



# What's new in tourist search behaviour?

A study on German tourists in Sweden

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# 1. Introduction

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During the last two decades, we have seen an increasing digitalisation. This development is not only permeating tourism but also the whole society, starting from making digital bank errands online to certificates and conversations carried out via computers. As a result, we have also seen a democratisation of travel as it has become cheaper to travel, apparently faster and easier to collect information about a destination, and to book a journey. Media is reporting about increasing globalisation, going hand in hand with spurred innovations in digitalisation (see e.g. BBC 2018). New systems named sharing economy or peer-to-peer economy evolve because of ubiquitous accessibility to information and communication technology, ICT. In many parts of the world, tourist destinations have been quick to adapt to this new paradigm. Homepages and blogs have been expanded, new systems allow for downloading information instead of being printed, and booking systems have been brought to perfection in order to facilitate access to hotels, attractions

and transport.

Tourists have not been late to respond to advancements in tourist information systems, but developments are uneven. In the dawn of what many call a new information era, non-technological values connoted to information appear to be equally important: confidence, play or representable status (Mieli, 2017). So, how does it work in practice when tourists seek for information about destinations? Which sources of information are used and why? How do tourists act at home, compared to en route?

This report focuses on German visitors in Sweden. The destinations Vimmerby and Ystad were chosen as case studies for the empirical work, as they account for large numbers of German visitors. The purpose of the study is to examine how German tourists search for tourist information about Sweden both before and during their journey. We both seek for the effects of different information sources, and for the reasoning behind tourists' choices.

## 2. Literature Review: Tourist Information Search

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The forthcoming chapter presents research literature on tourist information search in the digital age. Connected to this are themes about the decision-making process, information overload, and active disconnection from technical devices.

There is a longstanding division of tourist

information search into internal and external quests. The former consists of strategies connected to personal experiences and past information searches, and the latter involves literature, media, travel consultants and the like (see e.g. Fodness and Murray, 1999 for a mature overview). It is also acknowledged

that people are inclined to use a combination of information sources to reach their aims, hardly ever relying on one channel only. In order to understand tourist information search, several models have been established over the years. The general search models by Gursoy and McCleary (2004) explain information search before decisions have been made at home. Bargeman and van der Poel (2006) suggest a four-step-process lasting from the initial holiday plans to the more concrete preparations. Focusing on the Internet as information channel, Pan and Fesenmaier (2003; 2006) conclude that online planning is based on a hierarchical structure of so-called episodes, and on information hubs from which the searcher is linked to other websites. In other words, theoretical approaches to how tourists search for information do exist. Considering however the appearance of the smartphone and their including ubiquitous online access to information together with emergence of two-way-communication via web 2.0, changes in tourist behaviour come quickly. So should researchers' alertness in using information search models.

The Internet is an important information channel for travellers (Bronner & de Hoog, 2016). Its significance was already stated in times when access was spatially bound to a stationary personal computer, mostly placed in individuals' homes. Travel-related information search was early on considered one of the most popular online activities – and it still is (Ye *et al.*, 2011). The rise of smartphones is however the real game changer in tourist information, due to its ubiquitous access to information, independent of any restrictions in time and space. In recent years, this situation is reinforced due to the extension of free Wi-Fi, and abolishment of international roaming fees. Dickinson *et al.* (2014) can affirm that social practices are undergoing radical trans-

formations these days. It is made possible by the rise of the networked society, enabled by omnipresent admission to information and people. Mobile technology allows people to negotiate their daily decisions with growing fluidity, which again grants the possibility for ad-hoc decisions made on the move. We argue that this has substantial bearing on tourists' information search behaviour, as it simplifies access to information in the actual travel phase, thus contributing to delaying the decision-making process.

With the help of smartphones, tourists can manage many things that could not be done using place-dependent Internet. By linking tourists to distant information sources, they have become a prevailing tool for many travellers, allowing for spontaneous modifications of intended travel plans. Kwan (2007:437) describes this new condition as extemporal lifestyles – a development that makes already complex tourism travel even more complex, as options change perpetually en route. In addition, smartphones enable their users to access locally produced knowledge, which can potentially trigger detours, spontaneously disclose opportunities, and avoid redundant trips. To conclude, smartphone use has the potential to generate knowledge-rich visitors (Dickinson *et al.*, 2014). The question however is whether tourists really want to rely exclusively on one information channel. The supposition we make to contradict this statement is that other values beyond rational and pure tourist information are important as well.

Contrary to many actors' beliefs, online information does not seem to entirely substitute analogue channels such as guidebooks, tourist information centres, or the old-fashioned word of mouth. Empirical results show that digital information channels do get increasingly important, but that Snepenger *et*

al.'s (1990) declaration on the combined use of information sources is still applicable. Most recent research show that tourists still tend to use a combination of different sources of information.

The information search process can be divided into search at home prior to the journey, and the search en route. Both researchers and tourism marketers have long considered tourists to plan their activities at home, and then to fulfil their plans once at the destination. This has led marketers to devote the majority of their promotional budgets to information that is assessed at home (Becken & Wilson, 2006). Tourists have also been believed to be rational individuals, choosing their information channels in a determined way, and picking the sources that are most reasonable at the moment of access. Now, these statements need to be scrutinized as there are researchers suggesting them to be true.

In their 2016 publication in *Current Issues in Tourism*, Kah and Lee (2016) reveal that travel decisions are in fact flexible, as they are subject to both situational and information-related changes. Building on March and Woodside (2005), they expose how plans may remain unrealised, and actual behaviour may not have been planned. In short, their empirical results show that the use of traditional information sources tends to promote planned behaviour, while easily accessible digital information increases the likelihood to change it. Their conclusion in this debate is that more focus should be put on what actually takes place, instead of concentrating on what was planned at home. In extension, this statement necessitates a conceptualisation of actual information search behaviour at the destination. Secondly, tourists' information search has been found to be less rational than previously believed. While travellers have generally been supposed to search for

the information they really need (and to know what they need), Mieli (2017) shows that serendipity plays a major role in which information tourists really embrace. Serendipity in this case means to be able to take advantage of opportunities that occur when planning and conducting travel. From this point of view, coincidence plays a greater role than previously believed. Both results have major implications for actors working to influence tourists by providing tourist information.

## 2.1 DECISION-MAKING AND THE PLANNING PROCESS

Many decisions are involved in planning a holiday. First, tourists have to choose what destination (single or multiple) to visit, then decide how to get there, in what type of accommodation to stay, and finally what activities to do. Some of the decisions are happening at home, while others are taken en route. Blichfeldt (2008) argues that tourists' decision-making processes differ from other types of consumer decision-making. Therefore, tourists' decision-making and planning processes are addressed below.

Stewart and Vogt (1999) view decision-making from a case-based planning vacation perspective. They are interested in where planning occurs in such a process. This implies that plans are made but they are also revised along the way. Some decisions will be executed and others will be altered during the travel process due to for example new information, boredom, new preferences within the travel party or the weather. Thus, tourists make decisions but their plans are also adapted based on upcoming needs. Another presumption of the case-based perspective is that tourists plan for potential changes. When they make their plans they include possibilities for change in case something hap-

pens, for example bad weather. Furthermore, tourists' previous experience also have an impact on their planning behaviour. For some, it helps to make better plans whereas others want to be more spontaneous, although they have the knowledge to plan more thoroughly (Stewart & Vogt, 1999). Results from Stewart and Vogt (1999) showed that travel party, length of journey and travel mode were in most cases the same as planned. Results also showed that tourists planned more activities than they actuated. This goes in line with Zillinger's (2007) results.

In a study by Hyde (2008) exploring the interrelationship between tourist information search, vacation plans, and actual vacation bookings, he concluded that there were four different segments of tourists in this respect. The first group consists of people who are low in both searching for information, planning and booking since they want spontaneity in the holiday. The second group searches highly but are still low in planning and booking; they want to get to know the destination but not make many decisions beforehand. The third group searches and plans highly but is low in actual booking since they want to keep some flexibility during their vacation. The final group is high on all levels since they want to have a planned itinerary for their holiday. Thus, there are many different ways to act when it comes to searching, planning and finally booking. Another factor that had an impact on tourists' information and planning behaviour was the type and length of the trip they were going to conduct. For example, when it comes to types of trips like packaged holiday, travelling with a car, backpacking or visiting friends and family all had an impact on tourists planning process. Moreover, other results from Hyde's (2008) study showed that tourists who had familiarised themselves with a destination through guidebooks and word

of mouth were less likely to plan and book ahead.

Bronner and de Hoog (2012) focused on decision-making from a family perspective. They argue that decision-making is often a joint decision that requires discussion between the parties involved. Information search is used for supporting arguments in a discussion with all parties involved. Thus, the social context is highly important for decision-making. Their study revealed that for each sub-decision made, different sources of information were used to support the discussion, and to make a decision. The source of information with the highest impact were personal recommendations. Another result from their study is that the longer into the planning process tourists get, the more important factual information sources, including rating sites online, became for the joint decision-making process.

Just like information search, much of the research on decision-making has focused on behaviour prior to travel. Blichfeldt (2008) is an exception, exploring decision-making while on holiday. This is vital, as many tourists prefer to make many decisions when they are en route. In line with Bronner and de Hoog (2012), she focused on families who are on holiday, and how they make decisions. In her case, most people were travelling with some kind of travel party. Her study revealed that those tourists who were on a short trip (a few days) had made the main decisions beforehand, with only little room for added plans. Those who stayed longer might have planned many things to do, but were often quite content with doing nothing or making spontaneous decisions. In this case, it could mean staying at the caravan site and just relax. However, they could also decide to do some kind of activity. Decisions were then made on site based on information found on the spot.

Concludingly, we can summarise that decisions are only seldom taken by a single person. Rather, they are negotiated between all involved parties, whether it is family or friends involved. Furthermore, decisions are made at home as well as en route, and it is often a conscious decision to leave things unplanned to create flexibility and room for spontaneous decisions. The information search process is therefore also a continuous process, as decisions are not fully made beforehand. Different sources are used in combination and in discussions regarding decisions to be made.

## 2.2 TOURIST INFORMATION SEARCH AT HOME AND EN ROUTE

We know that tourists use a wide range of information sources when planning a trip. In this section, the information process is highlighted and different sources used both at home and en route are addressed. Tourists' information search is considered as the first step in a decision-making process. This process then has an impact on tourists' behaviour and expectations at the destination, as well as on destination image (Molina & Esteban, 2006). Again, different information sources are used. In this case, an information source is referred to as persons or organisations that provides information to tourists whereas a tourist information channel is the method used to communicate a message to a tourist (Grønflaten, 2009).

Research about behaviour and tourist information search can be divided into three different areas (Bieger and Laesser, 2004). The first one is the psychological/motivational approach. In this area, research is related to travel motivation theory with a push and pull perspective. That is, a tourist is pushed by personal internal needs at the same time as being pulled by external forces of the desti-

nations characteristics. Internal push factors that could have an impact on information search behaviour are sociodemographic factors, length and type of travel, previous travel experience and the travel companions. The second area of research focused on the economic approach. In this area, research has looked at information search and sources used as something driven by expected costs and risks associated with travel. Information search behaviour is here seen as a means to reduce potential risks at a destination. Information search in this case is a way to reduce levels of uncertainty and potential risks at destinations (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2011). Thus, the risk is for example related to tourists' expectations of a destination and the prospect of being disappointed. The information search is seen to reduce this risk as the tourists have more knowledge about a destination. The final area is the consumer information processing approach, where focus is on the process of information search rather than on the action in itself. Bieger and Laesser (2004) focused on the search process in their research, they view information search as something that is ongoing and not just an act of problem solving. While people however need less information while travelling simply because it is always available, information search as such does not disappear (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2015).

