub-factor affecting the Travel Type of Chinese tourists was Travel Experience and Market Maturity. This sub-factor strongly influenced the three other main factors, as it affected the tourist’s preference in terms of products,

behaviour at the destination, and focus in terms of external factors. It was noted that because of the price-level and the perception of Scandinavia as a more exotic destination, Chinese travellers to Scandinavia were more experienced and affluent on average, compared to Chinese tourists to other European destinations. This eased some of the challenges associated with inexperienced tourists somewhat in the Scandinavian context, although the number of more inexperienced tourists was also rising, as Scandinavia became a more known travel destination in China.

Information (sources) and Tourist Expectation also affected the travel type of the tourists. On- and/or offline WOM was found to be a major factor, while the relatively low *expectations* the tourists had when visiting Scandinavia had both positive and negative outcomes. Market Trends was also a significant sub-factor affecting Travel Type. The importance of this factor is a challenge to practitioners, because market trends are difficult to control. However, in the case of Scandinavia, they also presented potential, because many traits of Scandinavian destinations mentioned by the interviewees (e.g. novelty, cleanliness, and lifestyle) aligned well with the current trends in the Chinese market.

For Available Products, a deciding sub-factor was the *Volume* of incoming tourists. In the case of ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, the numbers were relatively low in many places, but the huge *potential* was enough to engage both suppliers and intermediaries. Combined, the volume and potential signified the importance of *demand* – respectively for Scandinavian tourism products by the Chinese consumers on the one hand and for Chinese tourists by Scandinavian actors on the other. The latter was heightened further, as suppliers in Scandinavia were continually discovering advantages of Chinese tourists compared to other source markets, other than sheer numbers. This suggested that the uniqueness of Chinese tourists, which is generally

regarded as a challenge of China outbound tourism, compared to other markets, also carried significant advantages. These included the Chinese tourists' tendency to arrive year round, and to prefer products that interested other tourists less. This finding adds to existing knowledge on China outbound tourism, by pointing to other advantages of China outbound tourism than sheer numbers and spending, which are often presumed to be the only attractions of the market.

Accessibility and Intermediaries' Destination Knowledge were also found to be important sub-factors influencing Available Products in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. The importance of the intermediaries' knowledge about the destination(s) has important implications. Previous research has mainly focussed on tourists' prior knowledge or image of a destination. The findings of this thesis suggest that the image or perceptions that representatives of intermediaries and other companies have, are as significant, as those of tourists, and that this should be recognised in future research.

(In)tangible Attractions was a deciding sub-factor under Destination Characteristics. Similar to other destinations around the world, Scandinavia's traditional attractions were important pull factors for incoming Chinese tourists. However, the analysis also revealed that more intangible factors were equally or even more important. Scandinavia was generally enacted as a 'special' place, due to its unique blend of 'environment' and 'lifestyle'. This was different from other European destinations, where group tourists in particular have traditionally been more focussed on traditional sightseeing. This knowledge is relevant to destination marketers in Scandinavia, who may want to base more of their marketing effort on the attributes that make Scandinavia unique and 'special'. Another important sub-factor under Destination Characterises was Supply, Capacity and Quality of Accommodation. The

analysis related to this factor solidified how tourism distribution, in this case ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, is not designed or planned by the actors involved. Instead, many of the decisions and choices about important issues such as product design resulted from reactions to challenges that related to supply, capacity and product quality, rather than from open choices. Seasonality and China Readiness were also confirmed as important sub-factors.

Finally, various sub-factors under Externals also affected ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. These included Scandinavian Cost-level; Economic Climate; Policy, Legislation and Political Climate; and Safety. The high price-level negatively influenced all aspects of tourism distribution. However, it also had some positive impacts. It meant that the incoming travellers to Scandinavia had higher incomes than typical Chinese tourists to other parts of Europe. In combination with the average travel experience of Chinese tourists to Scandinavia, which was also higher than to other places in Europe, this resulted in less of the negative behaviour, which has been associated with inexperienced low-income travellers from China. Policy and legislation also had important impacts on ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’, although the analysis indicated that general policies like the anti-corruption campaign impacted the respondents more than specific tourism legislation such as the Tourism Law of the People’s Republic of China.

All of these sub-factors were regarded as difficult to change by actors in the tourism industry. However, the analysis demonstrated how the actors still managed to deal with them, as they had often found creative and pragmatic ways to navigate or overcome the challenges that these factors presented.

Corresponding to the four main factors, the discussion also introduced four spectrums that provide a distinction between different types of China outbound tourists.

The first spectrum distinguished between group package tourists and (semi-)independent tourists. The analysis indicated that although (semi-)independent travel is on the rise in Scandinavia, the market will not instantly be transformed from group tourism to independent tourism and become an exclusive FIT market in the near future. The development is sporadic and overlaps and parallels with other developments, such as the rise in first time travellers from second and third tier cities.

The second spectrum distinguished between price/volume focus and niche/experience focus. Increase was found in all product categories, except for very cheap group tours, as new tourists emerged from new markets and existing tourists became increasingly experienced and demanded more experiential elements from their travels. Many interviewees reported a move away from the very cheap tours. This indicated a slow but steady qualitative rise in 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' at all levels.

The third spectrum distinguished between a focus on geography and/or activities. A movement towards a stronger activity focus among China outbound tourists to Scandinavia was located. (Semi-)independent tourists required more activities and tour operators began to incorporate more activity elements into even the cheaper tours. Based on this, it was also suggested that a stronger focus on activities rather than geography, might strengthen Scandinavian destination(s) in the future.

The fourth spectrum distinguished between focus on macro and micro factors. It was argued here, that although all tourists are affected by macro factors, tourists who travel with tour operators are more affected by these factors than those who travel independently. The reason was that these travellers were indirectly affected by macro

factors that concern companies, for example specific company legislation. On the other hand, tourists who travel independently were more affected by micro factors, such as local rules or customs, as these actors were in more direct contact with the local environments and therefore more influenced by the local contexts they took part in during their travel. Further studies that focus specifically on the nature and importance of such micro and macro factors and the relations between them are needed to deepen scholarly knowledge on China outbound tourism.

### **9.2.1. Tools Derived from the Thesis**

*Price vs. Experience Focus – Four Product Categories* (Figure 25 p. 298) is a development of the price/volume – experience/niche spectrum (Figure 23). It is a simple tool to distinguish between four different types of tour products depending on their focus on either price or experience.

*Three Tendencies in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’* (Figure 19 p. 210) was based on the finding that the rise in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’ may be understood as a confluence of three simultaneous tendencies. A rise in (semi-)independent tourists, with little need for special treatment; in group tourists, who are increasingly maturing and therefore need less special treatment; and in first time travellers, who are inexperienced and therefore need a high degree of special treatment. These simultaneous developments explain the differing enactments of Chinese tourists by Scandinavian suppliers, as actors are often talking about or working with different things, when they work with China outbound tourism. Considering the previous literature (See Existing Literature on China Outbound Tourism p. 24), it can be argued that these developments are not specific to Scandinavia, but are generally present for China outbound tourism. The model that has been proposed offers researchers and

practitioners the first illustration of this tendency, as well as a more precise description of the phenomenon than what previous research has presented.

This thesis has illustrated and confirmed that China outbound tourists to Scandinavia and generally are indeed heterogeneous and should not be stereotyped. Because of this, it has not been a goal of this thesis to characterise Chinese tourists in general. Instead, the thesis suggests that individual practitioners or researchers consider the type of Chinese tourists they are interested in on four different spectrums that correspond with the four main factors presented in the analysis. As the name suggests *A Conceptual Model for Characterisation of Chinese Tourist Types* (Figure 28, p. 310) offers researchers and practitioners a tool that allow them to do so.

Finally, the analyses conducted for this thesis are summarised by the figure entitled *Factors Affecting 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'* (Figure 21 p. 268). This figure visualises the four interrelated main factors and corresponding sub-factors that affect 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. It also illustrates how these factors are dependent on the actor-network(s) that they exist within, the relations and gateways that shape these networks, and the different ways that 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia' are enacted by different actors. For practitioners and researchers, the figure provides a tool to illustrate the aspects that should be the focus, if they wish to better understand and/or engage with distribution of 'Chinese tourism to Scandinavia'. On a broader level, the model and the analyses that substantiate it, provide a step towards a better understanding of China outbound tourism in specific contexts and of tourism distribution in general. The model can also be regarded as the first step towards a model that provides a broader overview of the important factors in China outbound



tourism in general. In order to develop into such a model, it will have to undergo further scrutiny. This would ideally consist of comparison with other qualitative studies to expand and deepen the content, and subsequent quantitative testing to ensure its validity.

### **9.3 Theoretical Contributions**

This thesis has contributed to (tourism) scholarship by introducing the concept of Activity Theory to the tourism context, and by combining this approach with Actor-Network Theory, which is still a relatively new approach in tourism studies. Tourism scholars have attempted neither previously. The application and integration of these concepts offer the potential of new and deeper insights on tourism distribution and potentially on other issues in tourism research. The novel ontological, epistemological and methodological approach that has been adopted in this study may also inspire other scholars to approach tourism distribution, or other aspects of (tourism) research, from alternative angles, which may help develop, deepen and strengthen (tourism) scholarship in the future.

More specifically, this thesis has highlighted an alternative understanding (enactment) of tourism distribution and developed an approach and framework, that may help researchers and practitioners to engage with it. This approach allows for a deeper understanding(s) of the processes, relations and factors involved in tourism distribution, as it takes a more open approach to tourism distribution that is not limited by a managerial epistemology. The biggest difference lies in the enactment of tourism distribution as a process of mediation, happening in dynamic relational networks of complex activity systems, rather than as a linear process of economic exchange. By introducing this approach, the thesis adds to current knowledge about tourism

distribution, as well as to knowledge about how tourism distribution may be understood.

As has been explained throughout the thesis, the researcher has presented an alternative approach to existing understandings of tourism distribution, not a substitute for them. The researcher acknowledges that appropriate approaches and tools may be applicable in different situations. The researcher also recognises that the suggested approach involves collection of data that may be difficult to access accessible, as well as temporal and monetary resources that may not be readily available to practitioners. Therefore, the approach and framework (Figure 9 p. 78) presented in the four introductory chapters of this thesis may be more relevant to researchers, who aim to gain deeper insights, than to practitioners, who are looking for a broader overview. Based on the results gained from the analyses conducted for the thesis, the researcher has developed four tools, which may be more accessible to practitioners looking for an overview (Figure 19 p. 210; Figure 21 p. 268; Figure 25 p. 298 and Figure 28, p. 310 ). Together, the advanced methodological approach and framework, and these more accessible tools shape the theoretical contribution for this thesis, and offers elements relevant to researchers and practitioners at all levels.

#### **9.4 Practical/Managerial Contributions**

The most valuable practical/managerial contribution from this thesis lies in the deep insights into the actors, enactments, relations, practices and specific factors that shape the distribution network in ‘Chinese tourism to Scandinavia’. These insights are relevant to practitioners in Scandinavia, as well as to other similar destinations with interest in the Chinese market. Similarly, they are also relevant to practitioners in the Chinese tourism industry with interest in Scandinavian or comparable destinations. For other practitioners, the four tools mentioned in the previous section may provide

valuable input as they provide insights and possible application outside the study context. These tools may be particularly relevant for practitioners who are new to China outbound tourism, or for those looking for an overview. When viewed alongside the existing literature, the results also contribute to the collective knowledge on China outbound tourism generally. These additional perspectives are relevant to academics and practitioners who are seeking an enhanced understanding of China outbound tourism.

### **9.5 Future Research**

Several suggestions have been made in the discussion chapter (Chapter 8) and in this conclusion about future research prospects. The present research framework and approach has only been tested within a specific study context – Chinese tourism to Scandinavia – and leaves open many opportunities to explore broader conceptualisations. The present research approach would benefit from replication with a larger number and greater diversity of respondents, either in the same or in similar contexts. Similar investigations of China outbound tourism to other destinations in Europe could verify whether the results of this thesis are only applicable to the Scandinavian context or if some of them apply more broadly to European destinations. Similar investigations based on other tourist groups, such as business tourists or students abroad, could confirm whether the results can be broadened to Chinese tourists in general. Application of similar approaches to other large emerging tourism markets such as India, ASEAN or Brazil would also be a valuable addition. Comparing the results of such studies with the results of this thesis, would allow researchers to better distinguish between those factors that are specific to a certain culture, geography or setting and those pertaining to large emerging markets in general. The tools that have been proposed would also benefit from further scrutiny by both practitioners and

researchers. Specifically, the model: ‘Relations, Networks and Factors Affecting ‘Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia’’ (Figure 21) should be subjected to additional qualitative testing in other destination settings with a view to broadening its scope beyond the current context, and from quantitative testing to verify the importance that has been attributed to the suggested main and sub-factors.

