How Important Is an Image?

Dutch Travel Agencies’ Perception of Sweden as a Travel Destination

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Abstract

Nowadays, when the world feels smaller as a result of the increasing flow of information, the competition of tourism between countries is getting bigger. This has caused that the marketing of the country has become vital. It is important for the country to send out the right signals so that the tourists have the right image of a destination. Once the image has been created, it might be hard to change it.

Scandinavian Travel Agent AB is a company arranging different trips around Scandinavia. They work as incoming agent for foreign tour operators, which they help with different types of travel arrangements in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland. Now they want to expand their business to other countries, and at the same time they want to identify how Sweden is seen as a tourist destination. We helped them with this by investigating travel agencies and tour operators in the Netherlands.

Our purpose with this thesis was to find out what kind of picture the Dutch travel agencies and tour operators have about Sweden. Furthermore, we wanted to know how the Dutch market looks like considering the trips to Sweden. To be able to analyze the phenomena of image we have taken closer look at the decision-making process, which was originally created by Mathieson and Wall (1984). It contains four areas (tourist profile, travel awareness, destination resources & characteristics and trip features) that have effect on the decision making process. Since we thought that image also has a big influence on the tourists’ decision, we chose to investigate that subject as well.

With the help of our theories we created two different questionnaires, one to Dutch travel agencies/tour operators having Sweden as a travel destination, and one to Dutch travel agencies/tour operators not currently offering trips to Sweden. After receiving the answers we interpreted them together with our theories and we found out that the respondents have a correct image of the reality. Sweden’s nature with the forests, water and snow were some of the most common parts of their image. Stockholm was also a prominent feature together with beautiful and clean nature. Sweden was also seen as a modern and safe country with high quality. Some respondent also mentioned space, but it was not as common answer as we expected.

Regarding the image, we found out that an image handles both a person’s affective and cognitive images, which arises from many different sources and influences. After doing this research our believes, about the image as a part of the decision making process, were strengthened. Therefore we saw the need to change the already existing model.

Our suggestions to the Scandinavian Travel Agent AB, is to first contact the travel agencies/tour operators who are currently offering Sweden, since they seem to be most interested in expanding to Sweden. Among the other travel agencies/tour operators an interest has to be aroused. This can depend on the fact that companies with Sweden can see the demand and the opportunities better than the companies who do not have Sweden.
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1 Introduction

In a globalized world, the brand of a nation is important and the rumor of a country has to be administrated. It is becoming more important that nations develop advanced methods for this and call it public diplomacy or nation branding. To create a goodwill and trust is important for Sweden on the way to become a better travel destination. The increasing international need and co-operation had made it even more important for a country to stick out on the world map.¹

Many companies have realized the importance of their consumers and many of them have detailed data from which they can develop organizational and marketing strategies. It is therefore important to understand how consumers behave. The American Marketing Association defines consumer behavior as “the dynamic interaction of affect and cognition, behavior, and the environment by which human beings conduct the exchange aspects of their lives.”² This means that how the consumers act involves their thoughts and feelings they experience, and the actions they perform in consumption processes. It also involves the environment that influences these thoughts, feelings and actions. According to Peter & Olson (2005) the consumer behavior is dynamic and it involves both interactions and exchanges. Moreover, Swarbrooke & Horner (1999) states that when it comes to purchasing a holiday it is even more important to recognize the behavior of the consumer. This is because it is likely to take much more time and it involves more careful consideration and selection, and emotions are highly entailed. Additionally the image which the tourist has about a destination has a big influence on his/her behavior.

Scandinavian Travel Agent AB is a company who arrange different trips around Scandinavia, for example round tours with buses for leisure travelers, and business trips combined with conferences or events. They work as incoming agent for foreign tour operators, which they help with different types of travel arrangements in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland.³ Now they are in process of expanding their business to other countries, mostly within European markets. At the same time they want to identify how Sweden is seen as a tourist destination. We are going to help them with this by investigating travel agencies and tour operators in the Netherlands, and see what kind of image they have about Sweden.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

To be able to analyze the phenomena of image we have taken closer look at the theories that already exist in the field. A lot of different authorities refer to the tourist decision-making process, which was originally created by Mathieson and Wall, 1984. It is claimed that a good model never gets old, so we chose to dig deeper into the original model as well. The entire model is not essential for us since our main concern is not the decision-

¹ www.visit-sweden.com
² www.mhhe.com
³ www.scantravel.biz
making process itself but instead the image of a destination. That is why we decided to concentrate more on the part “destination resources and characteristics”, which is marked grey in Figure 1 below. However we want to give an overall view of the model by going through shortly every step of it. A customers’ decision process is affected by four interrelated factors according to Mathieson & Wall (1984):

- Tourist profile – i.e. age and education
- Travel awareness – i.e. different information sources
- Destination resources and characteristics – i.e. attractions of the destination
- Trip features – i.e. distance and trip duration

Figure 1. The tourist decision-making process (Source Mathieson & Wall 1984)

1.1.1 Tourist Profile

Mathieson & Wall (1984) claim that the tourist profile can be divided in two different categories influencing how the tourist acts:

- The behavioral characteristics of the tourist – here we can see that motivations, attitudes, needs and values of tourists are of importance for the decision-making processes. These factors can be decisive when the tourist chooses the destination. They reflect tourists’ personalities and socio-economic profiles.
- The socio-economic characteristics of the tourist – here we can see that age, education, income and past experiences influence attitudes, perceptions and motivations and affect decisions. Relationships between socio-economic characteristics and participation in travel are well known, and easy to observe. It is still important to not only look at these variables, when it is not possible to predict tourists’ behavior only from the socio-economic characteristics.

Swarbrooke & Horner (1999) also add that for example lifestyle, hobbies, and existing knowledge of potential holidays can be influencing factors.
1.1.2 Trip Features
According to Mathieson & Wall (1984) trip features include factors such as distance, duration of stay in one or more destinations, time constraints, trip cost and value for price, perceived risk and uncertainty and the confidence in travel arrangements. Some of them are more significant than others for tourists. As can be visualized, these trip features are important, and they are something that the tourist most of the time takes into consideration.

1.1.3 Travel Awareness
According to Cooper et al. (1996) potential tourists may be motivated to travel, but unless they are informed of what opportunities are available, they may be unaware of the means of meeting their requirements. A customer’s awareness of destinations, facilities and services depends upon the availability of information. The image is also based upon the credibility of the source. Mathieson & Wall (1984) talk about both formal and informal sources. The formal sources include magazines, travel brochures, advertisements on radio and television, and discussion with travel intermediaries. Travel agencies are playing a big part here. Weaver & Lawton (2002) argue that travel agencies have a critical role in shaping tourism systems by providing undecided customers with information and advice about potential destinations. They also provide invaluable feedback to destinations managers since they know about trends and attitudes about particular destinations and services. Informal sources can, according to Mathieson & Wall (1984), be comments from friends, relatives or other travelers. Additionally, they refer to Nolan (1976:7) who notes that the information from informal sources, for instance friends, was the most informative. However, formal sources, such as guide books and travel agencies, were high ranked in terms of quality and credibility.

According to Balouglu & McCleary (1999) the influence of primary sources (e.g. previous experience) among first-time tourist becomes clear in the relationship between the number of visits made to places of interest in the destination and cognitive dimension of image of natural and cultural resources. This means that it is crucial that resorts carry out campaigns to make the tourist aware of the places of interest and so increase their visits.

1.1.4 Destination Resources and Characteristics
There can be many general factors that can potentially encourage or discourage tourist traffic to any particular destination. These pull factors are focused on the supply side of tourism. Weaver & Lawton (2002) give some examples of pull factors: geographical proximity to markets, accessibility to markets, availability of attractions, cultural links, availability of services, affordability, peace and stability, positive market image and the pro-tourism policies. The combination and relative importance of individual factors will vary from one destination to another. Mathieson & Wall (1984) also argue that the characteristics of potential destinations play an important role in the final choice of the destination. They state that the following points have impact on the tourist’s choice of a destination:
Environmental features and processes: These include for instance what kind of nature the destination has (mountains, lakes, sea), amount of sunshine, the types of animals, temperature and other environmental processes.

Economic structure: This includes among other things the level of economic development and the diversity of the economic base.

Political organization: The political structure of the destination is essential. Factors such as existence of capitalism or socialist principles; incentives and constraints; the roles of national, regional and local tourist organizations have an influence on tourist.

