



Enhancing the distribution of Swedish tourism services on international markets:
Possible export-ready criteria requisitioned by European tour operators

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Abstract

This paper identifies subjects which are relevant for Swedish suppliers of tourism services before approaching foreign markets. Most suppliers are micro, small or medium sized companies and use intermediaries, such as tour operators, for internationalization. The research considers the opinion of British and German tour operators, which require some criteria beforehand in order to simplify both the initialization and the development of cooperation. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are hereby the go-betweens since they not only represent small-scale suppliers on international markets, but also initiate first encounters between suppliers and tour operators. Suppliers need to provide DMOs with accurate information in order to ensure the best possible representation. After initializing collaboration, business relationships are sought to develop in order to facilitate long-term cooperation. Proper preparation forms therefore the base for strengthening the competitiveness of Swedish tourism prior approaching international markets. The enhancement of distributing Swedish tourism services on foreign markets appeared to be a profitable way to enable further growth, which is strongly limited on the domestic market. Increasing the export share therefore secures and further facilitates tourism's valuable contributions to the Swedish economy.

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1. Introduction

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) stated that tourism turned out to be the world's largest industry in 1995 (Philström, 1995 cited in Björkman and Kock, 1997). Agndal and Elbe (2007) mentioned that 'tourism firms are, therefore, significant for global economic activity.' From a Swedish perspective tourism significantly contributes to the employment situation and VAT revenues, which are a reasonable source of income for Swedish treasury (Tillväxtverket, 2010). To strengthen the competitiveness of Swedish tourism the export share has to increase. If more foreign travelers are tempted to visit Sweden to consume services offered by local tourist enterprises, value is created. Destinations in general and tourism suppliers in particular must consequently be export-ready. Therefore the objects of interest in this study are export-ready indicators, which need to be checked before entering international markets.

In Sweden the domestic market for the consumption of tourism products is quite limited due to minor population of approximately 9,4 million inhabitants (Umeå Universitet, 2010). Those who can afford it own summer cottages, which are used for spending leisure time and holidays (cf. Freitag, 2010). Due to these facts it seems reasonable for Swedish suppliers of tourism services to consider international distribution of their products (Peric, 2005) in order to enhance the growth of sales.

Also, contemporary debates relate to an international orientation of tourism enterprises all over the industry. As an example the international export-ready workshop, which was recently held in Australia could be stated. The apparent purpose of the workshop was '... to increase the number of international/ export ready products in the Capital Country region (Capital Country Tourism, 2011).' The event was aimed at local tourism suppliers.

As a matter of fact, most touristic enterprises are considered as micro, small and medium sized enterprises (Agndal and Elbe, 2007; Bécherel and Vellas, 1999). For that reason, the resources regarding staff time and know how about the particularities of internationalization processes are limited. Cooperation with intermediaries like tour operators is rather the rule than an exception (Succurro, 2008). Besides distribution of tourism products through intermediaries, direct distribution through the Internet becomes increasingly important (Evans, 2006).

The types of tourism products are manifold. On the one hand, there are suppliers, who offer attractions such as ski facilities or theme parks. On the other hand, suppliers offer supportive services like transportation, accommodation or intermediation services (cf. Agndal and Elbe,

2007). The specificity of all tourism products is their service status. And services differ a great deal from goods (Majkgård, 1998). Consequently, the knowledge, which was accumulated around the internationalization processes within the manufacturing industry, can be applied to a minor extent. More useful are findings that result from studies on internationalization processes of service firms. The study of Majkgård and Sharma (1998) is an example for this. But tourism suppliers depend on the place since they use natural and/or cultural resources for the production of their services (Björkman and Kock, 1997). This means that the suppliers need to 'import' the customers rather than 'exporting' their services once they made the decision to approach international markets (Agndal and Elbe, 2007).

The aforementioned specific features of tourism products and the subsequent international distribution were the corner marks to review literature and examine academic research. Relevant concepts are going to be presented within the literature review section of this report. Agndal and Elbe's work (2007) is one of the few papers, which provides reliable information regarding subject matter internationalization processes of small and medium sized Swedish tourism firms.

Even though direct distribution gets increasingly important, the focal point of the thesis is on indirect distribution. As reasons intermediaries' ability to attract large volumes within a relatively short time (cf. Elbe, 2009) could be mentioned. Nevertheless, cooperation between suppliers and intermediaries requires mutual prospects and standards in order to promote the alignment of the partnership. In-depth research has shown that solid information regarding such standards is available only to a very limited extent. Regarding the Swedish tourism market, this gap is what the thesis proposes to bridge.

The title of the thesis already states its purpose. 'Enhancing the distribution of Swedish tourism services on international markets: Possible export-ready criteria requisitioned by European tour operators.' The aim is to find out according to which criteria European tour operators base their decision on whether they cooperate with Swedish tourism suppliers or not. In order to facilitate best possible preparation, it would be beneficial for both parties to provide suppliers with relevant issues that can be considered as indicators for export readiness. This research is sought to identify according criteria.

2. Literature review and theory

At the beginning of this section the economic dimension of tourism in Sweden is stated. The author deemed this a duty since the economic impact of tourism can be regarded as an overall framework for the thesis. The literature review comprises relevant information regarding research, which has already been conducted on international distribution of products and services. The theory section is formed by definition of the globalization processes in general and specifically, internationalization. The part dealing with internationalization is concluded by reasons why enterprises decide to expand abroad.

2.1 Tourism in Sweden

Tourism is a big issue for the Swedish economy. This 'industry' creates significant revenues resulting from not only national business and leisure travel, but also revenues, which are generated by foreign tourists, who visit Sweden for different reasons. Over the last ten years the contributions of tourism has risen considerably. The growth rate is set at a mark of plus 67,8% compared to the year 2000. In 2009 the total turnover amounted to SEK 251,7 billion, which is 6,1% more than in 2008 (Tillväxtverket, 2010). Tourism therefore heavily contributes to the employment situation as well as value added tax (VAT) revenues. Foreign consumption must be stated explicitly, since it amounts to SEK 93,6 billion in 2009 (ibid., 8). Therefore the export revenue of tourism is a particularly valuable source of income for Swedish treasury.

Due to the aforementioned (economic) arguments the enhancement of the distribution of Swedish tourism services on international markets seems logical. This claim is backed by the fact that the domestic market is limited (Umeå Universitet, 2010). Seasonal concentration (short summer season) and a great number of domestic households, which are mostly vacationing in private summer cottages (cf. Freitag, 2010), further promote international distribution.

2.2 Globalization versus internationalization

According to Hjalager (2007) the term globalization describes 'one of today's most controversial issues' that has been frequently stated in existing marketing literature. However, globalization can refer to various phenomena and is sometimes used simultaneously with internationalization. While internationalization can be regarded as a process that describes firms on their way to acting

in foreign markets, 'Globalization can be defined as the highest development level of internationalization (Peric, 2005).' Globalization is an interdisciplinary process and consequently influences all dimensions of human life including travel and tourism (cf. Hjalager, 2007).

2.3 Management of internationalization processes

After a thorough revision of existing literature dealing with this issue, considering internationalization as a process seems advisable. This proposition is based on broad empirical support provided by Andersen (1993), Johanson and Vahlne (1993), Hjalager (2007) and Agndal and Elbe (2007). Currently existing literature provides different approaches to the internationalization processes. Andersen and Buvik (2002) for example identified two traditional approaches, which could be used for selecting international markets. First, there is a systematic approach and second, the unsystematic approach. Both of these have various representatives. The most cited unsystematic approach is the Uppsala Internationalization Model (U-M). Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul established the U-M in 1975. In this model the internationalization process of a firm is described as international involvement, which is successively (stage by stage) increasing (cf. Johanson and Vahlne, 1993). Traditionally the authors of the U-M distinguished between four different stages of entering international markets:

Stage 1: No regular export activities

Stage 2: Export via independent representatives (agents)

Stage 3: Establishment of an overseas sales subsidiary

Stage 4: Overseas production/ manufacturing units (Andersen, 1993).

Johanson and Vahlne have supplemented Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul's work with a dynamic model. This non-statically model implies a causal connection between state and change aspects of internationalization variables (Andersen, 1993). The state aspects include the variables 'market commitment' and 'market knowledge' while the change aspects consist of 'current business activities' and 'commitment decisions' (cf. Johanson and Vahlne, 1993). This dynamic model is illustrated in figure 1.

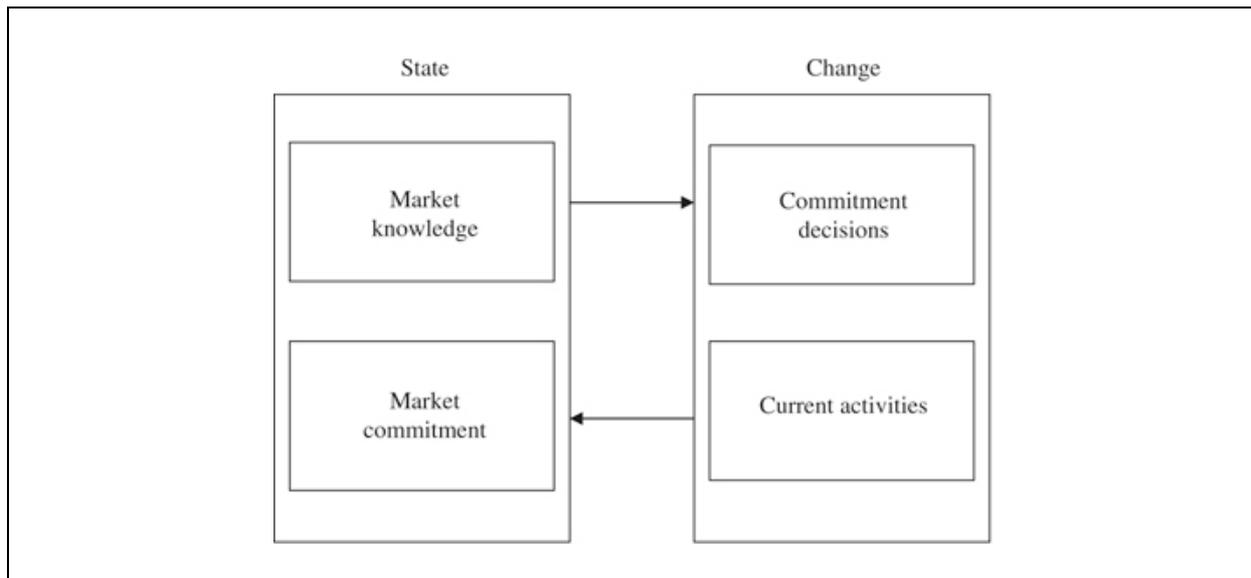


Figure 1. The internationalization process of the firm

Source: Johanson and Vahlne, 2009.

