

A critical review of APTEC 2

The overall aim of this paper is to assess the APTEC 2 report from a theoretical and methodological standpoint. APTEC 2 (Asia-Pacific Travel Encyclopedia) is the continuation of a series of white papers on key Asian markets produced in 2006/2007 by Royal Intel (RI), and is carried out in collaboration with Scandinavian Tourist Board and the Austrian National Tourist Office. The study investigates the travel motives of travellers from the markets of China, Japan, India, South Korea, and Australia visiting the Scandinavian region and Austria in order to determine the drivers and motives that shape traveller behaviour.

1. The theoretical foundation of APTEC 2

The paper will commence with a discussion of how recent theoretical developments have contributed to the understanding of travel decision making and destination choice. Subsequently, these insights will be contrasted to the theoretical underpinnings of the APTEC 2 report.

The travel decision making process is founded in theories on decision making, which is a vast area of research including a large number of different theoretical frameworks. Decision making has been scientifically studied for decades and incorporates a number of different fields, e.g. economics, psychology, and sociology (Decrop 2006: 1). The first conceptions viewed decision making as a purely rational process, while later developments entail a number of variables that influence the process, including risk, cognitive capabilities, time, etc. (Decrop 2006: 2-4). More specifically, travel decision making is based on the decision making theories related to consumer behaviour which will be the point of departure for this section. One of the most basic assumptions of consumer decision making is that a need or desire will create a problem to the consumer, who will have to choose an action to solve that problem, i.e. satisfy that particular need. This problem solving approach to consumer decision making has been proposed by Nicosia, Howard & Sheth, and Engel et al. (Decrop 2006: 5), and usually involves the following steps: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and outcomes.

In contrast to the problem solving approach, which clearly saw the consumer as a rational being making rational decisions, later developments have introduced a number of variables which influence the decision making process. These include socio-psychological, personal and environmental variables: socio-psychological variables pertain to how the consumer perceives

information, how it is processed, how decisions are made, and involves the concepts of learning, perception, and attitude. Personal variables concern a consumer's personality, motivation process, lifestyle, and emotions. Finally, environmental variables, the situational context, relate to the consumer's cultural and social influences, interpersonal or group influences, and situational influences, including time, money, health, etc. (Decrop 2006: 7-14). The aggregated impact of all of these variables is that the decision making process is now seen as a far more complex process than just the rational process undertaken when experiencing a need and acting upon it. Instead, the process is characterised by being rather unpredictable in practice as a result of all the personal and situational influences that affect the decision.

As the theoretical frameworks of consumer decision making have developed and become more comprehensive, the specific models that seek to illustrate travel decision making have evolved as well. Decrop (2006) presents an overview of these developments in the book "Vacation Decision-Making" from 2006. Though other articles or books on travel decision making have been studied for this paper, most focus merely on one stream within the area or on decision making as a sub-part of the tourism marketing mix, e.g. Middleton (2009), while Decrop's review encompasses all the theories that have contributed to this field of research. He distinguishes between three types of models; microeconomic, cognitive, and interpretive models.

Microeconomic models

The first stage, the microeconomic models, applies demand theory to explain tourism behaviour, portraying the tourist as a rational person seeking to maximise his gain given the choice he makes – similar to the earliest theories on consumer decision making. Viewing decisions as context-free and individual, this approach explains how tourists should behave rather than how they actually behave as the questions of how and why a specific decision is made are neglected (Decrop 2006: 24). Naturally, this rigidity is the main point of the criticism of these models. Decrop (2006: 28) argues that they fail to include various important variables that influence the decision making process and claim that they are useful to measure and predict, but not to understand the process.