This thesis contributes to wide-ranging discussions within research in general and within tourism research in particular. Such discussions include the respective applicability of quantitative and qualitative approaches, the applicability of Pragmatism in qualitative research, and the tendency to oversimplify and generalise about tourist groups who share only few common traits. The researcher looks forward to following and participating in these discussions into the future. Perhaps the primary contribution of this thesis to broader discussions within tourism research, is to commence an ontological and epistemological discussion about how researchers knowingly or unknowingly approach and understand tourism distribution. The researcher has suggested that prevailing modes of thinking have constrained the capacity to understand tourism distribution, and has proposed alternative approaches. How will future researchers approach the subject? Does the concept of distribution channels have a future in a world where traditional structures are being disrupted and challenged by new technologies and modes of travel? If the concept is to have future currency, this researcher has argued that it must be accompanied by other understandings, including more networked approaches. The researcher proposes that this thesis will initiate discussions about how to approach the idea of tourism distribution, in a time where both tourism and distribution are going through transformation.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Interview Guides

The following tables present the tools used to generate the interview guides for this thesis. These tables are based on the conceptual framework (Figure 8), the questions posed relating to the framework (Table 8) as well as inspiration from Flyvbjerg, as presented in Chapter 4. The interview guides brought to the field appeared as the right column of the following tables. The tables are divided into three columns:

- *Category*: The overall category that a group of questions belongs to.
- *Research Question(s)*: These are the questions the interview seeks to answer, however, many of these questions cannot be asked directly, because they are too complicated or because they may bias the interviewee.
- *Interview Question(s)*: The questions that will be asked during the interview. These are based directly on the research questions and meant to provide enough information to answer these questions.

The interview guides varied slightly depending on the specific interviewee. The following three tables present the standard for intermediaries, suppliers and tourists respectively, which were altered to fit the individual interviewee.

## Intermediaries

Category	Research Question(s)	Interview question(s) (The ones asked during the interview)
<b>Introduction to the project</b>		<p><i>I am a PhD Fellow from The School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. I am originally from Denmark.</i></p> <p><i>In my thesis, I investigate distribution of Chinese tourists to Scandinavia. This involves the companies that supply products to the tourists, the tourists themselves and the intermediaries that connect them (These may for example be tour operators, travel agents, eMediaries). The thesis may be useful to practitioners as they can get an overview of their potential cooperation partners and their competitors. This knowledge can be used to simplify or in other ways strengthen distribution towards the Scandinavian market.</i></p>
<b>Presentation (Subject)</b>	<p>What kind of company is this?</p> <p>What characterises the subject?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is his/her position in the company?</li> <li>- Can he/she speak on behalf of the company?</li> <li>- Are the utterings of the respondent affected by other roles (for example roles in boards, associations etc.)?</li> </ul>	<p>Could you begin by presenting yourself and your background in tourism, as well as the company/organisation that you represent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you have other roles in associations/boards, apart from the one that you represent here?</li> </ul>
<b>Chinese tourism to Scandinavia (Object)</b>	<p>How and why is the company involved in Chinese tourism to Scandinavia?</p> <p>How is this company practically involved in tourism distribution?</p> <p>How does the interviewee perceive Scandinavia? How much knowledge does the actor have of the destination?</p>	<p>Could you explain your company's/organisation's involvement in Chinese tourism to Scandinavia?</p> <p>Why did your company/organisation get involved in Chinese tourism to Scandinavia?</p> <p>Could you walk me through a normal sale of a trip to one or more Scandinavian countries?</p> <p>How do you work with the Scandinavian market? (As one market, as three countries or as part of bigger destination -</p>

		Western Europe, Northern Europe, or Europe)?
	Does the company work with Scandinavia in an organized way; is it a primary concern?	Do you have a specific strategy (with specific goals) for the Scandinavian market? - If yes, could you give a short explanation of the strategy?
	What are the main advantages/challenges in dealing with this market?	What are the biggest advantages and challenges in working with the Scandinavian market?
<b>External challenges in working with the Scandinavian market (Rules)</b>	Are there any external rules, laws, cultural barriers etc. that make it more challenging to work with Scandinavian partners compared to other places?	If you compare Scandinavia with other destinations, are there any specific laws, cultural differences or things like that, which make it challenging to work with this market?
<b>Important intermediaries in Chinese tourism to Scandinavia (Community)</b>	What actors do they consider as important to Chinese tourism to Scandinavia?	What actors do you compete or cooperate with in Chinese tourism to Scandinavia?
<b>Cooperation with other actors (Division of labour)</b>	How do they cooperate with other actors in terms of getting Chinese tourists to Scandinavia? This involves the questions asked by Flyvbjerg (2001) - “Who gains, and who loses? - Through what kinds of power relations? - What possibilities are available to change existing power relations? - And is it desirable to do so?”	You mentioned a number of companies as your cooperation partners; could you elaborate on this cooperation? - How do you cooperate? - What do you gain from this cooperation, what do you give up? - Who are most important? - Why these? - What role does your company play in relation to the others? - Do you think these relations will change in the near future?
		Who are the most important actors to you? - Why are they important?
		Are there specific companies that you left out on purpose, why so?
<b>Concluding remarks</b>		Do you have any comments or questions before we end the interview?



## Suppliers

Category	Research Question(s)	Interview question(s) (The ones that will be asked during the interview)
<b>Introduction to the project</b>		<p><i>I am a PhD Fellow from The School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. I am originally from Denmark.</i></p> <p><i>In my thesis, I investigate distribution of Chinese tourists to Scandinavia. This involves the companies that supply products to the tourists, the tourists themselves and the intermediaries that connect them (These may for example be tour operators, travel agents, eMediaries). The thesis may be useful to practitioners as they can get an overview of their potential cooperation partners and their competitors. This knowledge can be used to simplify or in other ways strengthen distribution towards the Scandinavian market.</i></p>
<b>Presentation (Subject)</b>	<p>What kind of company is this?</p> <p>Who is the interviewee?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is his/her position in the company?</li> <li>- Can he/she speak on behalf of the company?</li> <li>- Are the utterings of the respondent affected by other roles (for example roles in boards, associations etc.)?</li> </ul>	<p>Could you begin by presenting yourself and your background in tourism, as well as the company/organisation that you represent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you have other roles in associations/boards, apart from the one that you represent here?</li> </ul>
<b>Chinese tourism to Scandinavia (Object)</b>	<p>How and why is the company involved in Chinese tourism to Scandinavia?</p>	<p>Could you explain your company's/organisation's involvement in Chinese incoming tourism?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is it a point of focus?</li> <li>- How many, for how long etc.?</li> <li>- How does it compare to other markets?</li> </ul> <p>Why did your company/organisation get involved in incoming Chinese tourism</p>
	<p>How is this company practically involved in tourism distribution?</p>	<p>Could you walk me through a normal visit from a Chinese tourist, starting from the initial</p>

		<p>sale of the product to the tourist leaving your establishment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do they come in groups or as individuals?</li> <li>- Do you get them from specific sources?</li> <li>- Anything out of the ordinary compared to other tourist groups?</li> </ul>
	What are the main advantages/challenges in dealing with this market?	What are the biggest advantages and challenges in working with the Chinese market?
<b>External challenges in working with the Scandinavian market (Rules)</b>	Are there any external rules, laws, cultural barriers etc. that make it more challenging to work with Chinese partners/tourists compared to other places?	<p>If you compare China with other source markets, are there any specific laws, cultural differences or things like that, which make it challenging to work with this market?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relating to Chinese cooperation partners?</li> <li>- Relating to Chinese tourists?</li> </ul>
<b>Important intermediaries in Chinese tourism to Scandinavia (Community)</b>	What actors do they consider as important to Chinese tourism to Scandinavia?	What actors do you compete or cooperate with in your work with Chinese incoming tourism?
<b>Cooperation with other actors (Division of labour)</b>	<p>How do they cooperate with other actors in terms of getting Chinese tourists to Scandinavia? This involves the questions asked by Flyvbjerg (2001)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Who gains, and who loses?</li> <li>- Through what kinds of power relations?</li> <li>- What possibilities are available to change existing power relations?</li> <li>- And is it desirable to do so?”</li> </ul>	<p>You mentioned a number of companies as your cooperation partners; could you elaborate on this cooperation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you cooperate?</li> <li>- What do you gain from this cooperation, what do you give up?</li> <li>- Who are most important?</li> <li>- Why these?</li> <li>- What role does your company play in relation to the others?</li> <li>- Do you think these relations will change in the near future?</li> </ul>
		<p>Who are the most important actors to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why are they important?</li> </ul>
		<p>Are there specific companies that you left out on purpose, why so?</p>
<b>Concluding remarks</b>		Do you have any comments or questions before we end the interview?

## Tourists

Category	Research Question(s)	Interview question(s) (The ones that will be asked during the interview)
<b>Introduction to the project</b>		<p><i>I am a PhD Fellow from The School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. I am originally from Denmark.</i></p> <p><i>In my thesis I investigate distribution of Chinese tourists to Scandinavia. This involves the companies that supply products to the tourists, the tourists themselves and the intermediaries that connect them (These may for example be tour operators, travel agents, eMediaries). The thesis may be useful to practitioners as they can get an overview of their potential cooperation partners and their competitors. This knowledge can be used to simplify or in other ways strengthen distribution towards the Scandinavian market.</i></p>
<b>Presentation (Subject)</b>	What are the subject characteristics?	<p>Could you begin by presenting yourself and your travel companions (if any)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where do you come from?</li> <li>- What is your education level?</li> <li>- What is your profession (for how long)?</li> <li>- Travel experience?</li> </ul>
<b>Chinese tourism to Scandinavia (Object)</b>	How did the tourist decide that they want(ed) to go to Scandinavia?	<p>How did you decide that you want(ed) to go to Scandinavia?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What were the deciding factors?</li> </ul>
	How is the actor practically involved in tourism distribution?	<p>Can you explain the booking process for your trip?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Go through the booking process, what actors did you use, why these?</li> <li>- Go through the trip itself, what do you want to do/did you do, why?</li> </ul>
	How does the interviewee perceive Scandinavia? How much knowledge does the actor have of the destination?	<p>How do you see Scandinavia as a tourist destination? (As one market, as three countries or as part of bigger destination - Western Europe, Northern Europe, or Europe)?</p>

	What are the main advantages/challenges in dealing with this market?	What are the biggest advantages and challenges in going to Scandinavia instead of other places?
<b>External challenges in working with the Scandinavian market (Rules)</b>	Are there any external rules, laws, cultural barriers etc. that make it more challenging to travel to Scandinavian compared to other places?	<p>If you compare Scandinavia with other destinations, are there any specific laws, cultural differences or things like that, which make it challenging to go there?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In relation to tourism intermediaries, like airlines or travel agencies?</li> <li>- In relation to suppliers, like hotels and attractions?</li> <li>- In relation to locals?</li> </ul>
<b>Important actors in Chinese tourism to Scandinavia (Community)</b>	What actors do they consider as important to their travel to Scandinavia?	Which companies or people were important in planning and doing the trip?
<b>Cooperation with other actors (Division of labor)</b>	<p>What roles do these actors play, why are they important? This involves the questions asked by Flyvbjerg (2001)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Who gains, and who loses?</li> <li>- Through what kinds of power relations?</li> <li>- What possibilities are available to change existing power relations?</li> <li>- And is it desirable to do so?”</li> </ul>	<p>You mentioned a number of actors, what roles do these actors play in you going to Scandinavia?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do you gain from these relations, what do you give up?</li> <li>- Who are most important?</li> <li>- Why these?</li> <li>- Do you think these relations will change in the near future?</li> </ul>
<b>Concluding remarks</b>		Do you have any comments or questions before we end the interview?