According to the U-M the foreign market entry and the selection of the market country is based on objective knowledge and experiential knowledge (Penrose, 1959 cited in Majkgård, 1998, p.85). The former ‘can be taught’ while the latter ‘can only be acquired through personal experience’ (Johanson and Vahlne, 1993) by operating on international markets. The U-M further argues that the internationalization process starts in countries within a short psychic distance from the domestic market. Majkgård (1998) defines the psychic distance as a concept, which considers differences regarding factors such as education, language, the way of doing business and the level of industrial development. Andersen (1993) added the dimensions culture and political system, which have to face the challenge of differences between the home and the host countries. Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul’s study (1975) has shown that the analyzed firms entered new economies ‘with successively greater psychic distance.’

In their paper from 2002, Andersen and Buvik added another dimension through presenting the relationship approach. The major difference compared to the aforementioned traditional approaches is the research object. The unit of analysis is the *customer* in contrast to the question of which *country* to select. According to the conclusions of the article, a relationship approach might be more likely to suit if the customers are manufacturing firms or service industries (cf. Andersen and Buvik, 2002). Since tourist companies count as service enterprises the relationship approach deserves strong interest regarding the internationalization process.

In a nutshell, the aforementioned conceptualizations about internationalization are all based on so called stage models. But for all that, these models have been intensively criticized. Some enterprises might not stick to the stage-by-stage moving pattern. They rather make their market decisions according to specific circumstances, stages could be ignored or an ‘inward strategy’, which was proposed in Björkman and Kock’s (1997) work can be chosen (cf. Hjalager, 2007). It must be stated that there is a difference between suppliers that are actively exporting their services and those, which provide their services to both domestic and foreign visitors. The sooner frequently rely on exporting activities owing to growth limitations on the domestic market, which were stated in chapter 2.1. For the latter the export activities cause of course additional revenues, but their absence would not so much hamper growth. Chapter 2.5 will further elaborate on this. The following paragraph deals with born-global firms, franchising and licensing. This company type and concepts also lack any stage philosophy.

Born-global firms can be considered as enterprises, which try to reach international markets at the early stage (Knight and Cavusgil, 2005). Agndal and Elbe (2007) note that these firms develop, and therefore market their products for foreign customers rather than for locals. As reasons for this behavior the authors mention that foreigners might perceive the products as fascinating while might locals take them for granted. Born-global firms in respect of tourism can therefore be defined as enterprises, which primarily develop and market their products for foreign markets. As a consequence, the internationalization process begins within their first year of operation. Hjalager (2007) further mentions franchising and licensing. According to her paper, ‘many tourism services are well suited to franchising and licensing arrangements (Quinn and Doherty, 2000 cited in Hjalager, 2007:446).’

2.4 Service industry and the tourism product

An ongoing discussion about the characteristics of services can be found in existing literature. Services are often compared with physical goods (Grönroos, 2007:53). This comparison is not really helpful regarding the internationalization of service firms since Majkgård (1998) points out that ‘services are different from goods.’ Agndal and Elbe (2007) state that ‘tourism is a service-oriented industry.’

Grönroos (2007) defines services as processes, which consist of single activities respectively a series of activities, which is called ‘complementarity’ by Bécherel and Vellas (1999). Another

feature of services deals with the simultaneity of production and consumption (Williams and Shaw, 2011). Customers engage in the production of the service process as a co-producer. Agndal and Elbe (2007) further state that services are perishable and therefore cannot be stored. Additionally, they are intangible, which means it is hard to demonstrate or sample services. Last but not least services are heterogenic. For that reason, standardization is more difficult than it is for physical goods. Bécherel and Vellas (1999) state the ‘inelasticity of supply’, ‘elasticity of demand for tourism products’, ‘high fixed costs’ and ‘labor intensity’ as specificities of the tourism product.

The aforementioned characteristics are relevant to different services to and individual extent. Nevertheless, this fact makes an impact on internationalization. Since tourism products differ from manufactured goods but conversely need to be considered as a product, a suitable definition of the tourism product is required. Agndal and Elbe (2007) argue that ‘the core of the tourism product is the ‘attraction’ and further differ between tourism firms, which offer attractions and those who offer supporting services. Smith (1994) formalizes the assumption that tourism products are basically experiences, which motivate people to travel. ‘Attraction’ and ‘experience’ are contrasting with each other. The author assumes the latter definition of tourism products and will denote them as ‘services’ as things develop. Suppliers, which offer such experiences, need to be aware of the specific features of their services.

2.5 Micro, small and medium sized enterprises

The European Commission (2009) defines micro, small and medium sized enterprises depending on staff headcount and either turnover or balance sheet total. The stated staff headcount includes seasonal workers (Agndal and Elbe, 2007) and must not transcend 250 employees as long as this definition is applied. Figure 2 shows the graduation between the aforementioned categories. Applied to the Swedish tourism industry the definition of micro sized enterprises needs to be highlighted. Many Swedish tourism suppliers can be considered as belonging to this enterprise category.

SME Definition				
Enterprise category	Ceilings			
	Staff Headcount (number of persons expressed in annual work units)	Turnover	Or	Balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 million		≤ € 43 million
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 million		≤ € 10 million
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 million		≤ € 2 million

Figure 2. SME Definition

Source: European Commission, 2009.

The worldwide tourism business is dominated by SMEs (Cavlek, 2002) and 90% of all European tourist enterprises are considered as SMEs (Bécherel and Vellas, 1999). Agndal and Elbe (2007) state in their work about small and medium sized tourism firms (SMTFs) that interestingly little research on the internationalization of SMTFs has been conducted. This is surprising since many SMTFs tackle international markets by using intermediaries or approaching remote niche markets through direct sales on the Internet. Nevertheless, the particularity amongst SMTFs is that they depend on the place they are located at. This means that they cannot export their services. They rather have to import possible foreign customers, which consume consequently the tourism products on site by using natural and cultural resources (Björkman and Kock, 1997). Cavlek (2002) further states that a direct confrontation of multinational corporations (MNCs) and SMEs is caused by the most recent development of the tourism industry. The former derive from 'tourism generating markets' while the latter are mainly based on 'receiving markets' and therefore act destination-oriented. According to this, the Swedish market can be considered as being a 'receiving market'. Again, there must be distinguished between 'active' exporters that distribute their services frequently directly and 'passive' exporters, which often rely on indirect distribution. This graduation is what the author meant to express in the end of chapter 2.3.

Nevertheless, the modest size of SMEs could be used as an advantage instead of a disadvantage. The small size is accompanied by a high degree of flexibility, which makes fast responds to changes in demand and increased innovation possible. It is recommended that SMEs rather avoid competition for markets with MNCs. They should better engage in niche marketing or affiliating themselves (Cavlek, 2002).

2.6 Distribution

From a historical viewpoint, distribution (place) as a component of the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion [The Times 100, 2011]) changed its position over time. During the past four decades, the importance of distribution has increased significantly. Propositions have shown that in the 1970s the 'product' was followed by 'promotion'. The 'price' dimension was added in the 1980s. In the 1990s the significance of 'distribution' was highlighted. Consequently, the importance of 'distribution' has been suspended from last to first in the last decades of the previous millennium (cf. Knowles and Grabowski, 1999). Buhalis (2000) supports the importance of distribution since first, it is state to cost 20 to 30 per cent of the product price and second, it defines whether suppliers can meet their target markets and under which conditions this would happen.

Somewhat simplified one can say that distribution is divided into direct and indirect distribution. Within this report only one representative of each mode is going to be considered. Suppliers can either distribute their services online (direct) or through the usage of intermediation (indirect). Direct distribution can further happen through advertising, trade fairs, etc. To succeed in online distribution, the web pages need to be found easily and the distribution process is sought to be simple and credible for the customer. Well-known brand names and other references are important. It might take a long time to get such an impact since it is quite difficult to attract large volumes, as this form of distribution aims at individual travelers. For that reason, it might be easier for suppliers to distribute services by using an indirect distribution channels (cf. Agndal and Elbe, 2007). Intermediaries, such as tour operators, usually know their home markets. Their brands are already well known and they are capable of delivering large volumes (Elbe, 2009).

The rise of E-commerce caused a significant change in the distribution of tourism products. A lot of services can be booked online without consulting so called intermediaries (Evans, 2006). The process of intermediation is dealt with in the proceeding chapter. Intermediaries still play an important role in the distribution of travel and tourism services. While leisure travelers are more likely to possess greater flexibility and price elasticity, business travelers have to follow strict schedules. As a consequence, the latter tend to use intermediaries to organize their itineraries (cf. Buhalis, 2000). Travel agencies and tour operators were identified as the most important representatives (Cavlek, 2006).

2.7 Intermediation

The process of intermediation from a tour operator perspective can be described as a selection and bundling of individual holiday elements, followed by promotion and distribution. Furthermore, the customers need to be provided with information about destinations. The distinctiveness of supply and demand in tourism services justifies the existence of intermediaries, which link the service providers with travelers and tourists (cf. Cavlek, 2006). Therefore the key task of tour operators is to ensure easy access to the packages. Accessibility hereby can refer to price, product quality, package theme, etc. In general they manage the relations among suppliers and distributors of services (cf. Knowles and Grabowski, 1999).

Nevertheless, numerous risks can be identified, which can easily become competitive threats for tour operators. This concern involves price, as direct selling is striding ahead (Succurro, 2008), new emerging target groups (e.g. elderly travelers) or travelers, who have a great amount of experience and therefore want to organize trips on their own (cf. Knowles and Grabowski, 1999).

Once the cooperation between suppliers and tour operators is defined it can either work in a traditional way, through implementing the services of individual suppliers in a package, which is going to be distributed abroad. Besides this task, which has been mentioned previously, cooperation can take place in form of joint activities, such as joint product development (cf. Buhalis, 2000). The latter cooperative activity is followed by exclusive distribution through the intermediary on international markets.

