

Course: SKOM12  
Term: Spring 2018  
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Examiner

**[Let's Get *Hyggelig* in Denmark  
A Qualitative Case Study About Place Branding in Times of  
Mediatization**

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# Abstract

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## **Let's get *hyggelig* in Denmark – a qualitative case study about place branding in times of mediatization**

In a world that is coined by globalization, individualization, commercialization and mediatization, place brands try to use their cultural assets to distinguish themselves from others and compete for tourists. Although literature on place branding acknowledges the importance of culture, there is still a lack of culturally informed research in the field of place branding. The aim of this study is to bridge this gap by analyzing how mediatization informs the reproduction and transformation of cultural assets in the place branding process. The case of VisitDenmark's brand communication with the Danish concept of *hygge* which can be roughly translated to coziness is chosen as an example of this phenomenon. Theories on the role of culture for place branding and mediatization are used as a framework. The analysis is based on interviews with marketing and communication managers at VisitDenmark, text and images on VisitDenmark's website, Instagram posts and a German magazine called *Hygge* as an example of how foreign media present the concept. Results show how cultural assets are commercialized, simplified and transferred to another context through the place branding process and its presence in other media. In addition, the concept of *hygge* presents a counter-balance to sociocultural developments in many Western societies such as stress and information-overload. One possible downside of the concept's popularity is that Danes could become alienated to their own cultural concept due to these changes. In the end, the study proposes a new theoretical concept to account for place branding theory and practice that puts culture at its core: Cultural place branding.

*Keywords:* place branding, mediatization, culture, cultural place branding, Denmark, *hygge*

*Number of words:* 17,314

# Acknowledgements

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Looking back at it, this master's program has been a great journey. I want to grab this opportunity to briefly thank all the people who contributed to this thesis with their constant support and understanding. First and foremost, this goes out to every amazing human being who I was honoured to share the classroom with during these past two years. Meeting so many intelligent, open-minded and -hearted, inspiring and fun people was truly humbling.

I want to dedicate special thanks to Mădălina Barta and Ivanna Read for proofreading this piece of paper (and for being amazing friends!). To Stella Zimpfer and Marlodieka Wibawa for their friendship and keeping me updated about university life while I was writing on this thesis from Germany. To Marie for proofreading (and her fresh view as an “outsider” and a Danish resident).

A big thank you to the interviewees who allowed me to get insights into VisitDenmark and the Hygge magazine. Their positive feedback and input was extremely valuable to me. And, of course, thank you Maria and Nils, my supervisors who've supported me through this bumpy road, encouraged and challenged me.

Last, but certainly not least, to the most important people in my life. To all my friends, relatives and flatmates who accompanied this journey. My sambo Kim: For proofreading, drying my tears, encouraging me, making food, visiting so many times in Sweden and simply being the best human being. To my parents and my sister for supporting me in all ways; for keeping up with my constant moving and for coming up with the idea of taking Denmark and hygge as a case.

Thank you.

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# 1. Introduction

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In the highly complex late modern era, which is characterized by increasing degrees of globalization, individualization and mediatization (Krotz, 2014; Lunt & Livingstone, 2016; Jansson, 2018), destinations try to create brands to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Hankinson, 2010; Cardona, Sun, Li & White, 2017). But contrary to product branding, which is confronted with the challenge of increasingly similar products because of globalization (Hatch & Schulz, 2003), destinations can use specific attributes that become more differentiated due to globalization (Moor, 2007, p. 129). One of these attributes can be culture, as it is a resource that provides value and competitive advantage (Yúdice, 2003).

Therefore, culture is an interesting asset for place branding. Place branding, “in contrast to place promotion and place marketing, (...) is identity-driven” (Boisen, Terlouw, Groote & Couwenberg, 2017). This means that through place branding, one can create and communicate the identity of the place which is closely linked to its culture. Thereby, culture is both expressed in and influenced by the place brand (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013).

Scaramanga (2012) discusses how cultural resources are identified and managed for place branding. She departs from the assumption that finding the relevant cultural resources for developing strategic place branding campaigns is an internal process, meaning that practitioners need to find unique and distinct cultural goods from the ones that are available. However, looking at current place branding phenomena, we can observe the spread of intangible cultural concepts such as the Danish *hygge* (concept of coziness), Swedish *fika* (having a coffee break) or Japanese *Shinrin Yoko* (healing effects of being in a forest). These have entered countries and cultures other than their origin because the foreign media and brands picked up these concepts as inspirations for better lives. In contrast to Scaramanga’s (2012) statement, these phenomena are not actively selected for (place) branding, but rather become media trends without or before being used for place

branding. The dominant role of media in these case provide new challenges for place branding, especially when using the cultural concepts, that this thesis wants to analyze.

One helpful concept to analyze the significance of the media in culture and society is mediatization (Jansson, 2018). Mediatization is defined as a process of social change whereby media logic becomes ingrained into cultural and social areas of life (Silverstone, 2005). Next to being a significant emerging concept in media and communication studies (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014), mediatization is also connected to culture and cultural change (e.g. Silverstone, 2005; Hjarvard, 2008; Hjarvard & Petersen, 2013). One aspect where mediatization becomes visible is in the accommodation of institutions to media logic (Lundby, 2009). The fact that institutions, such as tourist destination organizations, communicate and transform cultural assets with media logic in mind makes mediatization a suitable theoretical frame for this study.

Orienting place branding towards media trends and expectations could lead to stereotype reproduction, i.e. reproduction of simplified cultural elements which do not match with the actual cultural situation within the place. In fact, place branding is a complex and strategic communication process that must take several stakeholders into account (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Therefore, I argue that the problematic part of this phenomenon is that disseminating a simplified picture of the destination could not only alter people's expectations and images of the place, but also change the cultural element so that it becomes disconnected from the locals and vice versa.

In his critical perspective on place branding, Arvidsson (2005) states that media usage of branding does not mean to send a message, but rather to provide a framework of what the brand can mean, thus setting the coordinates of "mood and feeling" (Arvidsson, 2005, p. 245). This view ascribes communicators merely limited influence on consumer interpretations of their brand messages, but still enough to create a frame for the brand identity. Although this perspective might be a good starting point, it does not consider the fact that many practitioners not only provide a strategic framework when communicating a place, but also that they do so by applying media logic. This does not only change the communication about a place and its culture, but also has the potential to shape cultural and societal change.



So far, research about culture in place branding includes for instance its importance for the place narrative (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2015) or the interplay between personal cultural orientation and place culture (Cardona et al., 2017). These studies researched the influence of culture on the brand image of the place. However, I recognize a lack of research about the strategic use of cultural assets for place branding and how they are transformed during the place branding process. Here it is important to note that culture is not static, which Kavaratzis & Ashworth (2015) criticize about most of the existing literature in place branding. The authors laid a foundation for a more process-based approach to destination branding which this thesis wants to continue.

As mentioned before, one example of a destination which already employs one of its characteristic cultural assets is Denmark. *Hygge*, as the Danish answer to the challenges of information-overflow and insecurity – especially within the travel industry –, rapidly spread, not only as part of the country’s destination brand. Even more, *hygge* has also developed into a lifestyle outside Denmark; a term that several media types and brands use to address people’s need for a slower, more mindful life (Horx-Strathern, n.d.). *Hygge* can be defined as a sense, as the “national feeling” of Denmark and roughly translates to coziness (Howell & Sundberg, 2015). The term is picked up by international media whenever Denmark is concerned (e.g. O’Neill, 2012; Parkinson, 2015; Altman, 2016; Berber, 2017) and is repeatedly mentioned as a reason for the country being among the happiest of the world (e.g. Wiking, 2016). With such a public presence of *hygge*, the German Zukunftsinstitut (= future institute; translated by the author) included *hygge* in its future report of 2017 as the next step of the ‘cocooning’-trend from the 1990s (Horx-Strathern, n.d.) when people found concealment in their homes and by themselves. Hence, this example highlights how a former Danish cultural asset, which is used for creating and communicating a distinct place brand, developed into a broader societal trend.

This case is chosen as a critical case which has “strategic importance in relation to the general problem” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 14). The fact that *hygge* already is a known concept in countries outside of Denmark, such as Germany, and that the official tourism organization of Denmark uses *hygge* in its communication suggests that it is a suitable case to shed light on place branding, culture and mediatization. By applying the conceptual framework of mediatization, I want to ana-

lyze the media's influence on place branding practices, especially of those that deploy the place's culture. Using this concept enables me to reach the aim of this study, which is presented in the following paragraph.

## 1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this research is to analyze how mediatization informs the reproduction and transformation of cultural assets in the place branding process. Thereby, I want to shed light on the processes and changes through which a cultural brand asset becomes part of a broader societal trend. Using Denmark and *hygge* as examples, the following research questions shall be answered:

1. How is the concept of *hygge* used for place branding purposes by VisitDenmark?
2. How is *hygge* reproduced and transformed by VisitDenmark and the German magazine *Hygge*?
3. How do mediatization processes influence place branding?

Denmark's use of *hygge* is employed as a case study. The first research question explores how VisitDenmark expresses *hygge* in words and images by looking at its English-speaking website and Instagram account. For the second research question, more attention is paid to how the concept of *hygge* is altered by its utilization for place branding. Plus, I also analyze how a German magazine called *Hygge* reproduces the concept as an example of non-Danish media. The last research question more explicitly ties the concept of mediatization to place branding. Here, I take broader societal and cultural developments into account that influence the spread of the *hygge* case and vice versa.

By analyzing two different communication channels for a distinctly Danish cultural asset, both print and online, one strategic and one detached from the original destination branding purpose, this thesis can provide insights into mediatization processes that influence place branding. To achieve this, I combine content analysis and interviews with three of VisitDenmark's brand communicators and the magazine's publisher. The interviews are necessary to shed light on the cultural reproduction by institutions such as the tourism board. Plus, I expect them to provide insights into the role of media logic for place branding.

## **1.2 Contributions to the field of strategic communication**

An increasingly strategic approach to place branding has been emerging throughout the past decade (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Place branding is, for instance, expected to play a strategic role in attracting visitors (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2015). However, this case shows that there is a lack of place branding literature that accounts for cultural concepts like *hygge* at the core of place branding activities. Existing theories tend to be one-sidedly focused on tangible elements of culture that fail to account for intangible cultural values. Therefore, with this study I hope to add another layer to culturally informed place branding theories.

The concept of mediatization adds a complexity to this view that is appropriate for the complex communication environment that globalization and digitalization present (Jansson, 2018). This is because mediatization considerably changes the way that organizations approach and frame their communication efforts. For instance, institutions such as tourism organizations, increasingly accommodate to media logic (Lundby, 2009). As a result, it is relevant to study how mediatization impacts the reproduction and transformation of the place's cultural elements through place branding.

The findings not merely have implications for destination branding – or any other culturally informed approach to branding –, but also for understanding the complex interrelation between media, communication, culture and society. By analyzing a specific case, I hope I can contribute to building a better understanding of how mediatization impacts strategic communication in theory and practice.

## **1.3 Demarcation**

This study focuses on national place branding aimed at tourists. Plus, a mediatization perspective on place branding is employed. Therefore, I include media channels from an organization's and a media company's perspective. I have only analyzed the Instagram account and the tourism website of the organization, thus excluding other channels like Facebook or print material. I also only considered one German print magazine, thus focusing on the adaption of the cultural asset to a German market. The theoretical concept of mediatization is quite exhaustive, but for this study, only elements relevant to the purpose have been included.

## **1.4 Disposition**

The thesis is structured as the following: In the second chapter, the field of place branding and the role of culture is introduced, pointing to the gap that his thesis aims to cover. The following chapter provides existing literature and theories about mediatization. Thereafter, the methods and research design of this study are displayed. The fifth chapter presents the analysis and its results. In the final discussion, contributions of the study, as well as its limitations and suggestions for future research conclude this thesis.

## 2. Background: Place branding

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In this chapter, theories in place branding are presented. Although some researchers acknowledge a significant role of culture for the place branding process, I spot a lack of research that includes culture as a central element of place branding. As an example of such a cultural asset, the concept of *hygge* is presented. Finally, I conclude with some summarizing remarks.

### 2.1 Definition

Place branding resulted from the convergence of urban policy, tourism and mainstream branding (Hankinson, 2010). Although place branding and place marketing are sometimes used interchangeably, they are two distinct concepts. Some authors define branding as a tool of place marketing (e.g. Hankinson, 2004), while others see place branding as the “strategic guideline for marketing” (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 70). This study adds to the latter understanding.

Blichfeldt (2005) notices some issues when applying regular branding theories to place branding. Since it is considerably harder, if not impossible, to manage and control a place compared to a product, the author argues that marketers can use place branding to “investigate, understand and respond to people’s (...) perception of the place” (Blichfeldt, 2005, p. 399). The aim of the place branding process is usually to differentiate a place through several brand associations (Hankinson, 2004), that Kavaratzis & Ashworth (2015) call “network of associations” (p. 156). Both Blichfeldt’s and Kavaratzis & Ashworth’ statements ascribe importance to the image and the identity of the place, which are explained in more detail in the following.