Level of tourist development: This encompasses the level of local involvement in tourism, nature and diversity of attractions, types and quality of accommodation the destination has to offer; activities, and eating facilities.

Social structure and organization: This category includes factors such as the demographic profile of the host population, the strength of local culture and the levels of health and safety. In addition for some tourist things like, religion, women in work-force and moral conducts have an enormous effect on the decision about the choice of the final destination. Perceptions, attitudes and values towards language, traditions and gastronomic practices affect on the decision as well.

1.1.5 Decision Process
According to Mathieson & Wall (1984) the decision-making process consists of five phases. The first thing for a tourist is to feel either the desire or need to travel. Thereafter the reasons for and against that desire are weighted. The next phase is information collection and assessment of different travel alternatives. Potential tourists utilize travel agencies, guide books, advertisements as well as friends and relatives as a source. In the end of the information collection phase the information received is evaluated against constraints such as time and money available, the costs of alternative trips and the accessibility of possible destinations. The following phase includes travel decision, ultimately decision about destination, accommodation, mode of travel and activities. The fourth phase consists of travel preparations. Here, bookings are made and confirmed, budget is organized, and clothing and equipment are being selected. The last phase is called travel satisfaction evaluation. The overall experience is evaluated during and after the travel and its results influence subsequent travel decisions. There is a lot of different ways of comprehending the decision process and since our aim is not to investigate the decision process itself we have chosen not to study the other views.

1.1.6 Criticism to the Model
Cooper et al. (1996) criticizes this model by stating that it does not take into consideration the important aspects of perception, memory, personality and information processing, which are the basis of the traditional models. The model is based on geographer’s product-based perspective, rather than that of a consumer behaviorist. By only incorporates the idea of the consumer being purposive in actively seeking information and the importance of external factors. This is one of the reasons we chose the model, because we are not interested in the internal factors, we only have access to the external factors.
Regarding to “the destination resources and characteristics” part, we feel that the decision-making process model by Mathieson & Wall (1984) is a bit insufficient. First of all, they do not mention anything about image, which we found to be an important factor of the decision-making process based on our own experiences. Second of all we think that this part of the model seems to be a bit vague since it is not explained anywhere whether these above-mentioned factors are seen from the customer point of view or what the reality really is. In other words, whether it is the customer’s perception of that destination or attributes which really exist, e.g. real facts. Since there was no clear answer for this, we chose to interpret these factors as something which are part of the image which the customer is carrying. As this is the case, they have a big influence on how the customer perceives the destination. Therefore, we chose to expand this model with the following part and this way makes it more suitable for us.

### 1.1.7 Image

According to Mathieson & Wall (1984), a tourist’s image appears from the information received and from the personal and behavioral characteristics of the tourist. Lawson & Baud-Bowy (1977) defines image as: “an expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudices, imaginations and emotional thoughts individual or group have of a particular object or place.” Balouglu & McCleary (1999) refers to Oxenfeldt (1974-75) and Dichter (1985) who take this definition deeper by saying that an image is seen as an overall or total impression which is formed as a result of the evaluation of individual attributes which may contain both cognitive and emotional content. With this definition, Oxenfeldt and Dichter recognized not only cognitive and affective images, but also the formation of overall image from evaluations of an object. This view is also supported by Mazursky and Jacoby (1986), and confirmed during the last years when White (2004) refers to Balouglu and Brinberg (1997). Cognitive evaluation refers to beliefs and knowledge about an object and affective refers to feelings about it. People develop both cognitive and affective responses and attachments to environment and places. Perhaps the most elaborated image, according to White (2005), was developed by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) who proposed that an image consisted of two components; one attribute based and the other holistic. The former means a more detailed image, and the latter means an overall picture of image.

Beerli (2004) writes that factors that influence an image involve both information obtained from different sources and the characteristics of the individual. Information sources—also known as stimulus factors (Balouglu and McCleary 1999a) are the forces which influence the forming of perceptions and evaluations. Beerli (2004) continues that with reference to the information sources, it should be emphasized that the induced sources such as tour operators’ brochures and advertising campaigns had no significant influence on the different factors of the cognitive first-time image.

On the other hand, he thinks that travel agency staff has been proved to be the only induced source which displayed a positive and statistically significant influence on the cognitive factor of sun and sand resources. This indicates that those responsible for promoting such resources must develop a relationship with this distribution channel and ensure that the messages transmitted coincide with the desired image of the place.
With these theories we recognized the need for more empirical research according to image and need to improve the already existing model. Therefore, we came up with the following research questions, which are linked to figure 1 on page three.

1.2 Research Questions

- How big part does the image of a destination play when a tourist is choosing his/her travel destination?
- What is the general picture of Sweden among Dutch travel agencies and tour operators?
- What kinds of trips are offered today from the Netherlands to Sweden and who is traveling?
- What are the reasons for travel agencies and tour operators to exclude Sweden from their service range?
- Has there been an increase in the amount of trips offered to Sweden?

1.3 Purpose

Our purpose is to find out what kind of picture the Dutch travel agencies and tour operators have about Sweden. Furthermore, we want to know how the Dutch market looks like, considering the trips to Sweden. Finally we are interested in knowing if the already existing model explains the phenomena of image.

1.4 Demarcations

We decided to limit our research to Sweden instead of the whole Scandinavia, because the time limit forced us to choose only one country. In addition we are more familiar with the Swedish culture and the tourist destinations than we are with the other Scandinavian countries. The reasons for choosing the Netherlands in our study are the following:

- Scandinavian Travel Agent AB wanted us to choose a country out of middle European countries which could be a potential market for them.
- Since the expected growth\(^4\) in Dutch economy can result in increasing possibilities of traveling, we thought the Netherlands would be an interesting country to do research on.
- The fact that the Dutch like to keep a certain distance from others, combined with the fact that it is among the most densely populated nations in the world\(^5\) (with 441 inhabitants per km\(^2\))\(^6\) could be a reason to travel to Sweden since it can offer a lot of space.
- Dutch people love to travel and many of them take two or three foreign holidays a year\(^7\) and this could mean that some of the trips might have Sweden as a destination.

\(^4\) [http://en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)
\(^5\) [www.thehollandring.com](http://www.thehollandring.com)
\(^6\) [www.swea.org](http://www.swea.org)
\(^7\) [www.nlplanet.com](http://www.nlplanet.com)
The reason for choosing the tourist decision-making process by Mathieson and Wall, (1984) was that it is seen as a ground model in this field. As mentioned above, the external factors are more important for us, and since this model is mostly concentrating on them instead of internal factors, we chose to use this model. Moreover, we also made a limitation in the model since our purpose was not to describe the whole decision making process. Instead we concentrated on the part; “Destination resources & characteristics”. However the decision process is generally playing a central role in this model and that is why we presented it shortly.

By choosing the travel agencies/tour operators as respondents, we are making a deliberate limitation, through not to be bothered by the Dutch tourists traveling to Sweden by car or other tourists not using travel agencies’/tour operators’ services.

**1.5 Definitions**

*A tour operator* typically combines components to create a holiday\(^8\) for sale via a travel agent or direct to the consumer. The most common example of a tour operator's product would be a flight on a charter airline plus a transfer from the airport to a hotel and the services of a local representative, all for one price.\(^9\)

*A travel agency* is a “retailer who sells independent tour or tour packages created by tour operators. Originally, the client did not pay for a travel agency's services because agents receive commissions from hotels, airlines, wholesalers on packaged tours, and other travel vendors.”\(^{10}\)

Trips can be divided into different categories. Aronson & Tengling (2003) state that first of all there are *leisure trips*, which are trips on the spare-time for different purposes, for example vacations, sports, culture, shopping and trips for visiting the family or friends. Second of all there are *business trips*. Business trips cover meetings, conferences and trade fairs. They can for example concern a visit at a supplier or customer. However not all travelers are on leisure or business trips, there are also other reasons for traveling, for example studies, health or religion.

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\(^8\) [www.stile.coventry.ac.uk](http://www.stile.coventry.ac.uk)


\(^{10}\) [www.chinatravel.com](http://www.chinatravel.com)
2 Methodology

This chapter outlines the processes and methods we used for approaching the research subject. We will describe the choices we have made when conducting this study, and argue for why we have made them. Additionally, we are discussing how scientific our research is, concerning the validity and reliability of the study.

