Projects written during my university career

MA in Tourism at Aalborg University, Denmark

10th semester:

Project:
Final thesis project (100 pages + app. 250 pages in appendix)

Title:
“Novelty or Familiarity? Travel preferences and behaviours of Japanese university students”

Descriptions:
The Japanese tourism market is often regarded as highly attractive because of its size and the high daily expenditure of Japanese tourists. This market has been widely studied among tourism researchers, and the image of the travel preferences and behaviours of Japanese tourists is rather uniform. Both in tourism literature and in popular discourse Japanese tourists are commonly perceived to travel in large groups; use pre-arranged package tours with transportation, hotels, guided tours, and Japanese tour-guides included; lack English and foreign language skills; demand high quality and service standards; and be highly concerned about safety. In short, Japanese tourists are perceived to be travelling within an ‘environmental bubble’ which maintains the comforts and familiarities of their home environment. Explanations of Japanese tourist behaviour often refer to the unique socio-cultural characteristics of Japan. Inspired by the work of Geert Hofstede and his cultural dimensions, Japanese people are commonly characterized as being group-oriented, having a high work-ethic, seeking to avoid risks and unfamiliar situations, adhering to hierarchical conventions, and seeking harmony among other traits.

Some tourism researchers identify new trends within the Japanese tourist market, but these have not been studied in detail. The dominant image of Japanese tourists contradicted with the authors personal experiences of mainly young Japanese tourists. Despite being an important part of the Japanese tourism market, young Japanese tourists have been neglected by tourism researchers. This study attempts to fill this research gap by exploring the travel preferences and behaviours of Japanese university students. The findings are compared with the conventional image of Japanese tourists, and the reasons for the identified discrepancies are investigated by exploring the significant changes Japanese culture and society is undergoing as well as the characteristics of Japanese university students. Likewise the study examines how the perceived cultural distance between Japan and foreign countries from the perspective of the young Japanese tourists affect their travel preferences and behaviours.

This research project is explorative; it aims to provide indications of the travel characteristics of Japanese university students, but it cannot claim to represent the entire student population or Japanese youth. Empirical data were gathered during a three months stay in Tokyo, Japan. In-depth interviews have been conducted with fifteen Japanese university students and two Japanese tourism professionals working daily with Japanese tourists. Furthermore, an online survey has been
distributed among Japanese university students receiving 53 survey responses. The empirical data has been analysed and interpreted relying on academic literature from a broad spectrum of research fields. Yet, this project first and foremost employs a sociological and an anthropological approach to culture, consumption, and tourism behaviour.

The findings of this thesis characterize Japanese university students as nuanced travellers. They generally value the freedom of travelling alone or in small groups and like to experience the local atmosphere of their travel destination. There seems to be a strong preference towards organizing the tourism trips themselves and thereby avoid the restrictions of tour-schedules. Therefore full package tours are generally only preferred, if time does not permit the students to arrange their own trip. The interviews left the impression that perceived cultural distance is not regarded to be an important influence on the students’ travel behaviours. Instead, their low budgets are considered to have great impact on how they travel. The majority look for cheap accommodation and transportation. While the students appear to enjoy experiencing a destination by visiting local friends, most of the students in this project also preferred to visit the famous tourist attractions of their destination country.

According to these findings, and in agreement with the student interviewees, the travel preferences and behaviours of Japanese university students appear to be significantly different from the conventional view of Japanese tourists. The data analysis and interpretation identified three key characteristics of Japanese university students to cause this difference. Firstly, they have different values and life experiences growing up in a culturally different environment compared to the older generations; secondly, their mindsets are much more international and their foreign language skills have improved considerably; and thirdly, their life-cycle and occupational characteristics result in certain preferences and behaviours.

The findings in this project suggest that the dominant image of Japanese tourists needs to be refined and reassessed. Japan is undergoing considerable social, cultural, and structural changes and will continue to do so. These changes affect the characteristics of Japanese people as consumers and as tourists, and therefore extra research on the Japanese markets is needed. This thesis project contributes by adding new knowledge to a neglected market – significant in its own right, but perhaps more important when considering the developing trends of the Japanese tourism markets in the coming years.

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9th semester:

Project:
Internship project (30 pages + 6 pages evaluation of the internship)

Title:
“’Økoturisme er…’: Begrænsninger for økoturisme i ressourcesvage områder med Ban Pao i Nordøstthailand som eksempel.”
Description:
A discussion of the constraints of ecotourism in areas with scarce resources. The project reviews the academic literature on the topic, and looks at the stated reasons why ecotourism apparently often fails to reach its goals. I compare the reasons given with a concrete case of ecotourism development in Ban Pao in North-Eastern Thailand, where I spent a considerable period of my internship. The case shows that the literature’s generalist approach to ecotourism is insufficient to explain the development of concrete ecotourism destinations. There are too many contextual factors which impact the development of a given destination, and there is a danger of oversimplifying the outcomes and constraints of ecotourism. To illustrate the limitations of a generalist approach to ecotourism, I apply an ethnographic method called *ethnographies of the particular* which studies the details of concrete cases. It thereby portrays a nuanced picture of the case that challenges many rigid conceptions of ecotourism.