#### 2.1.1 *Place identity and image*

A lot of existing definitions and theories stress the connection of place brand and place identity (e.g. Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Hultman, Strandberg, Oghazi &

Mostaghel, 2017; Boisen et al., 2017; Capitello, Agnoli, Charters & Begalli, 2017). Place identity is commonly defined as a combination of brand associations that is unique to the destination. From this perspective, branding means to create and communicate a place identity (Rainisto, 2004). Thus, a destination brand is essentially a concept that exists in the tourist's mind (Hultman et al., 2017). From his critical perspective, Arvidsson's (2005) even concludes that brands develop in unanticipated ways in the consumers' minds and that brand managers need to frame the represented lifestyle of the brand so that it stays "within the boundaries of the intended brand identity" (Arvidsson, 2005, p. 244). This view limits the influence of place branding to providing a framework to tourists.

Some scholars (e.g. Lichrou, O'Malley & Patterson, 2008; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013), point to the issue that place identity is not static. Rather, they see place identity as a process which influences and is influenced by the culture and the image of the place, with branding being a facilitator of the identity process (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013).

Strongly connected to place identity is place image. Kavaratzis & Hatch (2013) describe both concepts to be part of the same coin. Place image can be described as "the collective form of perceptions of the place" (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015, p. 1373). Some define place branding therefore as orchestrating the image of the place (Boisen et al., 2017). The image is based on the experience of different elements of the place, which might be direct or indirect, mediated or unmediated (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). Thereby, place branding links internal and external views (Capitello et al., 2017), meaning what the place *is*, what brand communicators want to *convey* and how tourists *perceive* it. These foundations help to understand the role of culture for place branding.

## **2.2 The role of culture for place branding**

In addition to place identity and image, some scholars also acknowledge the significance of culture for place branding. Bianchini & Ghilardi (2007) for instance suggested that place branding "should be more 'cultured', knowledgeable and critically aware of (...) the cultural life and cultural representations of a particular locality" (p. 285). According to them, culture is an integral part of a place and should therefore be thoroughly integrated into place branding. The fact that this is

yet to be implemented in theory and practice is also underlined by Kavaratzis & Ashworth (2015) who critically recognized a disconnection between culture and the place brand in most place branding literature.

Culture is one element that makes places unique and distinctive (Scaramanga, 2012). It is thus part of a place's identity and shapes its image. What needs to be addressed is the fact that not all parts of a place's culture may be suitable for cultural place branding. In 2008, Rausch said that "its historical depth and contemporary breadth, a multidimensional character and reality" (p. 142) make a cultural good appropriate for place branding. In essence, when cultural elements become part of place branding, they should be historically rooted, still relevant today and variable.

The strong interrelation between culture and place branding becomes evident when looking at researchers, such as Ashworth & Kavaratzis (2015), who state that "culture is necessarily strongly related to place branding, specifically how a place sees itself and wishes to be seen by others" (p. 121). The same authors define a place brand as a cultural resource which helps the residents to construct and narrate their culture, whereas foreigners can understand and experience the place's culture through the place brand (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2015). This definition accounts for the importance of narration and thus communication for place branding. One advantage of making cultural assets a centerpiece of place branding is that positive attributes that are connected to the cultural element can be transferred to the place brand (Rausch, 2008).

But what does culture really mean? Naturally, it is a broad term which is connected to several different definitions. In this thesis, I depart from the definition of Ashworth & Kavaratzis (2015) who regard culture as a process that is socially defined and redefined. However, their notion of culture in place branding is rather limited to consumable elements of the place such as cultural institutions, landmarks or the leisure and entertainment industry. Another definition on culture from a communication perspective lists "norms, beliefs, perceptions and values as some of the fundamental elements people consider when they define culture" (Fortman & Giles, 2006, p. 92). In addition, communication scholars see communication at the heart of culture, by which the aforementioned elements are passed on between the generations and by which people understand culture (Fortman & Giles, 2006). This perspective on culture highlights its intangible character and

that culture is bound to a group of people who share certain meanings through cultural processes.

In place branding literature, the tangible and intangible heritage of a place, including its rituals, are named part of the place's cultural resources (Bianchini & Ghilardi, 2007). Nevertheless, most research or theoretical discussion about place branding with cultural resources focuses on physical cultural elements such as landmarks or entertainment (e.g. Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2010). One example of a place branding campaign focusing on a country's sense of life as part of its intangible culture is Therkelsen's (2015) analysis of the tourism branding event "IMAGINATION – Discover the Danish spirit". The event took place during the Olympic Games in London 2012 and was organized by VisitDenmark in collaboration with the national TV-station TV2 to let tourists experience the Danish sense of life. One of the author's conclusions states that "a combination of classic tourist experiences with everyday consumer goods, the place branding event seemed well tuned into the demands of post-modern tourists who seek a mixture of extraordinary and mundane experiences" (Therkelsen, 2015, pp. 171-172). It underlines how versatile intangible cultural elements of a place can be used for its brand communication.

On a more general level, some branding researchers already established cultural branding as a concept. Banet-Weiser (2012) for instance defines the cultural process of branding as the "transformation of everyday, lived culture to brand culture" (p. 5). Holt (2004) uses the example of the Mexican beer brand Corona to show how successful brands adapt their myth to current societal trends. Corona first became popular as a holiday beer for US-teenagers on spring break vacations. After a drop in sales, the new Corona ad made use of the brand's distinct Mexican cultural assets: It combined relaxation with the dream of escaping the competitive American culture (Holt, 2004, pp. 18-19). The example also shows how the brand utilizes the cultural elements of a place to differentiate from competitors. The Mexican sense of life presents an appreciated contrast to the American lifestyle.

According to Holt (2004), brands become iconic by applying cultural branding. He claims that the success of cultural branding lies in adapting the brand's "myth" to current tensions within society. The similarity between a brand and a myth is also recognized in the context of place branding (Lichrou et al., 2008).



Although the relevance of culture for branding in general and place branding in particular, seems widely acknowledged, there is still relatively little research about the role of cultural assets for place branding. Even though Kavaratzis & Ashworth (2015) criticize the view of culture as an asset, I use this expression with the awareness that culture is not static, but an ongoing process. This is, for instance, visible in my choice of methods, which are based on a social-constructionist research approach. The lack of research is especially true for intangible concepts such as *hygge*. This part of the Danish culture is introduced in the following.

### **2.2.1 Hygge**

As already mentioned in the introduction, *hygge* can be defined as a sense, as the “national feeling” of Denmark (Howell & Sundberg, 2015). According to Bille (2015), *hygge* is part of the national identity and closely linked to security or security, togetherness (physical and emotional closeness), relaxation, informality, intimacy, food and losing a sense of temporality. It thereby seems to represent a socio-cultural counter-movement to modern life. Bille (2015) regards the claim that *hygge* cannot be translated into other languages to be false but agrees that it comprises several connotations, making it a vague expression. The English equivalent to *hygge* would be coziness. The word derives from the Norwegian language, not Danish (Howell & Sundberg, 2015). And although words and concepts for coziness also exist in other Scandinavian countries (like *mysigt* in Sweden or *koselig* in Norway), none of it is as known abroad as *hygge*.

There are several different aspects of *hygge*, as described by Bille (2015), including intimate *hygge* (being by oneself), social *hygge* (which involves the presence of others), Christmas *hygge* and neighborhood *hygge* (seeing familiar faces everyday). These different forms emphasize the “vagueness and plurality of atmospheres *hygge* denotes” (Bille, 2015, p. 61). In addition, some have recognized the potential of *hygge* deriving from this variety of connotations and components. The concept is nowadays used by various actors and for various needs. Howell & Sundberg (2015) argue

“that *hygge* has become an identifiable component of Danish ‘soft power’, and that the various material, sensory, and affective components of *hygge* are consciously and actively deployed by Danish firms and the Danish state as a tool to achieve economic, political, and social goals.” (p. 98).

In contrast to hard power, such as military superiority, soft power comprises tools such as cultural products, tourism programs, and socio-economic policies (Howell & Sundberg, 2015). It is based on the assumption that a country’s attractiveness is more powerful than compulsion or financial grants (Nye, 2004). One aspect of deploying *hygge* as a soft power tool could be VisitDenmark’s use of *hygge* to promote Denmark as a tourism destination. The increased presence of the concept in international media paved the way for this development. In Germany for instance, *hygge* and *hyggelig* were included into the spelling dictionary Duden, in 2017. The reason is the increased presence of the terms in the German language. In the entry about *Hygge*, the noun is described with the meaning of *Gemütlichkeit*, a term that is not translatable to English but approximates comfort or coziness. As examples of use, the sentences “*hygge* is the Danes’ recipe for happiness”<sup>1</sup> and “*hygge* is the new wellness trend from Scandinavia”<sup>1</sup> (Duden, n.d.). In this study, I will explore how VisitDenmark uses *hygge* in its communication (research question 1), how the concept is adapted or reproduced by the organization and the German magazine *Hygge* (2) and the influence of mediatization for these processes (3).

## 2.4 Summarizing remarks

From reviewing existing theories and research in place branding, I realized that culture, even though its importance for place branding is acknowledged, tends to be reduced to explicit forms of culture, to its consumable elements like entertainment or sights. Thus, this case can add another dimension of culture to place branding, namely an intangible concept that can be best described as a feeling or

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by the author

sense of life. To study VisitDenmark's use of *hygge* and the influence of other media in this process, I need a suitable analytical concept.

Both culture and branding are closely interwoven with the media. Hjarvard (2008) states for instance that the media cannot be regarded separately from other institutions, of which brands and culture are two examples. Scaramanga (2012) also regards brands in a global context to be an important part of all mediated messages as they represent "central ideas about 'the good life'" and thereby initiate "new value systems" (Scaramanga, 2012, p. 86). In these times of mediatization that Scaramanga (2012) describes, it is crucial to research the use of cultural assets for place branding against the background of its close interrelation with the media.

In this chapter, I provided an overview of previous research which led to the lack of a more culturally informed approach to place branding in the current body of knowledge, thus highlighting how this study can contribute. The next chapter will introduce the concept of mediatization in more detail.

## 3. Mediatization

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The aim of this research is to analyze how mediatization informs the reproduction and transformation of cultural assets in the place branding process. The mediatization perspective is chosen because the concept is said to be central for understanding the media's significance for culture and society. It is also closely linked to communication, as the mediatization culture is the product of the omnipresence of media and at the same time, the media play a fundamental role for the construction of reality where communication increasingly relies on certain technologies (Hepp, Hjarvard, & Lundby, 2015). Therefore, mediatization is an appropriate theoretical concept that works as a “framework for analyzing and building a theoretical understanding of how the media may interact with other social and cultural processes” (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 4). In this case, mediatization is used to analyze the media processes that influence VisitDenmark's place branding with *hygge*.

### 3.1 Definition

Mediatization is defined by Couldry & Hepp (2013) as “a concept used to analyze critically the interrelation between changes in media and communications on the one hand, and changes in culture and society on the other” (p. 197). This is a central point that is further developed by Hjarvard (2013), stating that the concept is useful for “understanding of how the media spread to, become intertwined with, and influence other fields or social institutions” (p. 1).

Formerly, research in the field of media and communication regarded the media as separate from culture and society: The media were considered as either influencing culture and society or serving different purposes (Hjarvard, 2013). Mediatization, however, acknowledges that the media are interwoven with culture and society (Hepp et al., 2015; Hjarvard, 2013) and that they play a role in “societal changes in contemporary high modern societies” (Lundby, 2009, p. 1). Therefore, mediatization studies aim at understanding “how social institutions and cul-

tural processes have changed character, function, and structure in response to the omnipresence of media” (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 2).

### ***3.1.1 Mediatization as a meta-process***

When talking about mediatization, one must acknowledge that this concept refers to a long-term process of social change. It has its roots in the transformation of institutions that happened throughout European history, developing for instance from Feudalism to capitalism in terms of economy (Hepp et al., 2015). Mediatization researchers assign the media a central role in transformational processes on a macro level regarding economy, culture and society (Krotz, 2014). Some researchers also agree that mediatization is a meta-process of modernity that is in line with other developments such as globalization, individualization, commercialization and urbanization (see e.g. Krotz, 2014; Hjarvard, 2013; Jansson, 2018). For researchers in this field, this would mean that studies investigating merely a certain phenomenon over a limited time are not relevant. However, Krotz (2014) notes that sub-processes of mediatization can indeed be studied based on cases to show the many facets of mediatization. Next to the macro level mentioned above, mediatization studies can also analyze changing organizations on a mezzo (Krotz, 2009) or metro level (Krotz, 2014), such as tourism organizations.

### ***3.1.2 Media logic***

Already in 1995, Thompson criticized the self-referential system of mass-communication, where different media use each other as sources of inspiration. This leads to a reproduction of topics that are already circulating in the media landscape. The increasing adoption of media logic is another effect of mediatization (Lundby, 2009). Not only the media, also other institutions accommodate the logic of the media, which Hjarvard (2013) calls a “conceptual shorthand” (p. 17) or “modus operandi” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 105). Media logic mainly combines commercial logic in line with the general commercialization of media and society, and technological logic, meaning that content is shaped by technologies (Lundby, 2009). The term itself goes back to Altheide & Snow, who name the organization of material, style of presentation, grammar and focus on certain characteristics as part of media logic (Altheide & Snow, 1991). According to Mazzoleni (2008), media content is shaped and influenced by media logic.