2.1 Methodological line of Action

Almost everything that we experience, think and imagine is built upon our understanding. It is influenced by the culture and the society that we have grown up in, which result in a specific view of the world. This could be seen as having different pair of glasses, which represent different outlooks on the world. This means that different people have different understandings, and there is no reason to presuppose that your own is the only right one, according to Thurén (1991).

Our purpose is to study the image of Sweden which the Dutch travel agencies/tour operators are currently carrying, with other words we want to get better insights into this phenomenon. Therefore we felt like describing purpose would be right for us. Christensen et al. (2001) states that this type of research attempts to answer questions about the current status of the subject or topic of study. Usually, this type of research involves studying the preferences, attitudes, practices, concerns, or interests of some group of people. However, even though the describing purpose was chosen, we are not excluding the other purposes (explorative and explaining) from our study, since they are often overlapping.

After choosing the purpose of the study, the methodological line of action is then decided. These are quantitative and qualitative methods. Holme & Solvang (2001) states that the purpose of the quantitative method is to discover, appoint and measure relations between different variables, which can lead to statistical analysis. Our research questions involve studying the perception and images of a group of people and that is why we needed to collect information in a wider perspective. It is not possible for us to look at the whole population and that is why we needed to take a sample out of the population (Lind, et al., 2002) and thereby we are using the quantitative method.

2.2 Data Collection

According to Christensen et al. (2001) the next step after choosing research area and how it methodologically should be approached it is legitimate to consider where to find the most adequate information. There are two main groups of data sources, secondary data and primary data. To gain a general picture of the situation in Dutch market and a theoretical background, we first procured ourselves an overall view of the accessible and relevant data. We studied previous researches on the topic of decision making process as well as of an image of a destination. Besides this the gathered information mainly consisted of books and scientific articles but in addition we searched for information on

\[11\] Gay & Airasian, 1999 from the web page: www2.gsu.edu
the Internet. Our primary data was obtained through the questionnaires. We sent out two different questionnaires; one for the companies having Sweden as a travel destination and the other one for the companies that do not have Sweden in their service range. This way we were able to gather the exact information which we would need for our research.

2.2.1 Source Criticisms
Ejvegård (2003) argues that it is not only interviews and questionnaires, even printed material need to be inspected. It can be hard, because even the most reliable encyclopedia can contain factual error. Since we are using already existing theories, it is not sure that these have been collected for the same purpose as ours. This means that we add our own interpretation and that we have to be critical to where our information is collected from. We used some Internet sources and we are aware of the fact that it might not be the most reliable source. To get a broad view, we went through many different sources with different views and additionally we used primary sources. With this in mind, we hope and think that we have a relatively objective view with a broad range of sources.

According to Belson (1986) when it comes to the primary data, the validity of postal questionnaires can be seen from two viewpoints: whether respondents who complete the questionnaire do so accurately; whether those who do not return the questionnaire would have given the same distribution of answers as did the returnees. Additionally we are not sure if the right persons answered the questionnaires. Especially an with e-mail survey (Zeithaml 2003), which is our case, it is hard to judge the value of the answers since you can not tell how seriously respondents took the survey; how much time and effort they put into them. An additional concern is that whatever the customers answer now about the future may still not be the thing which they are going to choose in the future. They can easily say one thing and do another. The answers to the survey questions may not truly reflect how people feel or how they will behave. Another flaw with our e-mail survey is that some of the questionnaires were sent to info-addresses, which might cause that they got forgotten or overlooked.

2.3 Quantitative Survey

2.3.1 Selection of Respondents and Realization of the Survey
We have chosen to send out one questionnaire to 45 travel agencies and tour operators, which already have Sweden as a destination. (Q1, with Sweden) The questionnaire consisted of questions considering the Dutch market and travel agencies’/tour operators’ view of Sweden. Additionally we sent out another questionnaire to 100 travel agencies and tour operators which do not have Sweden as a destination (Q2, without Sweden). To get an overall view of the travel agencies/tour operators in the Netherlands, we visited the webpage www.anvr.nl where every Dutch travel agency/tour operator is presented. We went through them one by one to find out which companies have Sweden as a travel destination and which do not have it. From there we found 45 companies which have Sweden included in their service range. We decided to contact all of them, first by phone and then by sending a questionnaire via e-mail. Thereafter we chose 100 companies which we thought could be a potential supplier of trips to Sweden. This means we excluded the companies who are currently arranging trips, for instance, only to Africa or
Asia. Out of these 100 companies there might still be some companies which are not current for us. This might be due to the fact that we do not speak Dutch and their homepages were not available in English. To these 100 potential suppliers we sent out another questionnaire via e-mail. Since we think that the companies with Sweden are more important for us, we chose to call only them. We gave all the companies one week time to reply. After this week we sent the reminder for them, and then we waited another week. From the first questionnaire we got 16 answers back and from the second we got six answers back.

2.3.2 Composition of Questionnaire

To be able to apply our theoretical framework to our questionnaires, we tried to make the theoretical concepts more measurable. We used them in the questionnaires to visualize the link between our theory and empirics. Like we mentioned before we sent out two different questionnaires. We chose to have companies with Sweden because we wanted to know what kind of picture they have about Sweden and this way to find out what kind of picture they are sending out to their customers. The companies without Sweden we chose to have because we were also interested in seeing their picture and in addition we wanted to find out some reasons for excluding Sweden from their service range. Besides we thought it could be interesting to see if there is a difference between the images among the companies. To make it easier to the reader to understand the connection between our theory and the questionnaires, we will go through our questionnaires part by part and explain why we chose to have these questions in the questionnaires.

**Q1 (with Sweden) Questions**

The first part of Q1 (with Sweden) (see appendix 1) consisted questions of general information about the respondent and his/her company (questions 1-3). We decided to include these questions to get a better understanding of the respondent.

Like some of the researches mentioned before, the image consists of two components, cognitive and affective. In the second part we wanted to find out what kind of image the travel agencies/tour operators have about Sweden in a holistic way. This is mostly connected to affective part of the image and moreover to our theory about “destination resources & characteristics”. In question number 4 we asked the respondent to mention the first three words which come to his/her mind when they think about Sweden. We chose to have this question as open-ended because we wanted to have the respondent’s spontaneous reaction. With the next question (number 5) we wanted to find out what picture of Sweden their company is trying to send out to their customers. We wanted to see if the marketing goes together with the reality. Question number 6 included the respondent’s thoughts about the weather conditions in Sweden. We thought this would be important in order to see if their perceptions are correct. The last question (number 7) in this section was about the price level from the view of the respondent. This is particularly connected to economic part of the “destination resources and characteristics”. The price level can have a decisive influence on the choice of the destination as well as on the image which people are carrying of the destination.
The next part (questions 8-10), like the heading states, handled trip features. Moreover, this is connected to our theory part “trip features”. We are interested in knowing what types of trips the company is currently offering, to where these trips are mostly headed, and what is the most popular period of the year to travel to Sweden.

Next section (questions 11-14) is called tourist profile. It includes questions about what kind of people are traveling, if they have been in Sweden before, how their knowledge about it is, and if their attitudes towards traveling to Sweden have changed during the last three years. These questions cover the cognitive side of image and to all of these questions we wanted to get the respondent’s opinion. Since we are not able to reach directly to the customers, the respondents are our intermediary.

In the last part of the questionnaire (questions 15-16) we asked if the companies have experienced any increase in demand in traveling to Sweden and also if they have thought about expanding the variety of journeys. These questions are not directly connected to our theories, yet we wanted to have them since we thought they could be contributions for our company.

Q2 (without Sweden) Questions
The first part of Q2 (without Sweden) (see appendix 2) consisted questions of general information about the respondent and his/her company (questions 1-3). The second part included questions considering the respondent’s knowledge and image of Sweden. This part is mainly connected to “destination resources & characteristics” in our theoretical part. There we wanted to find out the respondents’ holistic view of Sweden. Question number 4 was the same as it was in Q1 (with Sweden).

All the questions in the next section (questions 5-10) are connected to our theory part “destinations resources & characteristics”, which consist of five different factors. Each of these factors is brought up in Q2 (without Sweden). Questions 5, 6 and 7 refer to the first factor, which is called environmental features and processes. Question number 8 refers to the next factor, which is economic structure. Level of tourist development is covered in question. The last question combines the two remaining factors; political organization and social structure & organization. With this part we also wanted to get a better insight into the respondents’ image of Sweden.