**Appendix 2: Add for Potential Interviewees**

Date:

Dear Sir/Madam

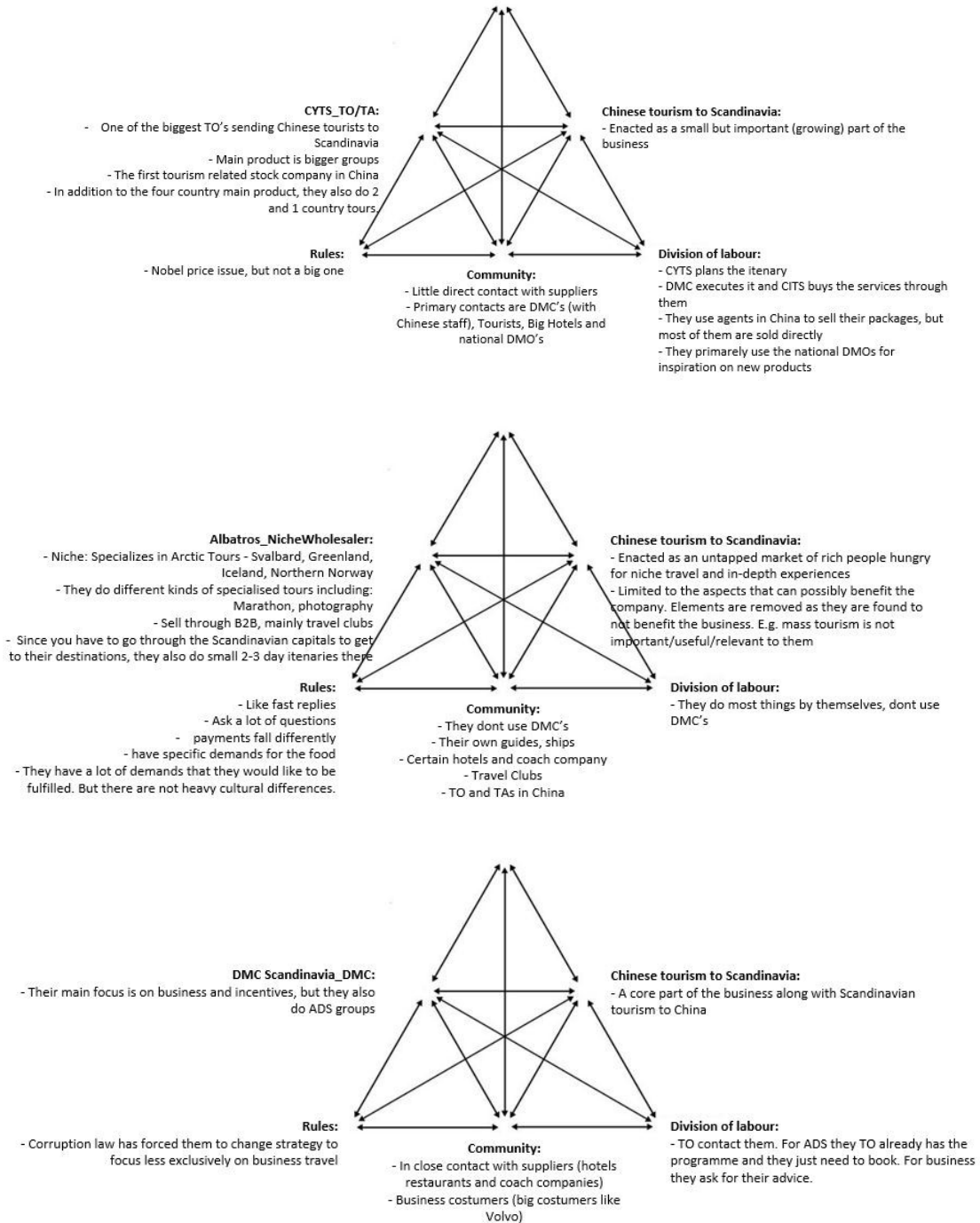
I am a Danish PhD student from School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. I am doing my PhD Thesis on Chinese tourism to Scandinavia. Therefore, I would like to get in contact with Chinese who have been to Scandinavia in the previous five years. If you are interested in helping me by sharing your experience face to face or via phone or Skype or if you know anyone who might be eligible, please contact me via email: [matias.joergensen@](mailto:matias.joergensen@) , phone Whatsapp: +852 5611 or WeChat: Mjmatias.

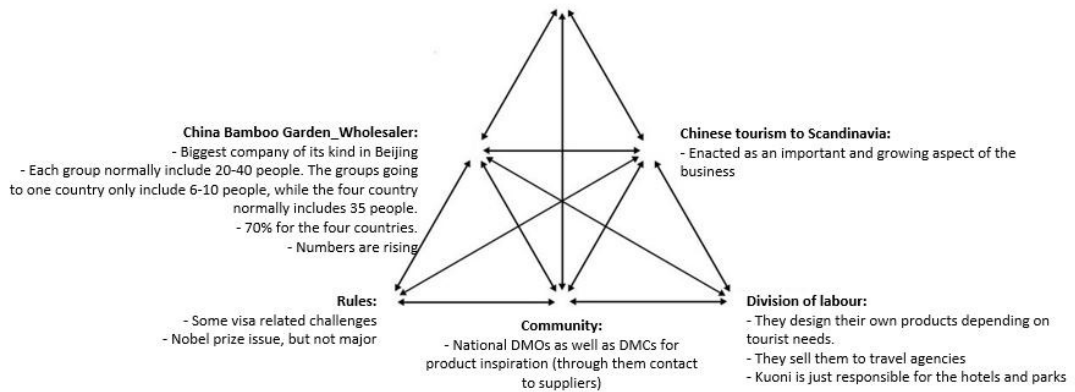
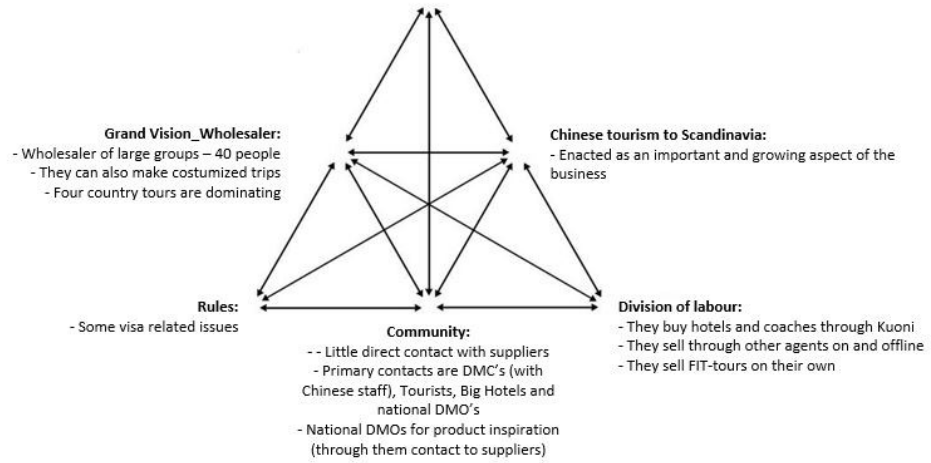
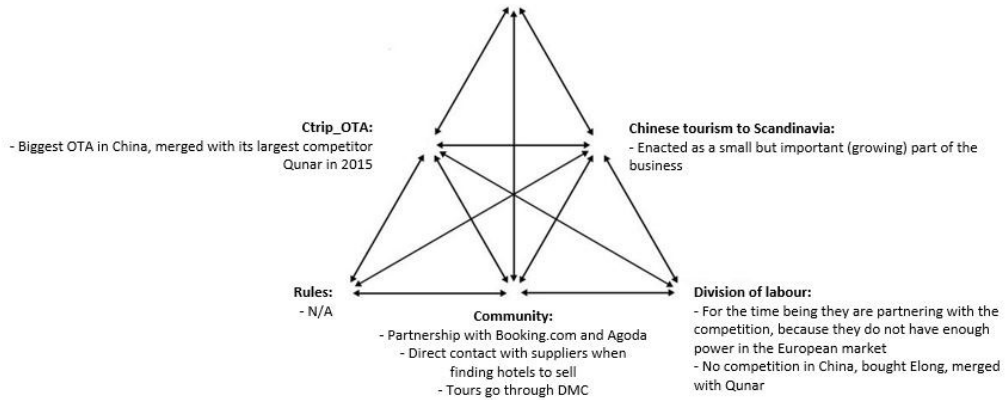
Best regards

Matias Thuen Jørgensen

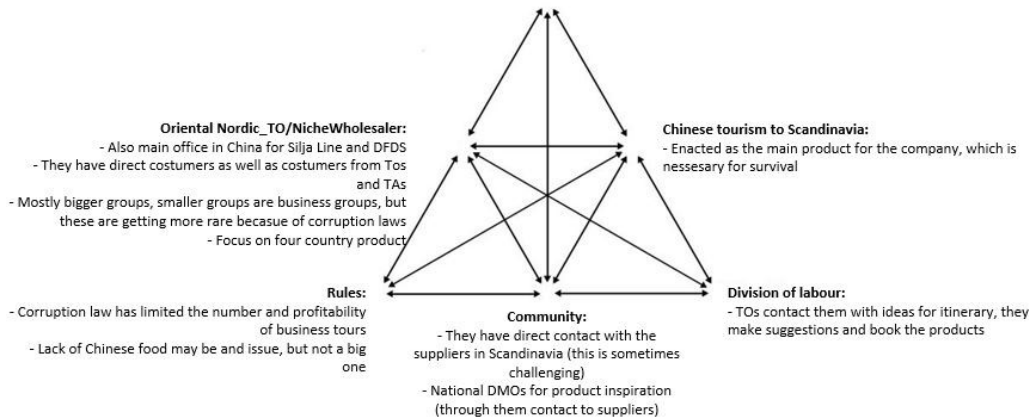
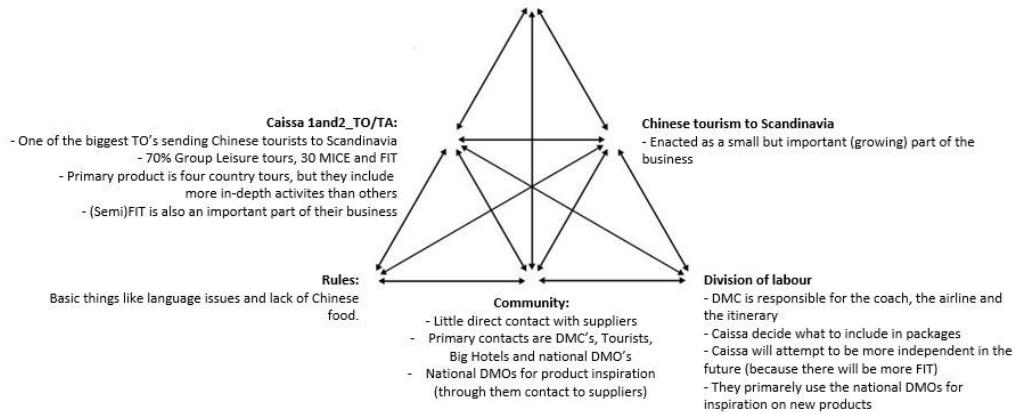
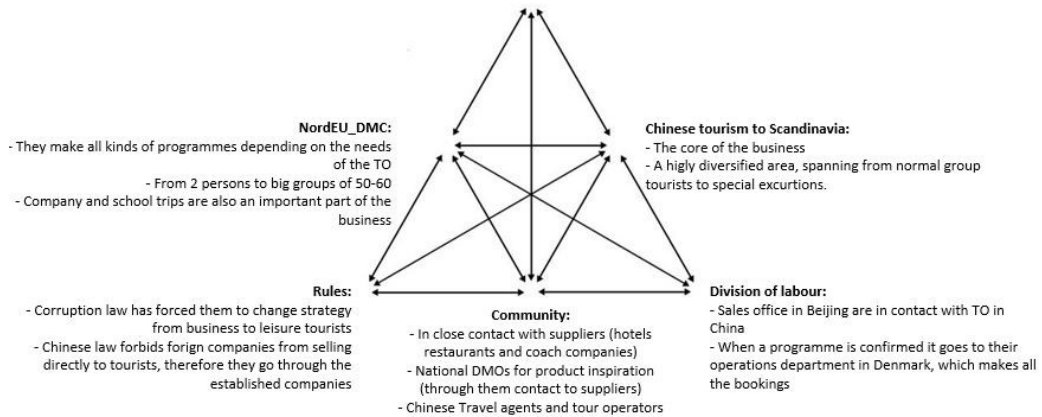
## Appendix 3: Activity Systems