Media logic is also part of the four dimensions or processes of social change in which mediatization happens proposed by Schulz (2004): *Extension* – media extending the “natural limits of human communication capacities” (Schulz, 2004, p. 88), *substitution* – media substituting and changing social interaction and institutions, *amalgamation* – media merging with non-media activities, *accommodation* – various organizations accommodating to media logic.

### **3.1.3 Critical voices**

Critics to the current state of the mediatization concept point out that these characteristics should be thoroughly checked for the phenomenon under study to avoid contributing to the “mediatization of ‘this-and-that’” (Deacon & Sanyer, 2014, p. 1033) or to “hashtag mediatization” (Lunt & Livingstone, 2016, p. 463), meaning that the increased use of digital media by different industries and companies should not be mistaken for mediatization. In addition, they encourage to explore in more detail different forms of possible reactions to media logic (Deacon & Sanyer, 2014) and to assess if Schulz’ dimensions can also account for the increasing significance of media in other domains than politics (Lunt & Livingstone, 2016). As a possible answer to critical voices, Krotz (2014) notes that there are different branches of mediatization research: “actual mediatization research to understand the developments and processes in media change of today and its consequences as part of the meta-process mediatization” (Krotz, 2014, p. 157) as well as an “integrative and critical branch” (Krotz, 2014, p. 158). The latter also considers other meta-processes like commercialization and globalization that are intertwined with mediatization. As a result, this branch of mediatization research will raise questions about critical issues such as privacy, new forms of control and alienation (Krotz, 2014). Jansson (2018) also notices a general lack of critical mediatization research as well as missing links between mediatization, globalization and individualization. In the summarizing remarks of his book, he discusses whether there is a potential “counter-mediatization” (Jansson, 2018, p. 8) in reaction to the mediatization processes as described before. He notices how activities such as disconnecting become increasingly valuable social assets in the late-modern society (Jansson, 2018).

### **3.2 Link to communication and branding**

The link to communication becomes evident in Krotz' (2009) definition of mediatization: "Mediatization describes the process whereby communication refers to media and uses media so that media in the long run increasingly become relevant for the social construction of everyday life, society, and culture as a whole" (p. 24). The author also states that "the mediatization concept defines communication as the core activity of human beings" (Krotz, 2009, p. 31). This connection is important to keep in mind for the study at hand since I approach mediatization and place branding from a strategic communication background.

In communication research, some existing studies approach mediatization from a PR perspective (Savic, 2016; Vercic & Tkalac Vercic, 2016), whereas tourism and mediatization have been mainly investigated from a tourism marketing perspective (e.g. Mercille, 2005, Månsson, 2011). One example of how corporate branding has been researched from a mediatization angle is Karmark's (2010) study of LEGO. He argues that by incorporating media products such as music and interactive software in their product line, the LEGO brand was increasingly mediatized. However, the company later reduced some of their mediatized products due to internal resistance and a clash between the company's identity and this new orientation. He concludes by saying that corporate identity plays a significant role in the mediatization process: "Mediatization balance may be an appropriate and safe strategy for organizations to apply" (Karmark, 2010, p. 126) so that mediatized branding practices do not clash with central elements of the corporate brand identity.

Another branding dimension in a mediatized world, so to say, is the concept of self-branding which Sarrimo (2015) discusses using the Swedish football legend Zlatan Ibrahimović. The author highlights how the "mediatization of the Zlatan myth" (p. 6) is accompanied by a process of commodification, meaning that the celebrity Zlatan Ibrahimović is turned into a commodity with a certain economic value. As this case shows, mediatization can turn something non-commercial into a commodity (Chouliaraki & Morsing, 2010). It will be interesting to see how the mediatization concept applies to place branding. In addition, the relation between mediatization and culture is presented which leads to its connection to place branding with cultural elements.

### 3.3 Mediatization and culture

Mediatization and culture are two closely linked concepts. Today, the media infiltrate society to a degree that they can no longer be separated from social or cultural institutions (Hjarvard, 2008). The late modern era is coined by a “growing media authority and the integration of media into nearly all cultural practices evoke cultural change, yet the outcome of this is highly variable and dependent on the context in question” (Hjarvard & Petersen, 2013, p. 2). In this environment, social or cultural subjects can move freely between different sources and channels (Jansson, 2013). The current state of mediatization, globalization and commercialization of culture makes cultural practices available to more members of the society, “but also transforms the very nature of these cultural practices“ (Hjarvard & Petersen, 2013, p. 2).

Hjarvard (2008) claims that “some see mediatization as an expression of the postmodern condition, in which media give rise to a new consciousness and cultural order” (p. 110). Jansson (2002), for instance, assumes that contemporary culture is in a state of general mediatization. In his opinion, mediated cultural products increasingly become points of cultural reference and as such contribute to developing and retaining cultural spheres. Through the mediatization of culture, media culture is reinforced and spread. Before, culture reflected the taste of cultural institutions or the local way of life. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Jansson (2002) argues, the media predominantly provide cultural products.

Especially interesting for this study is Hjarvard’s (2008) statement that “greater cultural reflexivity has the consequence that cultural development no longer takes place in naive isolation from other cultures, but will develop with an awareness that alternative courses are available” (p. 130). In that sense, the culture of one place can be transferred to another cultural context, but it can also be shaped by the awareness that there are different cultural developments in other countries. This idea is an outcome of the mediatization society we live in today and expresses its great influence on culture and communication. The case of VisitDenmark and *hygge* that this study investigates can be seen as an example of a place brand that utilizes a cultural asset within a mediatization context. The next subchapter talks more about the relationship between place branding and mediatization.



### **3.4 Place branding and mediatization**

Until now, there is relatively little mediatization research in the field of branding. Nevertheless, in the introduction to their book, Chouliaraki & Morsing (2010) find a strong connection between the two fields: “Branding refers to representation as a corporate strategy under conditions of mediatization” (Chouliaraki & Morsing, 2010, p. 12). They state that branding can be regarded as a logic of representation whereby non-commercial areas of the social life become redefined in a corporate discourse. Through the representation logic, people can also form cultural meanings about these formerly non-commercial areas. According to the authors, the mediatization concept is of heuristic value whereby the “challenges of the media-identity interplay” (Chouliaraki & Morsing, 2010, p. 15) are regarded as an open process that needs to be investigated within its specific socio-cultural context. As such, the authors define mediatization as a process by which media transform organizational identities.

The case of VisitDenmark’s place branding with the concept of *hygge* is an example of how immaterial culture, as a non-commercial area of life, is utilized for commercial purposes. Therefore, this paper wants to examine the relation between mediatization and place branding using cultural assets.

The relationship between media and tourism has already been researched by some studies (e.g. Mercille, 2005; Månsson, 2011). Some concerned certain streams of mediatization in tourism such as literary tourism (e.g. Hoppen, Brown & Fyall, 2014; Månsson, 2011) or film tourism (e.g. Reijnders, 2016; Hardy, 2011). This study, in contrast, is not interested in the mediatization of the tourism industry per se, but in branding towards tourists. Thus, I depart from a communication background instead of a tourism background, meaning that I am not interested to see how tourism products or tourist behavior change due to mediatization, but rather how mediatization influences the brand communication of a destination.

### **3.5 Implications for research**

To understand mediatization processes in “particular social institutions or cultural phenomena, and within specific historical periods in particular social and cultural contexts” (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 3), this study conducts a case study about VisitDenmark and *hygge* based on a mixed-methods approach. Another reason for

doing a case study is that mediatization is a non-normative concept, meaning that whether its consequences are positive or negative needs to be addressed with regards to its specific context (Hjarvard, 2008; Hjarvard & Petersen, 2013).

Krotz (2009) categorizes mediatization research in different levels, where this study belongs to the mezzo level, meaning that it studies the effects of media on the work of, in this case, tourism destination institutions. The concept of mediatization entails some assumptions which also shape the research process. For instance, some researchers (e.g. Hjarvard, 2013; Ekström, Fornäs, Jansson & Jerslev (2016) not that mediatization studies combine empirical foundations and theoretical reflections. Therefore, this study's empirical data will be analyzed based on the theoretical foundations of mediatization presented in this chapter, especially regarding the third research question which addresses the relationship between mediatization and place branding. Since this study also wants to add to the literature about place branding using cultural assets, place branding theory functions as a frame of analysis as well. The methods and research design of this study are discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

## 4. Methods and research design

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The purpose of this study is to understand, from a mediatization perspective, how destination branding reproduces and transforms cultural assets. To reach this purpose, a case study approach is chosen to generate concrete, context-dependent knowledge to better understand the phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Within the case study, I will combine qualitative interviews and qualitative content analysis to a mixed-methods approach. The underlying epistemological perspective of my inquiry is social constructionism. After describing this perspective, the chapter will justify the selection of case organizations and the methodological choice of interviews and content analysis. Finally, methodological implications and ethical considerations will be discussed.

### 4.1 Social constructionism

The social constructionist approach to qualitative research belongs to the post-positivistic paradigm and as such believes that reality can never be fully measured, but approximated by applying multiple methods (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Reality is seen as socially constructed and thus is not objective, but dependent on the humans' relation to it (Zhao, Falkheimer & Heide, 2017). This means that reality is constructed between people (Burr, 2015). As a result, there is also an intimate relationship between me as a researcher and the topic of my study. The inquiry is shaped by the concrete situation of the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Social constructionism is a suitable epistemological approach for mediatization studies. When it comes to mediatization, two central traditions emerge: Institutionalism and social constructivism (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). The latter highlights the influence of information and communication technology (ICT) in reorganizing different activities by being deeply, continually and socially ingrained in people's everyday lives (Deacon & Sanyer, 2014).

Couldry & Hepp (2017) even discuss the idea of the mediated construction of reality, that was introduced by Krotz (2009). They depart from the idea that reality is socially constructed, but the social in return is “constructed from, and through, mediated processes and infrastructures of communication” (p. 1). As Krotz (2009) puts it, “media have become increasingly relevant for the social construction of reality as people in their communicative actions refer more and more to the media and use them” (Krotz, 2009, p. 24). Resulting implications of conducting research in the social-constructivist tradition are given in the following.

#### ***4.1.1 Implications for the research design***

According to the social constructionist perspective, knowledge is specific to the cultural and historical context (Burr, 2015). Therefore, the case study approach is in line with this epistemological understanding. The chosen perspective does also have implications for the methods of this study. Qualitative research interviews help to “understand the world from the subject’s point of view” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 3). Since “meanings are produced through people’s interactions” (Zhao et al., 2017, p. 367), qualitative interviews are an integral part of this study. However, the interaction between me and the interviewees constructs knowledge, too, and I am aware that my involvement as the interviewer will play a role in the findings. One reason for this is that the interviewer’s assumptions may inform asked questions (Burr, 2015).

In addition, the uses and effects of language are of central interest to social constructionism (Burr, 2015). This aspect becomes also crucial in the content analysis, whereby the construction of the social world is researched through written language (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). To achieve this, I will analyze text and images in this study, to see how the concept of *hygge* is constructed and transformed in different contexts.

## **4.2 Research design**

With a combination of content analysis and interviews, this study uses a mixed methods approach, which simply means to combine two or more research methods (Silverman, 2013). Interviews are conducted with communicators in charge of *hygge* campaigns and with the publisher of the *Hygge* magazine. The interviews

are especially suitable for the perspective of mediatization, as they can provide insights into how institutions such as VisitDenmark reproduce a cultural asset through communication. Plus, they can also shed light on the media orientation of the communicators' work.

Interviews are often supplemented by additional data (Strübing, 2013, pp. 80 f.). Here, I use content analysis, both of VisitDenmark's website and Instagram account that contain presentations of *hygge*, and of the *Hygge* magazine as an example of a foreign medium that adapts this cultural asset. The following table provides more details about the units of analysis, the interview durations and partners as well as the respective research questions that shall be answered based on the empirical data.

	<b>VisitDenmark</b>	<b><i>Hygge</i> magazine</b>
<b>Interviews</b>	3 interviewees	1 interviewee
Job position(s)	marketing manager (interviewee 1), senior project manager (interviewee 2), PR & communication manager (interviewee 3)	publisher (interviewee 4)
Duration	40-50 minutes	30 minutes
<b>Content analysis – text</b>	approx. 25 units	approx. 70 units
<b>Content analysis – images</b>	110 units	253 units
<b>Research questions</b>	1, 2, 3	2, 3

**Fig. 1: Research design**

The considerable differences in the number of units are due to the large number of pages that each issue of the *Hygge* magazine comprises. As will be explained in chapter 4.5.1, I selected two issues of the magazine with around 160 pages each. These come down to the approximated number of text units and images presented in the above table.