2.7.1 Tour operators

Travelers use the operator's expertise to save valuable time, money and effort. They provide travelers with professional help (Knowles and Grabowski, 1999) and base their services on outputs that result from accessibility to networks and outlets. Besides that, their services lead into professional travel-advice, reservation of hotels and other components of travel packages. To put it simply, tour operators put package tours, which consist of separate services, together and sell them to private customers (leisure travel), companies (business trips) or companies to sell on (Evans, 2006) all for one price. As an example a tour comprising of a charter flight, transfer service from the airport to a hotel plus individual services of local suppliers could be mentioned.

On an international scale the distribution of tourism products either works on a business to business (B2B) or business to customer (B2C) basis. The B2B model is widespread in North America and is conducted either through the operation of receptive tour operators or (ordinary) tour operators. Receptive tour operators contract with overseas tour operators (wholesalers) and provide them with tourist services throughout the United States and Canada (Virginia Tourism Corporation, 2011). In conclusion, receptive tour operators can be regarded as an additional intermediary between suppliers of tourist services and relevant customers. In Europe receptive tour operators are better known as incoming agencies. The B2C model implies the distribution of tourist services from tourist suppliers to customers in a direct way. Again it must be stated that this paper focuses on the relationship between suppliers of tourism services and European tour operators. The international distribution model of tourism products was mentioned for the sake of thoroughness only.

2.8 Destination and destination marketing organizations

For the purpose of this paper, the author refers to the definition of Buhalis (2000), who describes destinations as geographical regions. The particularity is that its visitors must perceive these regions as an entity, bounded by a political and legislative framework for the marketing and planning of tourism. These activities are carried out by (local) destination marketing organizations (DMOs), which use available resources and power according to the aforementioned frameworks.

Tour operators expect to be provided with information regarding possible activities and facilities, which are offered at the destination. Furthermore, they are sought to have contact to suppliers. The DMOs therefore act somehow as intermediaries themselves between suppliers and tour operators. Sometimes DMOs participate in marketing campaigns when selected tour operators plan to feature whole destinations.

At this point, the role of Visit Sweden needs to be stated, since this national tourist board acts as a DMO as well. The destination, which is represented by Visit Sweden, is Sweden as a whole (Visit Sweden, 2011). Visit Sweden can also be regarded as an interface between local DMOs and tour operators, as long as they do not have direct interaction. Some of the key tasks of Visit Sweden are to represent the country on international trade fairs and to run marketing campaigns in desired target markets.

The Scandinavian Tourist Board's (STB) responsibility is to represent the destination(s) on a larger scale. This organization is based on a joint initiative by the national tourist boards of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. STB's major responsibility is to promote Scandinavian tourism products on the Asia-Pacific markets (Scandinavian Tourist Board, 2011). Since the focal point of the thesis is on a European perspective, STB's role is only partly relevant. The purpose of stating the STB is for the sake of completeness only.

The export of tourist services frequently depends on the activities of DMOs. This fact is due to the structure of suppliers of tourism services, which are mostly SMEs and therefore do not possess resources concerning capital, management expertise and innovative business models (Cavlek, 2002). According to the work Williams and Shaw (2011) '...internationalization requires firms to have superior knowledge compared to those operating only in the domestic sphere.' DMOs are sought to provide suppliers with valuable information regarding the internationalization process. The support can include activities such as export ready workshops (cf. Capital Country Tourism, 2011) as well as best practice examples (cf. Travel Alberta, 2009).

2.9 Summary

The preceding literature review of subject matter internationalization both provided the reader with relevant information regarding the topic and set the framework for the entire research. The (economic) dimension of tourism for the Swedish treasury has been outlined. Owing to tourism's valuable contributions to the GDP, future growth needs to be facilitated. Nonetheless, approaching international markets is linked to insecurity and novice mistakes that should be avoided. Proper preparation and adaptation of both distribution mode as well as operations on site are capable of relieving troubles when international markets are approached first. Short geographical and cultural distance play an important role when selecting international markets. Management of internationalization processes includes considering specific features of tourism services, company size and distribution modes. DMOs are the organizations in charge for providing Swedish suppliers with requirements that are expected by European tour operators. According to this knowledge base practitioners were consulted in order to find out whether practice differs from theory and if so, in which respects. The consecutive chapters will describe both method as well as relevant findings.

3. Methodology

This chapter is supposed to describe the framework of the investigation at hand in a detailed way. First, aims and objectives will frame the research comprehensively. Second, the various steps of the research process will be outlined. Third, data analysis according to the principles of academic research is expected to conclude this section.

3.1 Objective and design

The author's aim was to identify various criteria, which are essential for European tour operators when they consider implementing Swedish tourism services in their packages or intend to engage in joint product development. National suppliers of tourism services mostly count as SMTFs and are sought to fulfill so called export ready criteria before they can sell their services on international markets. According to the purpose of the research the author examined the opinion of British and German tour operators. This perspective was chosen due to both language proficiency and relevance of the aforementioned markets. Swedish suppliers as well as tour operators were not consulted since this was not the focal point of the thesis. Information and opinions that are expressed by native speakers are considered to possess high validity. Furthermore, the perspective of outsiders is sought to present an image, which is not biased. Being an international student strongly supported the aforementioned decisions.

3.2 Research method

The author deemed a qualitative design to be best suitable for the purpose of the thesis. Limitation factors such as: time, data availability, tour operators' willingness to cooperate with a student and lacking cooperativeness of the local DMO concerning the provision of contact details, data, etc. supported the usage of a qualitative design. According to Veal (2006) qualitative approaches '... tend to collect a great deal of rich information about relatively few cases ...'. Veal (2006) states further that 'qualitative methods can be used for pragmatic reasons, in situations where formal quantified research is not necessary or is not possible ...'. This is especially valid for the present thesis due to the limited amount of time. With reference to a critical review of research literature, qualitative research is frequently confronted with criticism. The most cited critics imply subjectivity during the conduction of the research and difficulties when findings

sought to be replicated (Silverman, 2004:51). However, objectivity and results that are capable of generalizing can be achieved through the application of triangulation. According to Golafshani (2003) ‘... triangulation, as used in quantitative research to test the reliability and validity, can also illuminate some ways to test or maximize the validity and reliability of a qualitative study.’ Using triangulation is therefore a suitable way to overcome the qualitative research paradigm.

Nevertheless, the qualitative design applies only to the research, which was conducted by the author. Besides that, other sources of information were consulted that all originate from different research methods. As a result, the author further talks about a multiple method design, which can be regarded as a framework for all the data that were considered within this research. The reason for choosing a multiple method approach was the aim to achieve more representative results. The following chapter will elaborate on this issue in more detail.

3.2.1 Information gathered

According to literature on research methods the application of a triangulation technique must be claimed when more than one data source is used (Veal, 2006). This fact not only facilitates the issues of reliability and validity, but also helps to overcome well-known weaknesses of methods (cf. Kelly, 1980 cited in Veal, 2006:195). With reference to the principles of triangulation, ‘...it is when the different data/methods address the same question that true triangulation can be said to have occurred (Veal, 2006).’ However, the author states that this was not the case within the research. All different data respectively methods addressed the subject internationalization but each of them addressed different questions regarding this issue. For the purpose of this thesis both the method as well as available data, were considered as best suited as well as valuable and sufficient. Nevertheless, the author is aware of lacking plausibility, which is ascribable to the aforementioned curtailments. Eventually a multiple method was applied in this research rather than triangulation. Figure 3 will illustrate an overview of the research method before the individual steps will be explained in more detail.

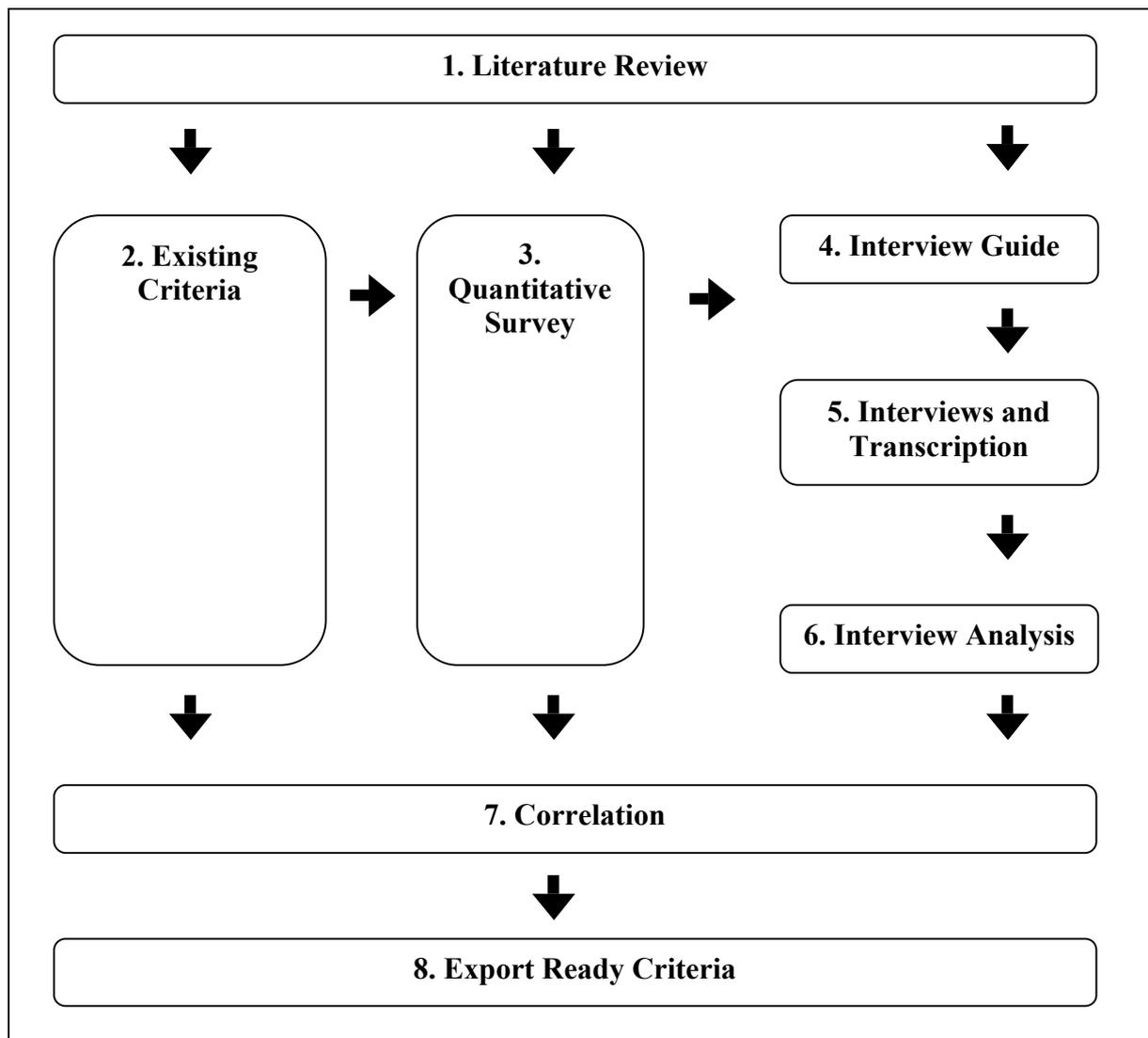


Figure 3. Research method

Source: own contribution.