There are three dimensions of information search (Fodness & Murray, 1999). The first is the spatial dimension of information search, either internal (i.e. individuals' own memories and knowledge) or external (accessing information from the environment). The second dimension is the temporal and represents the timing of search activities as something ongoing, building up knowledge for future needs or linked to a purchase situation. The final dimension is operational, that deals with

the actual information search and different sources used. Fodness and Murray argue that different forces are driving tourists' individual information search. These are possibilities, tourist characteristics, and the outcomes of a search. Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998) on the other hand discuss how information search is driven by different needs. The first need they identified is a functional need, which is information search driven by a certain purpose such as identifying different choices and possibilities of products available. The second need is hedonic; in this case, information search is conducted purely out of pleasure. It is seen as a leisure activity not linked to a specific journey. The third need is innovation, that is information search that entails something new and different, as well as a wide scope of interests. The final dimension is aesthetic; which is both a sign, and a stimulus for imagery and fantasy.

There are certain factors that have an impact on the information search process. Bieger and Laesser's (2004) research highlighted factors such as type of trip, degree of packaging, choice of destination, and choice of accommodation. This is relevant knowledge as it shows that the type of trip, in our research mainly independently planned trips to Sweden, influences tourist search behaviour. Furthermore, it is common to divide the information search behaviour into a time before and after a decision have been made. However, we have not addressed that distinction in our research project since we are interested in the information search as a process that takes place both before and during the trip.

According to Bieger and Laesser (2004), sociodemographic variables have limited value in explaining the information search process. Other studies show however that gender might have an impact on the information

search process, since women and men seem to search for information differently (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2015). In a study by Kim *et al.* (2007) on online information search behaviour it was observed that women put higher value on the use of a wider variety of both online and offline information sources when choosing a destination. Moreover, the results of their study confirmed that women tend to use more external sources in an information search than men do. Compared to men, women also have a higher level of functional search needs in the information process (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998).

A study by Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2011) linked the interrelationship between tourists' perceived risk of travel behaviour and their information search. They grouped the different types of sources into destination-specific external information and personal external information sources, such as friends and family, or media. In their study of Finish people, they concluded that the three most used information sources were the Internet, friends, and brochures. These sources were used differently by people depending on for example age and gender. Their results imply that external information sources may be categorised into public sources, tourism sources, friends and relatives, and governmental information.

Sources like family, friends and relatives are constantly ranked top three for tourists' information search. In addition, guidebooks and Internet are seen as important sources (Grønflaten, 2009). Draper (2016) concluded that the most important information sources were previous trips to the destination, friends, destination marketing organisations websites and relatives. In addition, search behaviour and choice of information channel depends on the level of familiarity with the destination.

Pearce *et al.* (2009) explored different sources used before travelling. For independent travellers, they concluded that when it comes to transport to the destination, Internet was the prime source of information. At the destination however, it was almost in equal parts between previous knowledge and Internet, followed by word of mouth. For accommodation, Internet was the primary source followed by previous knowledge and experience. For attractions and activities word of mouth and brochures were the most influential. In conclusion, different sources of information tend to be used for different purposes.

However, tourists' use of different sources change during the trip process, and depending on whether tourists are at home or on the way. Grønflaten (2009) found that friends, family and other travellers were the most important sources before travelling. During the trip, tourist information centres became the number one source of information, followed by friends and family (in case tourists were part of the travel company). However, the most important channels in the planning phase was Internet, followed by printed sources. While traveling, face-to-face channels were considered as the most valuable. DiPietro *et al.* (2007) have conducted one of few studies that focuses on tourists' information search while travelling. They concluded that local residents are highly important as sources of information, as well as car rental companies and other service providers at the destination. They also noted the importance of the travel company (just like Grønflaten, 2009) as a source of information while travelling. The source used for information search also has an impact on actual behaviour at a destination. Kah and Lee (2016) found that tourists who used traditional sources for information search tended to stick to their plans whereas those who used

information technology tended to alter their plans along the way. In their study, they also found that those people who search for lots of information beforehand continued to do so while traveling, and those who search for less information followed the same pattern while travelling. What is important though is that tourists tend to use a range of sources simultaneously before and during travelling.

### 2.3 INTERNET AS A CHANNEL FOR INFORMATION

Internet as a channel provides a range of information for tourists. It can be material from destination marketing organisations, consumer generated content on for example TripAdvisor or rating sites, or social media such as Instagram. Thus, the Internet is just a channel connecting many different sources of information. A common strategy for finding information is to use keywords and search engines as a start of the search. Moreover, memories of prior searches also have an impact on the actual search behaviour. If a certain webpage or search engine have been used before, it is most likely going to be used again (Ho *et al.*, 2012). Tourists' previous knowledge of a destination will also have an impact on their online search behaviour.

For those using a search engine, the abundance of information obtained can be quite overwhelming; it is difficult to find the relevant information. A common strategy is therefore to have several searches running at the same time in order to find relevant information: an information multitasking behaviour is needed. However, there are barriers associated with online searches: out of date information, slow speed in loading information, lack of linking web pages or pages that have been removed. All of this creates frustration. When information is not

obtained quickly enough, users just click and move to other sites trying to find what they are looking for. People are searching for information back and forth all the time and sometimes these searches also bring them to off-line sources (Ho *et al.*, 2012).

In a study on tourists from Scandinavia travelling on a package holiday to Mallorca, Jacobsen and Muñar (2012) conclude that the primary information sources for destination choice were people's own experience, and information from friends and family. This was followed by reports in newspapers and guidebooks. Online sources came out second to personal sources; the airline and tour operators' websites were used first. Although 24 % of the respondents had used social media sources it was ranked very low in terms of importance as a source for information. However, their study showed that those that are highly involved in social media are also relying more on this type of source of information, as well as on Internet sources in general. Furthermore, another source that had low relevance for this group of visitors was material from destination marketing organisations.

Internet based information can also be accessed through smartphones. People have similar search behaviours no matter if they use PC or smartphone (Ho *et al.* 2016). Some respondents indicated that the search on a mobile phone initiated further searches on the PC. Smartphones were mainly used for browsing, while PC was used more targeted in terms of information. Smartphones were also used for a more collaborative form of information search as relevant information is shared with others.

Social media are increasingly important as a source of information. Social media can include Instagram or Facebook, and travel review sites such as TripAdvisor. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) concluded that social media

makes up a substantial part of search results. For example, if someone searches for activities in Ystad, a list from TripAdvisor will show up in the results list, with headings such as '10 most interesting activities in Ystad'. Sometimes this is shown prior to information from the destination marketing organization in the results list. According to Duffy (2017), consumers trust TripAdvisor because they believe the site will help them. They know however that they need to handle the information themselves. The information from TripAdvisor is compared to other sources of information: the information is crosschecked on different platforms.

Another complicating issue with Internet is the abundance of information. The huge number of information sources makes it difficult for consumers to digest (Fang *et al.*, 2016). A popular attraction may receive thousands of reviews, making it difficult for potential visitors to find the information they need. In this way, many tourists are drowning in information.

#### **2.4 TOURISTS' SEARCH STRATEGIES IN ONLINE INFORMATION**

As online information has become more important, it is necessary to increase one's knowledge on how this information search is actually performed. On the one hand, consumers have access to an enormous amount of information from a high number of online sources, and on the other, this is exactly what may cause related problems. It is exactly the enormous access to information that is the problem, an information overload that individuals have to decode. They also have to discriminate between the variety of sources and channels, which present what is often considered as analogous, complex and equivocal information (Lu & Gursoy, 2015).

In searching for information in the plethora of links and homepages, the individual is exposed to a kind of risk, as s/he must decide for which way to go (i.e. which links to follow), and when to break off the search. In order to understand Internet search behaviour, Pirolli's (2007) Information Foraging Theory has been used to understand individuals' optimal decision-making in relation to online information search. The principle of this theory is that individuals would try to maximise the value of information retrieved from the Internet, in relation to the cost of the search, calculated in length of search. In this, the search can be compared to a sequence, in which the individual decides at each stage whether to go on (i.e. stay on the site), to switch (i.e. turn to a new site), or to stop (i.e. to end the information search, Chatterjee & Wang, 2012). Baeza (2015) used Pirolli's theory to understand international tourists' online search behaviour and came to the conclusion that individuals changed to a new website only when the current site had no value left.

Among others, Lu and Gursoy (2015) have developed a conceptual model to understand online tourist information search. What they find is an experience overload. In general, they can point at a number of factors that correlate with the intensity of information search. Factors contributing to information search confusion are learning orientation, price consciousness, cognition need, ambiguity tolerance, and level of Internet experience.

## 2.5 DIGITAL DISCONNECTION

There is a counter trend to digital connection, and that is digital disconnection. There is an emerging field of research that addresses tourists' needs and desires to be digitally dis-

connected while on tour. Dickinson *et al.* (2016) argue that a large proportion of earlier research has only addressed positive aspects of mobile technology and digital connectedness in the tourism context. They studied tourists' desire to be connected or disconnected while being on a domestic camping site. They found different aspects of digital disconnection; one was the unwanted disconnection caused by technological factors such as lack of places to charge mobile phones, weak signals etc. The other area that is more relevant for our study is tourists desire to disconnect themselves. They found that tourists want to escape from their daily lives, disconnect from work, and to be closer to their environment. To be digitally disconnected also enhances the possibilities to be and do things together. They concluded that nearly 50 % of the participants in their study had a desire to be digitally disconnected while being on a camping holiday. This is a vital finding since tourist information is becoming more and more digitalised while tourists themselves not always want to be connected on holiday.

## 2.6 TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES AS A CHANNEL FOR INFORMATION

The omnipresence of smartphones has clearly changed tourists' information habits when it comes to use of information centres (Lyu & Lee, 2015; Araña *et al.*, 2016). Traditionally the role of tourist information centres has been to market a destination by providing information free of charge. Generally speaking, the emergence of ITCs has negatively influenced tourist demand for traditional information. Simultaneously however, visitors are valuing human communication – and this may well be provided at information centres. In a situation where tourist information centres have less visitors than before, destination marketing

organisations have a hard time deciding how to spend their scarce amount of money in the best way: Should they keep on investing in an information centre, or should they spend their money on other ways to assist tourists at their destination? This is a difficult decision in many destinations. Rydberg and Björnell Thor (2017) found that municipalities in the South of Sweden made different decisions in regards to tourist information, most of which is too early to evaluate.

So what do visitors actually do when they enter an information centre? Among other things, tourists use Wi-Fi, visit restrooms and buy souvenirs – besides fetching brochures and asking for information (Lyu & Lee, 2015). In their study on visitors in Australia, de Ascaniis, Gretzel and Mistilis (2012) found that almost 50% of all questions asked concerned the geography of the destination, and this included requests for routes and tangible maps. Geographical consultancy was required because navigation technologies left a lot to be desired. Largely, the questions asked were very specific: visitors had informed themselves in advance and knew which particular questions to ask. The entirety of results led to the conclusion that human interaction was of utmost importance not only for the visitors to make decisions, but in order to make *better* decisions: the staff helped them to make decisions within the possibilities that they had already filtered.