### **4.3 Case study**

Case studies are characterized by an intensive analysis of a specific individual unit (Flyvbjerg, 2006), which will provide a clearer picture of what is going on in the broader context (Garrod & Fyall, 2011). Thus, a case study is considered a suitable

ble approach for this thesis. Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that this context-dependent knowledge derived from case studies lies the foundation for all human expertise. He suggests case study as a solution to the risk of “ritual academic blind alleys” (p. 6) by creating a proximity to the object and reality under study and by receiving feedback from the people under study. The case of Denmark’s destination branding with the concept of *hygge* is purposefully chosen as a critical case. A critical case has “strategic importance in relation to the general problem” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 14). This means that I choose Denmark’s use of *hygge* with the assumption that it will represent well the general phenomenon that I want to study, namely how institutions reproduce culture and how this reproduction is reinforced by the media.

According to Berg (2009), criteria for selection must be established before the actual analysis of data to ensure an objective analysis of the messages. The criteria for choosing VisitDenmark and the *Hygge* magazine were: (1) deploying a cultural asset for destination branding, (2) strong representation of this asset in social media and other media abroad, (3) accommodation of the mediatized cultural asset by a medium independent of the original sender.

#### **4.3.1 VisitDenmark**

VisitDenmark is the official Danish tourism organization which is responsible for promoting Denmark internationally as a tourist destination. On its website ([www.visitdenmark.com](http://www.visitdenmark.com)), it provides information about activities, destinations and accommodations as well as the possibility to book flights, hotels and cars (VisitDenmark, 2018a).

The organization has market offices in eight countries, including Great Britain and Germany, and cooperates with the Danish destinations which develop the destinations and market them on a national level. It also cooperates with several member organizations that work to promote tourism. VisitDenmark is partly financed by foreign commercial partners (60 percent) and partly by the state, destinations and commercial companies from Denmark (40 percent). Next to the website, VisitDenmark wants to communicate with tourists on as many digital contact points as possible in their goal to influence tourists to come to the country. There-

fore, VisitDenmark uses Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube (VisitDenmark, 2018b).

VisitDenmark is managed by a board of directors which gets appointed for a three-years-period and is responsible for the overall management of VisitDenmark. The members, in turn, appoint a management board that is taking care of the day-to-day management of VisitDenmark and reports annually to the Minister for Business (VisitDenmark, 2018c).

In its strategy for 2017 until 2019, VisitDenmark has set a target growth of 17 million more nights and an increased turnover of 45 billion Danish crowns to be reached until 2025. This shall be accomplished amongst others by increasing the international demand for Denmark, by strengthening digital tourism efforts and cooperation. Whereas VisitDenmark's purpose is to inspire tourists to travel to Denmark at the beginning of the planning phase, the commercial partners and destinations must convert the increased interest into concrete sales and experiences.

Under the name @govisitdenmark, the organization is active on Instagram. The desire for *hygge* is also expressed online: More than 3.3 million posts on Instagram use the hashtag #*hygge*, of which only 53<sup>2</sup> are shared by VisitDenmark. More than 7,000 uploads use #*danishhygge*. This shows the great potential of *hygge* to be represented on social media, and its popularity among social media users. Analyzing VisitDenmark's use of *hygge* on their Instagram profile as well as website texts about *hygge* is an essential way to understand how this Danish cultural asset is deployed for place branding purposes.

#### ***4.3.2 Hygge magazine***

The German publisher group Deutsche Medien-Manufaktur dedicated a new print magazine to *hygge* as the „emotion of this era, the counterpart to the digitalization and general acceleration of life” (Verlagsgruppe Deutsche Medien-Manufaktur, 2017, HYGGE – Das Gefühl section, para. 1; translated by the author) in June 2017. This represents a medium which regularly disseminates messages about *hygge*, except that it is completely detached from VisitDenmark and place branding purposes.

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<sup>2</sup> effective: April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018

The *Hygge* magazine wants to bring the Danish and Scandinavian feeling of coziness, togetherness, family, friendship, home and safety to Germany. It is divided into four parts, entitled as “being together”, “being spoiled”, “being home” and “being outdoors” (Verlagsgruppe Deutsche Medien-Manufaktur, 2017a, HYGGE – Das Magazin section, para. 1; own translation). The *Hygge* magazine is published six times a year and covers around 160 pages at a cost of five Euro. The first issue sold around 60,000 times and generated 5,000 subscriptions, which is considered a successful launch. The publisher’s CEO explained the success of the magazine being a fast and innovative reaction to a big societal trend. The *Hygge* magazine is said to be the first magazine addressing this Danish and Scandinavian sense of simplicity. The current circulation comprises 180,000 copies (Verlagsgruppe Deutsche Medien-Manufaktur, 2017b).

#### **4.4 Qualitative interviews**

Interviews can be defined as conversations with “a structure and a purpose (...), obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge“ (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 6). This method generates complex information (Strübing, 2013) and enables the researcher to learn from interviewee experiences to elaborate the issue in detail (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

In contrast to unstructured or structured interviews, semi-structured interviews match the requirements for this paper best: With a set of predefined questions but enough freedom to react to answers and analyze emerging topics in more depth, interviewees may bring up new aspects. However, there is a consistent focus on the central research questions (Strübing, 2013). For this study, interviews were conducted with only a few interviewees individually to elaborate their communication work regarding *hygge*.

As both parties – interviewee and interviewer – play an equal part in creating relevant data, interviewing can be seen as a craft that can only be learned through practice (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). I consider it, therefore, to be of advantage that I have worked with interviews as a research method before. Plus, this experience ensured my moderating competencies and enabled me to react spontaneously and to ensure conversation flow, which is considered important quality criteria of interviews (Strübing, 2013).



The first interview that I conducted served as a pre-test for my interview guide and the proceeding so that I could make adjustments where needed. All in all, I conducted four interviews over the period of two weeks from mid until end of March. The selection of my interviewees is presented in the following.

#### ***4.4.1 Selection of interviewees***

Since I did not have an established contact within the organization, I selected interviewees based on convenience sampling. Nonetheless, there are some criteria that interviewees should fulfill. For instance, they should work within the communication or marketing department and be involved in campaigns surrounding the concept of *hygge*. Plus, I regard six months of work experience in their current position as a minimum to ensure enough experience with this matter.

Purposeful sampling is common for qualitative inquiries (Patton, 2005). The selection of interviewees was restricted to employees from Denmark, Germany and the UK due to time limitations, but also because these matched the data from the content analysis. All interviewees have been working in their positions for six months up to two years.

Next to the three employees at VisitDenmark, I also talked with the publisher of the German *Hygge* magazine to represent the side of the media. Three of the interviewees have German nationality, only the project manager is Danish. For this cross-cultural interview, I know that some factors such as habits and differences in language might influence the interview situation. However, the German and the Danish culture are regarded as closely related and thus, the risk of cultural misunderstandings seems to be minimal. Another aspect is that two interviews were conducted in German and two in English. The issue of translation will be addressed later in this chapter, because it also pertains the content analysis. The interview process is portrayed in more detail below.

#### ***4.4.2 Interview proceedings***

The interview guide functions as the basis for semi-structured interviews. Before the interviews, I formulated questions based on the aim and research questions of this study. An interview guide “indicates the topics and their sequence“ (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 129-130) which were used as a frame for the interview

situation, but the order was spontaneously adapted and additional questions arose during the conversation. Thus, the interview guide (see appendix 1) provides a flexible framework by listing topical headings and several core questions (Gaskell, 2000). In one case, the interviewee asked for the guide beforehand for her to prepare for the interview.

The interviews lasted around 45 minutes each and were conducted via phone, Skype and Google Hangouts, depending which instrument the interviewees preferred. Luckily, there were no disruptions by a bad connection or technical failure. By briefing the interviews and starting with some small-talk, I tried to create a situation in which both parties felt comfortable. Thus, I am convinced that it was not a problem that the interviews were not conducted in person. Also, this introductory part established the participants' trust in my work. In this part, I asked for the participants' consent to audio-record the interviews for later transcription which took place directly after the interviews.

The questions included a variety of different forms such as introductory, follow-up, probing, specifying, interpreting questions or even silence (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Based on the literature review, I focused on the topics *hygge as a representation of Denmark, expressing hygge in text and images* and *hygge in other media*. For the complete interview guide, see appendix 1.

Since the analysis of the interviews is conducted similarly to the analysis of the website, Instagram and magazine content, the following section about content analysis is applicable for the analytical process of the interviews as well.

## **4.5 Content analysis**

Often, content analysis efforts focus on particular phenomena, ideas or attitudes (Krippendorff, 1989) and therefore match the case study approach that this thesis takes. There is an ongoing discussion on whether content analysis should be approached from a quantitative or qualitative tradition. Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond & McCroskey (2013) for instance state that „content analysis attempts to quantitatively summarize different messages” (pp. 275-276). On the contrary, Berg (2009) argues that quantitative content analysis is only suitable for identifying, organizing, indexing, and retrieving data. Qualitative analysis is then needed to analyze this organized data. For this study, images were quantitatively analyzed

to get an overview of common visualizations in terms of numbers and frequencies. The texts on VisitDenmark's website were also analyzed regarding the most frequent words. In addition, the texts on the website, as well as all textual material including the interviews were analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

#### ***4.5.1 Units of analysis and data collection***

For the online channels of VisitDenmark (Instagram and international website), I choose to analyze all material about the term *hygge*. This sums up to 53 posts on Instagram, 25 pages text from the website and 57 images from the homepage. The data was collected by hand and the texts are put in the content analysis program Nvivo for coding and further analysis. Depending on the density of relevant information, I use both sentences and paragraphs as units of analysis.

Regarding the print magazine, two of five issues were chosen. Criteria were that they should display different seasons and different stages of the magazine's development, i.e. one early issue and the newest issue. The issues under analysis thus were the third and the fifth and each consist of 165 pages.

## **4.6 Analytical process**

For the analysis, I oriented my work at the ladder of analytical abstraction as presented by Eksell & Thelander (2014). For the first step, a combination of in-vivo and abduction approach was used to code the empirical data after the transcription. This means that coding-categories were established and changed during the coding process (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). I tested the coding on a small part of the website text. To ensure objectivity during the process of analysis, I created a code-book which lists different keywords and codes. New codes were added throughout the process. With help of the codebook, one part of the data was also coded by a fellow student prior to the actual analysis. During this pre-test phase, I checked if we coded the passages differently by looking at intercoder reliability. This "is a measure of the extent to which independent judges make the same coding decisions in evaluating the characteristics of messages" (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002, p. 587). The percentage of agreement was 0.6. This percentage indicates on how many coding decisions we agreed, with 0 equalling no

agreement and 1 equalling perfect agreement (Lombard et al., 2002). After few adjustments and clarifications in the codebook, I coded the remaining data.

For the categorizing step, I applied Spriggle's (1994) description of categorization and abstraction as a form of analyzing the data. The categorization process is used to identify first patterns. The abstraction goes beyond this stage by grouping themes into conceptual classes. I hereby move from several concrete categories to fewer more general ones. Each data unit is now an indicator of a more general construct (Spriggle, 1994).

Halkier's (2011) ideal-typologizing is used as a tool for presenting and interpreting the data. The term "ideal type" in this context refers to "a one-sidedly focused synthesis of diffuse and discrete empirical phenomena into a unified abstract analytical construct which will never be discovered in this specific form" (Halkier, 2011, p. 790). The researcher thereby condenses coded patterns into a limited number of descriptions relevant to the research questions that underline only some characteristics. They are then labeled and represent one ideal type. The disadvantage with this form of analysis and representation is that it reduces the complexity of the data. Thereby, other patterns, overlaps and alike are not represented (Halkier, 2011). Despite this downside, I regard ideal-typologizing a suitable form of presentation and interpretation, as it helps me keeping the focus on the research questions and the aim of the study.

Lastly, I also tried to spot patterns and establish relationships between different codes and categories in connection to the theoretical foundations of this study. The steps described here were no linear process but rather a journey back and forth between each step.

#### ***4.6.1 Translations***

While the content from VisitDenmark and two of the interviews were conducted in English, two interviews and the *Hygge* magazine are in German. I did not translate the whole data to not change its original meaning. However, I have translated the quotes from the German material that are used in the analysis chapter to English. I am aware that there can arise certain issues by translating quotes since some nuances of the original language might get lost in the translation process. There is the risk that the values of the translator can become interwoven with the transla-

tion and thus, the translation can become disconnected from the original (Cassinger, 2014). Plus, translations are shaped both after and during the interview, since it is a process of translation between interviewer and interviewee (Cassinger, 2014). I tried to acknowledge these circumstances by asking follow-up questions during the interview to make sure I understood the answers correctly. Nevertheless, recognizing the implications that translations can have for the results of the study need to be transparently addressed.

#### **4.7 Ethical considerations**

There are some general criteria for quality and ethics in qualitative research, such as trust between the researcher and participants as well as trustworthiness of the researcher and his or her work. Another aspect is transparency. For this study, the interviewees were informed about the aim of the study and their contribution to it. They agreed to the recording and were informed that their data was handled confidentially. According to Brinkmann & Kvale (2015), “moral issues concern the means as well as the ends of an interview inquiry” (p. 83), plus the different stages of interview inquiry. With the aforementioned informed consent, confidentiality, and by minimizing stress for the interviewees within the interview situations, I tried to meet the moral criteria that Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) introduce. For the transcriptions, I made sure the written text was loyal to oral statements by sending the transcripts to the interviewees for them to check their correctness.