Cognitive models

In the second generation of travel decision making frameworks, the cognitive models, the focus is on the mental processes that influence a decision, including perception and information processing (Decrop 2006: 28). These frameworks comprise some of the most influential and used models depicting the travel decision making process. Among these are Crompton's model of destination

choice from 1977 which sees the first decision being whether or not to go on holiday and the second being where to go based on destination image and perceived constraints, such as time and money. Um and Crompton later refined this model by introducing three sets of variables: external inputs which are influences from the social and marketing environment; internal inputs, the tourist's socio-psychological profile including values, motives, personal traits, and attitudes; and cognitive constructs, which integrate the external and internal inputs into a set of destinations that the tourist is aware of. From this awareness set, which include all the destinations the tourist is aware of, an evoked set is chosen, and one destination from this set becomes the final destination choice (Um & Crompton 1990: 437). Of equal importance is Woodside and Lysonski's model for destination choice, which is reminiscent of Um and Crompton's model. In Woodside and Lysonski's model, however, the concept of destination awareness includes, besides a consideration set, an inept set (destinations that are rejected), an inert set (destinations that are not considered), and an unavailable but aware set. Furthermore, they add more variables that were not incorporated in Um and Crompton's model. These are: affective associations, feelings towards a specific destination; traveller destination preferences, a ranking of destinations based on destination categorizations and affective associations; and intentions to visit, the perceived probability of visiting a specific destination within a specific time (Decrop 2006: 31).

Other notable conceptions within the cognitive models are developed by Schmoll, Goodall, Moutinho, and Middleton, respectively. Though they all add new elements to the decision making process, only Schmoll's model from 1977 will be explained here as it is applied in the APTEC 2 report. Of the others, suffice it to say that the criticism of the cognitive models is quite similar to that of the microeconomic models: they are, mostly, easily understandable and applicable, but they generally include some unproven hypotheses, e.g. that tourism is a high-involvement product or that information search is extensive (Decrop 2006: 38). They are good for prediction and measurement, but not for fully comprehending the decision making process. Regarding Schmoll's model, the trigger of the process is motivation, followed by stages of information search, assessment of alternatives and decisions. Four sets of variables are encompassed in the model: travel stimuli, which are for example marketing efforts; personal and social determinants that shape motivation, needs, and expectations; external variables, which include destination image, previous travel experiences, and constraints such as time and money; and characteristics of service distribution. The framework is based on the consumer behaviour theories of Nicosia and Howard & Sheth, and the similarity to the problem solving approach to decision making is inescapable.

Interpretive models

The interpretive models are the most recent development within travel decision making. They apply a much more experiential approach to tourist behaviour and include variables that were not included in previous models, such as tourism being a low involvement purchase and passive information search (Decrop 2006: 39). One of the important contributions comes from Woodside & MacDonald whose model introduces a new level of flexibility in that decisions are no longer sequential. Instead, causality depends on each individual tourist, which is a clear distinction from the deterministic approach of earlier models (Decrop 2006: 39). The framework also seeks to explain the relation between group decisions, interactions, and events during the trip and how they lead to other travel decisions and activities. Although the interpretive models are the most complex and encompassing models yet, they still have shortcomings: they are hypothetical deductive in the sense that literature and assumptions come before empirical testing. Decrop (2006: 42) argues that by doing it in reverse order – allowing theoretical frameworks to emerge from empirical data – the result would be more realistic and stand a better chance of providing new discoveries, alternative explanations, and new theoretical leads.

Decrop makes an attempt at introducing a framework which takes all the shortcomings of previous models into account and which is based on empirical findings. His criticism of existing frameworks include that many of them only deal with a part of the vacation, e.g. the choice of destination or accommodation; that holidaying is less problem solving than actual joy seeking; and that travel decisions mostly happen in groups, but the dynamics of this process have not been fully investigated yet (Decrop 2006: 43-45). The results of Decrop's research suggest that more attention to opportunism has to be paid as this factor greatly influences decision timing, information search, and predictability of choices. Moreover, much of the information found about destinations and vacations is used for daydreaming and hedonistic pleasure, and is not necessarily predictive of destination choice. Finally, travel decision making is a highly complex process with decisions occurring on *multiple* levels *simultaneously*, e.g. the decision to go on vacation or not, which vacation type to choose, and which transportation or accommodation to use (Decrop identifies three levels; generic, modal, and specific). Decision making is not an isolated but an ongoing process, as more vacations are considered at the same time but with different time horizons and travel groups. Also, a considerable part of decisions and information search takes place during the vacation which further complicates matters. For these reasons, claims Decrop, it is not possible, maybe even not relevant, to identify and define one specific stage in the decision making process (Decrop 2006: 164-165).