### Intermediaries

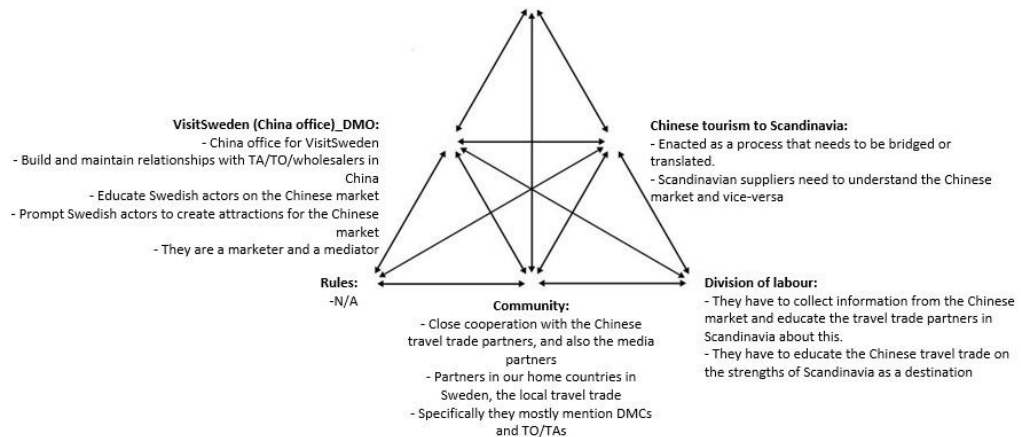
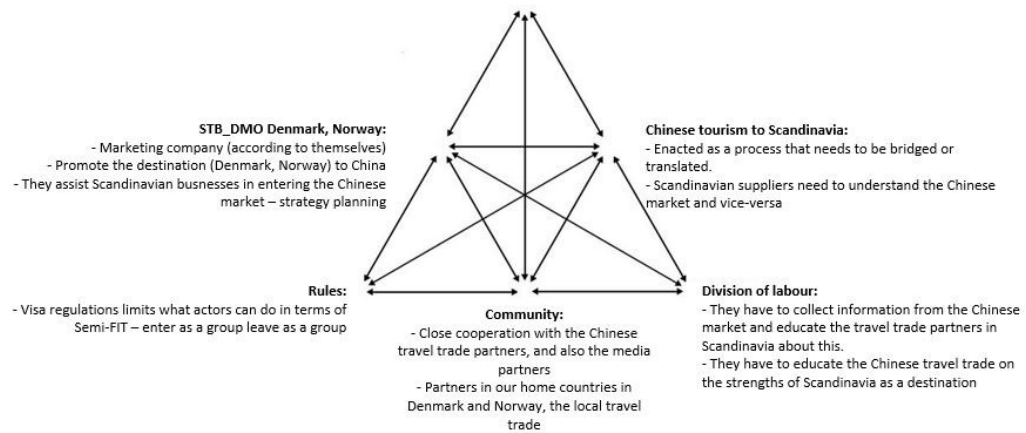
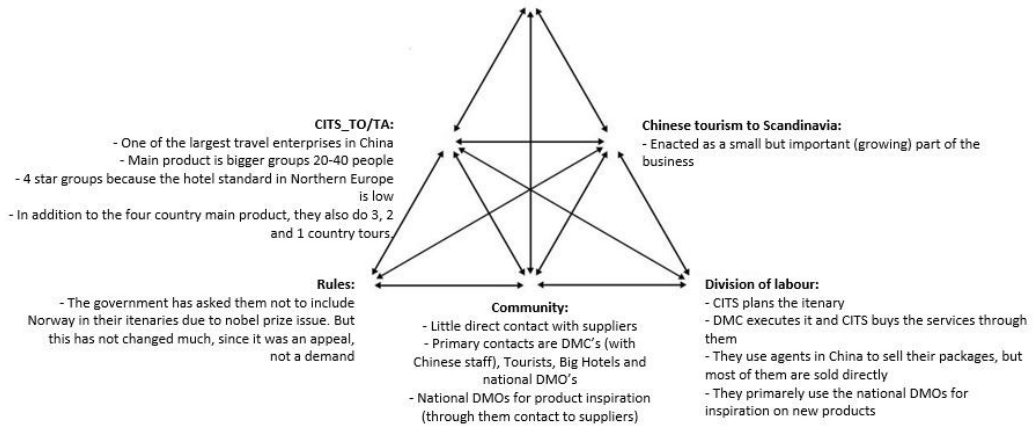




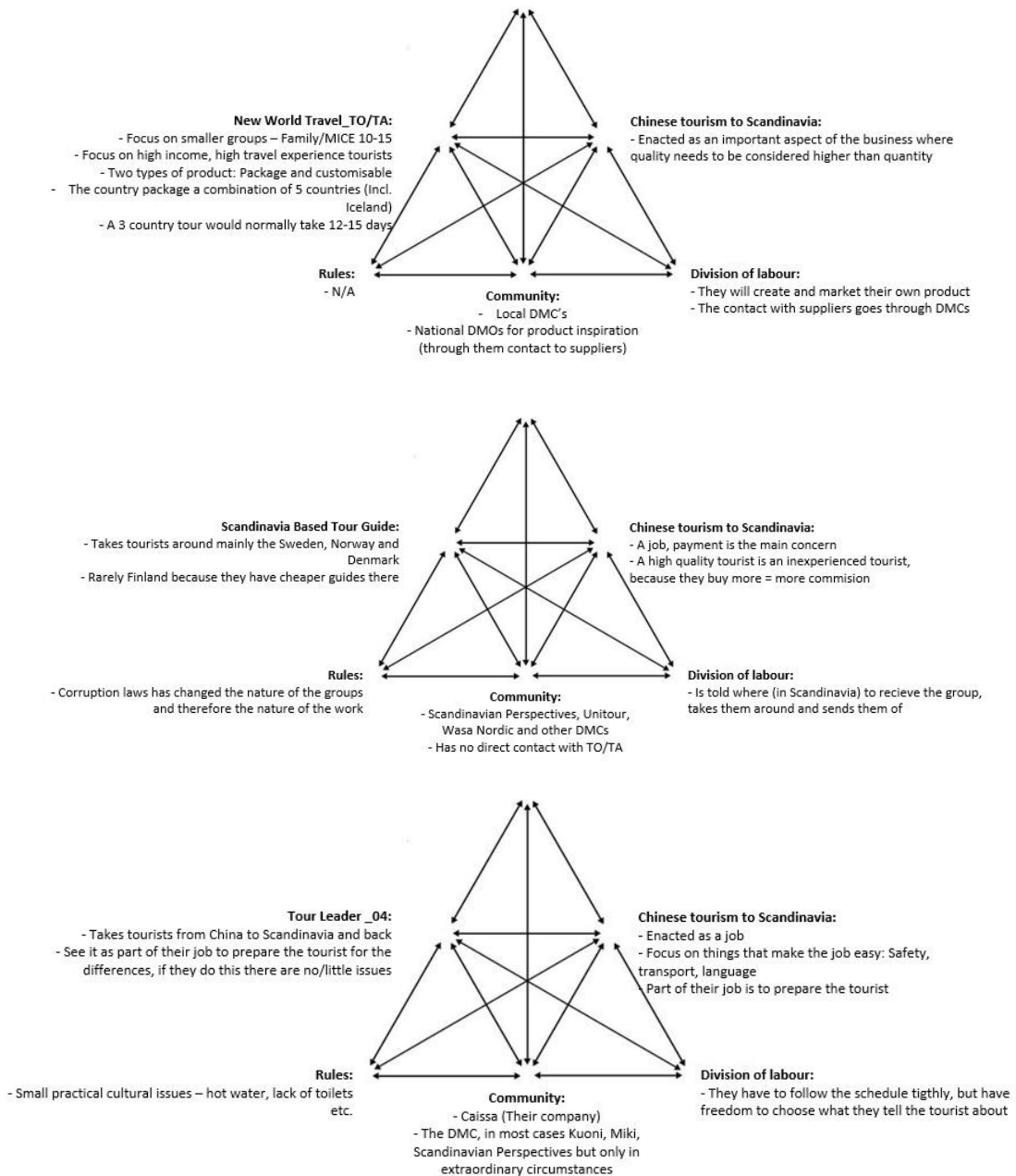
## Understanding Tourism Distribution

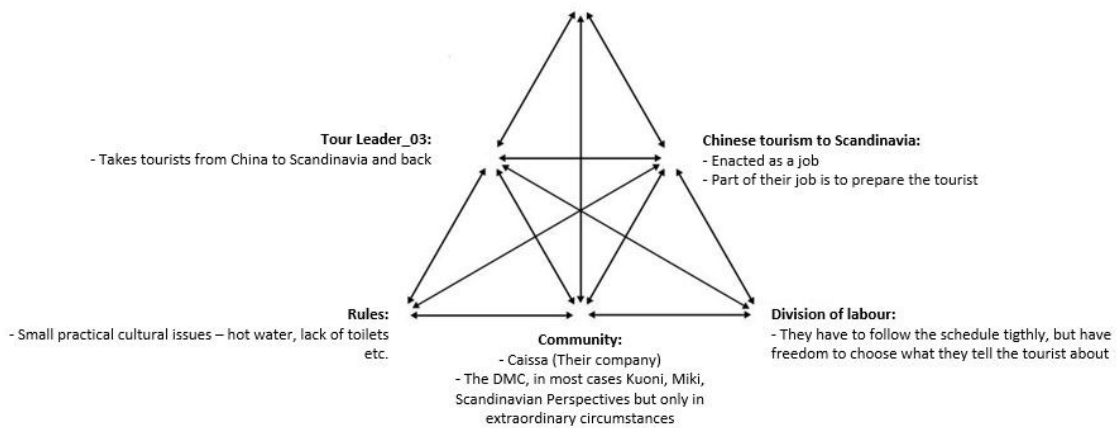
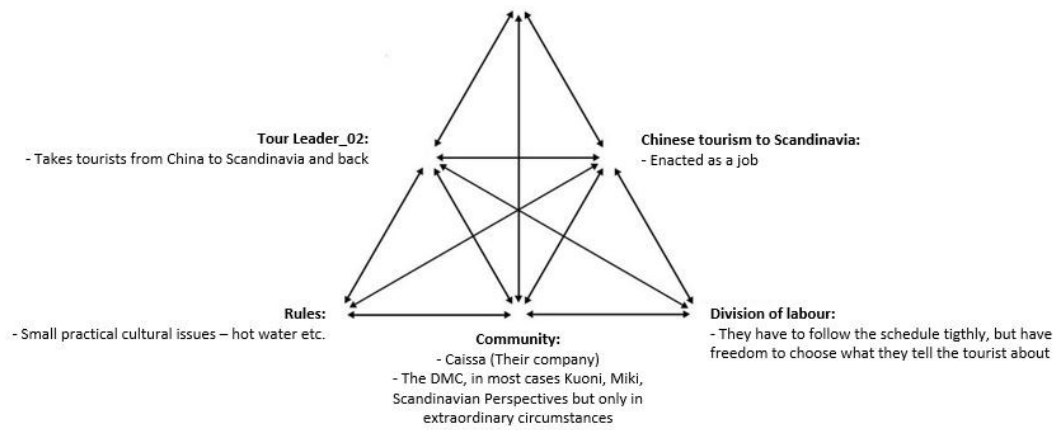
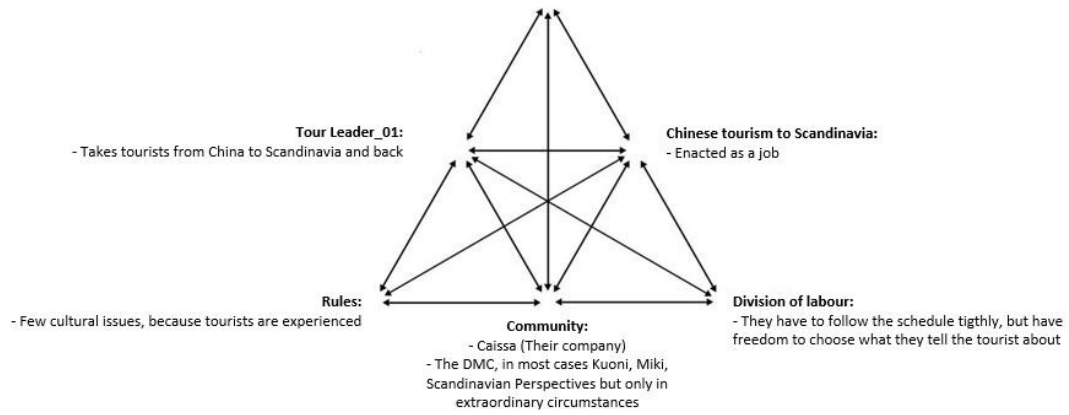