Indicators for interview quality can be that answers are spontaneous, specific, rich and relevant (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The fulfillment of these criteria becomes evident in the transcriptions. They also show that the interviews are characterized by short questions and long answers, that I asked follow-up questions and tried to clarify certain answers, whereby I tried to interpret what was said throughout the interviews. I am aware of the fact that I am German and that I was already quite familiar with *hygge* and the *Hygge* magazine may influence the research process. Some of my pre-establish opinions, for instance, could influence the questions I ask during the interviews or my interpretations of the content. However, I am convinced that this study can contribute valuable knowledge both in theory and in practice.

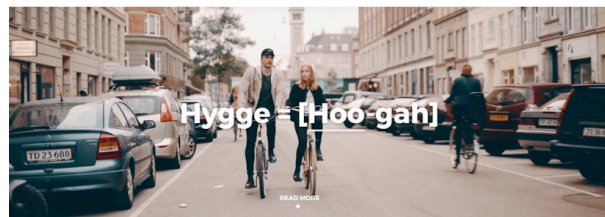
# 5. Analysis

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This chapter contains the analysis of the data gathered for this study. The first part provides an overview of the descriptive analysis, such as the frequency of words. This gives a first impression of differences in the presentation of *hygge* by VisitDenmark and the *Hygge* magazine. Thereafter, the division of subchapters is based on the study's research questions: First, it is explained how *hygge* is expressed and used for place branding with special regards to how an intangible cultural concept is described in words, images and events. One key finding was the diversity of representations and *hygge*'s potential to be connected to other Danish characteristics. Second, it is addressed how *hygge* is reproduced and transformed through place branding. As a result, the analysis shows how the cultural concept becomes commodified and commercialized, simplified and transferred to other contexts. The last part illustrates how mediatization influences place branding. The findings show that the media become increasingly intertwined with the place branding communication, that *hygge* provides a counter-balance but also poses the risk of alienation and over-representation.

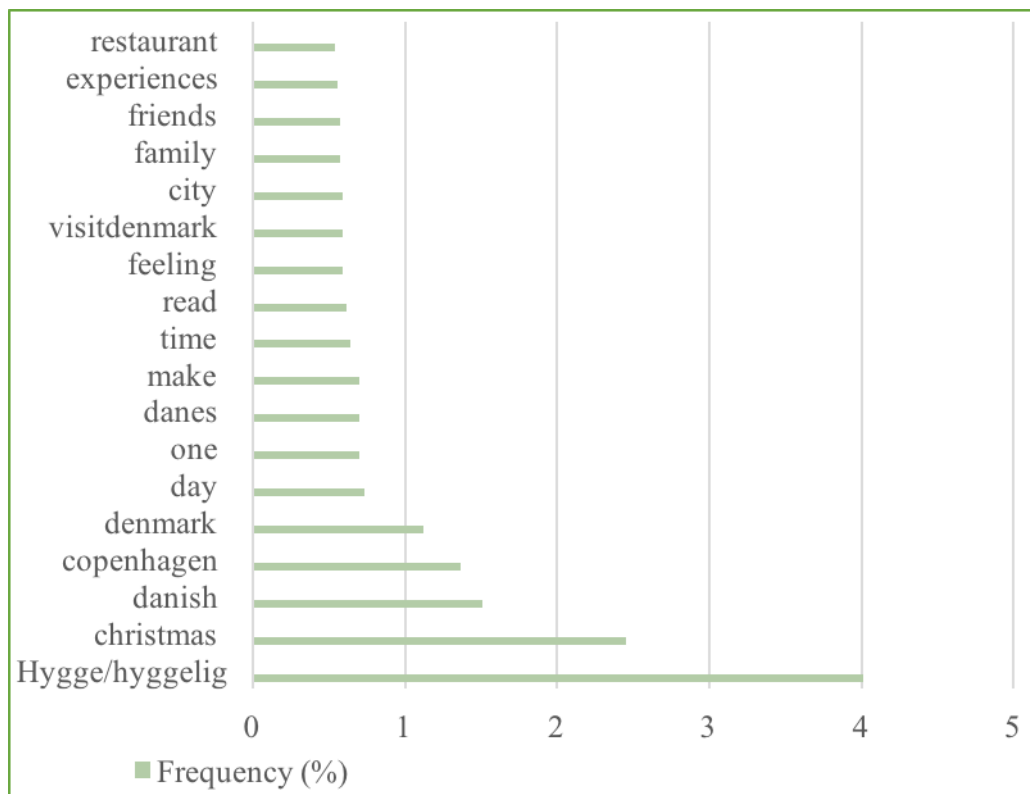
## 5.1 Descriptive analysis

First, I used the content analysis program Nvivo to determine most frequent words in texts about *hygge* on VisitDenmark's website (see fig. 2, next page). *Hygge* and its adjective *hyggelig* were mentioned the most. Interestingly, *Christmas* is on the second position of most frequent words, followed by *Danish*, *Copenhagen* and *Denmark*. In total, five of the 18 most frequent words are connected to Denmark.



Hygge: The Danish Art of Cosiness

Fig. 2: Header on VisitDenmark's website (VisitDenmark, 2018e)



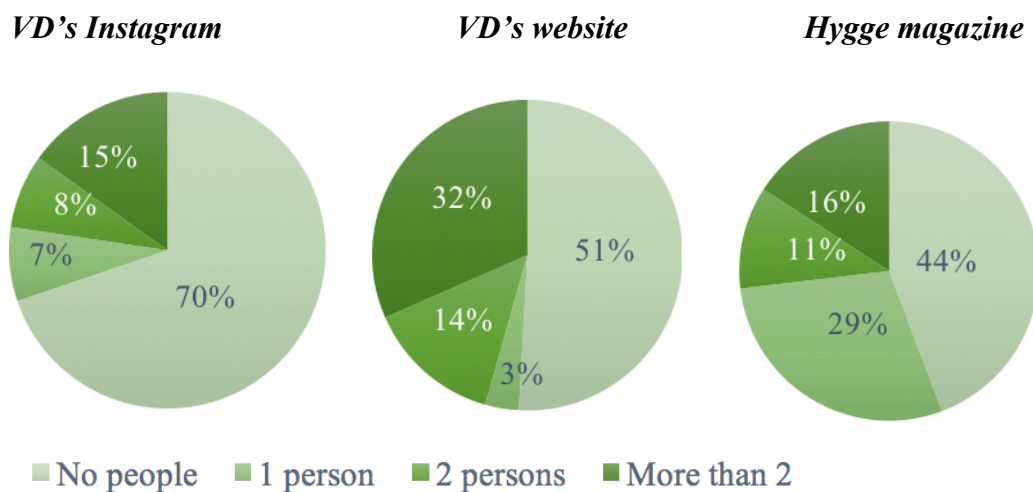
**Fig. 3: Most frequent words in texts about *hygge* on VisitDenmark’s website**

That can be explained by the fact that VisitDenmark’s purpose is to promote Denmark as a travel destination. In its English texts, VisitDenmark repeatedly connects the concept of *hygge* to Denmark. *Hygge* is a word that is already known and popular in the English-speaking key markets. Thus, by using *hygge* for place branding purposes, VisitDenmark aims to transfer the positive notion of *hygge* to Denmark as a travel destination. One advantage of using cultural commodities for place branding is that their positive image can be transferred to the place (Rausch, 2008). Although his statement refers to goods, this case shows that it also applies to intangible cultural elements like *hygge*.

When looking at the other frequent words, terms like *feeling*, *experiences*, *friends* and *family* are represented in the bar chart. Those usually belong to explanations or translations of *hygge*. For example: “*And there's nothing more hygge than sitting around with friends and family, discussing the big and small things in life.*” (VisitDenmark, 2018e) Since *hygge* is a concept that people outside of Denmark have probably not encountered in their life until recently, these explanations make the term graspable and understandable. Explaining *hygge* in a way that everyone can relate to the concept, even if he or she is not Danish, is an important

part of creating and communicating the brand identity. According to Rainisto (2004), creating and communicating the brand identity is the essence of place branding. What makes this case special is the fact that with *hygge*, a cultural concept that has existed for centuries, builds the foundation for the brand identity. Thus, *hygge* as part of the brand identity is not created but rather utilized for place branding.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to get hold of digital versions of the *Hygge* magazine's issues. For this reason, I cannot compare the most frequent words on the website to the magazine. Nonetheless, I will go into more detail of both texts, website and magazine, within the representation of the qualitative analysis in this chapter. Regarding the images, however, some differences become visible when looking at the varying frequencies of their content.

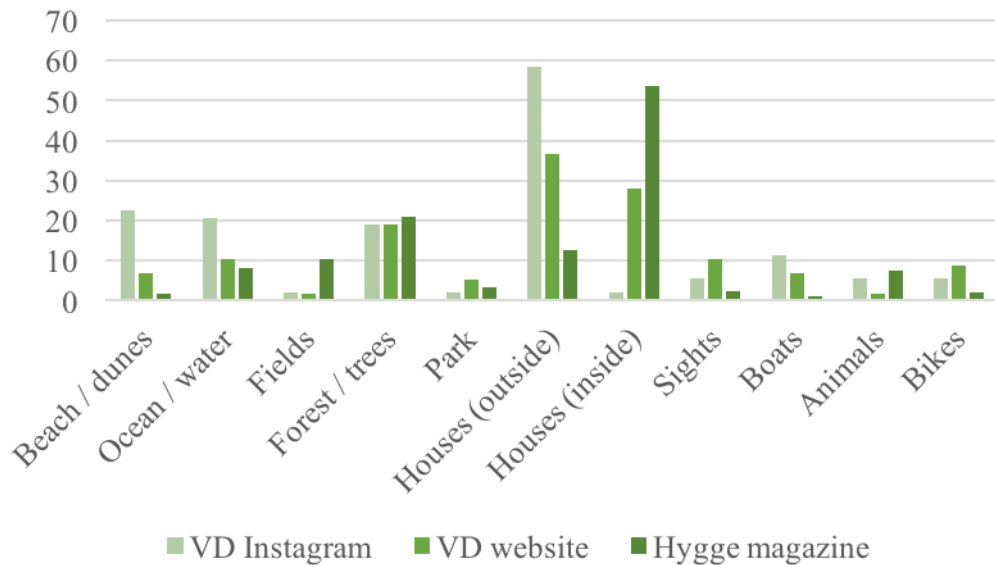


**Fig. 4: Amount of people per image and channel**

As can be seen in the pie charts, the three channels under analysis differ in their inclusion of people in the images. 70% of the images on VisitDenmark's Instagram account don't show any people. The website already presents a bigger share of images with people, namely almost the half. The highest share of images with people, however, is found in the magazine. This can be explained by the different purposes of the channels. The magazine wants to address its readers on a more personal level by depicting everyday situations that could also be experienced by the readers (for an example, see figure 6, page 41). The website, however, wants to transmit a certain image of Denmark, which does include tourists and locals,



but also sights and the Danish landscape. Instagram is used for candid and inspirational snapshots that show stunning nature or buildings. Reposting the pictures of followers on Instagram can be a good and still rather controlled way of including external views in the representation of *hygge* as part of the Danish place brand. These could both include its image among Danes and among tourists. This is similar to Capitello et al. (2017), who state that place branding links internal and external views. These observations become evident in the below figure:



**Fig. 5: Frequency distribution (absolute numbers) of landscapes**

On the one hand, VisitDenmark depicts more dunes, beaches and water than the *Hygge* magazine. On Instagram pictures, there is the highest number of beach, water, houses from the oversight and boats. Here, the representations seem to especially highlight Denmark’s connection to the sea. The website has the highest number of pictures with sights and bikes.

The *Hygge* magazine, on the other hand, portrays more buildings from the inside. This difference is probably the most striking difference in figure 5. A possible reason for the differences is that VisitDenmark wants to showcase nature, sights and buildings that are characteristic for the country as part of promoting it to tourists. Bikes for instance are frequently shown because Denmark and especially Copenhagen are known abroad to be bike-friendly. With these presentations of *hygge* and Denmark, the tourism organization shapes the image of Denmark which is based on the experience of a place. In this case, the experience of (poten-

tial) tourists is mediated through VisitDenmark's channels, but also through external media outlets such as the *Hygge* magazine. Although this is not the focus of the study, one side-conclusion can be that the media relations in this case are significant for shaping *hygge* and thus, Denmark's image. This finding is in line with Kavartzis & Kalandides (2015) who say that the experience of a place shapes its image, whether it is unmediated or not, direct or indirect.

Despite the *Hygge* magazine's intention to interpret the *hygge* concept in a way that people can also experience it in Germany, it still connects positive situations such as spending time with friends and family to the concept. Plus, figure 5 shows that houses from the inside are the most common setting for images in the magazine, followed by forest and trees, which are more widespread in Germany than beaches.



**Fig. 6: Example pictures from the magazine (Charpian & Hej Cake, 2017)**

To summarize the descriptive part of the analysis, some initial findings emerge: VisitDenmark focuses on connecting *hygge* to its country and to explain *hygge* in their communication. The analysis sheds light on the visualization and expression of *hygge* by VisitDenmark. Thereby, *hygge* as a cultural concept is utilized for place branding purposes. Regarding visual representations, there are considerable differences, both between VisitDenmark's channels, but also to the *Hygge* magazine. As a conclusion, it can be noted that *hygge* is adapted and presented differently according to different needs and contexts, such as different channels or target audiences. These explorations will become addressed in more detail throughout the following chapters.