Lyu and Lee (2015) had a similar result when they found that many tourists were significantly dissatisfied and frustrated about the information they had received elsewhere, and therefore decided to visit an information centre to check the quality and reliability of their information. This other information included both online and offline media. To the authors' surprise, visitors were predominantly young (they had expected the elder

to come) and national (many tourism officials focus predominantly on internationals). One interesting result here was that tourists prefer information centres located close to the attractions they are visiting, instead of being located in city centres or close to transportation facilities. Note that this study was made in South Korea, it is worth a consideration and a study whether this is the case in Sweden and Europe, too.

One argument is recurring in the literature about tourist information centres, which is the apparent paradox of wanting more digital devices on the one hand, and holding on to human interaction on the other. If all information is graspable anytime and anywhere, why would people still engage in the effort to visit an information centre, an activity that has no economic costs, but still a time-related price? The confidence in a human being with local knowledge was mentioned above. Lyu and Hwang (2015) add an encouragement of social network devices to visit tourist information centres more often. They explain this behaviour by tourists' tendency to upload their own experiences in social media, which in turn forces them to review whether the information they have is correct.

## 2.7 USE OF GUIDEBOOKS

Reading a guidebook becomes popular as soon as a destination has been chosen. This implies that this information is of minor importance when it comes to destination choice, but that they have other principles that are highly valued. Guidebooks contribute to giving their readers an overview, to structure space, and to give meaning to the places that are presented. This is of special importance, as a tourist's first interaction with an attraction is often not the site itself, but a repre-

sensation thereof. In this, guidebooks have the power to define what an attraction is, and what it is not (MacCannell, 1999; Lew, 2002; Zillinger, 2007). This is still true in our digitalised world, as guidebooks are still sold and read to a high degree, and thus exert influence on their readership. Their use dates back to ancient times, but it was first when the bourgeoisie started to travel in broader terms that the books began to remind of those we read today. In their times of appearance, they have gradually supplanted human guides who used to follow travellers on their journeys (Parsons, 2007; Zillinger, 2007; Peel & Sørensen, 2016).

Guidebooks are giving tourists a helping hand in travel planning, and they are also adding to the formation of tourist identity. In this, they contribute to mediating tourism practices (Mieli, 2017). Their use has been more or less established in different countries, with Germany being one of the most important countries in a historical view. In those guidebooks that are sold on the German market, Swedish tourism destinations are presented to a varying degree, with Stockholm leading the list, followed by Northern Lapland and regions in the South of the country. In their presentations, the content is mostly about culture, nature, and practical tourist information. Their influence on German tourists' choice of tourist sites in Sweden grows, as does the distance to people's homes. This means that the influence is largest in Northern Sweden (Zillinger, 2006).

The role of guidebooks has changed, as the Internet, and especially smartphones, have found their way into society. Against many people's conviction that guidebooks would simply be replaced by ubiquitous and easily accessible information like the Internet, travel guides are still sold (Peel & Sørensen, 2016).

The technological development however has led to guidebooks being valued in a different way by their readers. While they used to be preferred mainly for their practical information, hedonic values have now taken over. Guidebooks are appreciated for their stability in relation to digital information sources. For example, they do not get broken, they do not run out of battery, and they are not such a desired stolen goods as compared to a smartphone. More than that however, they are appreciated for their ability to give an overview on the chosen destination: solitary pieces of information have been collected and assembled to an entirety by a dedicated writer. This usually makes the book reader-friendly. Likewise, reading the writings of an accepted author also contributes to the high level of trustworthiness. Guidebooks are also used for the way they can evoke dreams and a desire to travel to different spots on the earth, and for many people, the pure reading is connected to a lot of fun, which can also be shared with others while reading, or by talking about what has been read. Once home again after the journey, guidebooks convert from delivering information to becoming a status symbol in the traveller's bookshelf, demonstrating all the places where s/he has been. In her study on the value of guidebooks in the digital age, Mieli (2017) thus reveals the differentiation in which guidebooks can be used, and in how many different ways they can be valued – far above their mere value as providers of information.

## 2.8 USE OF MAPS

A source of information that is essential for many tourists are maps. These could be national, regional or local maps. They can be printed or found online through for example Google maps on the PC or Smartphone.

Interestingly enough, there is only scarce knowledge on tourist maps although they are such a vital parts of the tourists planning process (Farias, 2011). Tourist maps have dual purposes: they guide the tourists and at the same time, they market a destination. A map offers both geographical and as tourist information of a place. This information is especially important for first time visitors and those that are unfamiliar with the destination (Yan & Lee, 2015). Chung *et al.* (2011) argue that those attributes that are listed on a map were more likely to be visited, since they are an integral part in tourists planning process. Furthermore, tourist maps are particularly vital in urban contexts, for planning day activities, finding as well as identifying major tourist attractions (Farias, 2011).

Tourist maps provide knowledge and information about different places for the tourists to visit. These maps are produced and distributed by a range of tourism actors such as destination marketing organisations, restaurants, local shops, hotels and tourist agencies (Farias, 2011). However, maps are not just displaying where to find certain attractions. They also have functions such as a memento after the holiday, a souvenir to take home (Boulaire & Hervet, 2010; Farias, 2011). Furthermore, maps are not just passively taken on by tourists. It is something that is performed by its users and Rosetto (2012) argues that a map is something fleeting, fluid and relational to its character. A map can be used by tourists to find attractions, viewpoints and scenic routes at the same time as it provides opportunities to map activities by showing what people actually have visited (Boulaire & Hervet, 2010). Digital maps also provide other opportunities such as saving the individual maps and travel itineraries. They can be easily shared with others afterwards, and they trigger anticipation before the journey.

## 2.9 POPULAR CULTURE AS INSPIRATION

Another important source of information is popular culture: books, films, music, magazines and TV productions. The use of these kind of information sources is, however, less systematic. Popular culture functions more as a source of inspiration.

Literature has a long tradition of influencing tourists' images of a destination as well as the activities they engage in during their visit. This tradition began during the period of the Grand Tours and has continued ever since (Watson, 2009). Modern day visitors' reasons for visiting certain literary sites are that they are attracted to places that are connected with a writer's life, attracted to the setting of a novel, interested in visiting literary sites because they bring out deeper feelings (for example it triggers childhood memories), interested in special events or dramatic episodes in the authors' lives (Herbert, 2001; Sjöholm, 2011). Literary tourism has been associated with literary pilgrims, that is, tourists who wish to visit places connected with a writer's life. However, the number of tourists who visit literary places out of curiosity or general interest outnumbers the literary pilgrims (Herbert, 2001). Moreover, Laing and Frost (2012) argue that literature inspires tourists in many different ways before people even leave their homes. People acquire different cultural aspects by reading about how to travel, what to expect, other people and cultures, and the difficulties involved in travelling.

Many books and crime stories have also been turned into films and TV productions. The concept of film tourism therefore relates to tourism induced directly or indirectly by a tourist destination or attraction being viewed on screen, including film, TV, commercials, video games and the Internet (Beeton, 2016). Film and TV have an impact on tourists' image

and interest in visiting destinations. Film tourists are attracted by any of the following factors in the film: the scenery – that is, the settings of the film; the storyline; the characters in the film; and finally exciting events within the film (Riley *et al.*, 1998). Films are seen as a highly powerful form of media to influence and create awareness of a destination for potential tourists. The reason is that these products create new or exciting twists on destinations while adding another layer to the understanding of a destination with new themes not previously associated with it (Eskilsson & Månsson, 2015; 2018; Iwashita,

2008; Månsson, 2015).

Therefore, literature and films have a great impact when it comes to destinations and attractions to visit. The potential of films, movies, fictional texts, and authors in attracting tourists and visitors to visit a destination seen on screen or read of in fictional texts is visible in a huge range of destinations all over the world, The Lord of The Rings tourism to New Zealand, Downtown Abbey visitors to Highclere Castle in England or Inspector Wallander visitors to Ystad in Sweden – to mention just a few (Månsson & Eskilsson, 2013).

### 3. Methods

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The purpose of this study is to examine how German tourists search for tourist information about Sweden before and during their journey. We both seek for the effects of different information sources, and for the reasoning behind tourists' choices. While the former requires a quantitative approach examining the effects of different information sources, the latter requests a qualitative approach, as we are searching for the meaning behind information-related actions. It therefore comes naturally to apply a mixed method approach. This was done sequentially, as we started out by qualitative spontaneous interviews. The insights that we received here were used to formulate questions for a questionnaire. This is a well-known and often used combination of methods, which potentially leads to more specific questions in the questionnaire. The third step, which was an online booking experiment, was independent from the others.

As with any other methodology, mixed

method comes with a number of (dis-) advantages. The approach benefits from a richer and fuller understanding of the research question: we could both see the effect of one factor on another and understand why German tourists act the way they do. However, using three methods is a very time-consuming way of collection. We started with the first explorative interviews in June 2016 and completed the online booking experiments in March 2018. Further, while some researchers would see a disadvantage in combining different paradigms, calling for the incompatibility of this approach (Hewson, 2006), we support the notion of pragmatic scholars who advocate mixed methods. The argument is that quantitative and qualitative paradigms may be different, yet not incompatible.

Another comment that we want to make in the beginning of this chapter is that we collected the most of the empirical data by ourselves. We were on the spot in Vimmerby

and Ystad and did the interviews, we made the online experiments with individuals, and we made sure that the technique worked well when we published the questionnaire, and later analysed it. Only a few interviews were done by project assistants.

### 3.1 SPONTANEOUS INTERVIEWS

During the summers of 2016 and 2017, 136 spontaneous and structured interviews were made with German tourists in Vimmerby and Ystad (see Table 1). The main aim of the interviews was to find out which factors caused the tourists to visit the chosen attraction on the day of the interview. We asked what they knew about the place, if and how they informed themselves about it, and whether they spread information about their holiday on social media. Most interviews were between seven and ten minutes, with a handful interviews even shorter, and some of them far longer than the average. In general, it felt like the tourists enjoyed talking about their own holidays, and many of them welcomed to make their own analysis of their activities.

**Table 1:** Number of interviews

	Ystad	Vimmerby	Sum
2016	49	26	75
2017	33	28	61
Sum	82	54	136

There were two main interviewers, both from the project group. One of us made interviews in German, the other one in English. During 2016, two high school pupils were integrated in this data collection in Ystad, and they were able to ask a few questions. They also made some interviews themselves, but only few of them are included in our material due to quality restraints. During 2017 we had a German speaking project assistant in Ystad who did

parts of the interviews. Not surprisingly, the German interviews were mostly longer and richer than the English ones. Most Germans understand English well, but when it comes to this kind of spontaneous communication, they sometimes happened to give an answer to a question we had never asked, or the answer got quite short. In general, however, it all went well.

The interviews were accomplished in central places where there were many tourists around. In Ystad, we talked to Germans in the shopping street as well as in front of the tourist information centre and on the central campsite. In Vimmerby, we stood in front of the tourist information centre and on the parking lot that belongs to the Astrid Lindgren museum Näs. Only a handful of people refused talking to us; those were in two cases elderly people in front of their caravans, and in one case a younger couple, eager to, as they told us, make the most of their holiday time (which obviously did not include talking to us). Getting access to suitable interviewees became a challenge we had not thought of before. If you want to talk to German tourists in the streets, you first have to identify them! This is not the easiest task, as far from all people talk to each other. We missed many opportunities when we heard German voices too late, or when we were unsure and did not dare to ask. The best spot for us was the parking lot, where we immediately could identify German tourists by means of their licence tags. This is also where we interviewed most people.