The last section in the questionnaire (questions 11-13) handle the demand; if the respondents have experienced any interest in trips to Sweden and if so, what types of trips are demanded. Moreover, we asked them to mention reasons for excluding Sweden from their service range, and also if they have planned to include Sweden to their services in the future. As we did in Q1 (with Sweden), we also chose to have these questions, even though they are not connected to our theory.

2.3.3 Analysis
We chose to use SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) and Microsoft Excel to analyze our empirical data. We used SPSS to calculate the frequencies and percentages for the close-ended questions, and with Excel we created different graphs to make it more
interesting and easier for reader to interpret the data. For the open-ended questions first we gathered all the data together and thereafter divided them into categories. In this way it was easier to see patterns and draw conclusions out of them. For instance on the question where the respondents were supposed to mention the first three words which come to their minds, we received different answers considering the forest. Some examples were woods, trees and forests, which we subcategorized into forest. This procedure we applied to every open ended question.

2.4 Quality of the Study
According to Ejvegård (2003), validity means that the author studies what he/she is supposed to study. Validity is also about how well a research and the results of a research can be applied to reality. It is best achieved through clear measurements and method of measurement, and it is also important for the author to know what the measurement stands for and to use it consistently. We have tried to secure the validity in our research through a clear formulation of our questions using accurate scales. In the questions about how the respondents feel about various things such as demand and price level, we used symmetric scales in numbers because we wanted to make sure that the questions would be clear and easy to understand for the respondents. Before we sent out the questionnaires we tested the questions on two persons to see if they understood the questions, if the measure instruments were correct and to see if we measured what we were supposed to measure. The first person used to work at a travel agency in Sweden, and that is why we chose to have her as a test person. She helped us to get a professional opinion about if the questionnaires were understandable for that kind of group of people. The other test person was native Dutch. We wanted to see if the language in the questionnaires was comprehensible. This helped us to form the questionnaires properly.

One reason why our paper can have a low validity is the big inference problem. It means that the result of the research does not show the same result as if all of the population were measured. To draw conclusions from only the respondents who took part of the survey might cause wrong results (Trost 2001). Our research is based on only 22 answers, which might not show the truth about the whole Dutch market of travel agencies/tour operators. However this amount is quite big if you consider that the Dutch market of travel agencies/tour operators, that can be potential suppliers or who can think of expanding their range of trips, consists of proximately 145 companies that gives us an answering rate of more than 15 percent of the population. Therefore we believe that some generalizations are possible.

The meaning of reliability is that the measuring of something should be as stable and reality related as possible and not be affected by random influences. It can also be good to have many sources that can support the statements according to Ejvegård (2003). We looked at the primary source of our main model, which is created by Mathieson and Wall (1984). A lot of different authors have referred to it and therefore we chose to use it. In addition it is always good to handle many different sources with different views, and therefore we chose to have a broad range of literature. That helped us to reach a more reliable thesis.
This chapter shows the result from our empirical research together with analysis. We will analyze the information obtained from the questionnaires and interpret them together with the theories. In addition we will express our own opinions about the data collected.

### 3.1 Q1 (with Sweden) and Q2 (without Sweden) Results

We sent out Q1 (with Sweden) to 45 companies, which are currently offering trips to Sweden. Q2 (without Sweden) was sent out to 100 companies, which do not have Sweden as a travel destination. The answer rate for Q1 (with Sweden) was 35.5 percent and for Q2 (without Sweden) it was 6 percent. These numbers are not that high but this was something which we were prepared for since the research was conducted in another country and not with their native language. The reason for getting a higher answer rate for Q1 (with Sweden) was probably that we called these companies first and asked for a permission to send out the questionnaires. We are first going to present the results for the questions which appeared in both questionnaires. Then Q1’s (with Sweden) results are presented, followed by Q2’s (without Sweden) results.

#### 3.1.1 Destination Resources and Characteristics

After the general questions, which we chose not to present here, we asked the respondents to mention the first three words that come to their minds, when thinking of Sweden. As expected, we got a lot of different answers and we chose to categorize them in the following way:

- **Nature, forest and water.** These types of answers were the most common. Many of the respondents seem to relate the nature to Sweden.
- **Stockholm, Scandinavia and north.** Stockholm was the most popular answer, and it seems to be the most famous feature of Sweden.
- **Cold, winter and snow.** As expected, a lot of answers considered the weather conditions, especially coldness.
- **Space, peace and rest.** Another predictable result handled the space. We thought since the Netherlands is overcrowded they would find Sweden spacious.
- **Green, beautiful and clean.** These were some of the adjectives related to Sweden.
- **Holidays, Ice hotel or other activities.** Some of the respondents mentioned a few activities which they associated with Sweden.
- **Abba, Pippi Långstrump and Viking.** Some famous Swedish persons or groups were mentioned.

These answers show the respondents’ affective part of the image, since it reflects the feelings they have towards Sweden. These spontaneous reactions show us their holistic view, instead of the cognitive side. As expected, Sweden’s most famous assets such as the nature, Stockholm and the cold weather came up often. According to Aronson and Tengling (2003), it is the nature that draws foreign tourists to Sweden, and the fact that the country does not have any mass tourism. Surprisingly, the fact that Sweden has a lot of space and that it is something which we are trying to promote a lot, only a few
respondents mentioned that. A reason for this could be that the most common answer was Stockholm, which is not particularly spacious. If the first thing which came to their mind was Stockholm, then it is unlikely that they would also think of space. This could lead to that the travel agencies/tour operators are not promoting Sweden as a country with a lot of space.

All these answers show that their affective side of the image is quite reality related. All the things mentioned in this question have something to do with Sweden. Since the respondents are working in the field of tourism, we expected them to have these more developed emotions about Sweden. We did not see any differences between Q1 (with Sweden) and Q2 (without Sweden) answers. This is an evidence of that the image is not more developed among travel agencies/tour operators offering Sweden. If we had asked the same question from tourists, the results would most likely have been further away from the reality.

In Q1 (with Sweden) and Q2 (without Sweden), one question was about Sweden’s weather conditions, and how the respondent experiences that. We found this to be important in order to see if their perceptions are correct. The weather can be a decisive factor in the decision-making process according to Mathieson & Wall (1984) and that is why we thought it is important to know how the respondents think about it. If the tourist has few different alternatives where to travel, the weather can be a significant factor. However, we question if it is always a decisive factor. We feel that if a tourist wants to visit Sweden (or any other country) they are going to do it, no matter what kind of weather the destination has. The respondents were asked to mark in boxes how they thought the weather is during the different seasons. Here it is difficult to see a good pattern, since the answers were pretty scattered. However, the most common thought was that during the winter it is cold, cloudy and snowy. During spring time the general thought was that it is a bit chilly, fairly sunny and rather snowy. Summer time, Sweden was considered warm and sunny with no snow. Autumn seems to be seen a lot like spring time except that some thought that there might be some snow. When it comes to spring and autumn there was quite some variation in the answers.

These answers should be interpreted carefully since we can not know where the respondents are comparing the weather conditions to. However, we believe that most of them compared to the Dutch weather and our conclusions are drawn from that belief. In general, they seem to have a good idea of the Swedish weather conditions. The aspect of weather is a part of a destination’s environmental features. We will come back to this aspect later.

After that we asked about the price level. This question also appeared in both Q1 (with Sweden) and Q2 (without Sweden). The price level was scaled from one to five, where one was low and five was high. Here follows the average answers:

- Shopping – 3,81
- Food and beverage – 4,33
- Accommodation – 3,76
As the result shows, the average of Sweden’s price level is slightly above medium for shopping and accommodation, and a bit higher for food and beverage. When three is seen as medium, we can state that the thoughts of the price level are pretty close to reality and that they are not on such a high level as we thought. Moreover, these numbers go well together with ECA: s tourist index\textsuperscript{12} where Amsterdam’s price level was 89 whereas Sweden was 100. This can as well influence the consumers’ choice of destination in a way that it has an effect on the image which the tourist is carrying about the destination. It is difficult to say though, how important this is for the customer. If a customer wants to go for a city trip, the price level is not necessarily number one factor affecting on the final destination choice since many more attributes and features are playing bigger role. And if the knowledge and affection about the price level are not that good and precise, they probably will not care. However, if the customer does not have much money, and want to go on a vacation, Sweden would probably not be the first destination that comes to his/her mind. This part does not only handle “destination resources and characteristics” but also “trip features”.