## 5.2 Deploying *hygge* for place branding

To answer the first research question, how VisitDenmark utilizes *hygge* for place branding, I analyzed the interviews with VisitDenmark's employees as well as VisitDenmark's Instagram posts, images and texts on the website about *hygge*. The challenge is how to transform a culturally coined emotion into images and text. This part of the analysis, therefore, investigates how VisitDenmark solves this task.

### 5.2.1 Visualizing *hygge*

A first look at the descriptive analysis revealed that there are some differences in how *hygge* is depicted in images between VisitDenmark's website and the Instagram account. Pictures on Instagram appear more candid and inspirational. They are reposts from pictures by followers who tagged VisitDenmark. They show situations and environments for the user to dream into. Here, the images largely speak for themselves.



**Fig. 7: Sample picture on the website vs. Instagram**  
(VisitDenmark, 2018d; screenshot)

On the website, pictures mainly visualize the accompanying text. Consequently, they appear more staged and commercial. Many show for instance Danish products or sights. The possibilities to express *hygge* in different forms are pointed out as an advantage by one interviewee: "*Hygge is different to me than it is to you*" (Interviewee 2, p. 2). Since *hygge* is a broad concept, even to Danish people, there are various ways of visualizing it, which makes the visual communication quite diverse. On the one hand, this can be perceived as a challenge for the brand com-

munication: “The biggest challenge is that everyone thinks of something else when they hear *hygge*” (Interviewee 1, p. 6). On the other hand, this vagueness is considered an advantage. Several motives can be published as *hyggelig* moments so that the visual representation of the concept is abundant and suitable for long-term brand communication. The importance of multidimensionality for employing cultural elements in place branding has also been noted by Rausch (2018). He found that cultural commodities are suitable for place branding when they ensure variability. The case of *hygge* shows that his finding is also applicable for intangible cultural elements. If the cultural concept was too specific, the content about it would be too limited and one-sided. The vagueness of the *hygge* concept, which is often expressed by stating that there is no metaphor for it, allows for several interpretations of the term. This does not only create challenges and opportunities for the visualization, but also for expressing *hygge* in texts and events, as the following part shows.

### **5.2.2 Making *hygge* tangible**

*“We try to create impulses based on which everyone can find a connection to the term and can discover what *hygge* means to oneself”* (Interviewee 3, p. 1). This quote from Interviewee 3 shows the communicators’ approach to incorporating *hygge* in place branding. One example from the website looks like this:

Hygge is as Danish as *æbleskiver* and it goes far in illuminating the Danish soul. In essence, *hygge* means creating a warm atmosphere and enjoying the good things in life with good people. The warm glow of candlelight is *hygge*. Friends and family – that’s *hygge* too. There’s nothing more *hygge* than sitting round a table, discussing the big and small things in life. (VisitDenmark, 2018e)

By reading this quote, readers shall get an idea of what *hygge* feels like. It shows that it is deeply connected part of the Danish culture, by highlighting its importance to the “Danish soul” and comparing it to the popular Danish dish *æbleskiver*. In addition, the text describes situations that everyone knows independent from his or her cultural background. Making the cultural asset come to life, even if that is just in words and images, also reveals its suitability for place

branding. *Hygge* is a concept that has a long history in Denmark and is an integral part of Danish everyday life, as both the interviews and the texts on the website indicate. Historical depth thus seems to be given for this asset. In addition, *hygge* offers the potential to connect to other well-known Danish associations. These associations include for instance food (*æbleskiver*) and interior design (candles), as the above quote indicates, but also biking and Copenhagen. The analysis of the website texts revealed that these topics, together with Danish Christmas traditions, are commonly mentioned together with *hygge*. Thus, the variability of *hygge* which has been already noted concerning its visualization is also valid for texts about *hygge* and the way in which it can be integrated into already existing brand image and identity. Rausch's (2008) findings that "historical depth and contemporary breadth, a multidimensional character and reality" (p. 142) make cultural elements suitable for place branding can thus also be observed in this case.

Another aspect of making the *hygge* concept tangible is how to let potential tourists experience this part of the Danish culture. As a solution, the interviewees gave the example of events, either directed towards tourists or the press:

Last year we brought 100 pairs of knitted woolen socks for everybody to have. They were so big that they fitted outside the business shoes and suddenly people were standing all around in suits and ties and socks on their feet. It just changed the conversation instantly. Everybody was just like: Well, Denmark is cozy. It also emphasizes the low power-distance we have in Denmark and the way everybody is equal; it just eased up the whole vibe of everything. It had the exact effect that we wanted. Just a small thing as doing that emphasized *hygge* we have in Denmark. (Interviewee 2, p. 3)

This scenario shows the difference between telling people about how cozy *hygge* feels like and what life in Denmark feels like, and letting experience this by themselves. Especially for this type of "national feeling" as Howell & Sundberg (2015) describe *hygge*, creating a direct experience as part of place branding is an integral part. The above quote shows that events provide an opportunity to directly experience cultural elements such as *hygge* through place branding. Plus, VisitDenmark uses events to create positive experiences of Danish *hygge* to thereby shape a

positive image of the place. The choice of such an integral part of the Danish culture, with *hygge* being able to refer to many aspects of the Danish lifestyle, this cultural asset is of great value for place branding. This reaffirms Kavaratzis & Ashworth (2015) in their thesis that a place brand is a cultural resource which helps the residents to construct and narrate their culture, whereas foreigners can experience this culture through the place brand.

However, culture does not only influence place branding but vice versa, place branding also influences culture (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). The latter issue will be addressed in the following part of the analysis. Plus, it also analyzes the role of the *Hygge* magazine as an example of international media that write about *hygge*.

### 5.3 Cultural reproduction and transformation

If we as a destination marketing organization portray *hygge* or Denmark in a way that it's not, Danish people will react in some way and say: This is not true and we cannot be portrayed in that way. So, we try to do everything as honest as we can. We often sit here in our team and talk about: Is this a good way, would we actually do that? Is this how we see *hygge*? And if it's not, we don't do it. Sometimes, of course, you can push the boundaries when it's marketing, but usually, we don't think that we cannot believe ourselves. (Interviewee 2, p. 3)

This chapter analyzes how VisitDenmark and the *Hygge* magazine adapt and adopt *hygge* and thereby answers the second research question. The above quote shows one difficulty when using a cultural asset for place branding: Representing culture in a way that local people identify with it. On the other hand, the interviewee admits that certain transformations become legitimate when utilizing culture for place branding. Balancing these interests is described as linking internal and external views by Capitello et al. (2017). Place branding needs to combine what the place *is*, what brand communicators want to *convey* and how tourists *perceive* it. The first part, what the place *is*, is to a certain degree shaped by the locals. The quote shows that place branding needs to stay true to the locals' perception of themselves, their place and their cultural values. Especially since the *hygge* concept is deeply ingrained in the Danes' everyday lives.

Nonetheless, some aspects of *hygge* become transformed in the place branding process and the media. The transformations and reproductions that influence the concept of *hygge* are: Commodification and commercialization, simplification and reproduction of stereotypes and change of context.

### 5.3.1 Commodification and commercialization

*“You can discover and be a part of this notion in abundance in Denmark's capital Copenhagen, where cafés, friendly accommodation and Danish design pieces welcome you to experience hygge first-hand.”* (VisitDenmark, 2018f)



**Fig. 8: Advertising on VisitDenmark’s website** (VisitDenmark, 2018e)

The above examples from VisitDenmark’s website show how consumable services get connected to a cultural element which is essentially not commercial. On the one hand, interviewees stressed that *hygge* is cheap and you don’t have to buy certain products or brands to *hygge*. On the other hand, they have partnerships for *hygge* campaigns, for instance with a Danish interior design brand or the airline SAS, and promote *hyggelig* restaurants and accommodation on their website. These activities slightly change the meaning of *hygge* from a feeling that you simply enjoy, to a feeling that you can buy. The effect that branding can turn something non-commercial into a commodity is also noted by other researchers (e.g. Chouliaraki & Morsing, 2010; Sarrimo, 2015), for instance in self-branding. In this case, place branding turns the cultural spirit that should be inclusive and free to enjoy into a commodity that is advertised and sold. Commercialization can be observed in the *Hygge* magazine. Each subchapter starts with a double page about *hygge* products (example: p. 42). Therefore, one enabler for the commercialization of *hygge* by VisitDenmark could be the reaction to commercial media logic.



**Fig. 9: Product placements in the *Hygge* magazine (“Magazin”, 2017)**

According to Lundby (2009), commercial media logic is the result of the increasing commercialization of media and society. This case implies that not only the media but also place branding and culture are part of this commercialization. Using cultural elements such as *hygge* for place branding comes with the effect that this contributes to the commercialization of *hygge* that is already happening in the media. Thereby, the cultural element slowly changes its nature.

### 5.3.2 Simplification and reproduction of stereotypes

The interviewees were also aware that in their place branding campaigns, they reproduce a certain image of *hygge* that is already prevalent in people’s minds:

I think also when you portray *hygge*, a lot of times it becomes quite stereotypical because that’s just what usually works. You kind of tap into what some people already envision when they think of it, so you take that a little further. (Interviewee 1, p. 4)



**Fig. 10: Stereotypical presentation of *hygge* (VisitDenmark, 2018e)**



With reproducing and contributing to a brand identity that is already prevalent in people's minds, this study shows that the brand identity of the cultural asset has already been framed by other sources. In this case, brand managers and communicators try to stronger connect Denmark to the image of *hygge* that people already formed based its media presence. Hence, the media and other brands play an important role in shaping the cultural concept, by adapting and reproducing *hygge* according to their needs. This contradicts Arvidsson's (2005) idea of branding, which says that branding can frame the intended brand identity. The below quote shows how one interviewee judges this development:

What we can see is that not only media but also other brands put *hygge* into a mainstream area and that they only focus on a certain part of *hygge*. For example, when Thalia [a German bookstore chain] displays a table with socks and candles, selling this as *hygge*. Often, the *hygge*-concept is also reduced to winter topics, where the contrast between the cold outside world and the warm inside world is being addressed. This tends to be simple and one-sided. (Interviewee 3, p. 4)

The interviewee notices a certain simplification of the *hygge* concept in the communication of other brands. She argues that the interpretation of *hygge* often only focuses on some aspects, which presents a threat to the variability of the concept that I discussed in chapter 5.2.2. But contrary to what this quote implies, it is not only other actors who put a certain focus on the *hygge* concept, but also VisitDenmark. The interviewee points out the connection between *hygge* and winter that many brands or media articles draw. If we look back at the descriptive analysis, however, Christmas is the second most frequent word in combination with *hygge* on VisitDenmarks website. Christmas is usually mentioned as a stereotypical way to describe *hygge*. It must be noted, though, that the high frequency of Christmas in the text could also be a result of this study taking place right after the Christmas period, with the data being collected from January to March.

This quote also shows that the cultural resource that place brands can provide, extends to other brands and media using *hygge* for various needs. This also alters the nature of the cultural resource. Focus shifts on the mere experience of certain *hygge* elements. Even if VisitDenmark might see the simplification by other rep-

representations of *hygge* they still reproduce a certain, already prevalent image of the concept. This is a result of *hygge* as a trending topic or, as the quote puts it, as mainstream. There is the risk that the place brand does not allow locals to narrate their culture, but rather the media create a form of the culture that works for their logic. Thus, this case indicates a contradiction of Kavaratzis & Ashworth' (2015) note that locals can use the place brand to narrate their culture. This part is not applicable to the contexts described by the quote. Rather, there is the risk that the *hygge* brand becomes a mere resource for people outside of Denmark to experience what they think is typically Danish. To sum this sub-chapter up, it can be said that both the media, other brands and VisitDenmark at least sometimes tend to present *hygge* in a simplified and stereotyped way.

### ***5.3.3 Transferring hygge to other contexts***

When transferring the cultural concept into foreign markets, one interviewee notices a certain freedom of loading the term with associations:

In Germany, we didn't have the term *hygge* until recently, so there is no real explanation or translation for it. Therefore, we were relatively free in connecting the term to content, meaning and emotions. (Interviewee 3, p. 4)

However, the same interviewee also acknowledges that *hygge* was a media phenomenon first, coming over from the UK and that they did not start using the word until it appeared in the media:

The word came at some point over from England, where it has already been adopted. And because the media also look at each other to find relevant topics, it also came into German media at one point. We've always lacked a key term which makes it complex to communicate a sense of life which is hard to grasp. So, when the media showed interest for *hygge*, we included the word in our communication and used it as a key term. This facilitated our communication because we had a single word that can represent a whole sense of life. (Interviewee 3, p. 2)

The first part of this quote shows how the media work as a self-referential system. The fact that different media providers look at one another to find topics and inspiration facilitates the spread of cultural elements. However, it also comes with the risk that one interpretation is reproduced over and over by different channels. The idea of a self-referential media system goes back to Thompson (1995).