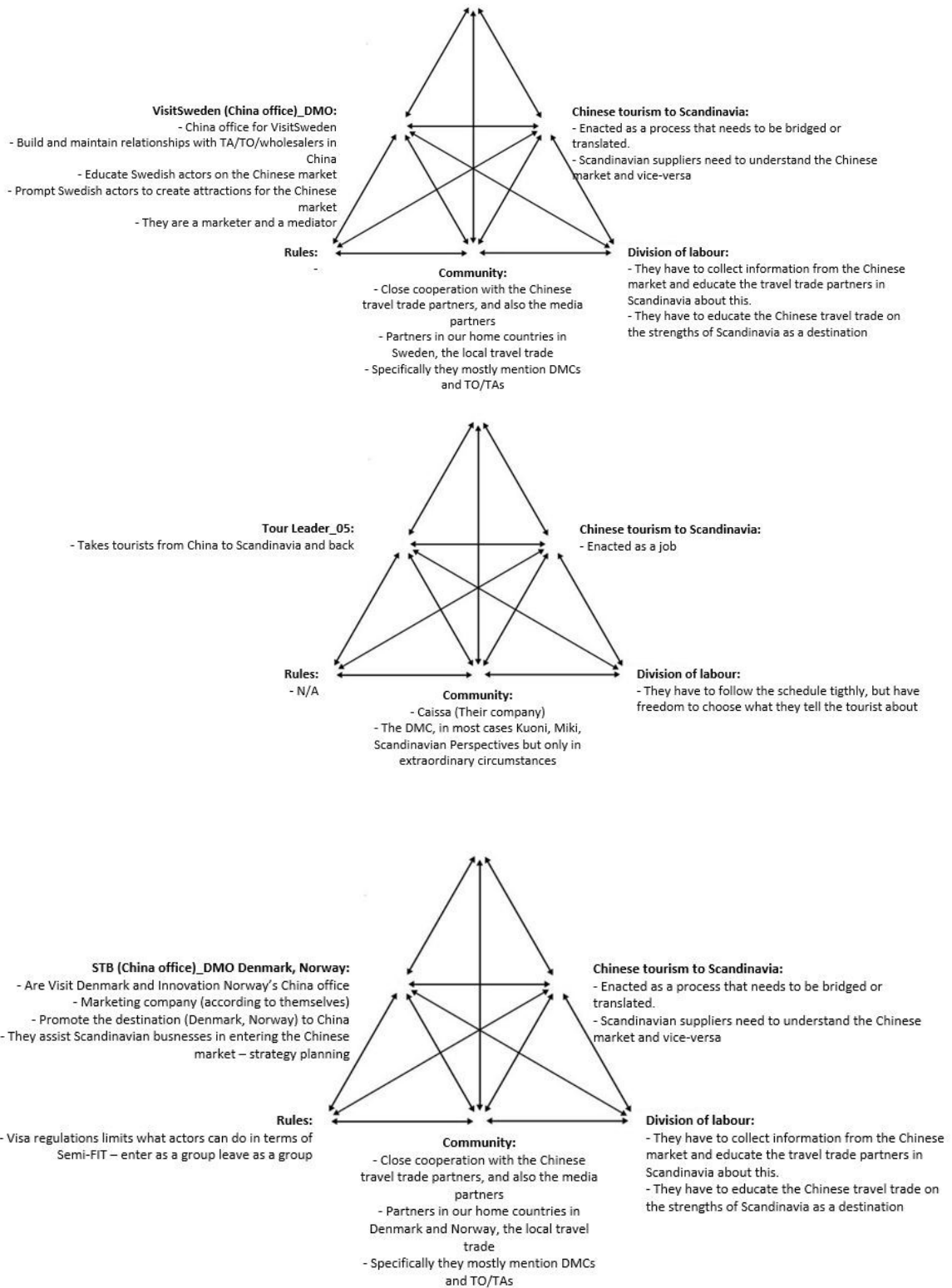


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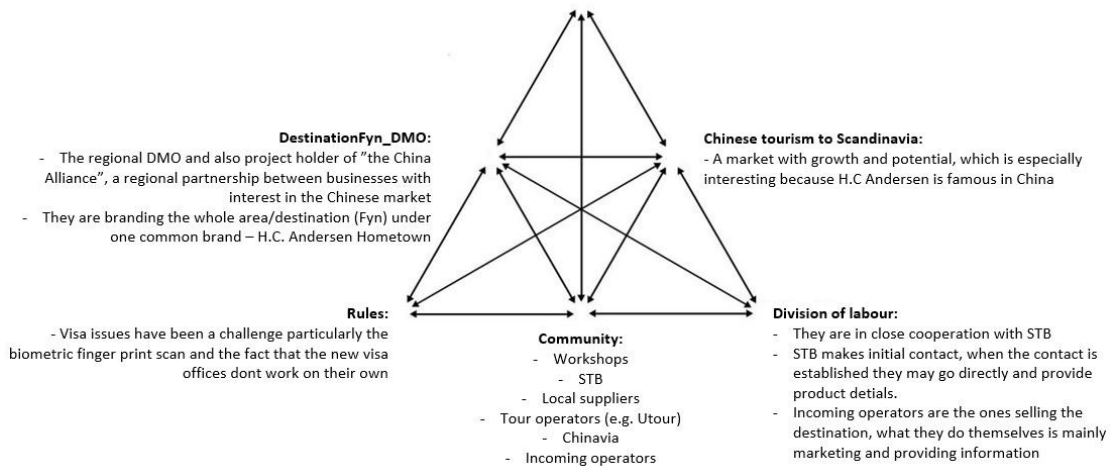
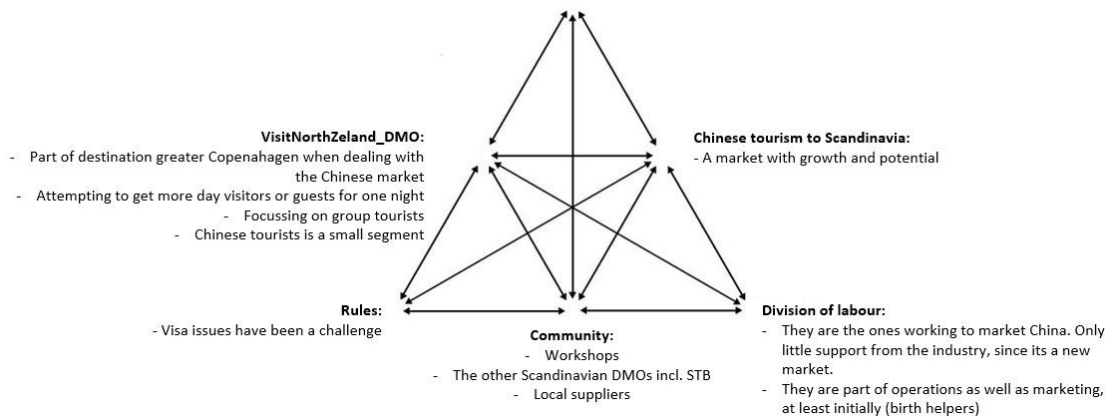
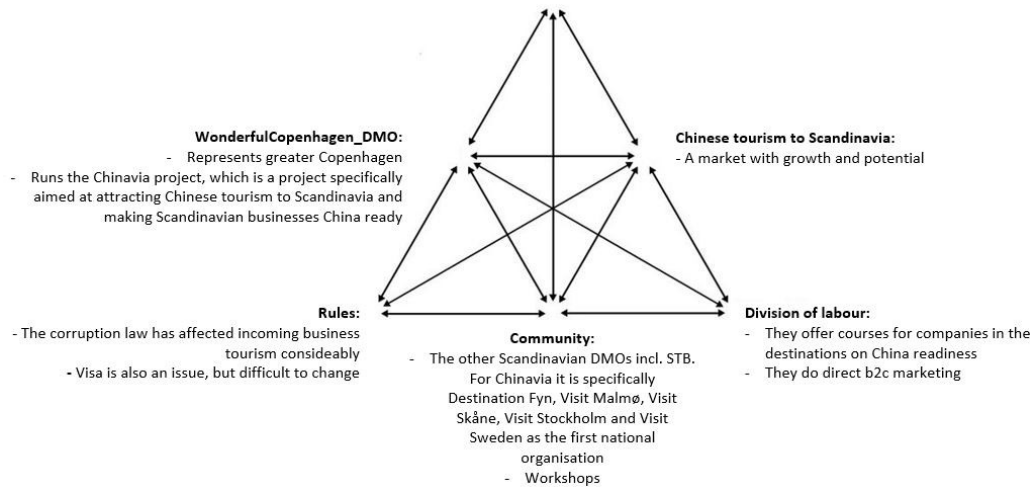




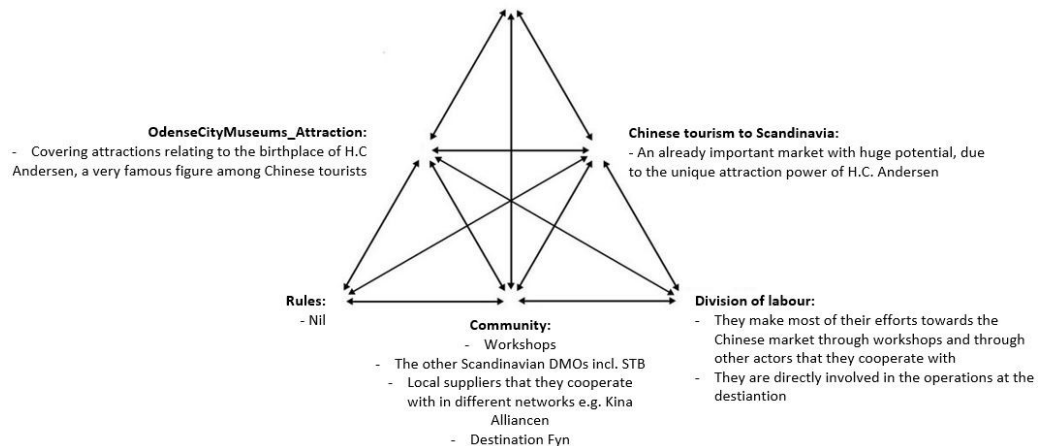
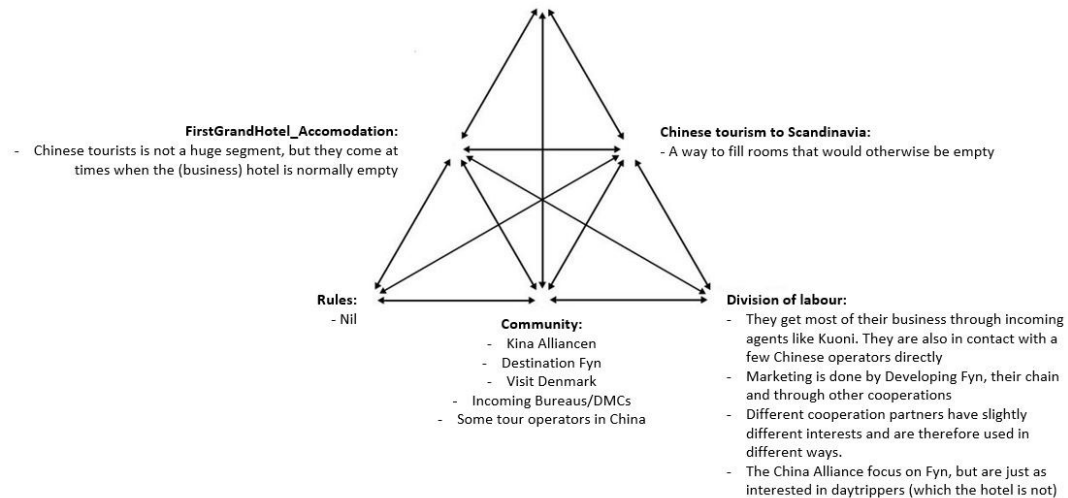
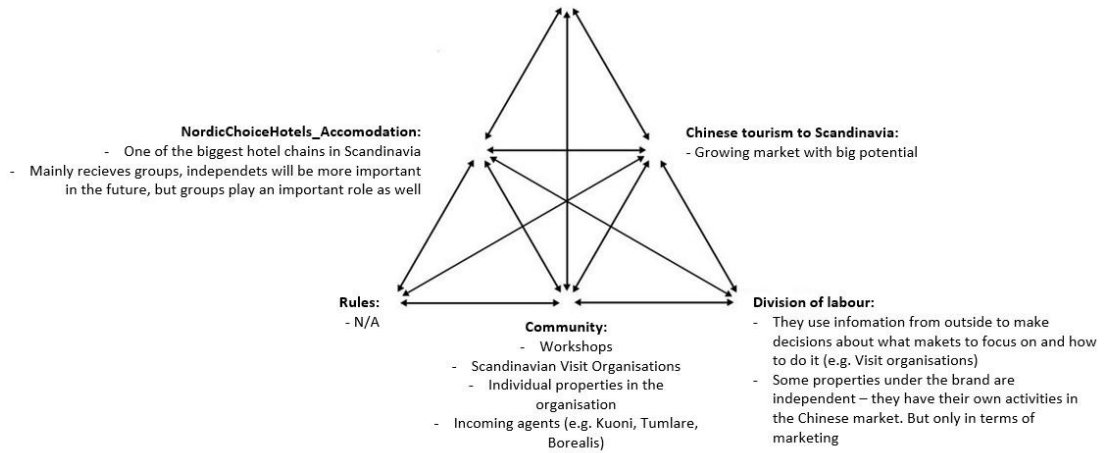
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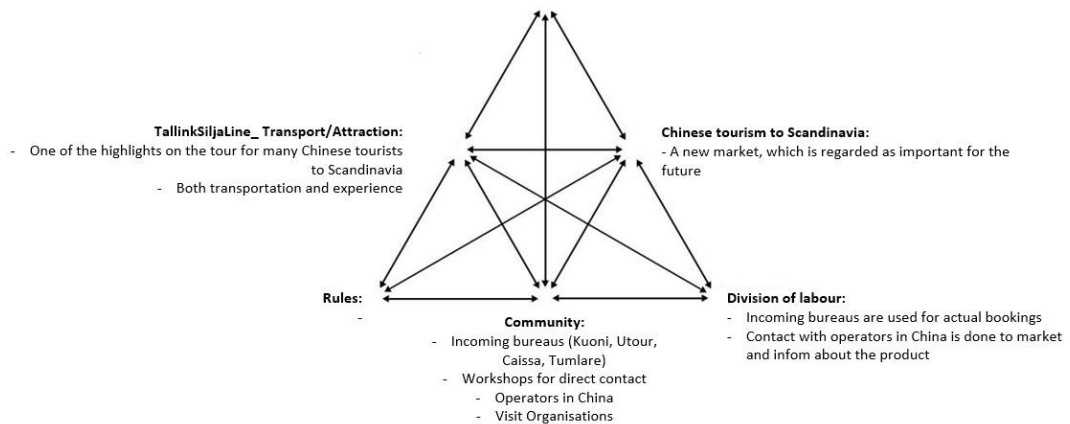
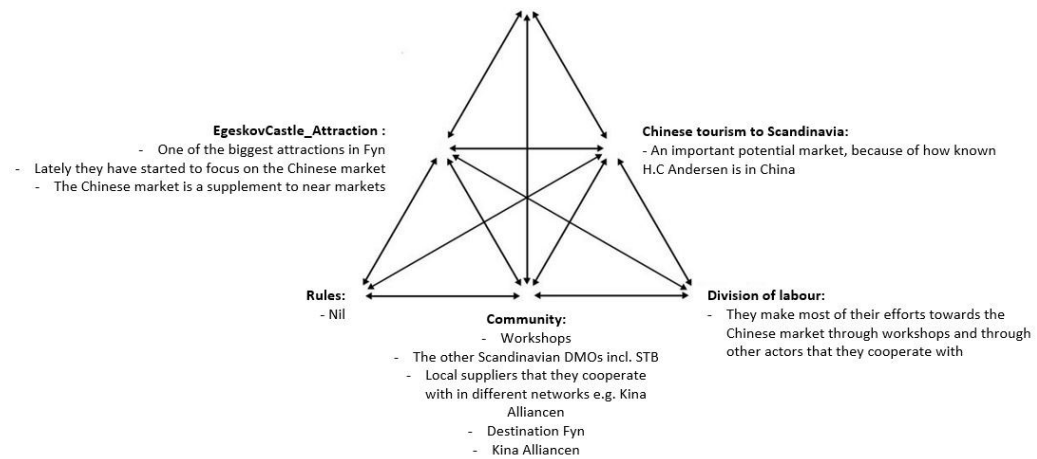
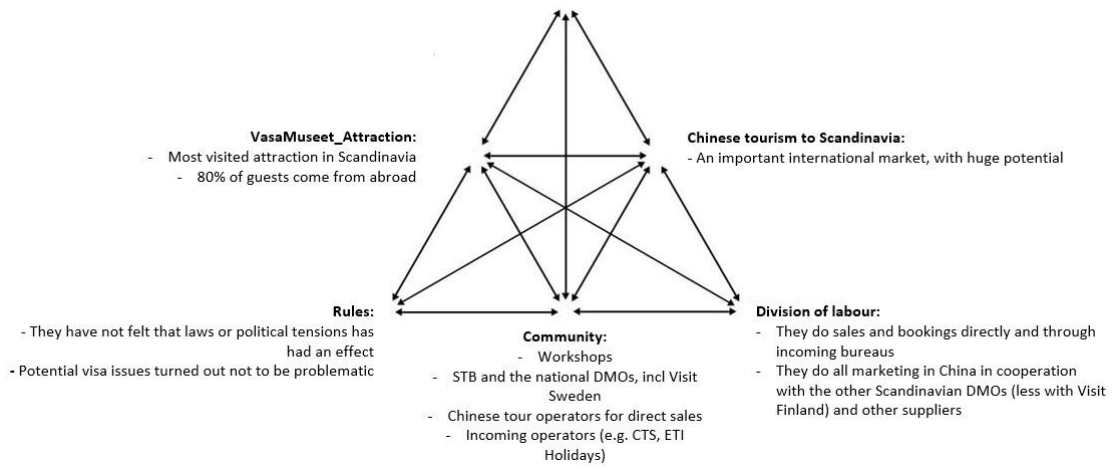