3.2 Q1 (with Sweden) Results

3.2.1 Destination Resources and Characteristics

From the companies that have Sweden as a tourist destination (Q1, with Sweden), we wanted to know what kind of picture they have and additionally what picture they are trying to send out to the customers. Most of them say that they are marketing the beautiful nature of Sweden. These are some of the most common answers:

- Modern country with high quality, and a safe destination.
- Friendly people
- Lots of space
- Beautiful nature including wilderness, water, forests and exotic sites.
- A lot to see and discover including the culture, hiking, huskies, canoeing and city trips.

Marketing is an important part of a company’s work. To catch the customers’ attention, companies need to show them what they offer. The same thing concerns countries. In Sweden, five organizations\textsuperscript{13} have the commission to promote the country. They developed a brand concept for Sweden as a destination – “Space for Minds” a couple of years ago. It is built on three bases – physical space (liberty to move in open, untouched and beautiful spaces), mental space (informal and real – no artificial) and minds (creators of strong ideas, creative solutions and strong brands). This is the picture of Sweden that they are trying to mediate.\textsuperscript{14} Formal sources, such as travel agencies, are playing a big part in customers’ knowledge about a country. So what they know about a destination, and what picture they are trying to intermediate, is important when creating the tourist’s image of the destination. It is very important that right image is sent out. The result shows

\textsuperscript{12} ECA:s Tourist Index (Aftonbladet, resebilaga 2005-10-29)
\textsuperscript{13} The travel and tourism Council of Sweden (Sveriges Rese- och Turistråd), The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (UD), the Swedish Institute (SI), the Export Council (Exportrådet) and Invest in Sweden Agency
\textsuperscript{14} www.visit-sweden.com
us, that Sweden’s nature is the most common symbol in the marketing of Sweden. Since that is a part of what the country are trying to market, the image of Sweden seems to be pretty correct. This would mean that most of the trips to Sweden are because of the beautiful nature. We will show you later where the most trips are headed, and that it might be different from what we have seen here. However, besides nature, Sweden is trying to promote its space. This was not shown as expected in the results since only a few of the respondents mentioned it.

3.2.2 Trip Features

The next questions (question 8) handled the types of trips that are currently offered. In Figure 2 the results of leisure trips offered can be seen. Vacations and nature trips are the most common trips currently offered. When it comes to business trips; meetings, conferences, trade fairs and education trips are almost equally spread.

![Pie chart showing trip features]

Every fifth trip to Sweden is either vacations or a nature trip. These two are with no doubt the most popular trips. After them, four other kinds of trips are equally spread; culture, sport, adventure and shopping trips. This indicates that it seems to be most popular to travel to Sweden for the nature and for having a vacation. A possible reason for that the trips visiting family and friends is only five percent, could be that the travel agencies/tour operators are not involved in such a trip. It will most likely be made privately by car or with only an airplane ticket.

Additionally, we wanted to see were these trips are headed. According to Aronsson and Tengling (2003), the foreign tourism in Sweden is widespread over the country; however most of it is concentrated in Stockholm. This is confirmed by our research. In Figure 3 presented below, it can be seen that Stockholm is the most popular Swedish destination among the leisure trips, and among business trips Stockholm and Gothenburg are equal. This shows us the fact that city trips, not nature trips, are most common. To be able to understand why it is like this, we have to analyze the whole empirical part. Of course, many of the trips also go to the north and to middle of Sweden. However, we can not overlook the fact that most of the travel agencies’/tour operators’ trips are headed to Stockholm. The feasible reason for that the southern parts of Sweden are...
underrepresented here could be that most of the people travelling there are going by cars, and therefore they are not included here.

The most popular period of the year to travel to Sweden seems to be summer which means from June until September, and additionally winter which is from December to March. Although for city trips, spring and autumn are most popular. The result shows, as expected, that Sweden is popular the whole year. But different trips are of course more frequent during special times, e.g. ski trips during the winter.

### 3.2.3 Tourist Profile

The next four questions (questions 11-14) are connected to our theory part of tourist profile. These questions cover the cognitive side of image. Since we were not able to reach directly to the tourists, the respondent’s opinions were important for us. First we wanted to see what types of trips the different (age) groups are making. The age is one of the socio-economic characteristics, and it influences the tourists’ choice of a destination. However, the tourist’ behaviour can not only be predicted from these characteristics, and that is why it is also the behavioural characteristics which have to be taken into consideration. In Figure 4 the results of leisure trips made by different groups are shown. It seems like sport trips are most popular among young people (groups 1 and 2). We are guessing that most of these trips are headed to a ski resort. Also adventure trips are common among young people. When it comes to the next age groups, these kinds of trips are rare. Here it is instead the nature and vacations that draw tourists to Sweden. In ages 40-61 (groups 3 and 4) also the culture trips are well-liked. In the figure, we can also see that shopping is not very popular. Then we have to ask the question: why are most of the tourists then going to Stockholm? Perhaps the respondents thought about vacations, when thinking of Stockholm, and maybe that is the main reason for most of the tourists to go there. The shopping probably comes second. This could be explained by the fact that Stockholm is a small shopping town compared to some of the cities in the Netherlands. Family trips (Group 6) were quite evenly spread over nature, vacation and trips visiting friends and family.
The different types of leisure trips are: 1= Vacations, 2= Sports, 3= Culture, 4= Shopping, 5= Adventure, 6= Nature, 7= Trips for visiting family and friends.

The results from business trips show that groups 2, 3 and 4 are the ones making them. This result was expected since people under 30, over 62 and families are not usually involved in business trips. Since the information received from these trips together with other trips was insufficient, we chose not to present them any further here.

The next socio-economic characteristic, which has an influence on the tourist’s behavior, is the previous experience of traveling to that destination. Therefore we wanted to know if the customers traveling to Sweden have been there before. The average answer was 2.64, in a scale one to five, which means that less than half of them have previous experience of Sweden. Since the number was below average, this could mean that the opinion of travel agent is going to matter more for the first time visitor than for the ones who have the past experience. According to Balouglu & McCleary (1999) the influence of previous experience among tourist becomes clear in the relationship between the number of visits made to the destination and the cognitive dimension of image. In the view of the fact that almost half of the tourists traveling to Sweden have been there before, this could mean that they liked the country and therefore their image of it is probably good.

3.2.4 Travel Awareness

We also wanted to know if the travelers have any knowledge about Sweden before they travel there. 3.13 was the average answer here, in a scale from one to five. This means that most customers have some knowledge about it. We expected this number to be close to previous question’s number (2.64) since if the people have past experience of the
country, they presumably have knowledge about it too. However, the reason for that it is a bit higher than 2, 64 could be that people have knowledge of it even if they have not been there before.

In the question 14, considering a conceivable change in attitudes towards Sweden, the answers were equally spread. There was 50 percent who answered yes, and 50 percent who answered no. The ones who answered that the attitudes have changed mentioned for example the following reasons:

- “The traveling has become cheaper.”
- “Scandanavia, especially Sweden has become a popular ski destination. Austria and France are considered 'normal'.”
- “Once people have been to Sweden, they consider returning.”
- “Dutch people know more about Sweden than three years ago, due to television travel programmes and so on.”
- “It is now also known as a safe destination.”

The most common answer was that it has become cheaper to travel to Sweden. This could be due to the fact that the competition within airlines has increased and therefore companies, such as Ryan air, are offering low-price flights to many destinations. This makes it easier and cheaper to fly to big cities, and this could be one reason why Stockholm is the most common destination in Sweden. This can be one pull factor, which according to Weaver & Lawton (2002) can encourage tourists to travel to Sweden. The next reason was that Sweden is seen as a popular skiing destination. According to one respondent the Alps are becoming more mediocre. This is something which we found very odd since for us it is the opposite. However, it is usual that your own country’s supplies are taken for granted, and after a while a tourist wants to investigate new places and experiences. The third reason for the attitude changes, was that tourists been in Sweden seems to return here. Presumably this means that they liked what they experienced the first time, which means that Sweden is taking good care of its visitors. The fourth reason was that Dutch people are more familiar with Sweden, due to for instance travel programs. We have also noticed an increasing interest towards travel programs in Sweden, which makes people more aware of other countries, and we know that media has a strong influence on the public. By increasing the knowledge it becomes more likely that people travel to new places. One respondent said that Sweden is known as a safe destination, and one reason for this can be that Sweden has not had a threat of terrorism like many other countries have. We presume that September 11th changed the attitudes towards safety of a destination, and therefore tourists are considering it more before booking a trip. This can be confirmed by our theory part about “Destination Resources and Characteristics”, where Mathieson and Wall states that a country’s social structure has impact on the choice and image of a destination.