3.3 Research process

1. The first step pertained to literature on internationalization. A thorough literature review was conducted with the purpose of gaining theoretical knowledge about the Swedish tourism industry, internationalization processes, SMTFs, service industries, the tourism product and its distribution on international markets through intermediaries. This deemed to be essential as Neergaard and Ulhøi (2007:467) claim that an academic paper needs ‘... to be based on existing knowledge in the shape of a literature review of some sort. A literature review demonstrates that you have read and analyzed the received literature in a way that informs your investigation and interpretation of results.’ According to that, a literature review is a critical analysis of text, which

is relevant as events unfolded within this investigation (Daymon and Holloway, 2011).

2. The next step was devoted to the question if criteria already existed, which were also applied and consequently used as an indicator for export readiness of tourism suppliers. Intense research on the Internet yielded the result that Tourism British Columbia formulated so called 'Export-Ready-Criteria' that are sought to make local tourism suppliers to meet specific criteria and therefore allows participation in international markets (Tourism British Columbia, 2009). Travel Alberta drafted a similar checklist (Travel Alberta, 2009). Both of these export readiness guidelines are based on the export ready criteria of the Canadian Tourism Commission. These criteria were endorsed by the DMOs' market development directors, who are most affected by these criteria. The aforementioned DMOs have market development directors for numerous countries, such as the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, China, South Korea and Mexico (Travel Alberta Info, 2011). The author consulted these export readiness guidelines due to numerous similarities, which exist between Sweden and Canada: climate, topography, economy and standard of living. It was these similarities, which lead to this decision. 'Both of these northern, industrialized nations derive 2% of their GDP from agriculture, 27% from industry and 70% from services (Boyd, 2002).' Further criteria that fulfill the same purpose could not be found.

3. The third step was a quantitative survey, which was conducted by Elbe (2009). The study questioned whether Swedish tourism enterprises were ready for exporting their services on international markets. Since the research aimed at a European tour operators' viewpoint, the findings of the study were highly valuable to the author of the study at hand. Also the application of the aforementioned multiple method approach was enabled by disposition of this quantitative study besides the succeeding qualitative technique.

3.3.1 Collection of primary data

The steps one to three focused on existing literature and research of this topic. The following two steps will describe the collection of data in more detail.

4. At step four, an interview guide was developed with the purpose of guiding both the interviewer as well as the interviewee through the interviews. 'Semi-structured interviewing is guided only in the sense that some form of interview guide is prepared beforehand, and provides a framework for the interview (FAO, 1990).' This guide contained information about the author

of the thesis and its aim. Also some general information about the interviewees, the companies, position and their experiences on the Swedish market was requested. The draft of the interview guide corresponded with the literature review, existing criteria and the study of Elbe from 2009. A detailed outline of the questionnaire is attached in the Appendix.

5. The fifth step of the research process was the execution of in-depth interviews. Veal (2006:197) states that ‘... in-depth interviews are characterized by their length, depth and structure.’ In questionnaire-based interviews, the interviewee is encouraged to talk and corresponding additional questions are asked. In in-depth interviews however, there is no pre-determined list of questions (Veal 2006). The participant is sought to talk freely and associatively about experiences and events. The reasons for choosing in-depth interviews were numerous. First, this technique was recommended as being the best tool to gather in-depth information (Veal, 2006) regarding opinions, beliefs and values. Nykiel (2007) states flexibility for the interviewer as a second advantage. Lastly Boyce and Neale (2006) highlight the rich depth of information gathered compared to other research methods. The interview guide was used as a checklist during the conduction of the interviews to ensure that all relevant topics were covered. The whole conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (Veal, 2006). According to Patton (1990:193) the sampling was purposeful since the selected cases (tour operators) were illustrative but not definitive. The sample included industry experts from the United Kingdom and Germany. A detailed presentation of the interview partners is illustrated in table 1. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were conducted in April and May 2011 via the Internet voice call software application Skype™. Overcoming the distance and recording the conversation was therefore easy and cost-extensive. By using the video stream supportive gestures and body language were well captured. Consequently no drawbacks compared to face-to-face interviews appeared.

Name	Tour operator	Position	Date/time (GMT+1)
Suzel Taber-Shaw	Taber Holidays – Roy Taber Limited	Managing director and owner	2011/04/13; 9:30-10:21
Timo Seghorn	TUI Wolters Reisen GmbH	Product manager Nordland	2011/04/14; 14:30-15:02

Terhi Sivonen	Best Served Holidays Limited	Marketing and sales manager	2011/04/15; 9:30-10:04
Rachel Jelley	Sunvil International Sales Limited	Product manager Scandinavia	2011/05/11; 17:05-17:37

Table 1. Presentation of interviewees

Source: own contribution.

3.3.2 Data analysis

6. After the transcription of the interviews the collected data was analyzed. According to literature on data analysis, the first step in the analytic process is coding. Charmaz (1995:37) notes that ‘... coding is the process of defining what the data are all about. Unlike quantitative coding, (...) qualitative coding means creating the codes as you study your data.’ After a first revision of the available data, an identification of different themes is sought to follow. With reference to the study at hand a clear answer pattern according to the identified issues could be figured out. They will be presented in detail within the research reports’ section. The interviewees’ points of view varied depending on the company size, ownership structure and national descent. The findings from all interviews were grouped together with the appropriate elements of step 2 and 3, as Boyce and Neale (2006) proposed.

7. The penultimate step was vital for the further development of the study. After the elements were grouped in a thematic way, the correlation between the findings from step 2, 3 and 6 was verified. In this context, the specific company size of Swedish tourism suppliers, the particular features of services and tourism products and special distribution modes were critically analyzed and implemented.

8. Finally, the collected primary data, secondary data from the quantitative research by Elbe (2009) as well as findings of the literature review were considered in order to conclude the results of the research. This final step was the most significant task since it is sought to combine theoretical knowledge with possible criteria, which are both achievable for the suppliers and satisfactory for foreign tour operators.

3.4 Best practice: Tourism British Columbia and Travel Alberta

Canadian DMOs provide companies, which intend to expand abroad, with guidelines that are relevant for international distribution. Such criteria relate to companies' expectations, human resources, financial and legal resources, competitiveness, customer profile, product modification, transportation, local representation and capacity (Alberta Canada, 2011). Nevertheless, the features of services in general and tourism products in particular, which have been mentioned at an earlier stage within this thesis, require modified treatment. The suppliers need to question themselves in addition what is unique about their products and if they are considered to be world-class. Do the services need to be modified according to differences in language, culture and business environment? And last but not least, how should the services be delivered? Possible distribution modes are in person, through consulting a local contact person or directly through the Internet (ibid.). For tourism products the latter are common, while the focal point of the thesis is on distribution through intermediaries.

On both a national and local basis the DMOs are responsible for providing the suppliers with export ready guidelines. Most of the time, they resemble each other a great deal. However, the author deemed the export ready criteria of Tourism British Columbia and Travel Alberta to be suited. Besides the above-mentioned expectations the suppliers are sought to fulfill further requirements concerning marketing as well as contracting and payments. The sooner deals with international travel trade activities and the provision of travel trade media clients. The latter includes the willingness to provide contracted wholesale net rates (off retail prices), solid understanding of according laws, provision of detailed pricing and program information one year to 18 months ahead of selling season as well as the acceptance of client vouchers as confirmation for payment and reservations (cf. Tourism British Columbia, 2009; Travel Alberta, 2009).

Tourism British Columbia (2009) and Travel Alberta (2009) both drafted some recommendations for best practices. Table 2 shows a conglomerate of examples in more detail:

Marketing	Operations
Define minimum and maximum group size. Consider access by tour buses and required facilities (parking lots, washrooms etc.)	Adapt to the specificities of overseas markets (last minute booking, changes, dietary requirements and cultural differences)
Offer familiarization tours for free or at reduced rates	Make sure that your frontline staff speaks the language of your customers

Participate in travel trade shows	Revise your departure and operation dates.
Include receptive tour operators in marketing and sales planning activities	Ensure transport facilities to and from international gateways, such as airports
Offer picture and video material of your products	Provide equipment that is necessary for your activities
Run a website with content related to your product	

Table 2. Examples for best practice

Source: own contribution, in relation to Travel Alberta, 2009.

3.5 Objects of investigation

Within this section the examined tour operators will briefly be introduced. Taber Holidays, Best Served Scandinavia and Sunvil Discovery are British tour operators while TUI Wolters is a German representative.

3.5.1 Taber Holidays

Roy Taber Limited operates as Taber Holidays. Suzel Taber-Shaw, who is also the managing director, owns this UK based tour operator. The company is a member of the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), possesses an Air Travel Organizer's license (ATOL) and is an Accredited Agent of the International Air Transport Association (IATA). Taber Holidays started its operation in 1973 and expanded, starting from Norway to Sweden, Iceland and Denmark since then. Nowadays Taber Holidays can be considered as a specialist tour operator to Scandinavia, featuring a full range of tours that cater to the individual needs of customers (Taber Holidays, 2011).

3.5.2 TUI Wolters

Wolters Reisen Limited was founded in 1919. Since 1989 the company is part of World of TUI. The tour operator, which is based near Bremen in Germany, offers a wide range of holiday home vacations all over Europe, the state of Florida and South Africa. TUI Wolters is considered as a

specialist tour operator for Scandinavia and the British Isles. The offer covers almost any mode of transport, accommodation and activity holidays as well as the world-famous Hurtigruten cruises. Customers benefit from many years of experience on the Scandinavian market (TUI Wolters, 2011). Timo Seghorn is product manager 'Nordland' and therefore responsible for offers concerning the Scandinavian market.