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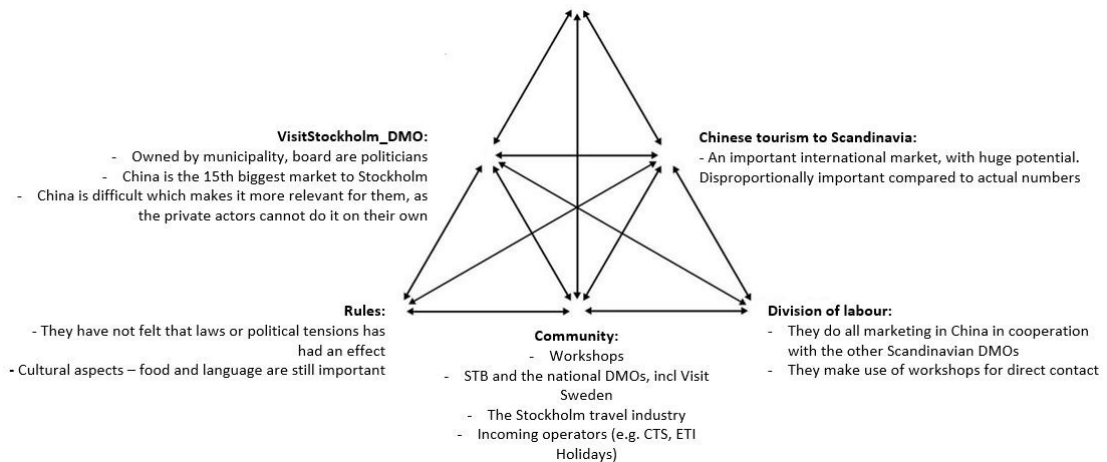
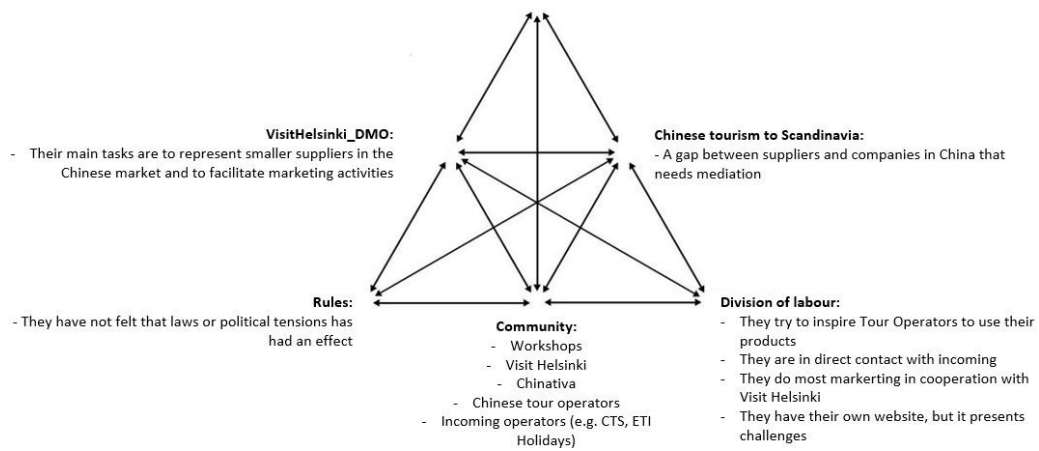
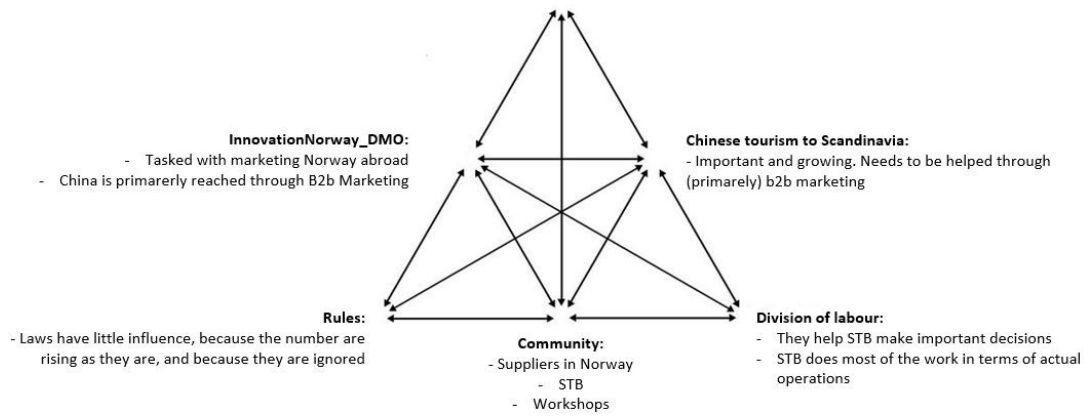


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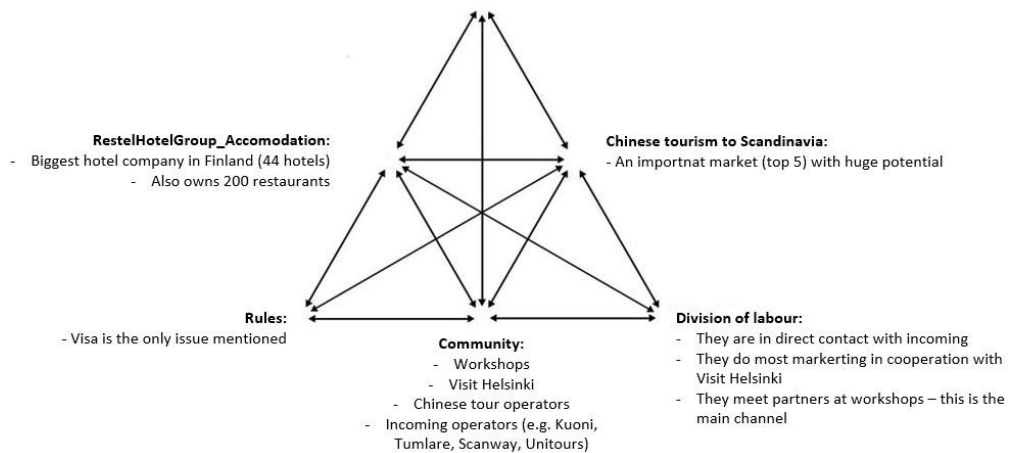
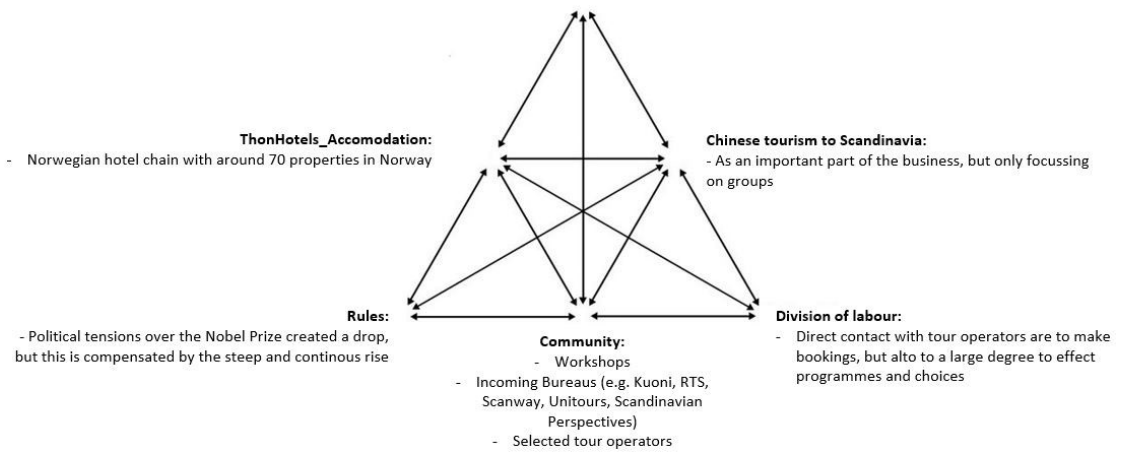
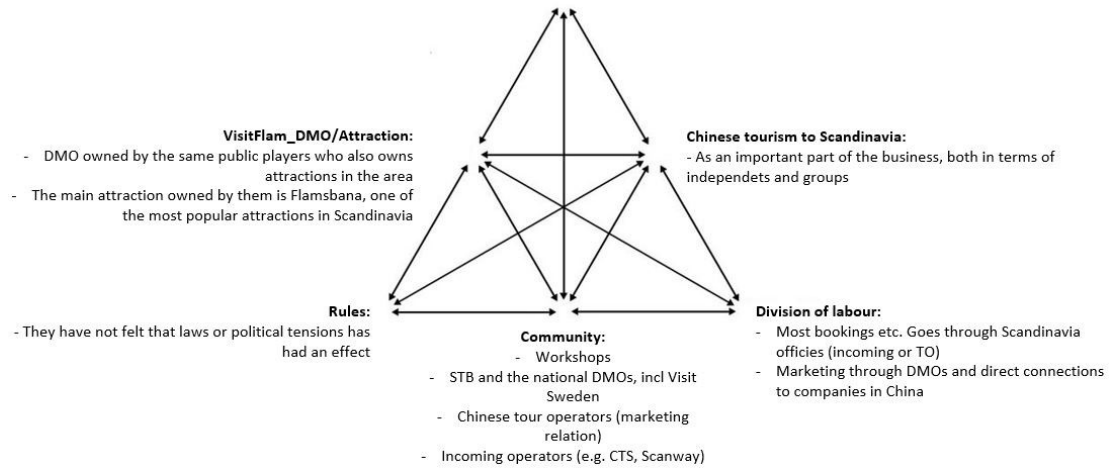