3.2.5 Demand

The next question (number 15) considered the demand. We wanted to see if the companies have experienced any increase in demand in trips to Sweden during the last three years. From the answers we can see that the most common answer was 3, 13, in a
scale one to five, which means that most companies have experienced some increase in demand during the last years. This question goes a little bit together with the previous question about attitudes. The five above mentioned reasons for attitude changes can be linked to the demand changes as well. If the image of a destination is good, the demand for that destination will probably increase as well. So to be able to increase this number, Sweden needs to improve their contact to foreign travel agencies/tour operators. Like Beerli (2004) argues, these are the only induced sources which have a positive and statistically significant influence on the tourist.

The last question in Q1 (with Sweden) (question 16) handled the companies’ intentions to expand the variety of journeys to Sweden. Here it can be seen that more than half answered that either they have not thought about it or they are not planning to do that. The reasons for this were, for instance, the lack of demand or that they think that they are already offering enough trips to Sweden. The rest, who have thought about it, mentioned the following reasons:

- To meet the demand
- The market is growing
- Currently having a small program

As we said before the demand for trips to Sweden is growing and we can see here that many companies only have a small program when it comes to Sweden. There are a few companies who want to expand their business but we think that the demand is higher than the supply, which could indicate that the need for a new incoming agent can exist.

3.3 Q2 (without Sweden) Results

3.3.1 Destination Resources and Characteristics

Now we are presenting the rest of the results from Q2 (without Sweden). The first part considered information about Sweden. All the questions in this section (5 to 10) are connected to our theory part “destinations resources & characteristics”. The first three questions handle the nature and the environment in Sweden and there we wanted to see the respondents’ view of them. Questions 5 and 6 were open-ended question and therefore we received a lot of different answers. Some of the most common answers on the question 5 where the respondents were asked to mention at least three characteristics of how Sweden appears to them, when it comes to the nature and the environment were:

- Nature is beautiful
- A lot of trees and lakes
- Clean air and unspoiled nature
- Feeling of freedom

Since the nature seems to be one of the most distinguishing features in Sweden, it was not a surprise that these answers were similar to the previous question where they were asked to mention three words considering Sweden in general. It looks like the general picture of
Sweden, considering the nature, is that the air is clean and the nature is beautiful. This shows that they have good knowledge of Sweden’s resources.

In the next question (number 6), we wanted to know what kinds of animals the respondents associate with Sweden. Here we can see that the opinions were spread out, and almost everyone had different answers. Some of the examples that came up were ice bear, mosquitoes, elk, bear, eagles, deer, dogs and salmons. Mathieson and Wall (1984) state that the animals can also have an impact on how the tourist perceives the destination, and furthermore on the tourist’s choice of a destination. Since we do not have any polar bears in Sweden, this answer was a bit surprising, especially since the respondents should have better knowledge of Sweden, according to us. On the other hand, we kind of expected someone to say that because of Sweden’s location and the general opinion that Scandinavia has polar bears since some parts of it lie on the Antarctic Circle. Next two questions (numbers 7 and 8) handled the weather conditions and the price level of Sweden, and they are already analyzed earlier in paragraph 3.1.1.

Question 9 in Q2 (without Sweden) was also regarding the image of Sweden, and it concerned the quality of different services. In Figure 5 the results are presented. No one of the respondents was answering that the quality of some service were low. However 16 percent of the respondents thought that all of the services were only on a medium level. Other than this the quality of the services were perceived high. The quality level of accommodation was the highest; more than 65 percent thought that it lies in the highest level. The average for the accommodation was 4, 5, which was higher than both eating facilities and the transportation averages, which were 4, 17. Because of the high quality of services, travel agencies/tour operators are setting a high level for their customers. This can be either a good or a bad thing; it might increase traveling to Sweden, but at the same time the customers’ expectations may be too high and they might get dissatisfied if the quality requirements are not met.

Next question (number 10) was about Sweden’s social structure and politics. We asked them to grade in a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is poor and 5 is very good, how they feel

![Figure 5. Quality of different services (1= low quality and 5= high quality)](image-url)
about the following things. According to the respondents, the average answer for health, safety and cleanliness was 4, 67 and for equity it was 4, 5. As the averages show, these factors are considered high, and the Figure 6 demonstrates that no one thought that none of these lies below or on medium. This indicate that Sweden’s reputation is good and since this can, according to Mathieson & Wall (1984), encourage people to travel, it is an advantage for Sweden. A reason for the high health number could be that they maybe compared Sweden to third world countries, where the health is considered low, partly due to the high HIV numbers. Another reason can be that the respondents know that Swedish people pay a lot of taxes, and in this way get cheaper health care, which results better health. When it comes to the safety, which is also a pull factor according to Weaver & Lawton (2002), Sweden is considered a safe place to be. The fact that Sweden has not had any terrorist threats and that they have been neutral in wars probably makes the Dutch people think that Sweden is a safety place. Regarding the cleanliness, Sweden is considered to be on a high level to. The cause for this might be Sweden’s assets for space and additionally the low density of people. When it comes to equity, Sweden is highly developed and Dutch people seem to know that. According to Mathieson & Wall (1984) this factor can have an enormous effect on the decision about the choice of the final destination. However, since our results are based on only a few answers, it is incorrect to say that this is what the whole Dutch population thinks. Yet, all the answers we received seemed to be homogenous, so we think that the small generalization can be done.

![Figure 6. Grading](1=Poor and 5=Very good)

### 3.3.2 Demand

Concerning the demand for companies without Sweden, we asked for the reasons for excluding Sweden from their service range. Some reasons were:

- The weather is bad
- No big popular tourist attractions that people know
- Too expensive
- Not a lot of demand
All these four points were expected reasons for excluding Sweden from the service range, although we think that the fact that the weather is bad is not a good reason for excluding Sweden. A valid reason would be that the customers perceive that the weather is bad. The customers’ perceptions about the bad weather would lead to a low demand and that would be the reason for the companies to exclude Sweden. It is difficult for us to know what the respondents meant by that statement. But we do not think that the weather, for example in Stockholm is that much worse than it is in Amsterdam or Brussels. The next point, no popular tourist attractions, could be a thing for Sweden to improve in their marketing efforts. The third point also connects to the fact that the demand is too low; if the customers think that Sweden is too expensive, they do not want to travel there. This largely depends on what kind of trip they want to make and where it is headed. For example, the ski resort in Sweden is not necessarily more expensive than it is in the Alps but the transportation to the north of Sweden might be more expensive and complex. The previous three points might be reasons for low demand, the last point. In addition, the customers who want to go to Sweden maybe do not go to the travel agencies/tour operators who do not have Sweden. That is why the companies who do not have Sweden do not daily meet these kinds of tourists, and therefore they experience a low demand. These reasons might be applied to the next question to, where we asked if they have experienced any interest from the customers to travel to Sweden. The average answer was 1, 5 out of five, where one is no interest and five is big interest. The ones who experienced some interest from their customers were asked for culture and nature trips, and in addition some business trips.

The last question (number 13) considered if the companies have thought about having Sweden as a travel destination. Two third of the respondents are not planning to do that. The rest of them have thought about it but any decisions have not been made because of the low demand and the high price level.

The last question shows us that the companies who do not have Sweden seem not to be that interested in adding it to their service range. On the other hand, some of the companies having Sweden showed a bigger interest towards the country, and it is probably them a new incoming agent should contact. This most likely depends on the fact that companies with Sweden can see the demand and the opportunities, while companies without Sweden seem not to have recognized them.
4 Findings

Our purpose with this study was to find out what kind of picture the Dutch travel agencies and tour operators have about Sweden. Furthermore, we wanted to know how the Dutch market looks like, considering the trips to Sweden. Additionally we were interested in seeing if the already existing model explains the phenomena of image. To make it easier to fulfill this purpose we created five research questions. To be able to answer them we sent out two different questionnaires, one to travel agencies/tour operators that are currently offering Sweden in their service range and one to travel agencies/tour operators that do not offer trips here. All of our results are based on 22 answers, which can be seen as a small amount. However, if we think about the market of travel agencies and tour operators in the Netherlands, this amount is fairly large, more than 15 percentages, and therefore we believe that the generalization is possible in some areas.