Project:
**Theory and Methods** (3.5 pages)

Title:
Critical review of:

8th semester:

Project:
**Topic study 4: Free written individual project** (15 pages)

Title:
“Rural Tourism: Målsætninger, muligheder og problemstillinger.”

Description:
Based on a review of existing literature about rural tourism, this project explains the historic and socioeconomic reasons for the development of this type of tourism. It explains the methods and motives that, according to the literature, often lay behind rural tourism projects. The project goes on to state the possibilities of rural tourism, among these rural development, local job creation, economic boosts knowledge enhancement, and sustainable development. The possibilities are discussed in relation to a number of constraints pointed out by academic critics.
Project:
Topic study 3: Product Development and Innovation (76 pages)

Title:
“Aktørinddragelse i Turismeudvikling: En sammenkobling af borgerinddragelse og offentlig – private partnerskaber.”

Description:
The project focuses on two popular concepts in tourism literature and development; public participation and public – private partnerships. The two concepts have been praised as reliable methods of developing holistic and sustainable tourism, but they have yet to be mutually integrated in theory. This project analyses the practical implications and possibilities of combining both public participation and public – private partnerships in tourism development.

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7th semester

Project:
Topic study 2: Tourism Policy (20 pages)

Title:
“Policy-problemer og strategier i Litauen under forandring.”

Description:
The project seeks to discuss three separate questions about the Lithuanian national tourism development plan of 1999-2002. The three questions are:

1) a discussion of the coherence between the problem definition and the policy actions as stated in the national tourism development strategy of Lithuania.
2) how the conceived problems and policy actions reflect Lithuania’s historical heritage from the Soviet era.
3) how the Lithuanian strategy positions itself in relation to the international trends of tourism policies.

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Project:
Topic study 1: Markets and marketing communication (98.5 pages)

Title:
“Den Gode Oplevelse: En analyse af oplevelsestilbud til MICE-turister med udgangspunkt i oplevelsesøkonomi.”
Description:
The main theme of this project is experience economy, which is a relatively new and increasingly popular term in the tourism sector. However, tourism literature is scarce on thorough analysis of the concept. The project reviews the concept and discusses a model of experience economy made by tourism researcher Lena Mossberg. The model has several insufficiencies, and is therefore greatly modified, and then applied to concrete tourism experiences offered by “Aalborg Tourism & Congress Bureau”. The project analyses the tourism experiences offered in relation to MICE-tourism (MICE is an abbreviation of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Education). After a thorough analysis of the offered tourism experiences, the project goes on to consider which elements of tourism experiences are vital in the creation of a unique and positive experience for tourists.

Project:
Tourism and intercultural encounters (12 pages)

Title:
“Modernitet og autenticitet i en turismekontekst.”

Description:
This essay presents a discussion about modernity and authenticity in the context of tourism. The discussion is based on a newspaper article, in which the author makes clear distinctions between the authentic and inauthentic, as well as conventional tourists and backpackers. The views of the author are questioned in this paper, which unveils the constructed nature of authenticity and the stereotypical viewpoints of the author. The second part of the essay looks at whether and how tourism can function as a means of enhancing inter-cultural understanding between the tourists and the host population.

Project:
The organization and management of tourism (5 hours written exam – 5 pages)

Title:
Exam: “The organization and management of tourism.”

Description:
Based on a case about the regional tourism organization in Northern Jutland called ‘Toppen af Danmark’, five questions were given. The questions centre around the organizational characteristics of Toppen af Danmark, and the following pros and cons resulting from these.
BA in Ethnography and Social Anthropology at University of Aarhus, Denmark

6th semester (National University of Singapore)

Project:
Term paper (National University of Singapore): Medical Sociology (5 pages)

Title:
“Cultural perceptions of gender: Consequences from a health perspective.”

Description:
The main object of this case study is to show how cultural constructions of gender relate to certain health patterns. Because of the limited scope of this paper, I have chosen not to look at the psychological difficulties in not conforming to existing gender categories, but rather at how compliance to ascribed gender roles affects one’s health. I will mainly portray how susceptibility to health problems and accessibility to care is influenced by shared gender perceptions.

Project:
Term paper (National University of Singapore): Economy & Society (7.5 pages)

Title:
“South Korea 1962-1979.”

Description:
As one of the four ’Asian tigers’, South Korea has gone through a process of rapid industrialization with unusually high measures of growth and changing social conditions. This development would not have taken place without the vital role of the South Korean state. Through its economic policy the state bureaucracy, led by President Park, aimed at the nationalistic project of modernizing the country and transform it into a major player in the world economy. This paper focuses on the social impact of the Park government’s economic policy that shaped South Korea’s industrialization from 1962, where the first five-year plan was made, until the assassination of President Park in 1979.