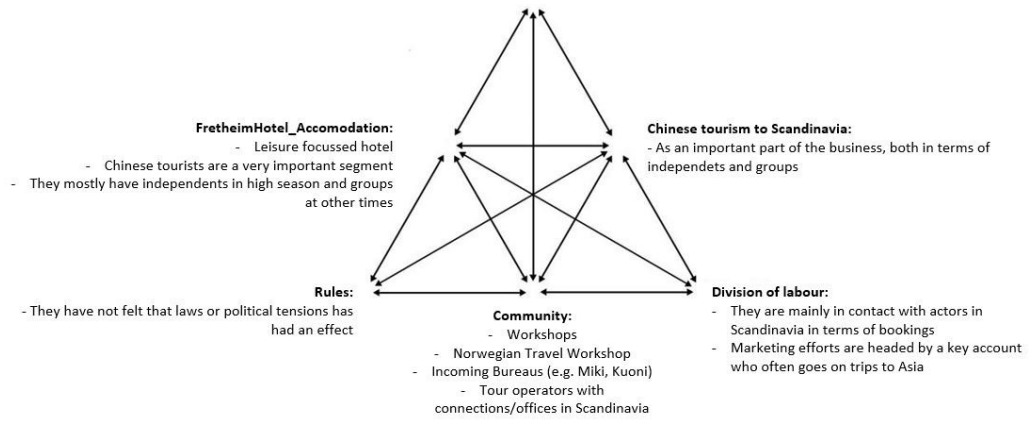
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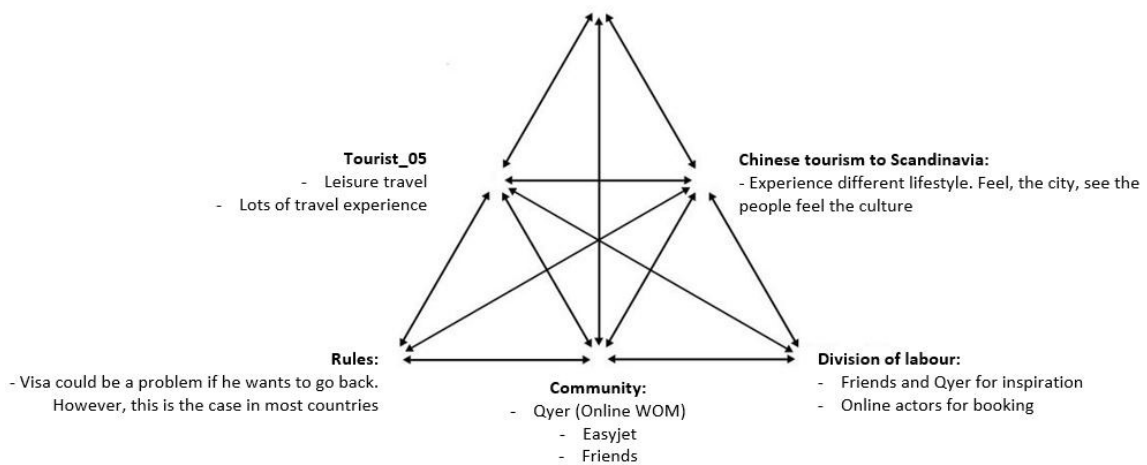
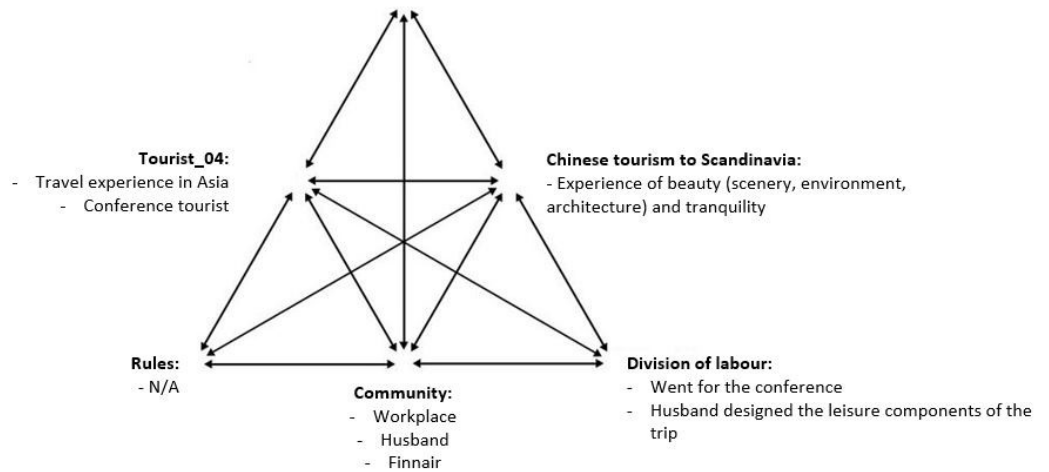
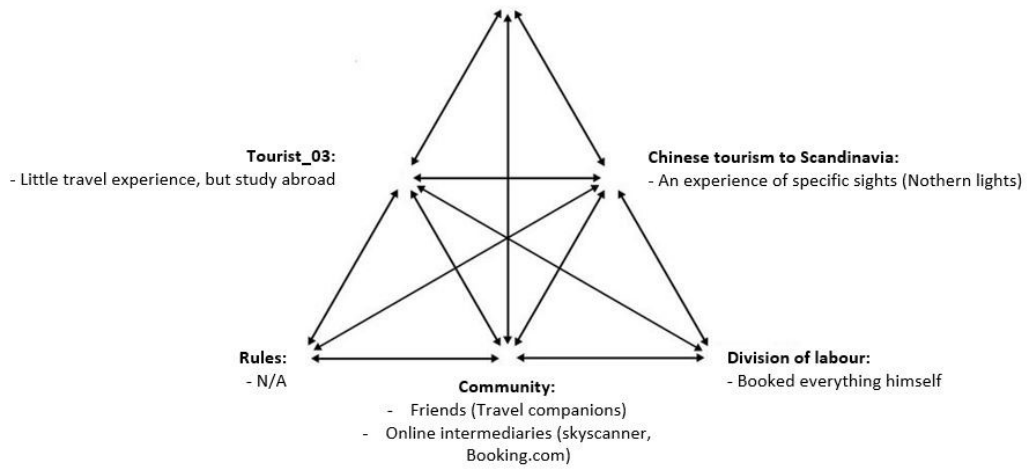




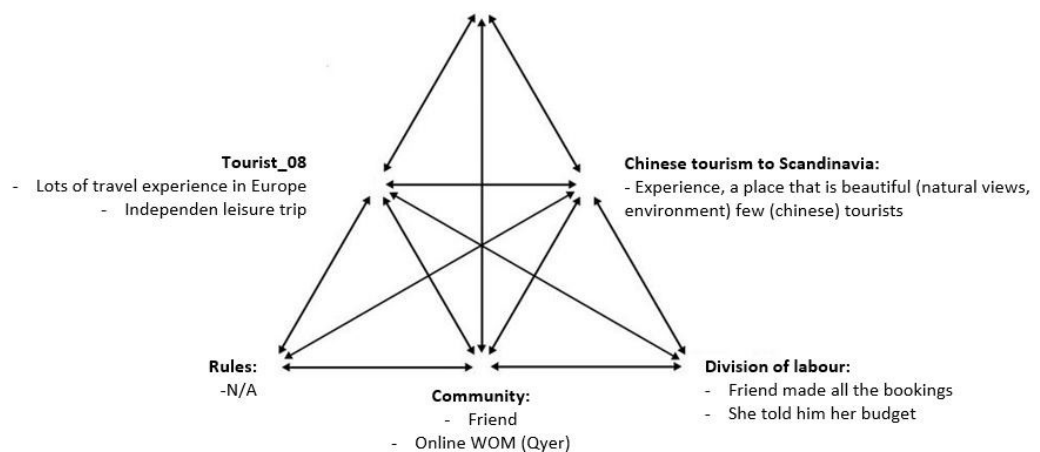
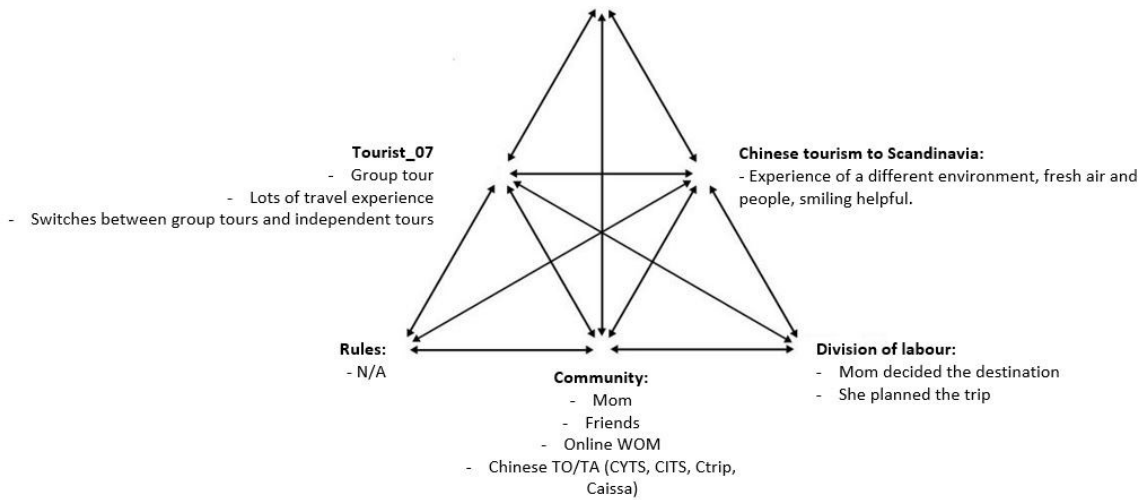
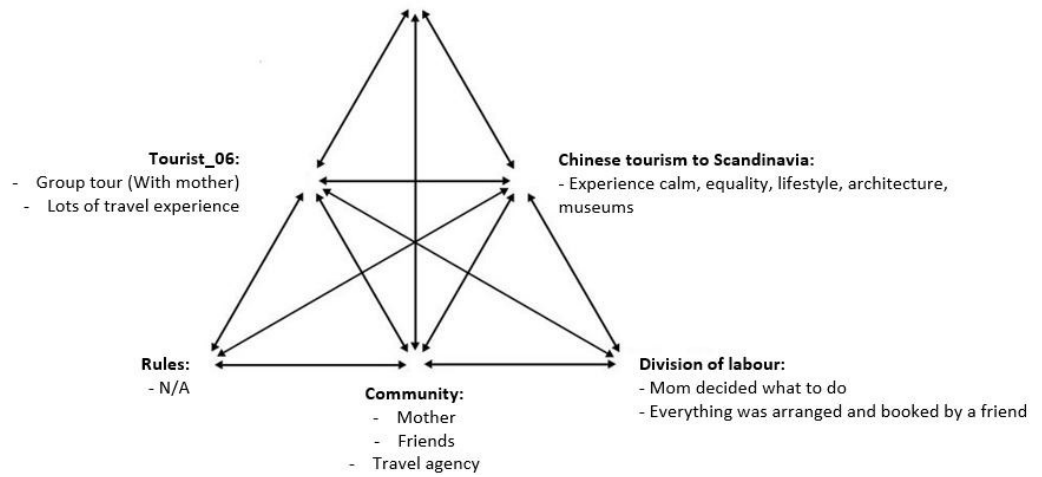
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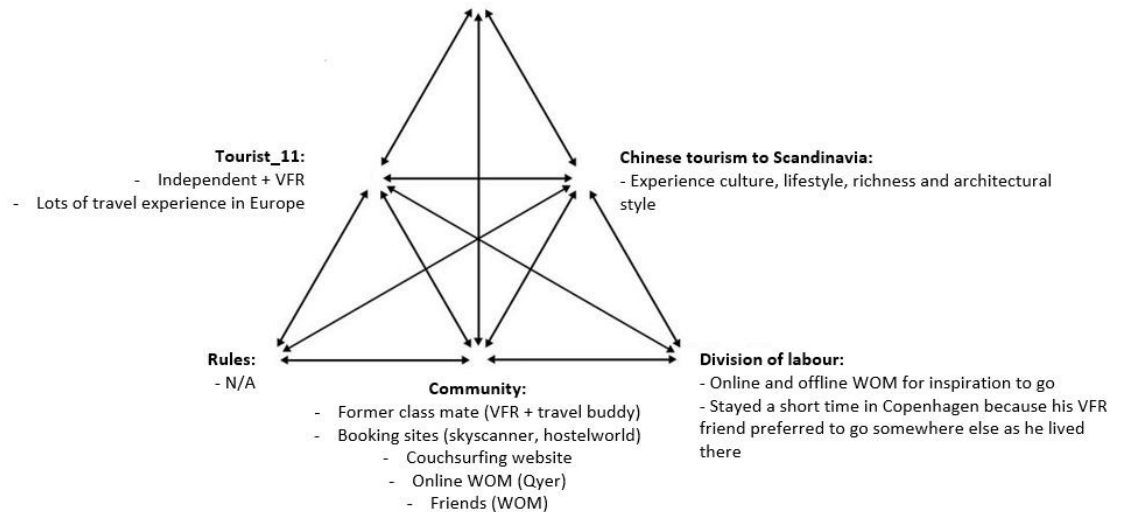
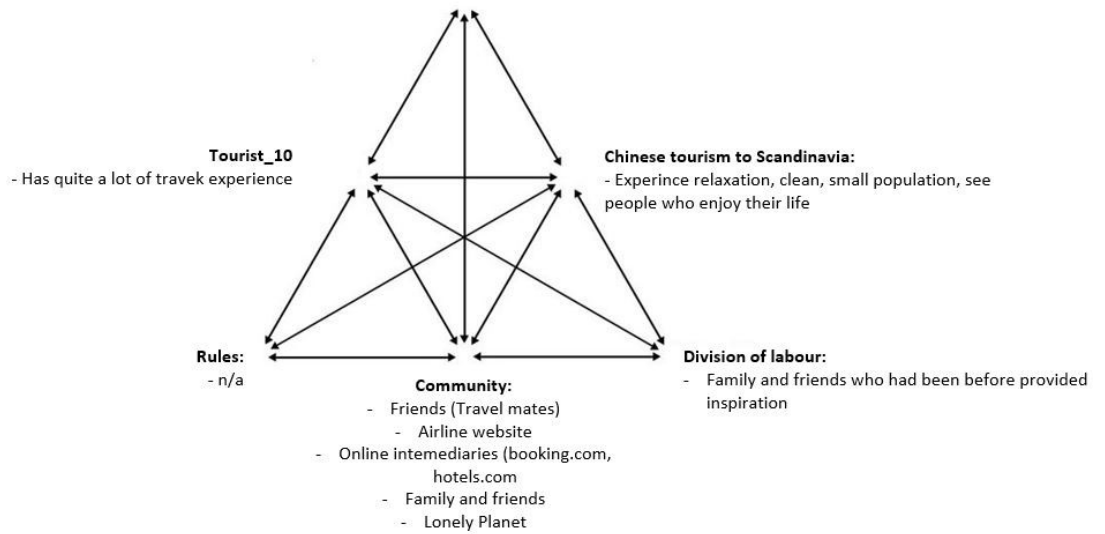
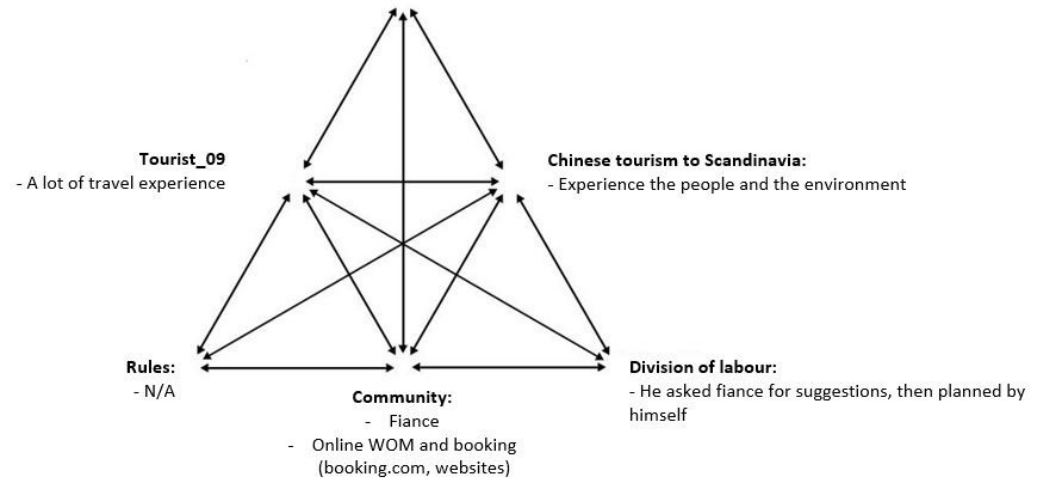