4.1 Practical Contributions

We are here presenting our research questions with the answers we came up with. We also give suggestions for the future researches, and contributions and implications are given as well.

- How big part does the image of a destination play when tourist is choosing his/her travel destination?

We found out that an image handles both a person’s affective and cognitive images, which arise from many different sources and influences. When a tourist have an image of a destination, it is hard to change that. It is therefore crucial for a company, or in this case for a country, to send out the right signals they want the customers to get. If an image is incorrect or vague, the destination probably will not be in the mind of the customer, and therefore not be the first choice when choosing a travel destination. However, in our revised model, which we will present below (Figure 7) we feel that most of the factors influence first the image and then the decision making process. Our empirical results show us that the respondent’s holistic view (nature and coldness) seem to be different from their attribute based view (Stockholm). Since a big amount of trips are headed to Stockholm, it looks like people are acting more based on their attribute based view instead of their holistic view. In addition the companies who do not have Sweden and who are not planning to have it in their service range seem to think that special attributes of Sweden, for example bad weather conditions, which is a part of their image, contribute to the fact that they are not interested in having it. Out of this we can see the connection between image and interest and we think it is realistic to say that this is also how the customer reacts. Therefore we think that the image the customer is carrying of the destination plays a big role when choosing the final destination.
What is the general picture of Sweden among Dutch travel agencies and tour operators?

When it comes to the Dutch travel agencies/tour operators and their image of Sweden, we have discovered that they have a truthful picture of the reality. Maybe the best evidences of the respondents’ image of Sweden are their answers to our spontaneous open-ended question. Here the feelings towards Sweden are shown, which give us the respondents’ holistic view. They were supposed to mention the first three words that come to their minds, when thinking of Sweden. We can see the travel agencies’/tour operators’ image, which they in turn forward to their customers. To summarize their image, Sweden’s nature with the forests, water and snow were something famous about Sweden. In addition, Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, constitutes a big part of the respondents’ image. Not that common comment was the fact that Sweden has a lot of space, at least not as common as we expected. Some other answers were that Sweden is beautiful, clean and in addition some activities were mentioned. Sweden is also seen as a modern and safe country with high quality. The respondents’ thoughts about the weather conditions and price level seemed to be correct.

What kinds of trips are offered today from the Netherlands to Sweden and who is traveling?

We discovered that the market of trips to Sweden mainly consists of vacations and nature trips. This indicates that it seems to be most popular to travel to Sweden for the nature and for having a vacation. After these two, culture, sport, adventure and shopping trips followed. These four are equally spread. Considering the business trips; meetings, conferences, trade fairs and education are almost equally spread. We also found out that Stockholm is the most popular Swedish destination among the leisure trips. In addition, many of the trips also are headed to the north and to the middle of Sweden. Among business trips Stockholm and Gothenburg are equal.

What are the reasons for travel agencies and tour operators to exclude Sweden from their service range?

The reasons, which we found out, for excluding Sweden from the service range, were quite expected. The most common answers considered the weather, the price level and the lack of information about the tourist attractions. All these factors are reasons for why the travel agencies and tour operators may feel the lack of demand on the market. For instance the price level is considered to be too high.

Has there been an increase in the amount of trips offered to Sweden?

Most of the companies, having Sweden, have experienced some increase in demand during the last years. Conversely, the companies that do not have Sweden have not experienced that. Therefore, they seem not to be interested in adding Sweden to their service range either. This probably can be explained by the fact that these travel agencies/tour operators do not meet the customers interested in Sweden. However, it is
hard for us to generalize this since we only received six answers, but we can see a clear pattern since no one answered that there is an increase. This could mean that a new incoming agent should contact companies currently offering Sweden. In general we think that there is an increase in traveling, since the competition between airlines has increased and therefore the tickets have become cheaper. Another reason is that the travel awareness among tourists has also increased due to the increased amount of travel programs.

4.2 Theoretical Contributions

In our main model, made by Mathieson and Wall (1984), the image of a destination is not mentioned. However, we think that it does have a big impact on the tourist’s decision making process. Therefore we saw the need to improve the already existing model. We chose to have image in the center of our model, see Figure 7. We agree with Mathieson and Wall (1984) that the four factors (tourist profile, trip features, travel awareness and destination resources & characteristics) have an impact on the decision making process and therefore we chose to keep them in the model. Still, we think that they first influence the tourist’s total image of a destination, which in turn influences the decision process. Since we can not find any relation between trip features and image, we put that part in the top of the model instead. We are aware of the fact that our empirical research may not be enough to revise this model. Therefore this can only be seen as one possible way of changing the model.

In the beginning we talked about “the destination resources and characteristics” as our most important part. Now, after working with the empirical data, we have realized that it is the image, created by all these parts (the different boxes in the model), that is the central concept. Every box in the model is significant in its own way but our convictions have been strengthened that the image could be in the centre of the model. To get to know a tourist’s image we have to be aware of the fact that there are many influencing factors, and these are not so easy to change. Only some of them the companies are able to change.

![Figure 7. Revised Model of Decision Making Process](image-url)
To make the new revised model more clear, we are now presenting each of the boxes shortly. First, and one of the most conclusive parts, is the destination’s resources & characteristics. This part is divided into five different points, according to Mathieson & Wall (1984), which are environmental features and processes, economic structure, political organization, level of tourist development and social structure and organization. All these five points have an effect on the decision making process, but first on the image a tourist have about a destination.

Another strong link to the image is the travel awareness. If a tourist is not informed of what different opportunities are available, they are unaware of the means of meeting their requirements. According to Cooper et al. (1996), the availability of information and the credibility of the source are dependable factors. Travel agencies/tour operators have a strong influence in creating tourists’ image, but also friends and media are playing a decisive role. Weaver & Lawton (2002) argue that travel agencies have a critical role in shaping tourism systems. Tourists who have not decided a destination yet, get the information about potential destinations on the basis of the travel agencies’/tour operators’ knowledge. In this case the travel agency/tour operator is helping the tourist to create the image of the destination.

The box about the tourist profile also influences the image. Mathieson & Wall (1984) divide that part in two different characteristics; the behavioral and the socio-economic. The first can be the tourist’s motivations, attitudes and needs against traveling. The other characteristics concern the tourist’s age, education, income, past experience and lifestyle. Both of these characteristics clearly have an influence on what image a tourist has of a destination, which in turn influence their decision making process. Additionally, we think that the tourist profile also effects the decision making process without being a part of the image. This can for example be realized if a tourist has a lot of money and out of that decides where to go. No picture is then created before the decision process.

As we mentioned before, we do not see any connection between trip features and image. Besides that, only some parts of it can be linked to the decision process, according to us. In our empirical results we saw that trip cost and value for price as well as the destination’s perceived risk influences where a tourist wants to travel. The part about distance and duration of stay that Mathieson & Wall (1984) brought up; do not seem to connect with the part about the decision making. Not many tourists, according to the travel agencies/tour operator we asked, cared about those features when choosing a destination.

The central part of this revised model is thus the image. Among others, Balouglu & McCleary (1999) talk about image as an overall or total impression which is formed as a result of the evaluation of individual attributes which may contain both cognitive and emotional content. Beerli (2004) continues by writing that factors that influence an image involve both information obtained from different sources and the characteristics of the individual. According to these researchers, among others, the image is influenced by different factors and plays a big part of the tourists’ decision making process. When an
image is made, it is difficult to change it, and it is therefore important to send out the right signals to the customers. If an image is incorrect or vague, the destination probably will not be in the mind of the customer, and therefore not be the first choice when choosing a travel destination.

When an image is created, the decision making process begins. According to Mathieson & Wall (1984) the decision-making process consists of five phases. The tourist is considering the different choices, with background of their own feelings and knowledge. Cooper et al. (1996) criticizes this model since it does not take a tourist’s feelings and behaviors into consideration. However, we think that this new model (Figure 7) is more sensitive to the tourist, since the image also includes the tourists’ feelings.

4.3 Implications

Everybody has some kind of image of everything. The way for the company to try to change a customer’s image is through marketing, same thing applies for countries. It is very important that right image is sent out. Nation branding has become an essential part of countries’ marketing efforts. We were interested in finding out what kind of image the Dutch travel agents and tour operators have about Sweden. We were interested in this because we know that the image these companies are carrying will be delivered to their customers as well.