It soon became evident that interviewing people is a situation of give and take. We expected the respondents to answer our questions. The respondents expected us to give personal advice on attractions, how to deal with the national telephone subscriptions, or information on how to pay with cre-

dit cards. We were asked to tell more about our research project, and the ability to speak German in mother tongue raised curiosity. We noticed that we became part of the local attraction, and that the interview was a possibility for our interviewees to get to know a real Swede, which sometimes induced them to take a selfie with us. Needless to say, those interviews became rich and deep in which we told a lot about ourselves, and the interviews were a dialogue where curiosity was on both sides. Usually, we talked to more than one person during the interview, as many of the Germans appeared in groups, most often in families or couples. In half of the interviews, both men and women answered our questions. For the remaining interviews, women alone answered the questions alone in most cases. Only in 16 cases, men alone answered our questions. This gender situation may be caused by the fact that all interviewers were women. However, it also goes in line with earlier research observations where women are dominant when it comes to taking part in investigations.

The interviews were transcribed shortly after the interviews had taken place, and enabled us to improve later conversations. In fact, interviews from 2017 are generally richer and deeper than those from 2016. We are learning individuals, and transcribing the conversations assisted us in finding out where we could ask more follow-up questions, or where we could have waited for some more seconds before we ask our next question. We did not notice it during the interviews, but the process of transcription showed us that we were sometimes too quick to continue, anxious not to cause any silence. Apart from learning for the next interviews, the transcriptions were a first step in the analysis. By listening to what was being said repeatedly, as you have to do when you are writing down

what you hear, we soon got to know our material very well. Based on this, we started the process of analysis.

The real analysis phase began in autumn 2017 when two persons met continuously to discuss the content of the interviews. This was done in three steps. We listened to and read through all interviews individually and made notes and comments as well as underlined valuable citations. When we met the first time, we started drawing a mind map on the whiteboard. The mind map consisted of bubbles, containing themes we had found in the interviews. Such themes were close to the data and consisted of topics such as 'Knowledge on Vimmerby/Ystad/Sweden', 'Importance of tourist centre', or 'Usage of Internet'. Several meetings were required to detect all vital themes in the interview data. The analysis is based on fifteen categories.

### 3.2 QUESTIONNAIRE

The second method we used to collect data was a questionnaire. The aim with this method was to find out how Germans interested in Sweden are generally looking for tourist information. The questionnaire was divided into five sections: 1) facts about the respondent's last journey to Sweden, 2) tourist information search *before* their journey, 3) tourist information search *during* their journey, 4) use of media in their leisure time, 5) attractive tourism supply in Sweden.

The posting of the questionnaire was done in cooperation with Visit Sweden's office in Hamburg. Once every month, they send a newsletter to Germans who are interested in Sweden and who have voluntarily enrolled in this. Visit Sweden also runs a Facebook group where they post Sweden-related news and photographs for those who have joined the group. Both spots had an invitation to join

the questionnaire in February 2017. Those interested could follow the link and answer the questions that had been published with Google Form. There was also a mini-presentation of the project available, and the possibility to contact the project group in case more information was asked for.

One of the project members had cooperated with Visit Sweden some years ago with a similar appeal to take part in a study. The support by Visit Sweden has helped a lot in both cases. It is a possibility to reach out to about 70.000 Germans who have registered themselves here. Not much is known though about these individuals, apart from the fact that they are interested in Sweden as a tourist destination; they enrol themselves to the newsletter without having to answer any questions about themselves. We do know however that they are interested in Sweden and that many of them travel to Sweden regularly. German travellers to Sweden are generally a group with both education and income level above average.

The request to take part in the questionnaire was sent in February 2017. As with most information on the Internet, the interest is great in the beginning, and decreases fast. After ten days, we closed the link and received 292 completed questionnaires by then. This is less than expected and arouses the question if we could have distributed the questionnaires in another way. Looking at the newsletter, the information about our study is one of many news, and one cannot be sure about how carefully people read the newsletter that are sent to them by email, and which they have to open by clicking actively on a link. We therefore cannot know how many people have seen our questionnaire but decided not to take part. 292 questionnaires is a relatively low number, it is however enough to show strong indications on how this group

of Germans thinks when it comes to tourist information. We treat this data as part of all data collected within our project, so we do depart from a stable base here.

The data was transferred from Google Forms to SPSS and analysed there. For the investigation, we used the common steps to make univariate and bivariate analyses and as usual, there was a need to take care of some missing data, to manipulate the data where needed (e.g. transforming variables or collapsing them into groups, etc.). Some of the tests we made were Chi square, correlation and regression, T-Test and Anova.

### 3.3 ONLINE BOOKING EXPERIMENT

During our interviews, the tourists often told us that they looked for travel information on the Internet. It also happened that they told that they had done some bookings on the net. In these cases, we asked them more exactly how they had searched for information. What are the different steps, where do they go first, what is important? In short: How do they do? It seemed important to ask, as not much is known about the precise steps of travel information search on the Internet. It turned out that our interviewees were not at all sure which steps they had taken. In general, they told us that well, they had been googling and then somehow, something interesting turned up – or not. However, we had no chance of opening this black box - the tourists themselves could not tell us.

In order to learn more about the concrete search behaviour, we had to observe them while on the Internet. For this, we arranged a trip planning exercise in which the tourists sat at home in front of their computers, and we were in contact with them via the video call platform Skype. Here, we could follow as they were booking a journey to Sweden, and get-

ting informed by help of various homepages. We were also able to record their activities by means of the programme Evaer, which enabled us to watch the videos again later. Every recording consisted of some questions on sociodemographic background factors.

Our twelve participants were usually alone in front of the computer, and the concrete task was to book a journey either to Ystad or to Vimmerby. The session started with a short presentation of us and the project, continued by a short assignment to find out about

tomorrow's weather. This part was meant to check in general how the process was going, to encourage the participants to comment on everything they did, and to make sure that the participant felt comfortable. After this, s/he was asked to 1) search for general information about the destination, 2) search for an accommodation, 3) decide for a travel route and 'book' parts of it if necessary, and 4) plan activities on the spot. These experiments usually took about one hour.

## 4. Findings

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In this chapter, the findings of the empirical work are reported. Findings have also been published in a Swedish report with a focus on empirical results and suggestions for tourism actors (Zillinger *et al.* 2018). First, we present a general picture of German tourists travelling to Sweden. This part is based on literature, statistics and data from the respondents to our questionnaire. Thereafter, our interviewees in Ystad and Vimmerby are presented. In the main part of the section, the results of the studies of the tourists' information search behaviour is presented and discussed. This part of the text starts with general data on information search, followed by accounts of specific information search behaviour prior to travel, en route and at the destination. In the following text, the word interviewee refers to the German tourists interviewed in person in Ystad and Vimmerby, whereas the word respondent is used for people conducting the online survey.

### 4.1 GERMAN TOURISTS IN SWEDEN

Germany is one of the world's largest travel markets, but Sweden's market share therein is very small. 0.5 percent of German overnight stays were made in Sweden 2015 (Visit Sweden, 2015). Germans' main travel routes, lasting 5 days or longer go to Spain, Italy, and Turkey. Among the Nordic countries, Denmark is the most important destination, with 1.7 percent of their international trips (Reiseanalyse, 2017). But German visitors are Sweden's second most important market for incoming tourism (19 % of overnight stays) only outnumbered by the Norwegians. The German market has grown steadily, but not dramatically (average 2 %) over the last ten years.

The fact that Sweden is clearly a niche market for German tourism makes it difficult to rely on aggregate data. This is the reason for not adding very much general information about German tourism in this report, and for not making generalized conclusions about German tourists based on our results.

However, the respondents to our survey were older (average 46 years for female and 43 years for male respondents) and better educated than the average German residents (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018).

An analysis of the spatial distribution of German visitors' overnight stays in Sweden shows that the South of Sweden (Götaland) is the main target destination with 62 percent of overnight stays in 2015 (SCB in Visit Sweden's Marknadsprofil). Stockholm receives 18 percent of the Germans. The rest is spread throughout Mid-Sweden and the North. The relative importance of the German market is very high in the provinces of Småland and Blekinge. Together these provinces cater for 28 percent of all German tourists to Sweden. This should be viewed in relation to the small populations of South-Eastern Sweden. Interestingly, both the North (Norrland) with less than 10 percent of visitors, and Gotland with 1 percent, are rather weakly positioned on the German market. The low number of visitors to Norrland is a bit surprising since many interviewees speak about attractions in the North such as the mountains, the midnight sun, and the *Aurora Borealis*.

This spatial pattern shows the importance of both the distances to Germany, and of the routes to Sweden. In 2014, 35 percent of the German visitors arrived by ferry, i.e. via Kiel or Fredrikshavn to Göteborg, from Travemünde, Rostock or Sassnitz to Trelleborg, or from Swinoujscie to Ystad. An equal percentage arrived by air, mainly to Stockholm. The remaining 30 percent are likely to have arrived via the Öresund Bridge or by the ferry from Helsingör to Helsingborg. The regional distribution of visitors is also reflected in the choice of accommodation: 30 percent of the German registered visitors stayed in hotels, about 30 percent in rented cottages or flats, 30 percent in camping, and the remained 10

percent stayed either in hostels or in huts (stugbyar). Apart from those, there is a large number whose accommodation is unknown. Many are staying in second homes or at friends and relatives.

The majority of the hotel stays are likely to have taken place in Stockholm. In this context, it should not be forgotten that business travellers are an important guest category in major urban areas. The growth in hotel stays is faster than the other categories, reflecting an international trend of increasing relative importance of urban tourism, which is short breaks fuelled by low-cost aviation. Taken together, these data show that the German tourist market in Sweden is predominantly (roughly 2/3) rural, and that most German tourists stay in the South of Sweden. General tourism data (Tillväxtverket, 2016) suggests that German visitors are more rurally oriented than other nationalities, with the possible exception of the Dutch.

The population conducting our questionnaire is not totally representative of German visitors to Sweden. It is a targeted sample. The respondents do however represent a particularly interesting group of visitors to Sweden: They are to a large extent repeat visitors, the median number of visits to Sweden the last five years was four. They are generally staying for a relatively long period; the median stay was 15 days. The respondents were evenly distributed between men (53 %) and women (47 %). The population had a relatively high age profile, the median age was 56, only 25 percent were younger than 43. The largest age group was the ones between 55 and 65. More than 80 percent travelled together with partner or family members. 31 percent of respondents brought children along, in most cases one or two. Ten percent travelled with friends, less than ten percent travelled alone. Putting it simply, most of the

respondents are middle-aged people travelling together with a partner or with a small family. The respondents are generally well educated, 55 percent have a higher education, and it is well above the German average. A substantial proportion of the respondents would fall into a segmentation category called *whops*, wealthy healthy older people. The interviewees in Ystad and Vimmerby were on the other hand mostly younger; couples in their thirties with children was the largest group in that sample.