The second part of the quote shows that it is actually not only VisitDenmark that frames the communication of a place, but also the media. Thus, it is likely that the communication professionals are less in control than they think. In general, the findings from the interviews suggest that deploying *hygge* for place branding appears to be more of a reactive decision in response to the media attention. Thus, media logic is already ingrained into their branding decisions. Schulz (2004) calls this stage *accommodation*, meaning that VisitDenmark accommodates to media logic.

With the *Hygge* magazine, this study looks at one example of how the media transform or reproduce *hygge*:

We've always said that Hygge is the magazine for simple pleasures, which does consider the Danish sense of life because we use their word. But essentially it is about the sense of life itself. For us, that's togetherness, caring about family and friends, concealment and congeniality. (Interviewee 4, p. 1)

The quote suggests that the magazine focuses on aspects of togetherness, whereas VisitDenmark combines several Danish elements, such as biking and Danish design, under the umbrella of *hygge*. The way the magazine interprets *hygge* shows their media logic. The magazine focuses on aspects of the concept that are selling and working in Germany. Plus, the magazine has the special circumstance that it needs to differentiate itself from other publications of the same publishing company: With "flow", the publisher already has a magazine about slow and mindful living. In return, *Hygge* puts special focus on the social aspects of the *hygge* concept. This factor also influences their turn on the *hygge* concept. Denmark is still part of this representation because it is obviously the origin of this cultural concept. But the magazine also extends *hygge* to other cultural contexts.

This becomes apparent in recurring columns like “my place” (people present their favorite places, usually within or close to their homes and not in Denmark) or “*hygge* around the world”. A regular column is written by Meik Wiking, who published one of the first books about *hygge* and thereby spurred the spread of the concept in the UK and Germany. In one issue under analysis, he writes: “*Whether Dane, German or Japanese: Everyone knows the feeling of hygge, but until now, some of us were lacking a suitable name for it*” (Wiking, 2018, p. 42). This is one example of how the magazine presents *hygge* as Danish, but not limiting it to this context. The concept is employed according to its own needs and the needs of the readers. One part of media logic, according to Altheide & Snow (1991), is emphasizing certain characteristics. Emphasizing that *hygge* can be experienced anywhere is one characteristic, that is part of the *Hygge* magazine’s media logic.

This example of how a Danish concept extends to different cultural contexts could also be an example of what Schulz (2004) calls extension: The media extending the “natural limits of human communication capacities” (Schulz, 2004, p. 88). Here, the media not only extend the limits of communication. Cultural concepts can move from one context to another, as well. Extension is one process that Schulz (2004) ascribes to mediatization. The next subchapter goes in more detail about the influence of mediatization on place branding.

In this subchapter, the transformations and reproductions of *hygge* have been analyzed. One of these changes is the commercialization of the concept. The commercialization of more and more aspects of our lives is a meta-process that Krotz (2014) sees as intertwined with mediatization. He states that commercialization, mediatization and other developments in our late-modern society happen simultaneously. This subchapter also showed, how place branding, in combination with other mediatization processes, dissolves the borders between cultural contexts and developments, where countries can adopt the cultural concept of another. In the mediatization chapter of this thesis, I pointed to Hjarvard’s (2008) statement that “greater cultural reflexivity has the consequence that cultural development no longer takes place in naive isolation from other cultures, but will develop with an awareness that alternative courses are available” (p. 130). Thus, the findings of this subchapter already indicate the importance of mediatization for understanding the relationship between culture, place branding and the media. The next subchapter will focus on tying this discussion together.

## 5.4 The role of mediatization for place branding

Finally, it is analyzed how mediatization influences place branding. Some of its impacts already become evident in the findings regarding the cultural reproduction and transformation. Mediatization theory departs from the assumption that the integration of media into cultural practices evokes cultural change (Hjarvard & Petersen, 2013): Cultural practices become more available but thereby also change their nature. This chapter presents how mediatization influences place branding in its use of cultural concepts.

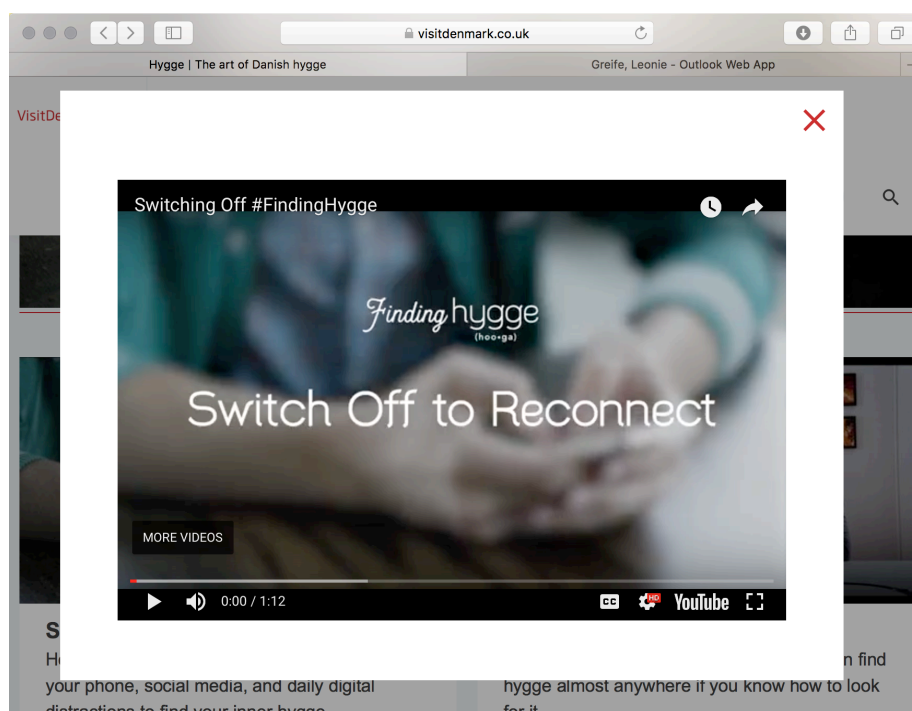
In this case, the media made *hygge* a topic of interest even before this cultural element was consciously deployed for place branding. The media are an integral part of place branding because they spread the culture and create an interest in society. This creates an opportunity for place branding. As one interviewee puts it: “*I think we would be stupid to ignore it*” (Interviewee 1, p. 2). Another interviewee states:

It’s a good thing, because it makes *hygge* more known to the world. We are a very small country and even though we think that people know Denmark out there in the world, they really don’t. (...) So, the more, the merrier, the more they talk about *hygge*, the more we have an opportunity to tell them that, well, it’s actually Danish and you should come here to experience. (Interviewee 2, p. 2)

The interviewees’ assessment of the media attention for *hygge* shows how the media can influence place branding institutions. The way in which interviewee 2 describes this influence, it seems that it only has positive effects on place branding. Mediatization, according to Hjarvard’s (2013) definition, is a useful concept to understand this influence. This last part of the analysis will analyze the ambivalent effects of mediatization for place branding, by looking at how media and VisitDenmark become intertwined, how cultural concepts become a counter-balance, and issues of over-representation and alienation.

#### 5.4.1 Place branding and media products become intertwined

When we did the Christmas campaign with Scandinavian Airlines, we borrowed material from a hygge documentary that just came out, “Finding Hygge”. It was an American production company that came to Denmark a few years back and fell in love with Danish hygge and decided to make a movie about it with that specific aim of exploring what’s good in Denmark, the whole welfare system and why we’re doing so good at the rankings; could hygge have something to do with that? (Interviewee 2, p. 2)



**Fig. 11: Clip from the “Finding Hygge” documentary (VisitDenmark, 2018e)**

All interviewees from VisitDenmark mentioned the Christmas campaign in collaboration with the “Finding Hygge” documentary as an example of how they use the concept of *hygge* in their place branding. It is also an example of how media products become intertwined with the place brand. Interestingly, the producers contacted VisitDenmark if they were interested in collaborating for a campaign, not vice versa. So, for this campaign, the film as a media product and VisitDenmark’s communication work became intertwined for a 24 days long competition to win a trip to Denmark while receiving tips for more *hygge* in everyday life.

Some of the video clips are still part of the website even after the campaign is over. Part of Hjarvard's (2013) definition of mediatization states that the concept analyzes how media becomes intertwined with social institutions. VisitDenmark's collaboration with "Finding *Hygge*" is a good example of this phenomenon.

#### **5.4.2 Cultural concepts as a counter-balance**

One aspect that is special to note about *hygge* is its societal fit. When asked why *hygge* became such a big topic in (foreign) media, the interviewees mentioned the concept to represent a counter-balance to cultural, societal and digital developments that are currently happening in Western late-modern societies:

I think if we compare today with former times, the world became much faster. It's very complex and connections are not as easy to grasp on first sight as they were before, and the future cannot be planned as coherently as before (...). That creates insecurity and as an answer to that, people look for some kind of counter-balance, for peace and concealment that is all expressed by *hygge*. (Interviewee 3, p. 2).

We believe that it's a counter-balance to a lot of things happening at the moment. We are very careful when we communicate it, by saying it's a counter-balance to bad things happening around the world, but we certainly believe that when bad things happen, people move closer together. And *hygge* can help them do that. (Interviewee 2, p. 1)

Some of the complexity that interviewee 3 describes, derives from the increasing role of media in culture and society. On the one hand, *hygge* represents this simplicity and disconnection from constant availability and therefore presents a counter-movement to the fast-paced, digital, success-driven, capitalist world. On the other hand, it is through media and the internet that the concept of *hygge* becomes known to the people, making it a double-edged sword. As Lundby (2009) states, the media are partly responsible for societal changes in late-modern society. One change is the increased complexity, such as data-overload in times of the internet. Therefore, values like togetherness and concealment become more valuable. It is

in this line of thought that Jansson (2018) observes that activities such as disconnecting become increasingly valuable social assets in times of mediatization.

The fact that *hygge* is currently present in various media and branding campaigns, at least in Germany, the UK and the US shows how well it fits into the current social and cultural conditions as described above. Thus, the *hygge* case supports Hjarvard's (2008) thesis that mediatization is an expression of the post-modern condition. That this condition can affect place branding in negative ways, too, is discussed in the following.

#### **5.4.3 Over-representation and alienation**

When trends have been going on somewhere, they peak and then they go down again. That's just the cycle of trends. I am not worrying that *hygge* will go down in the world. We always see that happen. In the UK, we had major discussions if *hygge* is still a thing there because the UK is an important market for us. And we decided that it still is. But maybe a year from now, people are sick and tired of *hygge*. I would be if I were living in the UK and would hear about this Danish word. (Interviewee 2, p. 4)

The above quote highlights the non-static nature of place image and place branding. The cycle of trends that is also influencing the attractiveness of *hygge* as a cultural asset for place branding shows how flexible place branding needs to be. This both offers advantages, like using certain trends to receive media attention, but also disadvantages. One downside is the problem of over-representation. The above quote shows that as with any trend, there is a high chance that it will decline at some point. The cultural asset, if it is deployment for place branding and additionally fueled by the media, can be perceived as annoying after a while. Nonetheless, considering the flexible nature of place branding is in line with Kavaratzis & Ashworth's (2015) call for a more process-based approach to place branding, to which this thesis wanted to contribute.

The idea that place branding constantly develops and re-negotiates its connection to *hygge* as a media trend could also result into a negative development: "*I really hope that Danes don't get tired of hygge because it's such a natural thing*" (Interviewee 1, p. 4). This statement expresses the fear that VisitDenmark's place



branding and the omnipresence of *hygge* in the media has a negative impact on how Danes perceive *hygge*. It confronts Danes with their own cultural concept in new ways. There is the risk of them reflecting more on their culture than before and even becoming annoyed of this omnipresence. Thus, Danes could experience alienation to an emotion that is usually a normal part of their culture. The problem of alienation is also discussed by Krotz (2014) as a critical issue that arises with mediatization. Therefore, alienation can be one effect of “how social institutions and cultural processes have changed character, function, and structure in response to the omnipresence of media” (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 2). The other effects mentioned in this subchapter are cultural processes as counter-balance and the entanglement of place branding and the media. The summarizing part of the analysis will now show what these and the other findings say about VisitDenmark and *hygge*.

#### **5.4 Summarizing remarks**

The analysis shows how *hygge* is expressed, transformed and reproduced during the place branding process under conditions of mediatization. Being a trend word in several countries, *hygge* is surely a special case of how place branding can use an intangible part of the place’s culture. For instance, the cultural concept of *hygge* as a counter-balance is one finding that connects mediatization, culture and place branding quite well. This urged me to think that there are aspects that the current cultural approach to place branding literature does not account for. In addition, I noted that the case of *hygge* and VisitDenmark is in line with definitions of cultural branding. Banet-Weiser (2012) for instance observes how everyday culture transforms to brand culture. And Holt (2004) defines cultural place branding as adapting the brand’s myth to current societal trends (Holt, 2004). In the following discussion part, I therefore propose a new theoretical concept for place branding that merges the principles of cultural branding with place branding.

