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**Tourism alliances:
The case of Hälsingland and Finnforest**

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FOREWORD / ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis has been conducted in behalf of Gävle University during the spring of 2013, and it is the final assignment for Master Degree in Business Administration from the authors' part.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Manager's perspectives within Tourism Alliances: the cases of Hälsingland and Finnforest

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Aim: This study investigates the most important advantages and disadvantages of being a member of tourism alliances. Furthermore, this project illuminates the importance of the experience within the alliance. Specifically, we investigate if the experience affects manager's perception to be a member of an alliance.

Method: It has been adopted quantitative and qualitative method. Data were collected from two alliances located in Sweden: Hälsingland Tourism and Finnforest; through questionnaires to the tourism organizations that belong to each alliance. Furthermore, we did face to face interviews to the Managers of the alliances and to the advisors of Coompanion who worked for the creations of the alliances. Finally, data were analyzed with Microsoft Excel.

Results& Conclusions: Sharing knowledge is the most important advantage to be a member of a tourism alliance. On the other hand the cooperation with weak and unequal partner is the most important disadvantage to be a member of a tourism alliance. Additionally, it was found out that the experience affects the manager's perceptions.

Suggestions for future research: As far as the financial support from the municipalities plays a key role in the creation and survival of tourism alliances, future studies could be conducted in that field.

Contribution of the thesis: It is essential for tourism managers to understand and value the importance of the alliance before joining or creating a network. Furthermore, it was emerged that tourism alliances give benefits for the creation of tourism destination.

Key words: Tourism sector, strategic alliances, tourism alliances, tourism sector, experience, tourism managers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Background	1
1.2	The Tourism Alliances in Sweden.....	2
1.3	Motivations	3
1.4	Aim of the study, research questions and limitations	4
1.5	Structure of the thesis	4
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	5
2.1	Strategic alliance	5
2.2	Advantages of entering an alliance.....	6
2.3	Disadvantages of entering an alliance	8
2.4	Tourism alliance	9
2.5	Implication in Tourism Alliance.....	11
2.6	Factors that influence the willingness of Managers to cooperate	13
2.7	Theoretical framework	14
3	METHODOLOGY	17
3.1	Choice of the case	17
3.2	Quantitative and Qualitative research.....	18
3.3	Questionnaire	19
3.3.1	Purpose of questionnaire.....	19
3.3.2	Creating the questionnaire	19
3.3.3	Types of questions	20
3.3.4	Distribution of the questionnaire	21
3.3.5	Coding	21
3.3.6	Interview	22
3.3.7	Critical reflection.....	24
4	EMPIRICAL FINDINGS	26
4.1	General information from the questionnaires respondents	26
4.1.1	What are the benefits of being a member of Alliance?.....	27
4.1.2	What are the disadvantages of being a member of Alliance?.....	30
4.2	Interviews findings.....	32
4.2.2	Description of alliances	33

4.2.3	Importance of the alliance	34
4.2.4	The most relevant empirical findings	36
5	ANALYSIS.....	39
5.1	Introduction of the Analysis.....	39
5.2	Advantages of tourism alliances	40
5.3	Disadvantages of Tourism Alliances.....	42
5.4	Discordant answers between Hälsingland and Finnforest	42
6	CONCLUSION.....	45
6.1	According to the Manager's perceptions, what are the most important advantages and disadvantages to be a member of a tourism alliance?.....	45
6.2	Are the manager's perspectives of these advantages and disadvantages affected by experience regarding tourism alliances?	47
6.3	Implications for the Managers sector and suggestions for future researches.....	50
	REFERENCES.....	51
	APPENDICES.....	57

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Advantages of being a member of Hälsingland Tourism.....	28
Table 2:	Advantages of being a member of Finnforest.....	29
Table 3:	Disadvantages of being a member of Hälsingland Tourism.....	31
Table 4:	Disadvantages of being a member of Finnforest.....	32
Table 5:	Interviews findings.....	37
Table 6:	Advantages reached from the questionnaires of being a member of a tourism alliance.....	37
Table 7:	Disadvantages reached from the questionnaires of being a member of a tourism alliance.....	38

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Connecting the advantages and disadvantages of being a member of a tourism alliance with the manager's experience.....	15
Figure 2: Main reason for joining an alliance	41
Figure 3: Factors affected of managerial experience.....	49

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1.....	57
Appendix 2.....	59
Appendix 3.....	60
Appendix 4.....	61
Appendix 5.....	63
Appendix 6.....	64
Appendix 7.....	65
Appendix 8.....	65

1. INTRODUCTION

In this first chapter we introduce the reasoning behind our thoughts that narrowed down the research area and led to the research aim. Furthermore we present the motivations, the research questions and finally the structure of this study.

2.1 Background

Nowadays the economy is dominated by the argument of Globalization. It has created a new

.....“strategic interdependence” among globalizing states, as these states’ economic power has become gradually more dependent on preserving, deepening and broadening economic relations with other globalizing states and the international system of peace and stability in which those economic ties thrive (Banning, 2006, p.391).