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to fill in their postal code (Postleitzahl). Thereby we can analyse their place of residence. The highest concentration of participants come from Northern Germany, with particular concentrations in Greater Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein and Berlin. Another large group comes from the densely populated parts in Western Germany: Niedersachsen, Nordrhein-Westfalen and Hessen. Smaller percentages come from the South. The pattern among the interviewees is similar, although with slightly less participant coming from the Eastern parts of Germany, and a somewhat higher percentage from Nordrhein-Westfalen. Clearly, the distance is an important factor for the choice of Sweden as holiday destination. This pattern does resemble the residencies of German second homeowners in Sweden in the 1990's (Müller, 1999). The major difference to that pattern is that there are relatively more people from the Eastern *Bundesländer* in our survey than in that material, evidently an effect of the re-unification.

What we see is a car dependent group of travellers, 62 percent used their own car and 18 percent used a caravan or a motor home. 38 percent made a round trip, whereas 55 percent travelled to one specific destination. This is in line with the accommodation pat-

tern described above.

In general, packaged tours constitute the most common way of organising a holiday trip. There are about 2000 tour operators in Germany in all sizes and segments, 100 of whom are doing business in Sweden. In Germany, most vacations are booked through a travel agent. 92 percent of all packaged tours are booked through a tour operator, preferably through personal service either face to face or by telephone (Cornelia Lohf, 2017). The general tendency to book online is increasing for the Germans (2006: 14 % of all bookings, 2016: 38 %. Note that this involve all kinds of bookings, not only packaged tours). However, personal conversations, especially in regards to travel agencies, remains the most important booking channel (Reiseanalyse, 2017).

Round trips by car, either self-drive or fly and drive, are the most common tour product for the German market in Sweden. This particular way of travelling is highly suitable for the kind of tourism most German tourists to Sweden are interested in, covering sparsely populated areas and rural destinations. Among the interviewees, the way of organising the trips differed a lot. Some did all the planning themselves; often in a spontaneous way, others followed a stricter planning. A substantial number had used travel agents to plan their trip. This mode of planning dominated among those staying in hotels. However, the respondents to the survey differ from the general picture as they mainly travel independently. This might reflect frequent visiting and a generally better knowledge of the country.

Most of the respondents mainly stay in the countryside or in small towns; the preferred accommodation is camping or a rented cottage. The rural settings, nature and peaceful surroundings, preferably close to a lake, are

the most mentioned assets. This is reflected in their leisure activities. When asked about what they liked to do for leisure, nature based activities dominate, see the six first mentioned categories in Table 2. Likely, the respondents associate these activities with their visits to Sweden. This resembles a large group of interviewees, mainly those interviewed at Vimmerby, whose main objectives for visiting Sweden are associated with rural activities. Activities like culture, motors, politics, home and garden seem to reflect leisure behaviour at home in Germany. In addition, many combine an interest in cultural activities with an interest in outdoor activities.

**Table 2.** Respondents' leisure interest, both on journey and at home. Number of mentions and later categorized (questionnaire).

Categories	Numbers
Culture (i.e. reading, music, theatre, etc.)	145
Hiking, experiences in nature	117
Travelling, Sweden	106
Home, garden, friends, family and socialising	93
Other sports, active and spectator	84
General hobbies (e.g. photography, knitting, dogs)	70
Bicycling	31
Motors, technology	26
Sea and water sports	25
Camping	21
Hunting, angling	20
Skiing and winter sports	13
Relaxing, doing nothing	12
Politics, society	9

#### 4.2 GERMAN TOURISTS IN YSTAD AND VIMMERBY

The people we interviewed in Ystad had, compared to Vimmerby, a more diverse set of holiday plans. A large number stayed in the vicinity, in camping or rented houses, making

excursions in towns and in the countryside of Southern Sweden. Another group made a stop in Ystad due to its location, and their knowledge of police inspector Kurt Wallander, on their way on a roundtrip, mainly along the East coast.

According to interviews, literature and films are an important reason for visiting Ystad. The books about Wallander, written by Henning Mankell and later turned into films, are known by a large percentage of the German visitors to Ystad. Nearly all the people we interviewed in Ystad talked about Wallander, even those who had not read the books or watched the movies. Interestingly, some interviewees mentioned Wallander, but demonstratively stating they were not in Ystad because of this, distancing themselves from this phenomenon. It has become one of the main attractions of the town, although in combination with the historic cobbled streets and half-timbered houses close to the sea. Ystad's Hanseatic connection is mentioned as interesting by some interviewees. Ales stenar was well known to many, as well as the coastline towards Blekinge. Among those interviewed in 2016 when the weather was generally good, the beaches to the East of Ystad were also an important reason for staying in town. Ystad is also favourably situated not far from the port at Trelleborg or the Öresund Bridge, making it a convenient stop over. We can conclude that the town has a good combination of activities and attractions, and a location which is close to both nature based and cultural attractions in the Southeast of Skåne. Some interviewees also mention the natural beauty of the surroundings, particularly in relation to cycling and hiking.

A large proportion of the people interviewed in Vimmerby were staying in the region, combining nature-based tourism with visits

to regional sites. Besides the attractions connected to Astrid Lindgren, moose parks are interesting to many as well as visits to small towns like Västervik and Eksjö. Another part of the interviewees visited Northern Småland as part of a round trip in Sweden or in the Nordic countries. The vast majority of them stayed only in the South of Sweden; only very few went further north than Stockholm. A typical round trip would include the East coast of Skåne and Småland, including Öland, Northern Småland (with a possible detour to Stockholm), passing the lakes Vättern and Vänern and then going down the West coast

towards Denmark and Germany.

Compared to Ystad, Vimmerby is much more a destination in its own right. Here the sites related to Astrid Lindgren are the main attractions, including Astrid Lindgren's world and the places where some of the movies were set. The interviewees seem to have little knowledge of other things in the vicinity. Vimmerby also has the advantage of being located in an area of natural beauty. The combination of literature and nature is important, in particular for families with children.



Figure 1: Astrid Lindgren's Näs in Vimmerby. Photo: Vimmerby Turistbyrå

There is an interesting inter-generational aspect to the Vimmerby visits, and to the attractions related to Astrid Lindgren. Her work has been an important part of children's literature in Germany for generations. The books and TV series have obviously made considerable impression on the older generations, shaping their image of Sweden and the Swedish way of life. Pippi and Emil are examples of such

films, including German actors playing the roles of Krösamaja and Prussiluskan. There are more current German film productions in Sweden as well, including Inga Lindström stories situated in and around Nyköping, and a TV series set on Gotland based on Mari Jungstedts crime stories 'Der Kommissar und das Meer'. Both display a rural image of Sweden. To many, Astrid Lindgren's books have

been very important: *'Astrid Lindgren is my childhood memory, it was very much connected to Astrid Lindgren'*, as one interviewee says. Another interviewee makes the following connection: *'There were so few books available for children back then, and getting a book was a big thing'*. Now, they bring their children (and grandchildren) to Småland as a way of passing on their own memories connected to what they read as children. They try to bring their children early, so they have not yet lost interest in the children's books. One interviewee admitted that she was more interested than her children were. The huge interest in Astrid Lindgren is of course a major asset for the destination's long term marketing efforts. Some respondents view Astrid Lindgren's Vimmerby as a place *'you must see'* when you are in Sweden. There are very few places with similar status, possibly only Stockholm. However, as the popularity of Astrid Lindgren's work will inevitably decline at some point in time, the reliance on this particular product may also pose a long-term challenge to the destination region.

Interestingly, the interviews show that the Vimmerby region acts as a symbolic representation of Sweden. The German visitors consider Sweden to be their destination; the whole of Sweden is seen as one destination. The particular sights and attractions are places where they visit Sweden. When speaking about their reasons for travelling here, they speak in terms of *'Swedish values'*. Many of these values are related to nature and the environment. They have the possibility to rent a cottage or put up their camping equipment in a peaceful setting, maybe far from other people so they can dwell there in a very slow and relaxed way. The Swedish destinations become places, which make a contrast to the hectic everyday life at home. They sometimes take the opportunity to *'turn off'*

from media, including TV and the Internet. This way they try to disconnect from daily routines. Although this might be difficult because they feel an expectation to stay in touch with politics and life at home, many have an ambition to focus on relations with fellow travellers when they are on vacation. Some German visitors seem to view Sweden as more natural than their own country, both in terms of the landscape and the people. More than a few interviewees also mention that they find Sweden particularly hospitable to children, *'it's so children friendly'*.

If Astrid Lindgren is the main symbol of Swedish culture and Swedish way of life, the moose is the emblematic symbol of Swedish nature. Moose are important to many interviewees, some even mention them as a major reason for visiting Sweden, and some chose to go further north in order to have a better chance of spotting one. Some interviewees are optimistic of seeing wild moose in the forests. Others with a more realistic view on this possibility look for parks where moose are held in captivity for visitors to meet and photograph. Our interviewees frequently mentioned visits to the Moose Park; it is actually one of the most mentioned attractions. Moose dolls are popular souvenirs.

The Swedish weather will probably never become our country's main attraction. However, the German visitors do not view it as a problem. Some visitors made a point of adjusting to the weather; they either changed routes in order to avoid bad weather or they changed activities. This is not to say that the weather is not important. There were more people staying spontaneously in Ystad in 2016 when the weather was good than in 2017 when it was more rainy. Temperature and sunshine are likely more important in coastal locations than elsewhere. For some visitors, the weather has an almost spiritual

connection to the Swedish nature; by coping with the weather when camping you also become part of nature. You can see yourself

as a winner when mastering bad weather in the woods.



Figure 2: Weather-dependent activity. Photo: Vimmerby Turistbyrå

#### 4.3 INFORMATION SEARCH AND ROUTE PLANNING – AN OVERVIEW

Earlier research shows that tourists share a tendency to plan their journey in advance, but that they often change their plans along the way. Activities are often changed due to weather and other factors. Accommodation is, on the other hand, rarely changed if it is booked in advance. People using caravans or motor homes are of course more flexible. There is generally a balance between holiday planning and daily spontaneity. The interviewees generally have a good understanding of how their vacation was planned. However, when asked, the respondents very often cannot recall how daily decisions were made. If people are taking longer excursions or are planning to go far, they plan it the day before, but often the plans for the day are decided

at breakfast depending on the mood of the family members. Weather and forecasts are also important; activities are chosen to take advantage of good weather. *'We have a list with all things we could possibly do, and then depending on the weather we decide what day we will do it.'*

Apart from dependence on the weather, another factor that impacts travel planning is the company of travellers, especially when travelling with children. Planning is something that is most often discussed among family members in order to take care of everyone's needs. Either the parents plan for the children, knowing what is best for them, or the children are involved in the decision making themselves. The age of the children is of course important for their participation. Underneath, there is an idea that the things you

do on holiday very much have the children's experiences as its purpose.

In the questionnaire, the respondents were first asked about how they searched for information prior to travel, and then about their information search during their stay. Table 3 shows sources of information that were ranked according to their importance. In the table, the first information source mentioned by a respondent was getting a higher ranking score (3) than the second (2) and third (1). The quantitative results coming out of the questionnaire were qualified by the face-to-face interviews.

**Table 3.** Prioritized sources of information, German tourists to Sweden. Results based on questionnaire (scores adjusted to ranked priority).