Project:
Term paper (National University of Singapore): The Sociology of Tourism (9 pages)

Title:
“What kind of tourists come to Singapore?”

Description:
Today, tourists come from all over the world, and as the complexity intensifies, so does the need to re-evaluate theories about tourism. Based on empirical data, this paper sheds light upon tourists in
Singapore today. It tries to explain what types of tourists come to Singapore, and what their purposes are for visiting. The theoretical framework is followed by a list of the main hypotheses.

The paper moves on to sections on methodology and data-findings. Subsequently, the data is analysed and compared to the initial hypotheses.

5th semester

Project:
Central ethnographic debates (11.5 pages)

Title:
“Civilisationssammenstød? – En undersøgelse af modstridende kulturopfattelser.”

Description:
The project looks at various conceptions of culture and investigates which social and political consequences different ideas about culture and how it operates can have. The starting point of the paper is Samuel P. Huntington’s theory about the ‘clash of civilizations’. This prophecy is based on Huntington’s rigid understanding of cultures, which will be discussed. The paper explores different kinds of culture conceptions and includes commentaries on a discussion within the anthropological forum dealing with whether the entire culture concept should be evaded in order to avoid stereotypical and simplified images of peoples.

4th semester

Project:
Bachelor’s Project (10 pages)

Title:
“Et Tredje Køn? En komparativ analyse af transseksualitet og kønsopfattelser med udgangspunkt i thailandske kathoey’s.”

Description:
The increasing interest in various gender systems worldwide, has challenged the notion that sexual dimorphism is a universal phenomenon. Ethnographic studies have shown that many cultures have strikingly different understandings of gender, differing from the simple separation of man / woman, and masculine / feminine. This project analyses alternative gender perspectives and the existence of a third sex / gender. Three different gender systems will be explored; the gender systems of Thailand, Brazil, and India, with the Thai gender system as the starting point. The study shows that sex and gender perceptions are connected to cultural context, and cannot be defined according to the same absolute criteria.
3rd semester

Project: Analysis of Culture and Society (10 pages)

Title: “En dekonstruktion af etnicitet.”

Description: The study examines theories of ethnic communities. It looks at what ethnic groups consist of (in reality and as imagined) and how the groupings develop. In public discourse there are often many simplistic and prejudice images of ethnic groups. This discourse often sees a particular ethnic group as a homogenous entity, and this can in turn have an internalizing effect on the group in question. The discourse ascribes certain characteristics of behaviour, looks, opinions, and personalities to a group. This paper aims to deconstruct such notions of ethnicity.

Project: Ethnographic Methods Project (18 pages)

Title: “Symbolske Streger: En antropologisk analyse af tatoveringer som identitetsmarkør.”

Description: Anthropologists talk about two types of identity; one that is ascribed and one that is achieved. The ascribed identity is given at birth and can be nationality, ethnicity and status, while achieved identity can be reached by personal choices such as hobbies, lifestyle, or for example tattoos; the object of this study. The tattoo is a personal marker of identity, and can be a symbol of how we see ourselves or how we would like to be seen by others. As tattoos are permanent, it can be assumed that the symbol, size, and place of the tattoo are of significant importance to the bearer. The project is based on ethnographic methods of qualitative data collection, and explores the thoughts and meanings which shape the decisions of the customers. The project pays thorough attention to the used methods and contemplates on the pros and cons of the decisions made.

2nd semester

Project: The Philosophy of Science (10 pages)

Title: “Determinisme.”
**Description:**
This project comments on one of the classic discussions of the human sciences; the discussion of whether we have a free will to make our own rational decisions. The discussion will present different views, starting out with that of the French Paul Henri Thierry d’Holbach, who was a firm determinist. His theories will foremost be challenged by the views of Karl Popper and Jean-Paul Sartre.

**Project:**
Regional Theme (Melanesia) (5 pages)

**Title:**
“Kulturmøder og strategier for kulturel integration.”

**Description:**
The study is regionally based on Melanesia, and discusses different strategies of integration of traditional Melanesian culture in a modern nation and in a globalized world. The study specifically explores the development of a local myth, which is exploited for the purpose of tourism. The study also discusses the question of host – guest relationships in the tourism industry, and how to ensure a socially sustainable tourism development.

**1st semester**

**Project:**
Regional Theme (USA) (3 pages)

**Title:**
“Diskussion af affirmative action.”

**Description:**
This short paper discusses affirmative action in the US. I look at two cases of affirmative action; one which took place immediately after World War II, and one which is carried out in the present time. The former gave white American soldiers a number of privileges, while the latter aims to even out the existing inequalities by addressing the poorer groups in society. Affirmative action has been an issue of much debate, and I examine the question of whether it can be justified, and under which social circumstances it must operate in order to have a positive effect on society.