## Tourists

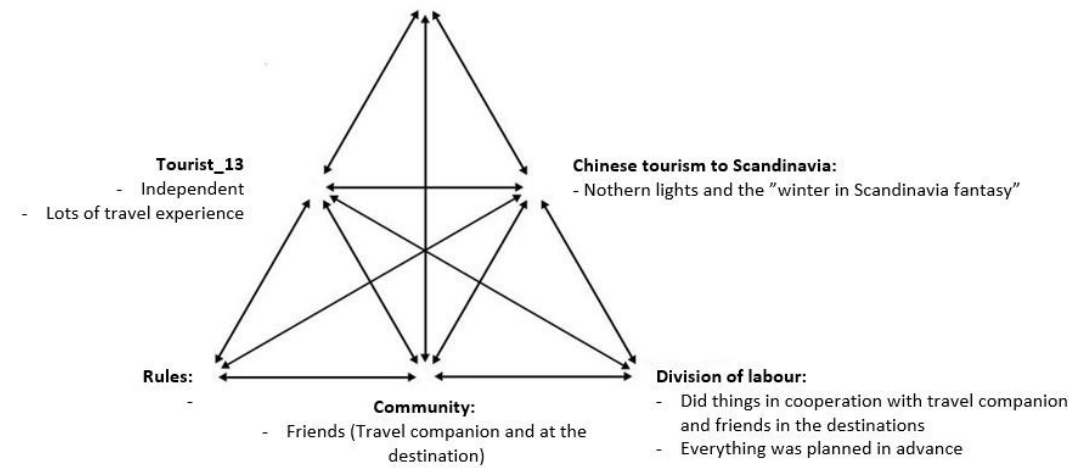
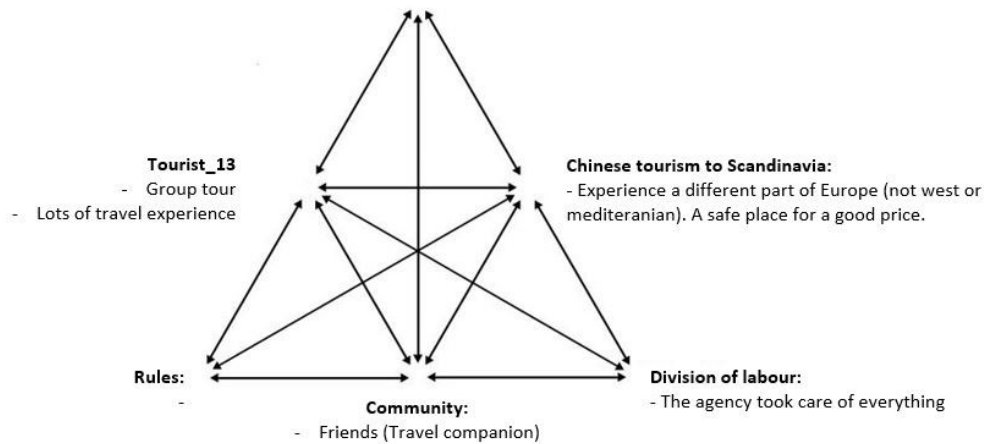
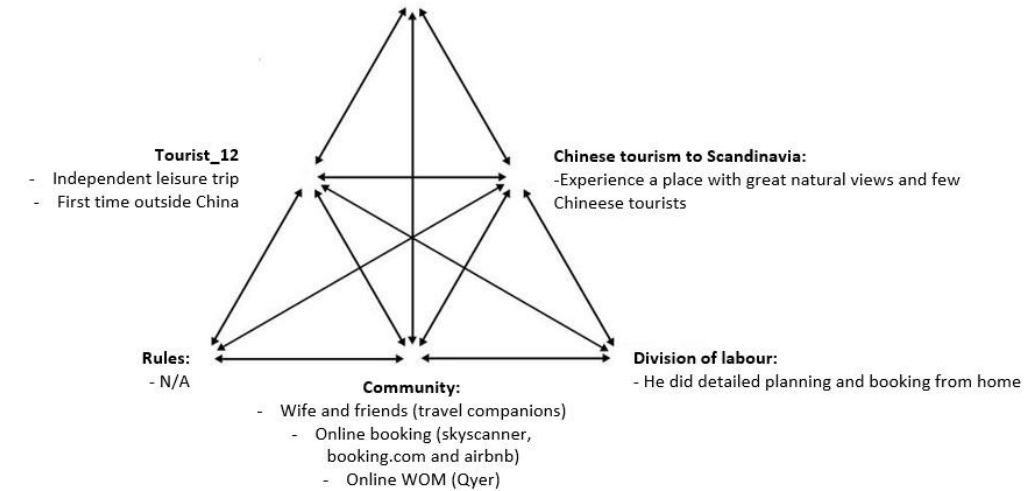


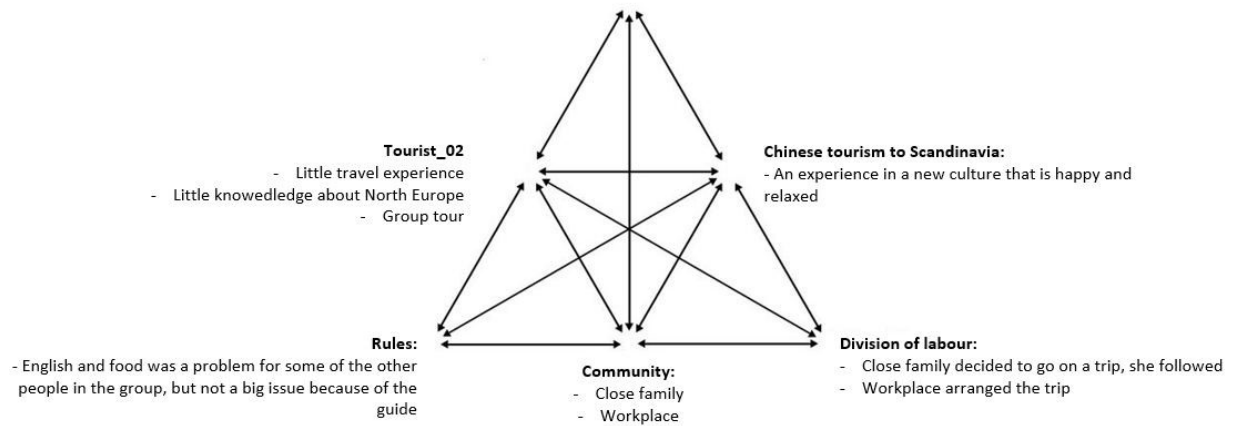
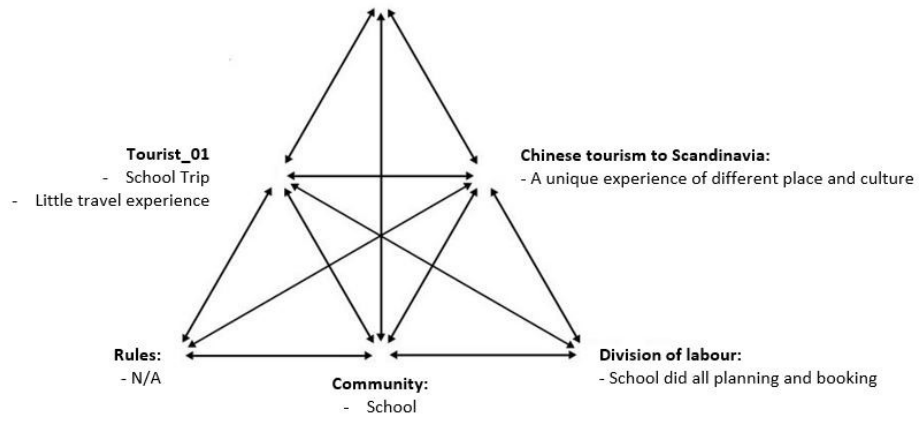
## Understanding Tourism Distribution





## Understanding Tourism Distribution





#### **Appendix 4: Interview Data (Online Resources)**

The sound recordings and full transcriptions for each interview can be accessed through the following link:

<https://goo.gl/DZ5v17>



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### ***Chinese Tourism to Scandinavia: Understanding Tourism Distribution***

This study provides a novel qualitative approach that deepens existing understandings of tourism distribution and China outbound tourism. A methodological framework for analysis of tourism distribution based on Activity Theory and Actor Network theory is developed. The use of this methodology on in-depth interviews with 52 respondents representing both Chinese tourists, Chinese intermediaries and Scandinavian suppliers, result in empirical insights on Chinese tourism to Scandinavia as a phenomenon. Based on these findings, conceptual tools are developed that allow practitioners and researchers to better characterise specific types of Chinese tourists and understand the different factors that affect them.