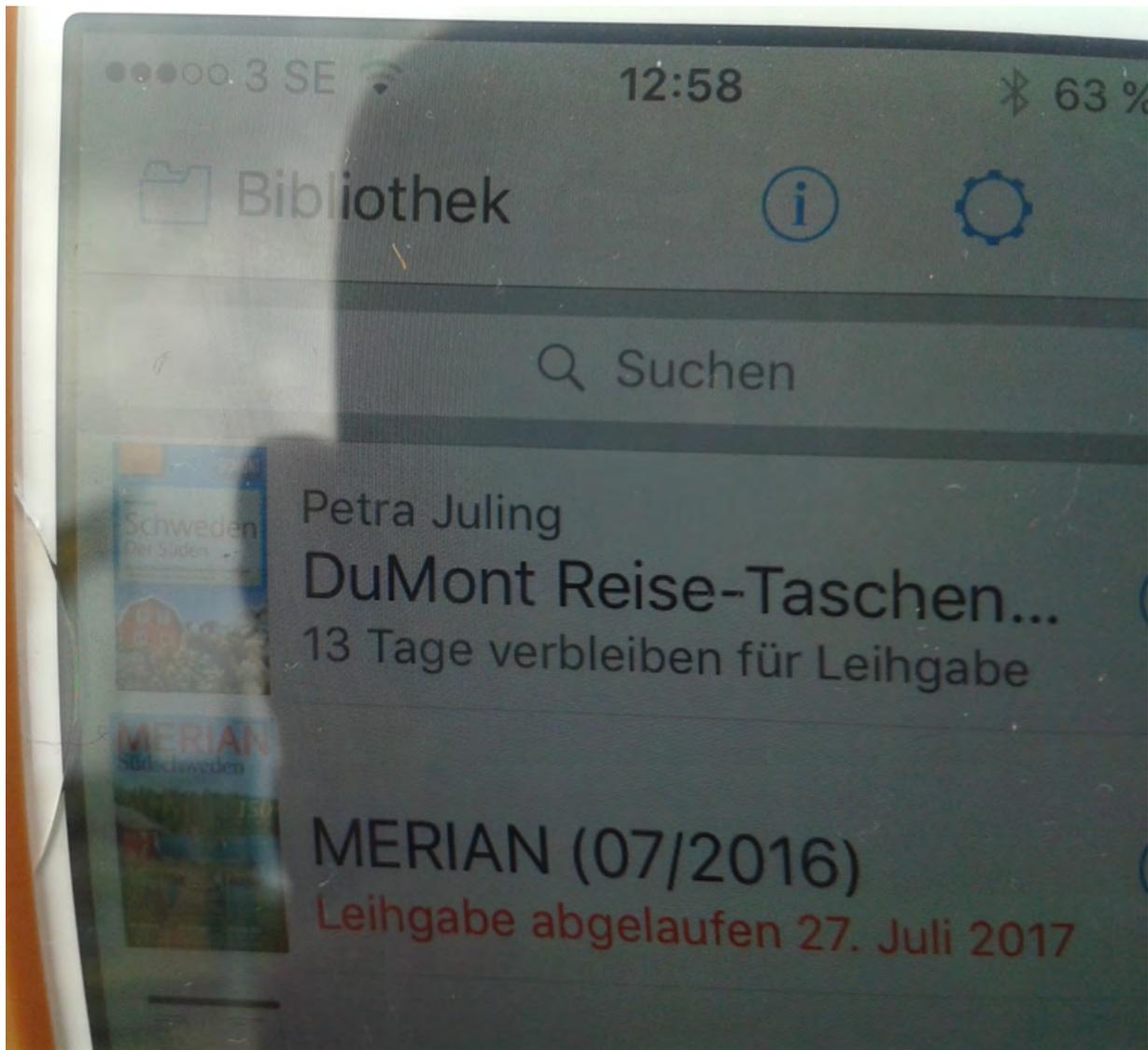
Sources of information	Prior to travel	During travel	Sum
Homepages	392	235	627
Guidebooks	228	256	484
Own experience	177	161	338
Maps	136	200	336
Brochures	144	153	297
Word of mouth	118	116	234
Tourist information centre	79	135	212
Magazines and newspapers	29	21	50
Travel agent	24	14	38
Social media	25	12	37
Rating pages	15	3	28
Popular culture	14	7	21
Other	34	22	56

The most important result is that the respondents use a variety of sources. These in turn are combined in many different ways. Some channels are digital, others are analogue; this is however of minor importance. Large parts of the tourist information are accessible both in analogue and in digital form, which points to the fact that the assumed division between analogue and digital information

is constructed. As will be shown below, the choice of information sources is affected by a combination of factors such as accessibility, user-friendliness, content quality, and trustworthiness. The German tourists nearly always use several sources of information in parallel. They are not willing to rely on digital material alone since the system is fragile. The batteries can run out of power, the connection may be weak, or the information may not be accessible or appealing. Several tourists chose to escape the digital world altogether during their vacation.

Table 3 shows that homepages are the most important sources of information today. These are, however, followed by traditional sources like guidebooks, maps, brochures and information received at tourist information centres. Own experience and word of mouth is also mentioned but more difficult to qualify, these categories are very broad and difficult to interpret quantitatively. Homepages are carrying so much different information that they have become the most common source of information, respondents do on the other hand point at many different homepages. Hence, it could be questioned if homepages are one source of information, no one would claim that paper is one.

Besides homepages, traditional media like guidebooks, maps, brochures, word of mouth (talk to other people like family, friends and acquaintances) and tourist information centres are used frequently. Sources like travel agents, popular culture, travel magazines, social media and rating sites rank significantly lower. The low number of respondents using travel agents is surprising considering what we know from other sources. This is likely explained by the fact that most of our respondents are repeat visitors, who do not need professional help with holiday planning.



**Figure 3:** Digital guidebook in a mobile phone. Photo: Maria Månsson

There was however a substantial number of interviewees who had travel agents to organize their trips. The interviewees using travel agents were mainly couples without children visiting Sweden for the first time. They mainly travelled by car, either their own or rented. The arguments for using a travel agent is that it is fast and easy, and not particularly expensive. It is mainly first time visitors who use this kind of service. They explain that they work a lot and that they do not have much time for preparing their holiday. They are willing to pay for the service in order to get the most out of their trip to Sweden. The role of travel

agents for private persons are likely to grow. Like for other services, many people nowadays are prepared to pay for someone else's time and expertise. The tourists present their general ideas to the travel agents who do the detailed planning, including bookings. The degree of planning differed, accommodation was always included but the route could be more or less specified. Tour operators often provide their guests with a tailor-made guidebook in the form of a pamphlet with travel- and tourist information, maps and practical instructions. Some of the tourists enjoyed having 'one set point on the agenda

each day'. Parts of this material is even for free, provided for instance by ADAC (the German motorists' organisation) through the organisation's webpage and app.

The low numbers for the use of social media are surprising considering the importance attributed to them in recent public discourse. Our data show that it cannot be considered 'general tourism knowledge' that all tourists use social media. The role of the own experience is in this context open to discussion. It might depend on high levels of previous knowledge gathered through frequent travel to Sweden, or on a high general experience of travelling. There is also a relation between general travel experience and the choice of information sources.

Looking at Internet based material is the most favoured way of searching travel information prior to a trip. During travel, the variety of media is larger; traditional sources like guidebooks, maps and visits to tourist information centres become relatively more important when the tourists have arrived in Sweden. The relatively lower use of Internet-based information during the trip might have to do with the material setting of information use; people search for information in the car, on the road, at attractions or in their holiday homes. This makes them highly dependent of infrastructure such as Internet connection to the phone or Wi-Fi. There might also be a time lag at work as this infrastructure has improved significantly the last couple of years, whereas some responses may relate to how they used IT earlier.

The interplay between using guidebooks and/or Internet could partly be explained by the planning process: *'In Germany we plan the basic structure [of the trip] and then the detailed planning is made in place'*. When tourists have made a decision about their destination, they tend to read guidebooks

to get a good overview: *'I can browse through guidebooks and linger in sections that interest me'*. Guidebooks are not as detailed as for instance specialised homepages. This also affects the mode of searching online, *'On the Internet, I need to search much more targeted'*. Some interviewees state that they use guidebooks first, and then turn to other information for more details. This combination of searching modes might be described according to the sandwich model, where information technology and word-of-mouth are used prior to travel for general planning such things as choice of destination, length of travel, and for booking flights and accommodation. Thereafter, guidebooks are used to get an overview, to plan day-to-day itineraries, to read about history and context, and to find recommendations. During travel and at the destination, information technology and word-of-mouth are used to find detailed, up-to-date, practical information. Metaphorically, information search using guidebooks is central to the process but chronologically squeezed in between layers of digital modes.

Another issue concerns information overload. There is a strong norm saying that tourists ought to be well informed in advance of travel. This is of course especially true for independent travellers. However, there seems to be a matter of 'a reasonable level of information' among many interviewees. They just want enough information, where enough ('genug') is what is needed in order to understand new information encountered on the way. Not being totally informed in every detail provides the traveller with a degree of independence, and a sense of exploring and adventure. Some have deliberately 'no plan' in order to getting to know something new and not feeling trapped by their own planning arrangements. Some interviewees simply do not care about the must-dos in order to

feel free and spontaneous. To many, it is also about that they view leisure as being away from everyday life, where the everyday includes modern communication. On vacation they do not want it: *'No TV, no Internet, it's good, just cut off [...] You entertain yourselves, face to face, together'*.

Put very simply, many interviewees like to have some basic knowledge about Sweden as well as an overall orientation about possible sub-destinations and attractions prior to travelling. Thereby they can develop their own preliminary planning, maybe including a bucket list of places they want to visit or things they want to do.

Our study also shows some gender differences in regards to information search. Men and women spend similar amounts of time looking for travel information, but they search for different kinds of information. In guidebooks, women look for activities while men are more interested in general information about Sweden and practical information, especially regarding transports.

#### 4.4 MODES OF INFORMATION SEARCH

This section focuses on different modes of information used by our respondents and interviewees. In the beginning, we discuss the most important search modes according to our survey. One of the results of this study is that most, if not all, sources of information are used both before and during travel. However, the ones discussed at the end of this section are more related to information search during travel and at the destination than the others are. It should also be noted that respondents and interviewees sometimes have difficulties in accounting for when they use a certain mode of information.

#### Internet

The Internet is a confusing headline when information search is discussed; the channel does not really say anything about the content. Nevertheless, people regard it as one source of information. In this respect, a fundamental problem is the amount of information and the seemingly random mix of sources on the net. As an individual, you need to know what you are looking for to be able to find it. The organisation of homepages is not always clear to the visitors: *'the way homepages are linked to one another is not the best'*. These findings point to the fact that searching the Internet for useful tourist information is not always an easy task, even if it is regarded as such both by actors in the tourism industry and by much of the tourism literature. The latter has not come to problematize tourist Internet use yet. For some interviewees, there is a degree of scepticism regarding what you find on the Internet: *'I don't always know if it really is so good, or if it really is so nice. I think it's sometimes hard to tell. If I have a guidebook, then I know.'*

Simply speaking, people use homepages in two major ways. As a first step, they look for pages resembling on-line guidebooks, generalised information sources. Visit Sweden's homepage is a typical example of that, it looks very much like a guidebook. Other examples mentioned are homepages from regions, towns and attractions they already know of. As a second step, the tourists look for information that is more specific. Many tourists mentioned the homepage of ADAC, the German motorists' organisation. ADAC also sends brochures to its members on request. Apart from general tourists information it includes a lot of specific information targeting motorists. Apart from visiting large and well-known pages, it is unclear how pre-

cisely people conduct their searches. *'I guess that we google'* one interviewee said, and many German tourists gave similar answers. Another way of getting information through the Internet is to download guidebooks and brochures. This is an argument to say that the Internet ought to be seen as a distribution channel, not as a carrier of content. Homepages have very different characters, some resemble traditional paper media, the only difference being that the user has to do the printing herself.