3.5.3 Best Served Scandinavia

Best Served Holidays is part of WEXAS, which is a members only travel club. The company is divided into several destinations. One of them is Best Served Scandinavia. The tour operator offers a wide range of tours to almost any destination in Scandinavia, the Baltic States and Russia. Different themes like weddings, incentives and spa are featured on a regular basis and can be tailored to the (luxurious) needs of independent travelers. Terhi Sivonen, who is responsible for marketing and sales, represents the ATOL licensed company with reference to the aforementioned destinations (Best Served Holidays, 2011).

3.5.4 Sunvil Discovery

Sunvil started operating holidays in 1970. The UK based tour operator is divided into three sections: Sunvil holidays, Sunvil discovery and Sunvil traveler. Each section includes various destinations and Sweden is part of Sunvil discovery. The company is considered as a 'fully bonded tour operator (Sunvil, 2011).' This relates to the fact that Sunvil is a licensed member of ABTA, possesses various ATOL licenses, is a member in the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO) and is further licensed by IATA. The company was awarded several times throughout the past for various achievements linked to travel (Sunvil, 2011). Sunvil as a product manager for the Scandinavian destinations employs Rachel Jelley.

4. Interview reports

At the beginning of this section the reader will be provided with an overview how suppliers and tour operators initiate cooperation and which components are essential. Subsequently, the individual steps will be explained in more detail. The information stated is based on all sources of information that were presented in chapter 3.2.1. Since the major source was collected primary data in form of in-depth interviews, the heading of the chapter is dedicated to them. Direct quotes were anonymized since the interview partners insisted on this condition. However, all information, which is provided in chapter 4., represents the opinion of the examined tour operators and will be analyzed in the subsequent chapters. The following themes were chosen according to both the structure of the interview guide and a clear pattern of answers, which appeared when the interviews were conducted.

4.1 A quest for suppliers

Tour operators mainly find possible suppliers either through workshops or recommendations, which both refer to the national tourist board, which is Visit Sweden. Both tour operating companies and suppliers, as long as they transcend a certain company size, attend such workshops and therefore meet each other. Small-scale suppliers are represented by Visit Sweden at trade shows and workshops. Tour operators give the national tourist board an idea about what they are looking for in terms of a product, accommodation facility or type of excursion. Consequently certain suitable suppliers are going to be suggested. The national tourist board can refer to local DMOs (local tourist boards) in case detailed information is needed. Some of the tour operators expanded their programs to Sweden, since they were featuring destinations in other Scandinavian countries before. In such a situation useful experience regarding cooperation between tour operators and Scandinavian suppliers was available already. The know-how was adapted to Swedish conditions and consequently eased the cooperation process. Concerning country specific differences regarding export readiness one interviewee said: 'The Swedes currently in my opinion are not as used to dealing with foreign tour operators as the Norwegians are. So even though lots of them have good products, they are not export ready. This is what we are working on.' However, the remaining respondents attested Scandinavia on the whole export ready.

Before actual cooperation between suppliers and tour operators can start, mutual trust, prospects and standards need to be agreed upon. Even though a recommendation through one of the

tourist boards implies export readiness further knowledge about an individual supplier or a destination on the whole need to be gained. Before contracts are drafted familiarization trips (fam-trips) are done since they are considered to be: ‘... an effective way of getting familiar with the product.’ According to the opinion of another respondent the purpose of so-called fam-trips is the following: ‘At the end of the day they (suppliers) try to impress us (tour operators) with a product of major quality, which we (tour operators) are keen on selling to potential customers.’ Therefore these trips are expected to be offered free of charge obviously. Nevertheless, tour operators accept this, if especially small suppliers offer fam-trips at reduced rates in order to cover their expenses. This understanding for financial contribution is especially present if tour operators have requested such a trip for the purpose of getting a personal product presentation apart from competitors. A definition of fam-trips can be found in chapter 4.6. All respondents mentioned to participate in fam-trips on a regular basis. Bigger operators even organize fam-trips themselves. Their purpose is to make agents, which are selling on tour operators’ behalf, familiar with the product.

4.1.1 Indicators for export readiness

A recommendation through the national tourist board or a local DMO is a trustworthy indicator for export readiness. Depending on the complexity of a product tour operators decide whether they try and sample a product, which basically means investigating the product by fam-trips. The non-sampling category includes companies that offer simple products like a transfer service or trips, which take place on a regular basis. As long as an established company provides these services and other tour operators use them as well, there is no need to try and sample the product. The sampling category deals with new companies respectively products that are more complex. In such a case representatives actually like to visit the destination, meet the people, sample the products and then make a decision, which is based on their experiences on site. Two respondents rely on DMOs’ recommendations in both categories while the remaining favor visiting a destination and meeting the suppliers of complex products before cooperation can start. Neither the first, nor the second two respondents do sample simple services like transfers.

4.2 Inquiries and reservations

The most cited way of making inquiries and reservations is based on emails, which are usually sent to the supplier's reservations department. In case of last minute bookings the availability is checked by phone prior to the actual reservation by two interview partners. The call is followed by a written confirmation, since this is essential to serve as proof. Written confirmations are of course crucial to all examined tour operators. For one tour operator email is not fast enough. This one prefers to have an oral confirmation via phone for any booking before a reservation in writing can be sent. As a reason this representative can be quoted like this: 'If email is not used in an appropriate way then it is rather slow and this consequently leads sometimes to losing a booking because it takes too long a time to provide us with information concerning availability. All this should happen fairly quickly.'

At this point it seems to be important to mention the time it takes to respond to emails. As previously mentioned, late responses sometimes cause the loss of a booking. The general expectation to get an answer is within 24 hours. Elbe (2009) discovered that replies and confirmations expected to be sent between four and 24 hours of email sent. For some tour operators, this is even an integral part of the contract. However, one respondent stated: 'Many suppliers come back within two or three hours. But there is a small number you have to chase all the time. Some we have to phone to say that we have sent them an email', which is kind of ironic. These are suppliers that should be rather called than emailed.

Another way of conducting reservations and bookings would be to use the online booking forms on supplier's websites. Tour operators struggle with this since they cannot use these forms. One interviewee mentioned: 'We (tour operators) negotiated different (cheaper) rates, which are usually not available via their (suppliers') websites.' Only few selected bigger suppliers provide tour operators with separate agent log-ins, which allow agents and operators online bookings. White-label-solutions formally belong here as well. They will be explained in chapter 4.3. One operator runs a paperless office, which implies automatism in order to facilitate the booking process.

In an ideal world the suppliers would accept inquiries and reservations on an all-year-round basis. The problem is that suppliers frequently do not have their rates or programs ready well in advance. So in that kind of case the operators let the clients know that a specific program was available during the previous season and that it is expected to be available in the upcoming season as well. But this information must be supplied without liability. Detailed information

regarding the time frame and availability of information and rates will be mentioned in chapter 4.10.

4.3 Promotion

The examined tour operators do not have any prerequisites in terms of marketing. Actual marketing and international trade activities from the suppliers' side are usually not checked beforehand. It is very much about the product itself. But this does not mean that support is not welcome. Tour operators have the possibility to favor companies by transferring business to them according to one good turn deserves another. Some suppliers want to work very closely with tour operators. They sometimes sponsor them to feature their products in brochures, e-shots or on intermediaries' websites, but that of course applies only to a few selected bigger companies.

Concise marketing ideas develop as the year passes by. Suppliers are sought to be imaginative, to come up with suggestions for the creation of events in a destination, for example. Tour operators can promote such highlights to a huge database of clients. And if places have a season, they are asked to suggest special campaigns with the purpose of adding value to the actual product. This can happen in form of additional services, which are free of charge. Such services are perfectly suitable for promoting offers that are only temporarily available.

Depending on the mode of operation some tour operators take over marketing responsibilities from suppliers and receive compensation in form of advertising allowances. Hence suppliers' products are promoted under the label of the tour operator. These so called 'white-label-solutions' are preferred because otherwise suppliers increase the number of direct bookings, which is not beneficial for tour operators. The customers will not recognize a difference since the booking procedure is processed via the booking platform of the tour operator. In fact they book directly with the suppliers. On interview partner formalized it like that: 'We (tour operators) just provide them (suppliers) with infrastructure that is necessary for online booking.' Obviously only bigger operators those are capable of providing suppliers with technical facilities for online booking engage in white-label-solutions.

So suppliers can contribute to tour operator's marketing in either a creative or financial way and therefore get preferential access to bookings. If they can neither support the marketing funds monetarily nor with creative marketing ideas then tour operators work the other way round. This

means to claim higher commissions or offering a special deal for a short time at the expense of suppliers.

A different form of marketing support is cooperation with the national tourist board or local DMOs. Their logo is placed in newspaper supplements for example, which have the purpose of promoting a specific destination area. By way of reciprocation they contribute to the printing costs in form of advertising grants. The downside of running marketing campaigns with tourist boards is competition with other operators. Usually more than one tour operator is invited to participate. For that reason most marketing activities are carried out individually. Nevertheless, tour operators have standard advertisements in brochures on Sweden and banners on DMOs' websites, which they pay for. They contribute annually to use these advertising spaces.

4.3.1 Content

Suppliers are considered to provide the content management systems of tour operators with material, which is suitable for advertisement purposes. All operators agreed on content requirements: 'We (tour operators) need pictures in high-resolution and also video material, which is a really powerful tool nowadays. Both need to be of very good quality.' One interviewee stated: 'We operators have access to the national tourism board's image bank, which is unfortunately not really good. For that reason we (tour operators) heavily depend on supplier's own material.' Customers cannot deal with uncertainty. That is why tour operators further require accurate information regarding service quality, transfer times and distances as well as facilities on site.

4.3.2 Familiarization trips

According to the notation of familiarization trips their purpose is to make intermediaries familiar with the product, which they are going to sell to future customers. One interview partner put it like this: 'Because at the end of the day the suppliers are trying to impress us (tour operators).' Representatives are therefore visiting the destination to try and sample a product. Another interview partner highlighted the importance of familiarization trips like this: 'The holidays we (tour operator) sell most here in my office is the holidays we have been on.' Regarding prices tour operators differ between familiarization trips to which they have been invited besides numerous other tour operators and those, which were requested individually. The former are expected to be

offered free of charge since they tend to be less effective. For the latter they do not expect them necessarily to be for free. Reduced rates would be accepted as well.