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

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With this study, I aimed to analyze how mediatization informs the reproduction and transformation of cultural assets in the place branding process. This research problematized how place branding in times of mediatization risks becoming a stereotype reproduction of simplified cultural assets. The findings give insight into the transformations the cultural asset experiences when being deployed for place branding: Commodification, simplification and alienation. Plus, the media are increasingly ingrained into place branding practices. My interpretation is that even though the brand communicators like to think that their communication is very loyal to the original cultural concept, they still shape and change it according to their function of promoting a destination to tourists. Plus, some parts of the communication are shaped by other media's representation of the concept, since their choice of words or images reproduces people's pre-established image. This case was especially interesting because the cultural concept was spread by other media and brands as a counter-balance to issues of the late-modern society. In the following, I will discuss how these findings contribute to theory and practice.

### 6.1 Contribution to theory

Already by reviewing existing research and theories about place branding and the role of culture, I recognized that culture, even though its importance for place branding is acknowledged, tends to be reduced to physical or explicit cultural elements such as buildings, personalities or events. The literature also showed that there is a cultural approach to place branding, but there is no overarching concept that puts culture in the limelight. Therefore, I introduce the term cultural place branding as my contribution to the field in this thesis.

As noted in the summarizing part of the analysis, the case of *hygge* provides an example of how the concept of cultural branding can be extended to place branding. Cultural place branding then means that culture is at the core of place branding activities. New to this approach is the intangibility and vagueness of the cul-

tural assets used for cultural place branding. It is the sense of life of a place which coins social interactions and practices and thereby shapes how people (both locals and tourists) experience the place. Through cultural place branding, the culture of a place becomes part of its place brand. With VisitDenmark and *hygge*, this thesis analyzed one example of how cultural place branding is utilized to suggest a counter-balance to current tensions in society.

This strong relation between place branding, the media and broader cultural and societal developments highlights the importance of mediatization for understanding cultural place branding. Analyzing the relation between mediatization and place branding implies that the media, more than the place brand managers, frame the communication about the cultural asset as they decide over its interest for the public. In addition, media products such as articles, books or movie scenes become intertwined with cultural place branding. As a result, former distinctions like literary or film tourism do not apply anymore. Rather, there is a general culturally motivation for tourists to visit a place – and for communicators to include the cultural asset in place branding. The downside, however, is the risk of overrepresentation because of the large media presence. Naturally, trends decline at some point because people are simply fed up with them. Therefore, there is the risk that the positive emotions that were connected to the place go into reverse, now connecting negative feelings to the place. Consequently, this form of cultural place branding that is highly connected to mediatization and media trends needs to be reflective and detect when the trend is over so that the concept does not become a negative image connected to the place brand.

## **6.2 Contribution to practice**

This study also prompts some practical implications for place branding. First, the cultural concept should be broad enough to ensure a diverse communication. This makes *hygge* more suitable for place branding than similar concepts like *fika* which I touched upon in the introduction. It should provide identification for the locals and match well with other aspects of the place that are utilized for branding. In addition to that, cultural place branding should reach the audience on an emotional level and make the culture come alive, for instance during events. This is no

exhaustive list of to-follow advices, but rather some findings from this study that might be helpful to consider when applying cultural place branding in practice.

### **6.3 Limitations and future research**

For this study, I merely looked at one market (Germany) and one media outlet. It could be interesting to see how Denmark's place branding differs for instance for the Norwegian and Swedish key markets, who have a lesser interest in *hygge*. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see if there are more cases of cultural place branding that future research could analyze. Testing the new concept against various incidents could help to strengthen its relevance and applicability. I focused only on one case of cultural place branding.

### **6.4 Concluding remarks**

Showing the role of culture in place branding and its increasing interrelation with the media: This is what I wanted to explore in this study. I hope that my work contributes to an increased inclusion of culture into place branding theories and practice. Furthermore, I want to highlight that the intertwining of culture, branding and the media is an ongoing process. With VisitDenmark, we can see that they are not resting on *hygge*'s current media attention, but rather push the spread and acknowledgment of "their" cultural place brand. Right at the end of my writing process, I, for instance, found out that Denmark applied to have *hygge* included in the UNESCO cultural heritage list for 2019. I believe that with this dedication, creativity and clever deployment of culture and media logic, cultural place branding is a worthwhile field of study and practice for destinations.

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# Appendix 1

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## Interview guide VisitDenmark

For my master thesis in Strategic Communication I am researching about destination branding using cultural assets.

This interview will take between 45 and 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded for me to facilitate the transcription. I will be the only one listening to the recording and your input will be handled anonymously in the thesis. I will send you the transcription for you to approve and to ensure that there were no misunderstandings.

I am primarily interested in how you work with communicating Hygge as a cultural asset. There are no right or wrong answers; any experiences and thoughts about this issue are appreciated.

Feel free to ask questions before we start ☺

[**German:** Für meine Masterarbeit im Fach Strategic Communication forsche ich zu Destinations-Branding mit Fokus auf kulturelle Besonderheiten. Das Interview wird voraussichtlich zwischen 45 und 60 Minuten dauern. Ich nehme unser Gespräch auf, um es als Grundlage für die Analyse transkribieren zu können. Ich bin die Einzige, die die Aufnahme hört und behandle Ihre Angaben in der Arbeit anonym. Die abgetippte Fassung des Gesprächs lasse ich Ihnen per Mail zukommen, damit Sie prüfen können, dass alles richtig dargestellt ist und es zu keinen Missverständnissen kommt.

Ich bin hauptsächlich an Ihrer Kommunikationsarbeit zum Thema Hygge interes-

siert. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten, jede Erfahrung und jeder Gedanke zu dem Thema sind für mich und meine Arbeit wertvoll. Fragen? 😊]

### **Introduction: Background information**

- Would you like to tell me about your role at VisitDenmark?
- For how long have you been working for VisitDenmark?
- Can you tell me about hygge-projects you're currently working on?

[**German:** Können Sie mir von Ihrer Arbeit bei VisitDenmark erzählen?

Was sind ihre Aufgaben? Wie lange arbeiten Sie schon für VisitDenmark?

Können Sie mir von einem Projekt mit Hygge erzählen, an dem Sie gerade arbeiten oder zuletzt gearbeitet haben?]

### **Hygge**

- How would you describe Hygge? Which emotions evolve around Hygge? Can anyone experience Hygge?
- Why does Hygge nowadays resonate with people?
- Which role does Hygge play in your life?
- What is your aim with using Hygge as a brand?
- Hygge-campaigns: Which partners? Which countries are (most) relevant?

[**German:** Wie würden Sie Hygge beschreiben? Welche Gefühle

Warum passt Hygge so gut in die heutige Zeit?

Welchen Platz hat Hygge in Ihrem Alltag?

Welches Ziel verfolgen Sie mit Hygge als Marketinginstrument für Ihre Zwecke?]

### **Expressing Hygge in text and images** [Hygge in Wort und Bild]

- Which aspects or situations are Hygge?
- How can Hygge be visualized and expressed?
- Is there a medium which is especially suitable for talking about and representing Hygge?

[**German:** Welche Aspekte oder Situationen verbinden Sie mit Hygge?

Wie kann Hygge dargestellt werden?

Gibt es ein Medium, das sich besonders dafür eignet?]

### **Hygge representing Denmark** [Hygge als Botschafter Dänemarks]

- Can you describe the connection/relationship between Denmark and Hygge?
- Do we have to visit Denmark to experience Hygge?
- Why is Hygge suitable for branding Denmark abroad?
- In what ways does Hygge, as it is portrayed on your channels, match with how Danes live Hygge? E.g. is it presented in a simplified way? Is there a focus on certain aspects of Hygge?

[**German:** Wie stark ist Hygge an Dänemark gebunden?

Muss man nach Dänemark reisen, um Hygge zu erleben?

Warum ist Hygge so gut dafür geeignet, Dänemark im Ausland zu bewerben?

Inwiefern entspricht Ihre Darstellung von Hygge dem Gefühl / kulturellen Phänomen, das die Dänen (er)leben? Vereinfacht? Bestimmter Fokus?]

### **Hygge in other media** [Hygge in anderen Medien]

- What was first: Other media talking about Hygge or your effort to make Hygge a topic of interest?
- How do you feel about the high presence of Hygge in different media (e.g. books, magazines, newspaper articles, Instagram)?
- Do you recognize a change in the meaning or representation of Hygge in other media (abroad)? If yes, which changes?
- Could the representation of Hygge in different media shape how people experience Hygge? How?

[**German:** Was kam zuerst: Andere Medien (z.B. Bücher, Zeitschriften, Instagram), die über Hygge berichteten, oder Ihr Bemühen, Hygge zu kommunizieren?

Wie stehen Sie dazu, dass Hygge in vielen unterschiedlichen Medien aufgegriffen wird (z.B. Bücher, Zeitschriften- oder Zeitungsartikel, Instagram)?

Können Sie erkennen, dass die Bedeutung oder Darstellung von Hygge je nach Medium unterschiedlich ist? Wenn ja, wie?

Könnten diese medialen Darstellungen beeinflussen, wie die Menschen Hygge (er)leben? Wie?]

## **Final Thoughts**

Now we've been talking a lot about your work with Hygge. Is there anything else you want to share with me that could be important for me to know? In case I forgot to ask about something, can I contact you again?

Mange tak, thank you for your time and input!

I will send you the transcription within the next two weeks.

[**German:** Jetzt haben wir bereits viel über Ihre Arbeit mit Hygge geredet. Gibt es noch etwas Wichtiges, das ich wissen sollte?

Falls ich etwas vergessen haben sollte, kann ich noch einmal auf Sie zurückkommen?

Vielen Dank für Ihre Zeit und Ihren Input! Innerhalb der nächsten zwei Wochen erhalten Sie von mir eine abgetippte Fassung unseres Gesprächs.]



## **Interview guide Hygge**

Für meine Masterarbeit im Fach Strategic Communication forsche ich zu Destinations-Branding mit Fokus auf kulturelle Besonderheiten.

Das Interview wird voraussichtlich zwischen 45 und 60 Minuten dauern. Ich nehme unser Gespräch auf, um es als Grundlage für die Analyse transkribieren zu können. Ich bin die Einzige, die die Aufnahme hört und behandle Ihre Angaben in der Arbeit anonym. Die abgetippte Fassung des Gesprächs lasse ich Ihnen per Mail zukommen, damit Sie prüfen können, dass alles richtig dargestellt ist und es zu keinen Missverständnissen kommt.

Ich bin hauptsächlich an Ihrer Kommunikationsarbeit zum Thema Hygge interessiert. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten, jede Erfahrung und jeder Gedanke zu dem Thema sind für mich und meine Arbeit wertvoll.

Haben Sie noch Fragen? ☺

### **Intro: Hintergrundinformationen**

- Können Sie mir von Ihrer Arbeit als Publisherin für die Hygge erzählen?
- Was sind ihre Aufgaben?
- Wie lange arbeiten Sie schon mit der Hygge?

### **Hygge**

- Wie würden Sie Hygge beschreiben? (einmal das Gefühl an sich, und dann das Magazin)
- Warum passt Hygge so gut in die heutige Zeit?
- Wie kam es zu der Gründung des Hygge-Magazins?
- Warum haben Sie gerade Hygge als Namen des Magazins gewählt?
- Was sind Ihre Ziele für die Hygge?
- Was unterscheidet die Hygge von anderen Formaten wie der Flow?

### **Hygge in Wort und Bild**

- Warum bietet sich ein Magazin an, um ein Gefühl von Hygge zu transportieren?
- Wie kann Hygge am besten visualisiert oder textlich ausgedrückt werden?
- Wie lassen Sie sich für die Themen für jede Ausgabe inspirieren?

### **Hygge als Botschafter Dänemarks**

- Wie stark ist Hygge an Dänemark gebunden?
- Muss man (nach Dänemark) reisen, um Hygge zu erleben?
- (Warum ist Hygge so gut dafür geeignet, Dänemark im Ausland zu bewerben?)
- Was denken Sie, inwiefern entspricht Ihre Darstellung von Hygge dem Gefühl / kulturellen Phänomen, das die Dänen (er)leben? Vereinfacht? Bestimmter Fokus?
- Gibt / gab es eine Zusammenarbeit mit VisitDenmark?

### **Hygge in other media** [Hygge in anderen Medien]

- Hygge ist ja mittlerweile vielerorts zu sehen: Auf Do-it-yourself-Büchern, als Café-Namen, und eben als Magazin. Wie schätzen Sie die Chance ein, dass der deutsche Markt bald übersättigt ist?
- Können Sie erkennen, dass Hygge je nach Medium oder Marketingzweck anders interpretiert wird?
- Inwieweit kann die (unterschiedliche) Darstellung von Hygge beeinflussen, wie Menschen Hygge erleben und wahrnehmen?

### **Finale Worte**

Jetzt haben wir bereits viel über Ihre Arbeit mit Hygge geredet. Gibt es noch etwas Wichtiges, das ich wissen sollte?

Falls ich etwas vergessen haben sollte, kann ich noch einmal auf Sie zurückkommen?

Vielen Dank für Ihre Zeit und Ihren Input! Innerhalb der nächsten Woche erhalten Sie von mir eine abgetippte Fassung unseres Gesprächs um zu prüfen, dass ich alles korrekt wiedergegeben habe.