Unlike social media (see below) the use of the Internet as a source of information is not dependent on generations. This result is in line with previous research studies. Instead, there is a positive relation between information searches in general and information search on the Internet; the more people search for information, the more important the Internet is. This indicates that there is a learning process involved for the frequent users who do their bookings online.

Access to the Internet, and the costs involved, determines the degree of use. If Wi-Fi is available in camping sites or other accommodations, the use increases. There was also a pronounced increase in Internet use between 2016 and 2017 because of cheaper access through the telephone, when roaming fees were abolished within the EU. This means that place bound information about the immediate surroundings has become much more accessible. Practical information has become easier to find through homepages and digital maps. However, this measure is unlikely to affect information search prior to travel, or for that matter the experienced value of different modes of information search.

### **Searching the Internet – in Practice**

Our online booking experiments (see 3.3) show that searches most often start with

quests for accommodation and transport. If these things are not available to the right price, then it is not worthwhile to continue searching. Price differences in travel and accommodation also determine the length of the journey. The journey is shortened or prolonged in order to find cheaper options. The price hunt sometimes leads to illogical decisions as additional costs may be disregarded.

***'I google Airbnb Vimmerby to see what's available, but at the same time I google for hotels in Vimmerby'***

The importance of time efficiency made the participants of our experiment use different pages in parallel. This makes it easy to lose track when loads of information is processed at the same time as the visitors have to make decisions. Decision-making processes are not always rational. Information processes are most easily managed if visitors make notes while searching.

It is difficult to find information on homepages. Google is the most commonly used search engine. Different words and phrases are used in combinations, for example 'Ystad + attractions' or 'Vimmerby + tourism'. Some participants used Google for all their searches. Those not using Google had difficulties finding the right information; some for instance had problems finding municipal homepages. Language issues made things more difficult; those using the German language faced some serious problems. They could start on a page in German, but when choosing the attached links they only came to Swedish pages, or they were sent back to the initial German page. This phenomenon was common; one participant called it 'lama walks'. It was a source of large frustration among participants.

The patience with badly working homepa-

ges was generally rather low. When some of them ran into difficulties, they were about to quit searching entirely. Others chose to put questions instead of using search words or phrases when having trouble finding adequate information in German. Those using English were more successful. But limited knowledge of the Swedish language was not very helpful, either. Using knowledge from previous visits could cause additional trouble since not everything is built up as expected. For instance, *.se* is not always used as suffix to homepages; some tourist information page used *.com* instead. Sometimes the wrong, but very similar, word is used, using *bostad* instead of *boende* leads to very different kinds of information. To be able to find the right information using Google, one must know exactly what to search for. It is important to use precise and accurate words not to be misguided. Appropriate and complete homepages in German are essential for the visitors.

When participants reached their search result, they normally skipped the first advertisements directly; those are not considered trustworthy. Participants moved further down the page to find other alternatives. Many participants used municipal homepages, although they sometimes were hard to find. Participants use municipal pages to find accommodation and attractions, often in combination with Booking or Airbnb or the attractions' own homepages. Price is the most important factor for deciding on accommodation. Germans spend a lot of time finding the most favourable options.

The search for the perfect accommodation is based on location, price, and the pictures showing the cottage, the living space and the surroundings. It is often combined with ratings. Texts are less relevant than the feeling people get from looking at pictures. When looking for attractions, the focus was

on information about possible things to do. More specific information was sought at their respective homepages or through visits to tourist information centres. It should be emphasized that the visual side to the homepages was very important for the choices the participants made. The Germans wanted to see what it looks like, and not read about it. The importance of visual aspects is shown by the fact that some participants looked at Google images before they looked for written information. The increasing use of Instagram also points at the increasing importance of visual impressions.

TripAdvisor is the most commonly used source for comparing accommodation and attractions, it is used for judging whether chosen places are worth visiting. Ratings help in decision-making. Some participants think that TripAdvisor has an appealing design, which makes it interesting as a source of information. It has a mix of advertisements, ratings, comments, maps and information in combination. TripAdvisor also comes out on top when you google for a destination since it has rating lists for restaurants and attractions. It attracted the participants to visit these pages. Pages like TripAdvisor and Booking are important for people's search for information. However, in our study very few posted any ratings.

**'We use TripAdvisor at home to look for the best places on Lofoten. But I don't post anything, I am a silent reader.'**

Another source which is frequently used in combination with information search is maps, either digital or on paper. In the experiment, many participants started with looking a place up in Google maps. The positioning is important in relation to other places and attractions, and for finding adequate accom-

modation. A map is also useful for finding things like petrol stations and grocery stores. A majority of the German tourists are to some extent self-catering. Maps are thus an essential element in the packaging of tourist information.

In the experiments, it was noted that information search for transportation caused particular difficulties. It is easy to find information about flights, ferry lines, and international train travel on Skyscanner and other search engines. Finding public transports in Sweden was quite difficult, though. Those participating in the experiment could easily find flights to Copenhagen and Stockholm respectively, but going further with public transports proved to be more difficult. The participants could not find information about local or regional traffic in English or German; they ended up on international train pages. Other alternatives were more successful, for instance using the route-planner on Google maps or the German railway's homepage [www.bahn.de](http://www.bahn.de). There you can find most train connections, but price information for Sweden is lacking. There is also a lack of information about public transports in regards to attractions; people are more or less expected to travel to Sweden by car. Many international homepages have a headline called 'how to get there', which could be a role model for Swedish attractions as well.

### **Guidebooks**

Guidebooks are used by 70 percent of the respondents. Their use is somewhat more important during the trip than prior to travel. Guidebooks are viewed as the main authoritative source of information by a large number of interviewees. They are supposedly based on non-biased experts' opinions. Some also view them as more authentic: *'[The guidebook] is made by people who have ex-*

*perienced things themselves'*. The books as material things are also important, the fact that it is a book. *'I am obsessed with books. I don't like to look at the Internet, or I rather turn pages and see things. That's why I find guidebooks good.'* The same person continues: *'To me, it's important to hold something in my hand, I can turn pages, with pictures or just things that are described that interest me. I read a lot, reading is very important to me. That's the way I get my information.'*

The market for guidebooks in Germany is huge. There are the ones that give an overview over a whole country, as well as those specialised in a region or a specific theme. Therefore, the respondents often use a combination of two or more guidebooks. According to the interviewees, there is a hierarchy among series of guidebooks in the German market. The traditional ones sold in bookshops (such as Baedeker, Marco Polo or Dumont) are seen as the most trustworthy whereas those bought in the supermarket are considered second-class. The publisher's reputation is important for the valuation of the guidebooks' content.

Guidebooks are used before, during and after the journey. They are an important source of inspiration and anticipation prior to travel. Tourists read to become knowledgeable and to get a bigger picture of the destination. The format of guidebooks are good for overviews. During travel, some interviewees read them loud in the car. When travelling, the maps inside guidebooks are also important sources of information. Maps are often a reason for buying guidebooks. Those maps are often drawn with the purpose of being tourist information; thereby guidebooks sometimes substitute for buying regular maps. A few interviewees also mention practical advice such as insider tips about restaurants or accommodations.



**Figure 4:** Bookshop in Flensburg with bookshelves full of guidebooks. Photo: Malin Zillinger

Based on the interviews, it seems like women are more likely to use guidebooks than men are. We know from other studies that women generally read more than men (Kulturrådet, 2004). When speaking about how guidebooks are used on route, a number of interviewees give us another explanation to this. It seems like men are most often driving the cars, their partners are reading the maps and guidebooks. Another significant gender difference is that women are more likely to look for attractions and activities in guidebooks – what the holiday will be about. Men are more looking for transports and other practical information. Specialised guidebooks, for instance on motor homes or angling, are only mentioned by men. In other words a classic division of labour.

Guidebooks are sometimes used very selectively. One woman said she had written a kind of guidebook by herself based on her readings and copying. It contains two full folders. The actual guidebooks are left at home. She combines the material brought

from home with maps and printed material collected when visiting tourist information centres. This combination is based on material collected on-site, conversations, own experiences and personal comments. In this way, the 'guidebook' becomes a souvenir in itself, and works as a basis for family decisions and conversations about a place.

After the journey, guidebooks turn into souvenirs. They become tangible memories of the vacation and of the visited places. Guidebooks thus bring more values than just to be sources of information. In some cases, the guidebooks at home in the bookshelves become a sign of status, a proof that a well-travelled person lives there.

#### **Maps and Road Signs**

According to the questionnaire, maps are the third most used source of travel information, second only to webpages and guidebooks. Maps play a prominent role in many Germans life as tourists, much more than expected. Many German tourists have a high degree of cartographic literacy and some interviewees

show a large interest in maps and atlases. They read maps before their travel to get an idea of what to find, it helps planning an interesting route. Some interviewees spend hours in company with their maps.

People use a variety of maps. Street atlases and road maps are frequently mentioned, as well as maps contained in guidebooks. These are most often brought from Germany. Maps that are more detailed are acquired in place, in bookshops, in camping sites, petrol stations or more often in tourist information centres. But, it is sometimes difficult to find a place in Sweden where you can buy maps. Classic maps are still in high regard, some interviewees told us that they liked the feeling of having an old-fashioned map in their hands. The quality of them being made of paper carries a tactile value. The maps can be carried, touched upon, and decorated with comments and symbols. Thus, besides giving an excellent overview of the chosen places it has the potential to become a personal souvenir.

A large proportion of the interviewees of course uses digital maps. Some use it extensively: *'I downloaded all electronic maps that I could find, that were available for my ipad.'* Maps are also brought along in cars or on bicycles. They are not only used for finding the way, but also as a means of information for finding sites and attractions. Maps in telephones mainly seem to be used for finding things of immediate use, such as practical information on opening hours for restaurants, shops or attractions, or for finding things like an ATM or a place to change currency. However, connections are not always perfect, the GPS does not always work. One interviewee had two navigators in the car, but the Swedish system was not connected to them: *'Europe yes – but no Sweden'*. People who usually depend on GPS sometimes find it adventurous

to navigate with the help of an old-fashioned map and road signs: being dependent on their own skills instead of technology. It was seen as an adventurous mix of challenge and accomplishment.

When speaking about information channels, simple artefacts like roads signs, public maps in city centres, orientation maps along roads and information posts are often forgotten. They are taken for granted, but many tourists mention them as important sources of information. Road signs, especially the official brown signs pointed at points of interest, are seen as highly authoritative. It helps them recognise the attraction's importance, *'they resemble a Michelin star'*. One interviewee mentions the blue information signs: *'Why the tourist information is a good stopping point? Because I can see the big "I" all over, it is very well signed'*.

The fact that public maps and information posts are often located in strategic places make them especially important. You will find them in ports, at parking lots, and at stops on main roads close to roads leading into towns or villages, at petrol stations and roadside restaurants or cafés, or at other facilities. This means that tourists do not need to actively look for them. Road signs and other roadside information serve as alerts for tourists, as for this visitor: *'We were just driving along, having thought to just drive straight on. [Then] we saw the sign for Vimmerby'*. Signs are also used in combination with guidebooks: *'First we see the sign, and then we look it up in the guidebook'*. This way, signs help visitors to remain spontaneous; they see something, look it up, stay or go.