In summary, the understanding of travel decision making and destination choice has evolved from being described as a process instigated by the experience of a problem or need which the tourist, by using rational thought, seeks to satisfy to the best of his ability given the skills and methods available, to an extremely complicated ongoing process consisting of several decisions on multiple levels taking place concurrently while numerous variables influence the decisions, among others that fact that decisions often take place in group settings. The following will compare these developments to the theoretical foundation of APTEC 2.

In the APTEC 2 report, a number of frameworks and concepts contribute to form the theoretical basis. These are Gutman's means-end theory, the travel decision making process, travel motivation, destination image, destination choice, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty. As mentioned earlier, regarding the travel decision making process, the study heavily relies on the model developed by Schmoll, but is not restricted to adopting Schmoll's view on the process. Instead, some criticism of the theory has been included, for instance it is mentioned that some researchers, Hudson & Gilbert, have criticised the model for not being useful for prediction. Furthermore, the report acknowledges the fact that not all decisions occur prior to the trip, but also happen during the course of it (Royal Intel 2009: 14). Nonetheless, Schmoll's model is applied in the report in order to investigate *"the relationship between the use of information sources and travel decision making"* (Royal Intel 2009: 7), and in that sense the study espouses the problem solving approach to tourism research: the cognitive model.

As for destination choice, Crompton's model from 1979 is the main source in the report, although the economic perspective, supply and demand, is explained first. Moreover, the study utilises a framework for destination choice which, ostensibly, incorporates Woodside & Lysonski's general model of traveller leisure destination awareness and choice, Um & Crompton's pleasure travel destination choice model, and Beerli & Martin's model for the formation of destination image. The framework furthermore integrates the following processes: (1) the conceptualization of destination image, (2) the antecedents to destination image formation, (3) the impact of destination image on the selection of a specific travel destination, and (4) the influence of internal and external moderators (Royal Intel 2009: 10-11). However, nowhere is the source of this framework acknowledged, which makes it practically impossible to assess the quality of said tool.

Finally, the report includes an attempt at developing a new theoretical framework for the

explanation of travel decision making and its outcomes. However, the model has several shortcomings: first of all, the model is poorly explained as the exposition takes up approximately half a page. It must be assumed that when introducing an entirely new framework, care must be taken in explicating the details of the model and the relationship between the various parts of it. Second, the sources that the model is based on are not mentioned. Unless, of course, the model is based on all the theories used in the report – which would further stress the need for a detailed explanation of the model. Finally, maybe more a personal observation than a shortcoming per se, it is hard to see the relevance of developing a new theoretical framework. Such an attempt appears to be fit for scientific research and articles, not for a business report, and as the client expects valuable market insights from the report, they would hardly appreciate the attempt at developing a theoretical framework. Furthermore, the model is seemingly founded in the literature and not empirical data, which was a strong point in Decrop's criticism of the existing frameworks for travel decision making.

Despite the vast amount of theories included in the literature review, it is hard to see the relevance of all of them. For example, the travel decision making process is applied to the interview guide in order to reveal the information sources used by the respondents. However, as the fact that many decisions occur *during* the trip is acknowledged, the questions "how did you seek information on your travel destination(s) after making your decision?" and "how did you get to know about the places visited?" hardly seem elaborate enough for fully uncovering the process. Such questions fail to take into consideration the concepts of awareness and evoked sets of destinations, as proposed by Um & Crompton (which are cited in the literature review). Moreover, the complexity of the travel decision making process with all its variables and different levels is not recognised, and the theoretical foundation of the report seems both rather outdated and too comprehensive for its own good. Many of the theories are not applied properly to the interview guide, and the sheer number of different theories and frameworks get in the way of a decent understanding of the topic – the report simply tries to do too much, and it would have benefited from using fewer, but better adapted theories.

2. A critical review of APTEC 2

This section will assess the methodological and analytical shortcomings of the report and comment on how the research design should be improved in order to enhance the reliability, validity, transferability, and objectivity of the findings.