4.3.3 International trade activities

According to corporate policy especially bigger suppliers are expected to participate in trade shows. Smaller organizations are usually represented by Visit Sweden respectively regional tourist boards, which are also known as DMOs. Their attendance is normally sufficient. Nevertheless, the suppliers need to provide their representatives with adequate information regarding their services. This is important since such workshops frequently act as locations for first encounter between tour operators and potential suppliers.

4.4 Contracting

Contracts between suppliers and tour operators are to contain information regarding terms, which both parties have agreed upon during the contract negotiations. The contract should on the one hand include operation, booking, payment and cancellation terms as well as rates and specified operation dates. On the other hand financial risk should be excluded. Depending on the corporate policies of the tour operators they either have standardized or individual contracts. The complexity is subject to the type of service the suppliers offer. In order to be capable of setting up a contract suppliers need to operate under a certain name: must have valid bank account data and suitable insurance coverage. This is exactly what Elbe (2009) figured out as well. Tour operators agreed on the fact that in Scandinavia as a whole the rules and regulations for running a business are rather strict. However, the opinion of one interview partner can be quoted like this: 'The implementation of minimum requirements leads to a natural selection of efficient entrepreneurs on both sides.'

4.5 Payment terms, rates and commissions

The twofold payment model can be split up into either automated payment in case of long-term cooperation and invoice payment for new partners. Of course the company size plays an important role here since bigger tour operators frequently request huge allotments, which small suppliers are not always capable of providing. The aforementioned large-scale tour operators will also work with central reservations systems (CRS) that only support automated payment. The

customers usually show client vouchers as a confirmation and therefore do not need to pay monetarily when using a service.

Suppliers are to provide tour operators with best prices. According to the definition of a respondent: 'The best price obviously being one that we (tour operators) can sell and one that they (suppliers) can make money on.'

Regarding prices there are also two different ways for calculation. First, there is the possibility to receive net rates, which means fully inclusive tour prices (FIT-prices) for individuals. Second, suppliers can state a gross price and add a commission, which should be 20% at least. This minimum commission was set concordantly. Only tour operators that do not have agents selling on their behalf accept lower commissions. Depending very much on the type of service and how tight the suppliers' margins are the commission can go up to 30%. Nevertheless, some tour operators have agents to sell on their behalf, which also receive 10%. As a result, one interview partner notes: 'Small suppliers that offer commissions below 20% will hardly have a chance to start cooperating.' Round trips usually require net rates in order to allow exact calculation. Another term that appeared with rates was mark-ups. As stated earlier, tour operators favor to get net rates, which they mark up in order to get a profit margin as soon as the clients have booked. If suppliers were not able to sponsor tour operators with marketing funds, then they possibly negotiate higher commissions.

4.6 Language requirements

There are only few destinations where the majority is as capable of communicating in English as Sweden. This is normally sufficient due to the fact that the contracts are drafted in English also. One exception is specific target customers like round trip participants, who are frequently older than 50 years of age. In such a case tour guides or go-betweens that are capable of speaking the customers' mother tongue would definitely be a benefit. Individual travelers usually speak English so that this is the first and foremost language requirement.

Small destinations sometimes do not translate their web pages to English. Instead they refer to translation services that are available on the Internet for free nowadays. Nevertheless, the results differ quite a great deal. The provision of bilingual information therefore is an absolute requirement for attracting foreign visitors. An interviewee explained: 'English is not just for the natives. Also Germans, Frenchmen, the Greeks and Japanese travelers, they want to read in

English when their mother tongue is not available on the website. And this shows if a company (supplier) is really interested in them (customers) as potential buyers.’

4.7 Seasonality

Seasonality in Sweden is due to the climatic conditions, which makes it difficult to generate business for suppliers throughout the year, high. The summer season starts in late May and ends in September. Shoulder season offers are not well defined and therefore hard to sell. The winter season has had a tendency to start later each year. An additional problem is that the domestic market in Sweden requires accommodation capacity during this time of the year. For that reason it is hard to get access to allotments. In case the accommodation suppliers allocate capacities they distribute only slots from Monday to Friday, which interferes with holiday behavior in other European countries. Booking a winter holiday that lasts one week and includes a weekend is almost impossible. Therefore it is hard for European tour operators to gain a foothold in Sweden during winter season. Elbe (2009) discovered that availability of activities throughout the season is considered as being essential for tour operators.

Seasonal concentration is not a problem as long as the specific operation dates were mentioned in the contract. Tour operators need to know in advance if suppliers are not open over Christmas, Easter or on national holidays. Swedish suppliers tend to assume that the aforementioned holiday times are similar all over Europe. But the Midsummer festivities, which take place in late June, are an exception in this respect.

4.8 Transportation

Some tour operators offer packages that include self-drive tours where organized transports are not a matter. This applies to group tours also since coaches are chartered then. Another easy task for tour operators is to arrange car hire and flights. But in all other situations suppliers are expected to organize transfers. One tour operator even stated: ‘This is the whole point of cooperating with them (suppliers).’ Other operators remain more neutral and expect suppliers of excursions only to arrange transportation since this would be an integral part of their product. Small suppliers would struggle with the fact that customers sometimes arrive drop by drop in the destinations. The situation becomes even more delicate when excursions to remote places must be organized. This is stated as being a problem in Swedish Lapland around Luleå. This destination area is said to have great offers but no transfers, as they would be too expensive. In

an ideal world the supplier would pick up the clients at the airport, bring them to the hotel and go on excursions with them, all out of one source.

4.9 Equipment

Like transfers suppliers are expected to provide necessary equipment, since the majority of customers arrives by airplane and therefore luggage restrictions apply to them. As a result, transportation of equipment would be inconvenient and expensive. Complete packages assume that customers are supposed to get all services, such as accommodation, transfers and activities all out of one hand. So it is more than a bonus if suppliers provide essential equipment. It is assumed to be an integral part of the product. Specially required equipment concerning clothes and safety definitely need to be provided. An example would be for a destination like Lapland, thermal clothing and helmets for snowmobile tours are required. Concerning essential equipment accurate information is required so that tour operators can advise their clients beforehand to sort out insecurities from scratch.

4.10 Planning period

It was mentioned earlier that some operators receive customer inquiries before they are provided with details concerning information and prices of services. That means for example that offers for the winter season are requested in late spring already. Generally the production of informational material such as catalogs and brochures requires some time. Therefore essential details need to be communicated well in advance. In terms of prices tour operators state: 'The earlier the better.' Airlines usually publish their prices 12 months before departure. If suppliers of accommodation and activities could do the same it would be fantastic. In reality they fulfill their obligations later. Hotels especially want to finish the season before they start thinking about the rates for the next one. The most tolerable stage would be 7 or 8 months prior to start of the season. Elbe (2009) figured out that tour operators make decisions about their offerings for the upcoming season 9 to 12 months before and in some cases up to 15 months ahead of the selling season. Reservation should be accepted between 3 and 12 months before the seasons while cancellations need to be made till latest one month prior to season start in order to give the suppliers some time to offer according allotments to other tour operators (ibid.). Canadian suppliers are expected to provide details even 12 to 18 months ahead of the selling season

(Tourism British Columbia, 2009). Nevertheless, the provisional date of product details and rates is not only vital for the production of printed material but also an integral part of the contract.

According to the viewpoint of European tour operators Scandinavians tend to be late concerning the provision of information and rates for emerging products. Their 'casual way of doing business' might cause misunderstandings and obfuscate the cooperation. Catalogues and brochures are produced in summer and are then valid for the whole consecutive calendar year. The editors of the promotional material therefore require sticking to deadlines regarding the provision of accurate information and rates. Again, the length of the planning period very much depends on the product.

4.11 Geographical and cultural distance

Tour operating practitioners generally supported the theory that markets, which are located within short physical distance, are approached prior to others. This relates to the fact that the biggest foreign markets for Swedish tourism are Denmark, Norway and Germany. The UK- and USA market is growing so it can be supposed '... the closer the markets are the more priority they have.'

Both the physical distance as well as the 'perceived' distance to Scandinavia regarding culture and mentality is rather short. One interviewee put it like this: 'Nordic culture appeals to travelers.' One example is to Nordic mythology that fascinate potential travelers and increases their will to visit Scandinavia. Northern territories such as Lapland are especially concerned and therefore highly frequented.

Cultural similarities are based on a good command of English that makes communication easy and efficient. Besides, there are Swedish communities found in both the United Kingdom and Germany. Also, there is very close business links regarding workflows, which are organized and efficient. But being professional is not a feature, which is specifically required. Tour operators want all their suppliers to be professional, since the expectations are the same contrariwise.

In terms of personality Swedes are considered to have an outdoor lifestyle and the way of living is more relaxed. One interview partner stated: 'That is what we would want to be if we could.' Swedes are assumed: 'To have time for family, friends and walking.' These are activities that Brits do not engage in anymore in their everyday life. For that reason they want to experience such a

way of living during their vacation. For Germany no statements concerning the image of Swedish lifestyle were mentioned.

4.12 Internet

As stated earlier, E-Commerce is increasing constantly. New web pages, which are more multifunctional since they provide customers with both interactive information as well as booking masks, were launched recently. Furthermore, suppliers are more eager to support online (marketing) campaigns and social media is forging ahead. These statements strongly support the impression that intermediaries are outdated nowadays since suppliers could use the Internet as a direct sales channel. Nevertheless, tour operators still have a right to exist. The following paragraphs are going to provide arguments that both support and disprove this proposition. A critical discourse is hereby facilitated:

Scandinavia is one of those few destinations where specialist tour operators are needed. One opinion can be quoted like this: 'The situation is changing elsewhere in the world but or at least in the UK they (tour operators) are doing quite well because it is such a different area and there are so many little details you need to know. So the customers feel the need of assistance. Few people book online unless it is a city break. But as soon as it gets a little bit more complicated most clients consult a tour operator.'

Another argument for booking with tour operators is full coverage in case of unexpected changes. As an example the Icelandic volcanic ash eruption of 2010 could be mentioned when European air space was closed for two weeks. People that had traveled with tour operators were protected by the package regulations and the ATOL bonds that tour operators need to have according to national and European travel policy. 'A tour operator that puts together a package in order to sell it to the clients is responsible for every element of that package.' For that reason these clients were able to cancel their holidays, had full refunds and were capable of staying longer in their resorts at no additional costs. These insurance bonds did not cover the customers, who had booked all of their package components separately. Consequently they had to pay extra. And some people still have not been reimbursed for flights that were cancelled. So travelers, who are consulting tour operators, clearly have an advantage when an act of God occurs.