Since tourists like to be spontaneous on the road, simple things like road signs have immediate impact on decision-making. If they see an interesting sign, they simply turn the wheel. Being a tourist is associated with

being flexible, to be able to take it easy without planning too much in advance. It is also more adventurous not to be too well planned. Encounters with other people or new information may also affect decision along the way. It has also been shown that those who rely on digital information channels tend to change their plans more often than do those relying on traditional sources. Information in place may thus be of large importance for the choice of route or activity.

### Brochures, Travel Magazines, Newspapers and other Mass Media

Brochures from companies, attractions and destinations are widely available at tourist information centres, accommodations and other service sites. Hosts at camping sites and cottages often supply the tourists with brochures and maps. Sometimes they put together a tailor made package for their guests. German tourists often leave behind information to the next guests, who often are German too.

About 70 percent of respondents have been using brochures. Surprisingly, the percentage having used them prior to travel is as high as that having used them during the trip. According to the interviews, this can be

explained by the fact that people order them to their homes prior to travel. Some interviewees point at how convenient it has been to use the Internet to order brochures; they were impressed that the tourist information centres sent them for free.

There is an abundance of travel related media available in German speaking countries. Firstly, there are the regular (often monthly) travel magazines which cover a broad range of topics and geographical destinations. Articles are most often rather short, thereby they are mainly used for inspiration, not so much for information. Secondly, there are magazines with a particular regional focus. GEO is a very good example of both. It has both a monthly GEO Saison and regular special issues covering countries or regions, the latest Geo Special about Sweden came in 2009. Thirdly, leading serious newspapers (e.g. Die Welt, FAZ) have tourist and travel supplements, often in the Sunday issues. Magazines are viewed as interesting and practical, they can be brought in the car and it is regarded as nice to turn the pages. Travel magazines, like guidebooks, could also be seen as a form of literature; reading them becomes a literary experience.



Figure 5: Analogue tourist information. Photo: Maria Månsson

Other mass media is often related to popular culture. In the interviews, it is shown that many German tourists get information from different media, for instance TV, films and literature. For example, ZDF (a German TV-channel) has quite a lot of travel reports, including the Nordic countries. Clearly not only facts but also fiction acts as information sources to tourists. Books and films by Astrid Lindgren and Henning Mankell are the obvious cases in point here.

### Social Media

In the context of tourism travel, we define social media as Internet based platforms where people can interact with other users, i.e. two- or multiple way communication through web 2.0. This contrasts to traditional homepages where communication mainly is one way. Typical examples of social media are Facebook and twitter. These generate electronic word of mouth when people post comments, photographs, etc. related to travel. Recent research has pointed at the importance of social media for how young people form their identities as tourists (Gössling & Stavrinidi, 2015). At the same time, some respondents are a bit confused about what social media is; *'What's App isn't social media – is it?'* This question reflects a situation where many people do have a general idea about social media and its use. However, they might not have insights of all apps and platforms available on the market, which may cause some confusion.

In our questionnaire, social media was ranking among the least important sources of information. The interviews confirm that view. Most interviewees can be considered passive Internet users, i.e. they are just looking at available content. Only few are posting material themselves, and those who do are young. Many interviewees have

mixed feelings towards using social media, in particular on vacation. Social media is by no means a neutral gadget. Some people regard social media as part of everyday life whereas others make an active stance against using it on vacation (or in some cases against using it at all).

We can see a generational difference here; social media is not regarded as a matter for grown-ups. *'I don't belong to the generation that needs to document every step they take on the Internet'*. Interestingly, people under the age of 30 considered themselves too old for social media. It seems like something happens when people start a family and travel with children; people may become more cautious about what they are posting online. This may be a case where Germans differ from Swedes. There is, on the other hand, a substantial group of people who are very active on social media. They tend to use a variety of sites; they share content on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. These people are all young, very few over the age of 30. Germans are in general much more concerned about personal integrity than Swedish people are. Personal information about citizens is much less available to the public than in Sweden. Germans are for instance more reluctant to use credit cards, thereby giving away information about their spending. The reason for this is likely based on historical experiences from totalitarian regimes.

Many traditional homepages and search engines include elements that could be characterised as social media, i.e. it is often possible to post comment on a destination, hotel or attraction. In our survey, they were called review pages (Rezensionsseiten), exemplified by TripAdvisor. Sometimes there is a formal rating system, which is very important for the visibility of businesses. TripAdvisor is a good example of the blurring of informa-

tion categories; it includes information, maps, advertisements, ratings and comments in the same interface. Many respondents display a lack of trust in social media. It is not considered serious and there is no person responsible for the information. Ratings are particularly distrusted, they are open to manipulation, and they might be 'getürkt'. Another kind of social media could be exemplified by 'Schwendentipps', it is a site where German holiday-makers give advice to others. This kind of information is regarded as more trustworthy than other social media, due to the language being German. Looking at this particular site, it might be because the advice and messages are personal; the sender is visible.

In the questionnaire, about a third of the use of review pages referred to accommodation. This suggests that the respondents have used booking sites (e.g. Airbnb, booking.com or hotels.com) either for booking or to find out information about hotels. Very few have used review pages, such as TripAdvisor, to get information about restaurants. This likely reflects a high degree of self-catering.

### Personal Information

The questionnaire shows word of mouth as an important source of information, both at home in Germany and in Sweden. Friends and relatives are important sources of information prior to travel, as well as Swedes living in Germany and others with a connection to Sweden. *'My mother has colleagues who always go to Sweden'*. Tourists also speak with other tourists, *'in the beginning of our trip we met up with some people who were already here, and they spoke highly about how beautiful it is'*.

People are for practical reasons often talking to the same category of tourists as themselves. People with motor homes meet other motor home owners at camping sites or

service points. It becomes natural to chat and exchange information. Of course, Germans prefer talking to Germans, other tourists as well as Germans and German speakers working with tourists in Sweden. Others think Swedes are easy to talk to. A person visiting Ystad says that she met many people who were very friendly and ready to advice. *'It's absolutely great in Sweden.'* It is evident from the interviews that 'traditional' word of mouth is regarded as very trustworthy. It is especially interesting considering the sceptical attitudes towards electronic word of mouth, i.e. social media.

People renting out cottages to Germans often provide their guests with printed information material in German; brochures or in some cases guidebooks are left for the guests to use during their stay. *'At our house where we live, there were already brochures. [...] They were German speaking landlords, meaning German landlords.'* They are often important speaking partners and informants about the neighbourhood. *'The landlord showed us a few things, places you could go to.'*

Camping sites are places that provide basic services like a place to put your camping van or tent, and where you can take a shower, do your laundry, and cook. If the weather is good it becomes a destination in its own right, where you can relax in the sun doing nothing. They are also places where you can access information, at the reception or by talking to fellow tourists. The fact that a number of Swedish camping sites are run by Germans makes information more accessible and trustworthy.

### Tourist Information Centres

Tourist information centres are used by a bit more than 50 percent of the respondents. The interviews confirm their importance. This gives a new perspective on the current Swe-

dish development where many municipalities have plans to close them down, or already have done so. The interviewees could be divided into three groups when it comes to visiting tourist information centres. Some do not visit at all; others buy souvenirs and use simple facilities like Wi-Fi or the toilette. A third and significant group uses the centres as a complement to guidebooks, maps and homepages. There are also examples of people using audio guiding as a means of sightseeing a town. For many of the latter group, it is important to bring something tangible from

the visit: it might be a brochure, map or other physical treasure.

As in other cases, information provided in tourist information centres is a complement to other information. 'Guidebooks are good for getting a first overview, for detailed information is it always very good [... to use] a tourist information centre, they often have detailed brochures that help you on, and detailed maps. [...] And then it is sometimes good too, when you are on the Internet to go to some special homepages of places where we like to go.'



**Figure 6:** Personal information at Vimmerby Tourist information centre. Photo: Vimmerby Turistbyrå

Local knowledge is seen as a main advantage of visiting a tourist information centre. Local maps are often purpose-made for tourists and are an important source of local knowledge. Information on paper is viewed as interesting for many, and even if the text is in Swedish, most Germans are able to decipher significant parts of it. However, it is of course an advantage if local knowledge can be brought to visitors in German. The presence of German speaking staff is highly valued. Local information that you get from

talking to an experienced person, preferably in German, is regarded as highly trustworthy.

The personal encounter is very important to many visitors; they like to get service in a friendly way, be taken care of, and get that extra piece of personal information. '*Personal contact is always better than any kinds of media channels*'. Some interviewees felt that it was '*always a luxury*' to get all that information material, maps and some personal information.

## 5. Concluding Reflections

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The study shows that different sources of information are used in different stages of the travel process and that a combined use of information sources is still applicable. The actual choice of information sources is affected by a combination of factors such as accessibility, user-friendliness, the quality of content, and trustworthiness.

Furthermore, the study shows that tourists' information search is less rational than previously believed. Tourists take advantage of opportunities that occur when planning and conducting travel. Coincidence and flexibility plays a greater role than previously believed, and so does the feeling of spontaneity and adventure. Both results have major implications for actors working to influence tourists by providing tourist information.

Contrary to many actors' beliefs, online information does not seem to entirely substitute analogue channels. In the study, the Internet with its homepages dominates as information channel, but analogue sources are also important: guidebooks, tourist information centres, maps, road signs, to name a few.

Homepages are valued for their updated information, but are on the other hand sometimes associated with low trustworthiness. Furthermore, searching the Internet in practice is not always an easy task. The online booking experiment in this study showed that there are many challenges on the way: language problems, required presumptions, and illogical links.

Tourist information centers are still important to many visitors, and so are other kinds of personal meetings at the destination. Tourists highly value the access to local knowledge and the possibility to get personal recommendations. Personal service is regar-

ded as a luxury.

Interestingly enough, social media is not as widely used as expected. The recommendations and advices on social media have low reliability, compared to personal meetings. In addition, some tourists prefer to log out during their vacation.

Furthermore, there is a belief that to be digitally connected is something that is valuable for all tourists with more and more information only accessible through digital resources. Tourist information is available at any time on the Internet, whether it is producer generated or consumer generated content. Thus, tourism – and to be a tourist – has become highly digitalised. This is considered to be something positive for tourists, adding value to their experiences. However, we have identified a counter-trend that there is a group of tourists who wants to be digital disconnected while being on holiday. This is important to keep in mind while organisations plan for their information strategy.

The study shows that different kinds of information material have different values, and that the different sources of information used are read for more reasons than their information value. Tourists read guidebooks for fun, speak with people at tourist information centers in order to practice their Swedish, like to bring a brochure home as a souvenir etc. The things brought home are reminders of the trip, also things like books, maps and brochures. Some guidebooks are also viewed as status symbols in the book shelves at home. Sources of information are in this respect not only information, they have functions other than the explicit role of supplying data on a place or an attraction.

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# What's new in tourist search behaviour?

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During the last two decades, we have seen an increasing digitalisation. Tourists have not been late to respond to advancements in tourist information systems, but developments are uneven.

This report focuses on German visitors in Sweden. It aims to examine how German visitors search for tourist information about Sweden both before and during their journey. We both seek for the effects of different information sources, and for the reasoning behind tourists' choices. Results show that analogue and digital information is used in parallel ways, and that the question of trust is gaining renewed importance. In the end, transformed information search behaviour not only influences the choice of information sources, but tourism behaviour in general.