From the onset, APTEC 2 is a qualitative study. This is explicitly stated in the section on methodology:

"This study employs a qualitative approach based on the justification that understanding the individual travel motivation requires a methodology that unravels the factors that link travel needs to choice of destination." (Royal Intel 2009: 2)

The empirical data on which the report is based was to consist of in-depth interviews with 30 respondents divided between the five Asia Pacific markets, thus resulting in a total of 150 interviews. However, as stated in the delimitation (ibid.: 4): *"apart from India, all the key country markets undertook Question and Answer surveys instead."* Though it is acknowledged that these fixed responses *"restricted in-depth interpretations"*, they are still treated and applied to the study as qualitative data. Moreover, no reason is given as to why conducting in-depth interviews was not possible, and the implications of reliance on quantitative data is never adequately explained in the report. As for India, the only market in which in-depth interviews were conducted, the actual responses have been shortened and summarized so that only key words and statements are available for analysis. The so-called in-depth responses have been prepared by putting them into tables featuring short statements from the interviews, meaning that they are presented as if they were quantitative data, and transcripts of the interviews are not available to the client. Furthermore, in a few cases statements that were somewhat similar have been copy/pasted so that any distinction between them is completely gone. All of this, in effect, means that the "qualitative" interviews are not qualitative at all, but more akin to a questionnaire survey. Finally, as interviews with Australian respondents were not *"technically and logistically feasible"*, the report relies on analysis of travel blogs from Australian travellers and *"other literature sources"* (Royal Intel 2009: 4). Neither this solution is justified in the report, and the possible implications of analysing travel blogs, questionnaire responses, and "qualitative" interviews on the same grounds are never mentioned.

Although the above circumstances and changes to the original study design are mentioned and, in the case of the reliance on questionnaires instead of qualitative interviews, the consequent restrictions acknowledged, the qualitative aspect of the report seems practically non-existent. Yet, the research design is still drawn up as if the report was dealing with qualitative data, and this discrepancy between the aim and the execution of the study is one of the major methodological shortcomings of the APTEC 2 report. Moreover, there is little consistency in the choice of

respondents for the study as they consist of various different segments, including business, leisure, VFR, luxury, and group travellers, DINKS, FITS, city slickers, backpackers as well as, in one case, people from the travel industry (Royal Intel 2009: 129-130). The group of respondents is not homogeneous in any sense, and it seems that no criteria for segmentation have been applied, e.g. demographic (they are not of the same age, gender, or level of education), geographic (they are not from the same country, not the same parts of each country), psychological (this is not clear – if used, it is not mentioned in the report) or behavioural (neither this has been investigated, it seems) segmentation, as proposed by Moscardo et al. (2001). As the report does not mention any particular strategy for respondent segmentation, it must be assumed that no segmentation prior to the interviews has taken place. Unless, of course, the entire region of Asia is considered one segment – but this would seem to be a very vague and unclear segmentation criterion. In fact, it appears that the study employs convenience sampling rather than purposive sampling, which is a frequent problem with qualitative research, according to Diefenbach (2008). This only further undermines the generalisability of the findings, and a more concise and stringent research design should have been chosen instead of this unfocused approach. By choosing one specific segment for the study to focus on, the credibility would have been significantly enhanced.

It should be noted that some actions have been taken in order to address the limitations of the study. First, it is mentioned in the report that a second stage of data collection based on a quantitative survey of 250 respondents from each market is prepared. However, the results from this survey are not included, so they add no value to the outcome of APTEC 2. Second, extensive desk research and literature reviews were undertaken to "*compliment the limited qualitative primary data*" (Royal Intel 2009: 5). Yet, as the subject of study was the desires and needs that trigger Asia Pacific travellers to choose certain Scandinavian destinations, accommodations, tour packages, and overall tour products – information which is valuable to the client for promotional and marketing purposes mainly – it is not clear how desk research or literature reviews should substitute for genuine qualitative data in this regard. The desk research involved reports produced by the European Travel Commission and World Tourism Organization among others, and it seems highly probable that the client was already familiar with these reports, for which reason the desk research does not add any value to the study findings. Moreover, the reports do not focus on travellers from the Asia Pacific to Scandinavia, which is what the study sought to investigate, and therefore they seem inadequate for the APTEC 2 report. Similarly, however extensive the literature review in APTEC 2 is, it does not help to elucidate why APAC travellers choose specific Scandinavian destinations, accommodations, etc. and must therefore be deemed more or less irrelevant to the client. In summary, even though the

limitations of the study are acknowledged and certain measures has been taken to address these, the inclusion of desk research and literature reviews as a substitute for qualitative data is not adequately justified and explained, and does not add much value to the study outcome.