4.3.1 Implications for the Industry

When it comes to Sweden, the five organizations, mentioned earlier\(^\text{15}\), have the commission to promote the country. So far they have tried to create a concept “Space for Minds”, which is mostly built on space; physical space, mental space and minds. This is the picture of Sweden they are trying to send out to people. However, our respondents did not mention space as much as we expected and that made us to think if the “promoting campaign” of space is working out that well after all. Things, such as nature, Stockholm and coldness were more perceived features. Most likely, the high awareness of Stockholm is one reason for why the space was not so popular feature among the respondents. The organizations promoting Sweden should probably put more effort on advertising other towns and places beside Stockholm and this way try to deliver Sweden as a spacious country. They could try to promote more places such as Gotland, northern part of Sweden or for example the west coast.

4.3.2 Implications for Scandinavian Travel Agent AB

The answers to our research questions (presented above) are something that the Scandinavian Travel Agent AB can take into consideration when deciding whether to expand to the Netherlands or not. In addition, as we mentioned before, the expected growth in economy, together with the fact that Dutch people take a lot of holidays, could result increase in traveling. We believe that one of the reasons why this increase in traveling could be headed to Sweden instead of some other countries is that the

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\(^{15}\) The travel and tourism Council of Sweden (Sveriges Rese- och Turistråd), The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (UD), the Swedish Institute (SI), the Export Council (Exportrådet) and Invest in Sweden Agency
Netherlands is a densely populated country (with 441 inhabitants per km²), and since Sweden is a very spacious country we could offer a lot needed space for the Dutch people.

A new incoming agent, like Scandinavian Travel Agent AB, could first contact the travel agencies/tour operators who are currently offering Sweden, since they seem to be most interested in expanding to Sweden. This is probably due to the fact these companies can see the demand and the opportunities better than the companies who do not have Sweden. Among the other travel agencies/tour operators an interest has to be aroused.

### 4.4 Suggestions for Future Studies

We were commissioned to investigate how the Dutch market looks like when it comes to trips to Sweden, but also to see how the Dutch travel agencies’/tour operators’ image is about Sweden. Since our purpose was to look at the companies, we did not put any efforts in investigating how the Dutch tourists really think. But since we know, from earlier researches, that travel agencies/tour operators have a big impact on tourists’ decisions, we thought it would be sufficient for us to just investigate them. However to be able to get better insights into how the tourist itself makes the decision it could be interesting to do research on how the tourist make their decisions when it comes to choosing a travel destination; what factors they feel to have an impact on their decisions. Furthermore, to look more into the internal factors affecting the individuals’ decision making process. After defining this, it could be interesting to see if the opinions from the companies coincide with the tourists’ opinions.

When it comes to our theoretical part, we would be interested in knowing whether the image has as big influence on the choice of the travel destination as we think. There could be a study conducted about how much tourists’ image of a destination really affects on the final decision of the travel destination. This could be a hard thing to measure but when succeeding the results would be truly interesting.
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APPENDIX 1

Q1 – Companies having Sweden

General Information:

1. What is your function within the company?

2. Is your company

☐ Tour Operator
☐ Travel Agent
☐ Other:

3. In what town/province is your company located?

Information about Sweden:

4. Please mention the first three words which come to your mind, when you think about Sweden:

5. What kind of picture of Sweden does your company try to send out to the customers?

6. Please mark in the boxes below how you experience the weather conditions in Sweden?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cold</th>
<th>Warm</th>
<th>Rain</th>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Snow</th>
<th>No snow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winter (Dec-March)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring (April-May)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer (June-Aug)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn (Sep-Nov)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. What do you think about the price level in Sweden concerning: (In a scale 1 to 5, where 1 would be low and 5 would be high)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>shopping</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food and beverage</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accommodation</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Trip Features:**

8. What types of trips does your company offer to Sweden? (More than one option possible)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leisure:</th>
<th>Business:</th>
<th>Other:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vacations</td>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Trade fairs</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trips for visiting the family or friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Please mark the most popular destinations of the different types of trips: (Bunch of Boxes- Leisure, Business and other) (More than one option possible)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South of Sweden (i.e., Malmö, Halmstad)</th>
<th>Leisure</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Coast (i.e., Grebbestad, Smögen)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South- East Coast (i.e., Gotland, Öland)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Sweden (i.e., Dalarna, Värmland)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North of Sweden (i.e., Lappland, Umeå, Jukkasjärvi Ice Hotel)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gothenburg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Comments:

10 Could you please specify what the most popular period of the year to travel to Sweden is? (Season, month, specific date)
**Tourist Profile:**

11. Could you please indicate which types of trips each of the following groups generally make? (More than one option possible)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>Group 5</th>
<th>Group 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18-28)</td>
<td>(29-39)</td>
<td>(40-50)</td>
<td>(51-61)</td>
<td>(62...)</td>
<td>(Family)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Leisure:*
- Vacations
- Sports
- Culture
- Shopping
- Adventure
- Nature
- Trips for visiting the family/friends

*Business:*
- Meetings
- Conferences
- Trade fairs
- Education

*Other:*
- Studies
- Health
- Religion

12. Do you think your customers, traveling to Sweden, have been there before? Please indicate in the boxes below. (In a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 would be *no one* and 5 would be *most of them*)

1 2 3 4 5

13. Do you think your customers have any knowledge about Sweden before their trip? (In a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 would be *no knowledge at all* and 5 would be *extensive knowledge*)

1 2 3 4 5
14. Do you think that customers’ attitudes towards traveling to Sweden have changed during the last three years? If yes, please describe how.

☐ No  ☑ Yes,

**Demand:**

15. Has your company experience any increase in demand in traveling to Sweden during the last three years? (In a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 would be *not at all* and 5 would be *plenty*)

1    2   3    4   5
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

16. Has your company thought about expanding the variety of journeys to Sweden?

☐ Yes, we are planning to do that  ☑ Yes, we have thought about it
☐ No, we have not thought about it  ☐ No, we are not planning to do that
☐ I do not know

Please describe why:

**Thank You for Your Participation!**
APPENDIX 2

Q2 – Companies not having Sweden

General Information:

1. What is your function within the company?

2. Is your company

☐ Tour Operator
☐ Travel Agent
☐ Other:

3. In what town/province is your company located?

Information about Sweden:

4. Please mention the first three words which come to your mind, when you think about Sweden:

Nature:

5. Please mention at least three characteristics of how Sweden appears to you, considering the nature and the environment:

6. Please mention three animals which you associate with Sweden?

7. Please mark in the boxes below how you experience the weather conditions in Sweden?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Cold</th>
<th>Warm</th>
<th>Rain</th>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Snow</th>
<th>No snow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winter (Dec-Mar)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring (April-May)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer (June-Aug)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn (Sep-Nov)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Economics:

8. What do you think about the price level in Sweden concerning: (In a scale 1 to 5, where 1 would be low and 5 would be high)

   shopping 1 2 3 4 5
   food and beverage 1 2 3 4 5
   accommodation 1 2 3 4 5

Tourism:

9. What do you think about the quality of the following points in Sweden: (In a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 would be low and 5 would be high)

   eating facilities 1 2 3 4 5
   accommodation 1 2 3 4 5
   transportation 1 2 3 4 5

Social structure and politics:

10. How would you grade the following points considering Sweden? (In a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 would be poor and 5 would be a very good)

    health 1 2 3 4 5
    safety 1 2 3 4 5
    cleanliness 1 2 3 4 5
    equity 1 2 3 4 5

Demand:

11. Please mention some reasons why your company does not offer trips to Sweden:

12. A) Has your company experienced any interest from the customers to travel to Sweden? (In a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 would be no interest and 5 would be big interest)

    1 2 3 4 5
12. B) If you think there is any interest in trips to Sweden, could you please indicate what kinds of trips the customers are asking for. (More than one option possible)

**Leisure:**
- Vacations
- Sports
- Culture
- Shopping
- Adventure
- Nature
- Trips for visiting the family or friends
- Other

**Business:**
- Meetings
- Conferences
- Trade fairs
- Education
- Other

**Other:**
- Studies
- Health
- Religion
- Other

13. Has your company thought of having Sweden as a travel destination?

- Yes, we have planned to do that in the near future.
- Yes, we have thought about it, but no decision has been made.
- No, we have not thought about it.
- No, we are not planning to do that.

Please describe why:

**Thank You for Your Participation!**