An argument against using the services of tour operators originates in the fact that customers can spend more money. The intermediaries have to cover their administration charges, which is

necessary due to the work that happens behind the scenes. In times of a delicate economy people are more eager to look for cheaper options. Sometimes that concludes in the fact that they forget about protection and consequently book directly with suppliers, most of the times through their webpage.

Another approach deals with the fact that not only suppliers can use online services, but also tour operators themselves as one representative put it: ‘Our website is our chief selling tool. We show all our products, prices and itineraries but we do not actually take bookings through our website.’ This statement explains first, the current booking behavior and second, that the Internet is used as a communication channel rather than a distribution channel today. Nevertheless, the importance of online distribution is expected to increase in the future.

4.12.1 Social media

Earlier in this report it was mentioned that the integration of social media applications is growing. Many tour operators have created a profile on the social network website Facebook, comment on their and other’s activities via the microblogging service website Twitter, run an independent Travel Blog or post videos on the video sharing website Youtube. Those activities are expected to increase in the future and their purpose is based on information, education and the creation of awareness, which all aim at the promotion of their products. One respondent mentioned: ‘It is all about informing and educating clients about different products from different angles.’

4.13 Business relationships

According to the theories of Ford (1990 cited in Elbe, 2009) business relationships develop over time and can be divided into three different stages. They are called initiation stage, development stage and the stage of stabilization.

Concerning the first stage, it is very important to act pro-actively for suppliers in order to initiate collaboration with tour operators. The latter expect to be courted by potential new suppliers, but in reality it is the operators themselves that have to search for possible suppliers. Familiarization trips are considered as a distinct advantage while the participation in international trade activities, such as workshops and trade fairs, is not regarded as being an absolute requirement.

The development stage of a relationship is characterized by mutual adjustment and development. Only few tour operators expect their suppliers to engage in joint product development in order to improve the product for customers and to strengthen the relationship. However it can be seen as a positive contribution to the development of a relationship.

Regarding the stabilization stage, almost all tour operators are willing to be attached to destinations and therefore are interested in forming long and trusting relationships that reach the stage of stabilization. Therefore, these long-term business relationships are considered as a requirement for common long-term development (cf. Elbe, 2009).

Business relationships play an important role, not only for small-scale operators, but also for bigger tour operating companies. With some suppliers they have been cooperating with over decades. Especially if the enterprise is family owned a long-term relationship is belike, whereas the relationships with chain enterprises are rather limited to actual transactions. Mutual trust and support are integral parts of the relationships' maintenance.

Tour operators have a system where they list preferred suppliers to which they can direct business. All interviewees stated that long-term business relationships are vital. The opinion of a small-scale tour operator is this: 'As a small organization we like to consider all our suppliers as our friends.' Another respondent noted that: 'Such relationships can also act as a communication channel, which is permanently open.' Consequently, tour operators are aware about events and activities that are happening in a destination. Additionally, it is rather easy for tour operators to promote such highlights when they are well informed and aware of happenings on site.

But this does not mean that tour operators do not engage in the acquisition of new suppliers. As one interviewee said: 'At the same time we (tour operators) are always open for new suppliers and constantly looking for new angles, new ideas and new products.' Therefore, relationships are developed with new suppliers as they are found.

4.14 The role of DMOs

The first task of DMOs is to know about the offers, which are available at their destination area. These organizations are expected to both provide information about current and future products as well as engage in joint product development. According to one opinion: '... another important task is to raise awareness and communicate the unique selling propositions (USPs) of the products that exist in their destination.' Special events and highlights that people cannot miss

need to be announced and new products introduced. Some tour operators expect to be guided through the various processes. It starts with the decision of featuring a destination. Recommendations concerning hotels, transfers and excursions are sought to follow in order to facilitate the process of package composition. Concerning further intermediaries, such as incoming agencies, Elbe (2009) discovered that foreign tour operators would rather work directly with suppliers after DMOs initialized the collaboration.

Concerning the role of Visit Sweden, their task is the following: 'To market Sweden as a destination and to advise tour operators of any new products in both destinations that are already featured as well as emerging destinations.' Another mission is that Visit Sweden simply acts as an interface between the tour operator and local DMOs, which further refer to suppliers. All these DMOs' tasks facilitate the process of cooperation. Another task of Visit Sweden is to inform suppliers on behalf of tour operators in case the sooner are enraged by contract drafts, which are provided by the latter. One respondent stated: 'The DMO simply needs to confirm that such contracts, which usually are filling pages, are common nowadays in travel businesses and possibly offer to check the draft in order to sort out insecurities.' Such services are sought to encourage especially small-scale suppliers to cooperate with foreign tour operators.

4.15 Product development

The aim of the following part of the research report at hand is to reveal ideas about possible new products. The crucial thing when talking about product development is according to practitioners' experience to be different in comparison with competitors' respectively existing products. Suppliers can either develop their products alone or in a mutual way through cooperation with tour operators. Joint product development can also take place between DMOs and/or tour operators respectively suppliers. Regarding business relationships this activity is sought to occur at the development stage of the cooperation.

'Water activities and (outdoor) adventure are key features in Sweden anytime.' That is what the examined tour operators agreed upon. Some suppliers offer rigid-hulled inflatable boat (RHIB) safaris within the archipelagos of Stockholm and Gothenburg. One respondent described them as '... a great way of seeing the scenery and good fun at the same time.' Unfortunately these offers are currently available for groups only. Many customers would like to participate in this activity individually. Therefore there should be regular excursions with regular departures. A

similar product is island hopping on Sweden's West Coast between Gothenburg and the Weather Islands. Such products are strongly requested throughout the season.

Another possible area of interest could be soft adventure with special relevance to older clients. The market for wealthy, healthy and older people (WHOPs) is constantly growing and this target group demands activities, which are not too strenuous but still imply physical exercise and outdoor adventure. Examples such as fish trips or mushroom-picking trips were mentioned in the interviews. Another idea concerning emerging products were cooking courses, maybe even to prepare the mushrooms and berries that were picked right before cooking class. Scandinavia always implies outdoor activities. So not only natural experiences like walking and hiking tours, but also road trips and that sort of activities, where one can just see the nature, are strongly recommended.

Other interesting features are activities that take place in the showplaces of Swedish fiction literature. The best-selling novels of Henning Mankell and Stieg Larsson were all turned into movies and therefore reached a huge target group. This model perfectly works with Southwest England and the novels of Rosamunde Pilcher, which could be considered as a good example.

5. Conclusion and discussion

The enhancement of distribution of Swedish tourism services on international markets depends on various criteria, which were identified in this research. The internationalization takes place in several steps and various issues become relevant within this process. The following sections will outline these issues by comparing both theoretical and empirical findings and discuss their significance and possible sanctions in order to facilitate the distribution of Swedish tourism services on foreign markets.

5.1 Market selection

The internationalization process is supposed to start with the selection of potential markets. According to literature on subject matter internationalization a supplier need to decide according to the strategy of the enterprise which market to tackle. In contrast the empirical investigation has shown that tour operators rather search for possible suppliers in markets they intend to approach. This does not mean that suppliers cannot choose tour operators in new markets, but more likely is the establishment of cooperation through mediation of DMOs, since they have listed both tour operators as well as suppliers. They can bring together the two parties by matching demand and supply. Special relevance concerning initializing cooperation possesses Visit Sweden. This national tourist board acts like a DMO for Sweden on the whole. Tour operators consider suppliers as being export ready as soon as they have been recommended by a DMO. Additionally, a familiarization trip with the purpose of sampling the product can take place. Such a decision depends on both the supplier and the product. Well-known suppliers that have a good reputation usually do not have to undergo sampling procedures. This is also valid for simple services such as single transfers. However, foreign tour operators expect suppliers, which are capable of acting on international markets. It is regarded as being the DMOs' task to check the export readiness prior to the recommendation of appropriate suppliers.

5.1.1 Physical distance

Both literature and empirical findings support the proposition that markets, which are located within a small physical distance of domestic markets, are approached first. This can be illustrated by the fact that the biggest foreign markets for Sweden are Norway, Denmark and Germany. These markets can be considered as being somehow similar regarding legal, cultural, political and

other aspects. Nevertheless, the empirical investigation revealed some differences that hamper the cooperation. The awareness regarding planning periods and deadlines seem not to be as pronounced as in Central Europe and Great Britain. This finding can be illustrated by the example of the planning period, which is necessary in order to do all preparatory tasks. Tour operators expect to be provided with prices and information concerning suppliers' offers at least seven to eight months ahead of the selling season. First-time and more complex products, such as packages require even a longer planning period. Since catalogues are produced in summer and are then valid for the whole consecutive calendar year, the awareness concerning deadlines need to be more pronounced.

5.2 Distribution and communication channel Internet

The coexistence of tour operators on the one hand and direct booking via Internet on the other hand can be considered as being ambivalent. Increasing web dominance caused a reorientation of tour operators and opened a direct sales channel for the suppliers, which no longer depend on intermediaries. A downside of direct sales through suppliers' web pages is the lacking capability of attracting large volumes of customers. This is based on the experience that individual (leisure) travelers rather than groups or business travelers engage in direct sales. The advantage for travelers, who book services directly with suppliers, is clearly lower rates for individual services and therefore a lower 'package price.' Disadvantages deal with no assistance through the booking process, the necessity of numerous independent booking procedures and no insurance coverage by the bonds of tour operators in case of unforeseen events. To conclude this example it is essential that the benefits of working with a tour operator are well known and publicized in order to create awareness among travelers. Besides new selling opportunities for suppliers the Internet also enabled possibilities for tour operators. They can use it both as a communication/information and sales/distribution channel. Nowadays it is used as the sooner rather than the latter. Social media and how it is currently used within this context support this tendency. Their purpose is based on information, education and the creation of awareness, which all aim at the promotion of tour operators' products. Future development is expected to increase both sales and distribution via the Internet as well as the importance of the Web as communication channel.