There are several ways in which the research design should be improved in order to enhance the reliability (dependability), validity (credibility), transferability and objectivity of the results. Decrop (1999) suggests triangulation as a means to implement Lincoln & Guba's four criteria for qualitative research: credibility (how truthful are the findings?), transferability (how applicable are the findings to another setting or group?), dependability (are the results reproducible?), and confirmability (are the findings neutral and unbiased?). Triangulation, based on the analogy of viewing a point from three different sources in order to restrict any personal or methodological biases and enhance the study's generalisability, can be achieved using four different methods, according to Decrop: data triangulation, method triangulation, investigator triangulation, and theoretical triangulation.

Data triangulation

The immediate way to apply data triangulation to a study involves the use of various data sources, e.g. a combination of interviews or observations and written material in the form of documents, reports, books, newspapers, etc., or writing field notes during or directly after the interviews (Decrop 1999). In the APTEC 2 report, the former method is, as mentioned above, attempted via the use of literature reviews and, especially, desk research, but as neither the literature nor the reports focus specifically on Asian visitors to Scandinavia, it cannot be regarded as data triangulation as such, according to the analogy of viewing the same point from different sources. At best, it is supplementary data on outbound tourists from the key markets included in the study, which of course can be useful in its own right, but it does nothing to improve the validity of the study findings. Neither are there any signs that field notes were written after the interviews. If the report was to implement data triangulation, one way to do so would be apply travel blogs from Asian travellers which focus specifically on Scandinavian destinations. As the report already includes analyses of travel blogs and Asians are considered very active bloggers, it would seem straightforward to do so, and in doing so valuable information on Asian travellers' experiences and impressions, or maybe even desires and needs, could be deduced from this secondary data set, thus improving the reliability of the study findings. Although travel blogs are incorporated in the study, they are written by American or British authors, which seems to do little as for elucidating the needs and desires of Asian travellers.

Method triangulation

Method triangulation can be achieved by applying several methods to study a single problem, and can be both different qualitative methods or a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Decrop 1999). However, notes Decrop, not in a hierarchical order, which implies, for instance, that a subject is studied qualitatively while conclusions are quantitative. Whether or not it is a deliberate choice, method triangulation is clearly attempted in APTEC 2, albeit not always successfully. As shown above, the report is a mixture of methods for gathering data: interviews, questionnaires, desk research, and literature reviews, and although mixing qualitative and quantitative methods is recommended by Decrop, APTEC 2 seems to fall into the category of using the methods in a hierarchical order: the data is unquestionably quantitative in nature, but the analysis is structured towards qualitative sense-making. If the combination of methods used in the report was to enhance the dependability of the findings, the analysis of the questionnaires (and the "qualitative" interviews) should be based on quantitative measures, while blogs and other sources could be included as secondary sets of (qualitative) data. This method would substantially strengthen the credibility of the study findings, although the data set might have to involve more than 30 respondents from each market. Also, it should be noted that elaborate information on visitors to the Scandinavian countries, including statistics on APAC visitors, is introduced in the report. However, this material is not applied to the analytical process and, as such, does not influence the study outcome at all. Moreover, the data is merely statistics on visitors from the Asian markets to the Scandinavian countries and does not include information on particular destinations or attractions within each country, for which reason the data tells little about the need and wants of the visitors.

Investigator triangulation

As the name implies, investigator triangulation entails using more than one researcher to interpret the study findings in order to circumvent any personal bias. Moreover, allowing informants to read and comment on transcripts of their interviews or the researcher's analysis, and incorporating their comments in the analysis, should ensure the credibility and consistency of the analysis (Decrop 1999). To my knowledge, the majority of the actual writing of APTEC 2 was undertaken by one person. Even though different people carried out the interviews in the five markets, these people did not participate in analysing the responses and therefore did not influence the study findings. Whether or not the informants were allowed to read transcripts of their interviews does not appear from the report. However, the fact that it is not mentioned suggests that this procedure did not take place. Throughout 2009 one person at Royal Intel was working on APTEC 2, and no evidence indicates that other employees have been involved when interpreting the overall study findings.

Naturally, allowing other people, particularly from the management of Royal Intel, to help interpreting the data or review the process would have improved the study's credibility, but this method might have been disregarded for one of the following reasons: internal disputes in the company, or the limited time available for analysing the study findings due to delays in the process of carrying out the interviews and the fact that the deadline was pushed forward by two months – or it possibly never occurred to the researcher(s) that investigator triangulation should be implemented.

Theoretical triangulation

Applying theoretical triangulation means viewing a set of data from more than one discipline, e.g. sociology, anthropology, marketing, etc., or viewing it from different schools of thought within one discipline (Decrop 1999). While the APTEC 2 report employs concepts and frameworks from the field of tourism research only, a multitude of different theories are used to strengthen the foundation of the study. The selected theories, however, all revolve around the theme of tourist motivation, so it is arguable if the report in effect utilizes theoretical triangulation or just views the problem from one discipline.

These are the four techniques to attain sound scientific results through triangulation, according to Decrop. However, he states, the list is not exhaustive as triangulation, above all, is a state of mind which requires much creativity on behalf of the researcher. More importantly, Decrop concludes that triangulation is not the only criterion for good research and does not ensure that findings are interesting or provide satisfactory answers to the research questions. The latter seems to be the case with the APTEC 2 report, not necessarily because triangulation does not work, but because it has not been implemented properly in the research design. Although data and method triangulation is applied in APTEC 2 to some extent, there are several shortcomings to the way it has been done, and in the end it does little to improve the trustworthiness of the findings. The overall credibility and transferability of the results would have been greatly enhanced if secondary data in the form of for example (Asian) travel blogs was incorporated. However, to improve dependability, a much larger base of respondents should have been chosen, and the combination of qualitative and quantitative data should have been enforced. As it turned out, it can be argued if the report is a qualitative study at all due to the poor data collection, and this obviously affects the dependability of the report in a negative way. Finally, the objectivity of the findings should have been improved by using more than one researcher, however unbiased this researcher attempted to be.

3. The usefulness of the market insights of APTEC 2

The following will elaborate on how the findings and insights of the report might be useful to the client. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the report contains neither proper qualitative nor quantitative research, which naturally complicates matters in terms of how useful the report is. However, the report does include some valuable information on the Asian informants' perceptions and images of the Scandinavian countries as travel destinations. Whether or not these particular findings are known to the client is practically impossible to tell, and consequently commenting on the usefulness of the market insights is difficult to say the least. Accordingly, this section will presume that the client has a fair share of knowledge on the outbound markets of Asia and evaluate if the APTEC 2 report brings anything new to the table.

A factor which needs to be taken into account when assessing the quality of the study findings is that of the politeness of Asian cultures. In some Asian countries, being the bringer of bad news or saying 'no' to a question is avoided due to the perceived risk of causing the other part to lose face (Doucet 2005; Doucet 2008). Seemingly, nowhere in the report is this matter taken into consideration, neither in the interview design nor in the analysis of the responses, and given the positive nature of almost all of the informants' statements it seems likely that the Asian politeness did in fact influence the responses. This effect might even have been magnified if the interviewers were of Western (or Scandinavian) origin, as the respondents out of politeness might try to 'please' them by giving positive statements. However, it is not known if the people who conducted the interviews were of Eastern or Western origin, but, regardless, the respondents might have answered politely as they would know the recipient of the report would be from Scandinavia. Though it might not be possible to circumvent this issue, it should have at least been mentioned in the report as a factor which possibly impacted on the study outcome – on a different note, this would have enhanced the credibility of the findings, too – despite the fact that the client in all probability is fully aware of the phenomenon.

When interpreting the market insights of APTEC 2, it must be kept in mind that it is based on a small section of representatives from very different segments for which reason generalisations are not possible to make. Therefore, the value of the report must lie in the evaluating statements provided by the respondents in spite of the aforementioned Asian politeness which might put the trustworthiness into question. As long as care is taken when interpreting the data, the report can indeed be a useful tool for the client, especially in connection with marketing strategies aimed at the

Asian markets.