5.3 Business relationships

According to literature on business relationships suppliers are expected to take the initiative in order to trigger the development of cooperation. However, in reality it is the tour operators that frequently take the first step. Besides provision of detailed information and rates regarding the offers, initial contacts can be facilitated by familiarization trips. Such trips should be offered either free of charge or at reduced rates. The tolerance regarding expenses for these trips depends on the company size of the supplier and the number of competitive participating tour operators. Familiarization trips that were individually requested were to be offered at reduced rates. International travel trade activities concern again mostly bigger suppliers. Tour operators expect them to participate in trade shows and workshops rather than small-scale suppliers. These are usually represented by DMOs, which is considered to be sufficient. Nevertheless, smaller suppliers need to provide their representatives with accurate information about their offers in order to ensure appropriate international representation. The development stage of business relationships is characterized by joint product development according to contemporary literature. However, it is not expected by tour operators that suppliers engage in this process. After successful stabilization, long and trusting relationships form the base for long-term cooperation. Business relationships are vital, especially regarding cooperation between both small-scale suppliers and tour operators. The ownership structure is another criteria for the successful emergence of business relationships. Family owned enterprises base their cooperation frequently on mutual trust and personal friendship, whereas management contracts tend to limit the level of cooperation. Larger enterprises have standardized procedures, whereas small ones are more flexible. They are capable of adapting their offers in case of changing demands, which can be considered as being a competitive advantage over larger enterprises. They tend to be more inflexible. Nevertheless, mutual trust and support are integral parts of the relationships' maintenance in both cases.

5.4 Destination marketing organizations

The tasks of DMOs were not the focal point of this research. However, they have been mentioned frequently in both the literature review and the empirical section. This fact illustrates the importance of their work not only for suppliers, but also for tour operators. This is what the author discovered within the process of research. Firstly, they act as an interface regarding communication between the two parties involved. DMOs are expected to advise tour operators

about new products and ongoing activities in destination areas. The other way round they inform suppliers about potential future products. Additionally, DMOs are responsible for the communication of export readiness requirements. This task is vital since it partly states the object of this thesis. Secondly, they represent small-scale suppliers at international trade activities. They further act as representatives when it comes to joint product development. Tour operators do not expect suppliers to engage in such a development process but DMOs with the purpose of facilitating the composition of packages. Last but not least they are sought to either run or engage in marketing campaigns.

5.5 New products

Opportunities regarding potential new products deal with outdoor activities that combine experiencing scenery with having fun. RHIB boat safaris totally meet these expectations and are therefore strongly recommended. WHOPs are a constantly growing target group, which demands soft adventure products. Cooking courses, which show how to prepare fish, mushrooms or berries, can follow activities, such as fishing, mushroom and berry gathering. Since Scandinavians are considered as being outdoor people, who both like and have time to spend with friends and families, hiking and walking tours are demanded. The purpose is to imitate a relaxed but active Scandinavian lifestyle. Other offers could aim at showplaces, which are famous thanks to Swedish authors such as Henning Mankell and Stieg Larsson. Most of their novels were turned into movies and therefore reached millions of potential visitors. Products that are based on according destinations are expected to sell successfully. Product developers could follow products from Cornwall/UK. They focus on Rosamunde Pilcher's showplaces, have a similar purpose and are already well established.

5.6 Marketing and target groups

Marketing is another relevant issue. From the side of tour operators there are no certain prerequisites. Nevertheless, they expect some contribution in form of content, which eventually are pictures in high resolution and video material. They can also contribute to marketing campaigns in a financial way. All contributions are made voluntarily and yield in favored booking positions. If there is no contribution, tour operators tend to negotiate higher commissions. A certain percentage will be added to the minimum, which is 20 %. Marketing campaigns that are

run together with DMOs work in a different way and will not be elaborated in this concluding section. Seasonality strongly influences the marketing of destinations. For Sweden on the whole seasonality is high due to short summer seasons, winter season offerings that are strongly requested by domestic travelers and long shoulder seasons. In the latter case well-defined products are lacking, which hamper the generation of business. The market claims of other European nationalities are different. This fact includes the possibility of booking winter holidays by the week including one weekend. Swedish suppliers therefore need to revise their definition of target groups for each season and distribute their allotments accordingly.

5.7 Integral parts of contracts

Depending on the company size of the tour operator, either standardized or individual contracts are drafted. They contain relevant information regarding the formalities of the cooperation. Contracts play an important role when it comes to the reservation of allotments, which usually affects bigger enterprises rather than small-scale suppliers and operators. For occasional bookings the two parties involved normally do not insist on a contract. Inquiries and reservations, which are commonly sent by email, must be accepted respectively replied to within 24 hours. Ideally, this should be possible on an all year round basis. Elbe (2009) found out that the possibility of online bookings is not an absolute requirement for tour operators. However, it is definitely considered as being an advantage. Requirements regarding language proficiency concern English, since this is the language of contracting, communication and frequently the language of the customer. In some cases, such as elderly travelers and target group WHOPs, tour guides that speak the customers' native language are expected. Bilingual information needs to be provided in all facilities that are part of activities, excursions and the like. Websites are to be launched in English as well. This is the main language issue since it shows whether suppliers are really interested in hosting international clients. Tour operators expected suppliers to organize transportation in some cases. Even though the key task of tour operators is to put together packages that also include transfers, suppliers must arrange them as long as it is an integral part of their service. This is especially valid for excursions. The same conditions apply to equipment, which should be provided as well. Especially when specific equipment regarding weather conditions and safety is required, the provision of adequate equipment is considered to be part of the product.

5.8 Implications of the research

Theoretical implications deal with findings that have an impact on existing theoretical patterns that are taken for granted. One of these identifications is the fact that tour operators often initiate cooperation since they take the first step. They probably do this task according to their business strategy, as it was proposed by theory on internationalization processes. The assumption that suppliers of tourism services initiate cooperation with foreign tour operators, since they are the party that is keen on distributing their services on international markets, cannot be verified. The reasons could not be attained, however, what the suppliers can do is ensuring best possible representation through DMOs on international markets. Only in this case the suppliers are going to be considered by foreign tour operators for cooperation. The Canadian examples for best practice contain issues that all were somehow relevant for the examined European tour operators. Only the inclusion of receptive tour operators (incoming agents) in marketing and sales planning activities was not thematized. However, the application of a multiple method has discovered similar requirements regarding export readiness on both continents. This fact is widening the dimension of this research and possibly allows the application of the identified criteria on further markets.

Methodological implications relate to the fact that all research methods can be criticized for various reasons. However the application of triangulation models is a suitable way to overcome research paradigms. The crucial thing with triangulation is that all methods aim at the same research question, which was unfortunately not the case in this investigation. Nevertheless, it must be stated that such a multi method is contributing to the validity of gathered data in a positive way and therefore ensures more representative results. For the purpose of the study at hand the application of 'a modified triangulation' in form of a multiple method deemed to be sufficient.

Practical implications somehow frame the thesis, since this was the purpose of conducting this research. All issues that were mentioned in chapter 5 can be regarded as valuable findings, which should be considered by Swedish suppliers before they start cooperating with foreign tour operators. Basically, suppliers need to define their target groups and adapt their operating modes accordingly. Seasonality hereby plays an important role; especially the winter season currently aims at both domestic as well as foreign travelers. Allotments concerning capacity need to be distributed with reference to prioritization. On the one hand suppliers need to strive for long-term business relationships, on the other hand they are sought to be creative and imaginative concerning development of new products and consequently, new cooperation partners as well.

The research also presents some new product ideas that are known to have high potential since tour operators already have recorded demand. By considering these suggestions expensive market research becomes superfluous. These are just some recommendations. The consecutive chapter will not only illustrate the power of the identified findings that might have practical implications, but also weaknesses and limitations that hamper the validness of according findings.

5.9 Limitations and outlook

The aim of this research was to find out which issues are important to European tour operators when they decide whether to cooperate with Swedish tourism suppliers. The identified criteria should be examined in order to facilitate best possible preparation prior to approaching foreign markets. However, the study was carried out within certain limitations, which might forward additional research. The following paragraphs will explain this in more detail.

The findings of this research are not sought to undergo any statistical probability measurement. More likely, the findings can provide Swedish suppliers of tourism services with valuable information concerning the requirements when selling on international markets. This method is cost extensive and unsophisticated and could be examined at a preliminary stage. Some requirements and expectations may be generic while others might be market specific or even only valid for a specific target audience. Nevertheless, an application of the criteria does not claim to produce a holistic picture. Consequently, further criteria, which are relevant before entering international markets, need to be investigated. However, this exercise concerns other people's responsibilities and is not task of the thesis. The paper only identified some elements that could be considered for possible export ready checks.

The author further notes that the European dimension was limited to the viewpoints of German and British tour operators. Findings and resulting conclusions were based on three representatives from UK and one from Germany. Due to the limited amount of time, the execution of more interviews was impossible. But despite of the aforementioned weaknesses the author believes that he still has been capable of creating a relatively clear picture of what is generally important for foreign tour operators to initiate a successful cooperation with Swedish tourism suppliers.

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7. Appendix

Interview guide

My name is Hans-Peter Gahleitner and I study as a graduate student at Dalarna University in Sweden. I am enrolled in the Tourism Destination Development Program and currently working on my master thesis, which carries the title 'Enhancing the distribution of Swedish tourism services on international markets: Possible export-ready criteria requisitioned by European tour operators'. I am very grateful that I have the chance to gather primary data from industry experts, which is a great opportunity to reveal unexpected/unknown features.

If you do not mind, I would like to record the interview in order to be able to focus on the conversation during the interviewing process. I will transcribe the record and analyze the answers for the purpose of my thesis only. I can assure that I will not pass on the material to third parties.

In case you have some questions now is the time to ask! Right after all insecurities have been sorted out we can start with the interview. Please keep in mind that all information you state should be customized to Swedish suppliers of tourism services. Please comment on the buzzwords below as associative as possible and state information from your intuitive and experiential point of view. You are not expected to answer the questions in writing. They should rather work as a guideline or trigger preliminary considerations. All information will be gathered in form of the subsequent interview!

General information

What is your name?

Which tour operator are you working for?

What is your position within this enterprise?

How do you search for Swedish tourism suppliers, you intend to cooperate with?

How do you check -up to now- if a supplier is export ready?

Proven Track Record & Safety

Business activity, insurance, etc.

Inquiries and Reservations

Time, means (telephone, fax, email), confirmation of booking, etc.

Marketing

Prerequisites, media clients, etc.

Contracting and Payments

Law, tax, licenses, prices, time, etc.

Operations

Familiarization tours, trade shows, language, operation dates, transportation, equipment, etc.

Experience, Prospects

Which role does geographical and cultural distance play?

Which role does the Internet play as a direct sales channel?

Which role does the existence of business relationships play and how do they develop over time?

How would you define the tasks of Swedish (local) Destination Management Organizations?

What kind of theme/experience/activity would you recommend possible suppliers?

Anything else?