The report provides insights into how the Scandinavian countries are perceived in the different Asian markets, including their pre- and post-vacation images. This may be useful to the client in the sense that a comparison of the images held before visitation and those held after could reveal interesting information directly applicable to a promotion strategy, and concurrently give clues on whether or not a country's perceived image proves correct in reality. If a country is perceived differently after visitation, then perhaps the chosen marketing strategy should be modified so as to realign the perceived image with the actual image attained after the visit. If, however, the two images are identical, then it should assure the client that the current strategy is indeed working (given that the image is a positive one). Yet, the report does not uncover how or where the respondents acquired their pre-vacation image and it is therefore not certain that they were influenced by the current strategy at all.

In general, many of the informants share the same images and impressions of the Scandinavian countries and are attracted to the region for the same reasons. The beautiful sceneries and landscapes are mentioned time and again as the main pull factor and best part of the vacation, and most respondents seem to have a clear image of the Scandinavian nature, including snow-tipped mountains, green landscapes, idyllic villages, and the Norwegian fjords. Also, the long history, the unique culture, the popular Scandinavian design, and the friendly, albeit a bit reserved, people are highlighted as favourable attributes. That the images of the individual Scandinavian countries are so similar across the different Asian markets may or may not be useful to the client, depending on what they knew about this area beforehand. In some cases this might indicate that standardized marketing strategies for the different markets in Asia could be applied, if indeed the markets are so similar that adaptation is not necessary. Nevertheless, more studies into this area would have to be carried out to determine the right strategy for each market.

In terms of concrete findings, there are some interesting aspects of the report which might be valuable to the client. For instance, even though the Scandinavian cuisine was generally well-liked, two of the markets, India and China, had some complaints about the selection available. In India's case, the prevalent grievance was the lack of vegetarian food, while the Chinese tourists complained about the lack of authentic Chinese food. The latter is a known and established fact (Ooi 2007; European Travel Commission 2007), and therefore may not be particularly interesting to the client, whereas the former seems to be less studied from a scientific perspective and for that reason might

be more useful. In general, according to the literature review of APTEC 2 and preliminary research for this paper, the Indian outbound travel market has not been studied and scrutinized to the degree that, for instance, the Chinese one has, which might indicate that the study findings concerning India could be specifically valuable to the client. Still, the findings of the report do corroborate the literature findings and verifies that this particular circumstance regarding the Chinese travellers' desire for authentic Chinese food is still existing and valid.

Another concrete finding is related to the experience of language barriers in the Scandinavian countries on behalf of the South Korean and Indian respondents. Clearly, the client has no influence on the linguistic skills of the Scandinavian peoples, but it might nonetheless be valuable information that could be incorporated in the promotional efforts towards India and South Korea, if indeed further studies indicate that this is a problem to tourists from these markets.

In the analysis, questions on locations visited, products purchased, and activities undertaken at the destinations take up a relatively large share of the interviews. According to the research question and overall aim of the report, hardly all of these topics shed light on the motives of Asian travellers, but they might be valuable still. With regards to locations visited it is difficult to see what value this subject brings which could not have been provided by for example regular visitor statistics, especially given the shortened nature of the responses. All the Scandinavian tourist boards gather such statistical information and are better and more reliable sources for this type of data. The questions on products purchased, on the other hand, might tell something about the image of Scandinavia as many of the products were country-related items, such as dolls, sweaters, crystals, handicrafts, and works of art. Though probably not comprising the sole motivation for visiting the region, the image of Scandinavia as a place with a unique culture and the renowned Scandinavian design might have affected the travel decisions of the respondents. Whether this is useful or not, it does provide insights into the preferred products of Asian travellers visiting Scandinavia; an area which might not have been examined earlier. More pertinent are the activities undertaken during the vacation as they reveal a great deal about the reasons for visiting the region, particularly because a majority of respondents mention taking part in winter activities, e.g. skiing and snowboarding, and other nature-related activities such as trekking and biking. This suggests that outdoor activities in general, and winter activities in particular, are an important part of the holiday to many of the respondents and may even be one of the motives for visiting the region.

A perusal of visitscandinavia.com.au shows that the abovementioned qualities are similar to the

properties which the Scandinavian marketing strategy for Asia focuses on, implying perhaps that it is well-chosen, even though we cannot tell if it has influenced the respondents or not. In either case, the resemblance between the study findings and the current Scandinavian marketing strategy consequently entails that, in this regard, the report does not add any new and pivotal information but only underlines what was, probably, already known about Asian travellers' image of the Scandinavian region. Still, it might be valuable for the client to be reassured in this regard.

Throughout the analysis section, the report compares the study findings to the literature on Asian travellers in order to elaborate on the results. While such a comparison might be of value to some readers, it seems more appropriate for an academic paper, and not the business report that APTEC 2 is. Regardless of whether or not the findings are in line with the literature, the comparison adds little or no value to the report from the perspective of the client. The rationale of the study was to investigate the motives of Asian travellers as of 2009, so what the literature, which is in some cases more than 20 years old, says on the same subject appears to be rather irrelevant to the client, despite the client's (un)familiarity with it. Furthermore, the inclusion of an extensive review of literature resembles a scientific article more than a market report prepared for an international tourism organization, and as the old literature references were a point in the client's criticism of the report, it appears that this part did not satisfy the client or add any value to the study from their perspective.

There seems to be a discrepancy between what the client expected from the report, and what the author *thought* the client expected. There may be two or more causes for this: 1) RI and the client did not thoroughly discuss the aims and objectives, as well as the methodology, of the report. To my knowledge there was never an official contract between RI and the client, which suggest that this is the case. 2) the internal communication at RI during the development of the report was either lacking or simply non-existing. If the aim of the report was clear to the management, it certainly seems it was not clear to the author. When dealing with a report of such a scope for a key client, some discussions and assessments of drafts of the report in order to ensure that it was on the right track would be expected early on in the process. This could be done internally in RI, as well as with representatives of the client, but the harsh criticism of the report on behalf of the client (and the management at RI) indicates that such an ongoing evaluation never took place. Had this been done, the major shortcomings of the report could have been avoided, and the final result would have proven more valuable to the client.

In summary, despite its obvious flaws, the APTEC 2 report does contain some market insights that

could be of value to the client. First of all, the perception of the Scandinavian countries is apparent from the study as the pre- and post-vacation images are rather clearly described by the respondents. Second, there are some concrete insights which are touched upon in the report, e.g. the perceived language barrier or the hassles related to the Scandinavian cuisine. Furthermore, a minute cross-examination of the findings might reveal more interesting aspects that could be useful for the client. Given the original objective of the study, however, it is not surprising that the client is not satisfied with the report and it could be argued that the research question is not properly answered. In terms of new and revealing information about the motivational drivers of APAC travellers, the study hardly lives up to the original objective and when taking the various factors of the study design and execution as well as the Asian politeness into account, it certainly limits, if not undermines, the value of the study findings.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine the theoretical foundation and the methodological approach of the APTEC 2 report. As the three previous sections have demonstrated, there are a number of severe shortcomings regarding the study. First, the theoretical base is a clutter of different concepts from tourism research, many of which are either considerably outdated or simply not incorporated in the interview design or subsequent analysis. Nonetheless, it is claimed that the literature review adds to the study findings and that it functions as a compensation of the lacking qualitative data of the report. However, from the perspective of the client, a literature review, however extensive it may be, can not fully replace genuine empirical data from the key markets, and it is questionable how and if the theoretical aspect improves the study. Second, there are major shortcomings pertaining to the methodological approach, the most pertinent being the complete lack of qualitative data. Quantitative data, and in one case an analysis of travel blogs, is included in order to make up for this lack, but the implications of such a methodological change and heterogeneity of data sources are not discussed. Due to the relatively low number of respondents, the study findings are not generalisable for which reason the actual value of the study outcomes is dubious. Third, whether or not the client will find the market insights useful depends on their expectations as well as previous knowledge on the drivers and needs of APAC travellers. Yet, given the shortcomings detailed above and the original objective of qualitatively investigating this area, it would appear that the usefulness of the report is quite limited, although not entirely non-existing. A number of particular findings as well as the general image of the Scandinavian region might contribute to improve the marketing strategy for the various Asian markets included in the study, and this might

just be the most useful aspect of the APTEC 2 report.

It should be mentioned that even though RI was responsible for writing and preparing the report, they were not in charge of the interview processes and are therefore not to blame for the failure in carrying out qualitative interviews. Furthermore, it is likely that internal disputes in RI have had an impact on the process of preparing the report. Finally, it should be acknowledged that an edited version of the report is being prepared at the moment on the basis of the criticism it received. Whether the new version will satisfy the client remains to be seen.

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