This phenomenon affects the business and social structure all over world included the tourism organizations; especially the small firms cannot survive in the huge increasing of the competition. In view of the intensive competition, free trade unions, increasing macro-trends of globalization, the creation of regional trading blocs, accelerating speed of technological developments and rapidly changing environment, strategic alliances have been considered a natural choice for many organizations when they want to expand(Fadol et al., 2011 p. 113). Strategic alliances are basically partnerships of two or more corporations or organizations which work together to achieve strategically significant and mutually beneficial objectives (Elmuti et al., 2001). A special category of strategic alliances are tourism alliances.

Tourism organizations have begun to join together in a strategic alliance effort to better market the cities as a tourism destination (Laura et al., 2012, p.131) and it has become a key subject area in tourism studies and the literature. The role of destination management is to ensure the effective management of the destination (Bornhorst et al.,2009) by focusing on coordination, planning, informing and promoting (Scott et al., 2006) and thus to influence its overall success (Mazanec et al.,

2007). Cooperation in tourism marketing management, marketing planning, and implementation can create, build and maintain mutual benefits, not only for the countries involved in cooperation, but also for tourists and other stakeholders as well (Tosun et al., 2001 p. 354). On the other hand, recently results suggest that tourism professionals that feel positively towards tourism alliances still may feel uncomfortable cooperating because of the possibility of loss of profit, or having their knowledge challenged by others (Laura et al., 2012, p. 141). It is important for us to highlight the importance of creating of tourism alliances. The development of tourism that is sustainable in economic, environmental, social and cultural terms has been repeatedly recommended but researchers have found that the management and implementation of tourism requires the involvement of many partners. Furthermore this collaboration between diverse stakeholders is both complicated and difficult to achieve (Paskaleva-Shapira, 2001).

It has been pointed out that manager' perceptions of alliance-related issues influence their predisposition toward entering into alliances (Larson, 1992). According to Carpenter et al., (2004) the willingness for managers to participate in strategic alliances is partly based on their specific characteristics, such as experience and background. Consequently managers should conduct environmental analysis with a view to understanding of how internal and external factors affect tourism businesses before any form of strategic alliances can be formed (Jaloni et al., 2007 p.143) Literature has also suggested that the choice to participate in a strategic alliance is a reflection of the values, cognitive bases, and characteristics of the managers of the organization; these characteristics include education, age, experience, and background (Laura, 2012, p. 134).

1.2 The Tourism Alliances in Sweden

Tourism and travel is a global phenomenon and has a major impact on the development of society on many levels. According to a recent study, tourists in Sweden spend 80 billion SEK annually on shopping, representing 13 per cent of total annual retail sales and 30 per cent of all tourists spending in Sweden (Svensk Handel, 2010). Finnforest is a new tourism alliance in Sweden and its goal is to work together with just under 50 local businesses and associations to tell the story of the Forest Finns to people visiting the region. This network has been created in March of 2013. On the other hand the tourism alliance Hälsingland Tourism was formed in 2006 and has 203 members. Additionally, this

tourism alliance has been working together for several years and his primary mission is to promote and coordinate the marketing of Hälsingland as a tourism destination. Its objective is to attract more people and show them the tourism activities that their province has to offer. Destinations are amalgams of tourism products, offering an integrated experience to customers. Traditionally, they are regarded as well-defined geographical areas, such as a country, an island or a town (Davidson & Maitland, 1997). On the other hand, increasingly they are seen as a perceptual concept interpreted subjectively by consumers, depending on their purpose of visit and travel itinerary (Buhalis, 2000).

Each destination in both Tourism Alliances offers hospitality preserves and highlights the culture of the area in different ways with the support of many activities such as tracking, beauty farm, dog sledging, camping, rafting, fishing, riding. The main different between Finnforest and Hälsingland Tourism is their experience regarding Tourism Alliance. Therefore, this study points out different managers perspectives that depend on different experiences.

1.3 Motivations

This research focuses on the most important advantages and disadvantages of being a part of an alliance and if they are affected by the manager's experience regarding their participation in alliances. Additionally, it is important to note that it is purposefully decided to focus on the experience since our research is based in two alliances, one that is created in 2006 (Hälsingland Tourism) and the other one that has been created in March of 2013 (Finnforest). Previous studies have conducted researches about strategic alliances within tourism organizations in several countries to understand what are the benefits and the limitations of this cooperation. This is the first study where is analyzed the comparison between the Finnforest and Hälsingland Tourism. Furthermore, the paper, want to formulate hypothesis according to the previous findings to apprehend if they are confirmed. The relevant factor is that Finnforest is a new alliance; therefore this is a unique opportunity to figure out the current opinion of its managers who decide to cooperate in order to achieve common goals.

1.4 Aim of the study, research questions and limitations

As stated above most of the research has been conducted on strategic alliances and less on the formation of tourism alliances. Therefore the aim of this study is to generate knowledge about the most important factors that are of creating an alliance from the manager's perspective. Furthermore, as far as our research is based on two tourism alliances one created since 2006 and the other one formed on March of 2013, this research project will aspire to illuminate the importance of the experience. Specifically, we investigate if the experience affects manager's perception to be a member of the alliance. In order to achieve the aim, the proposed research questions are:

RQ1: What are the factors which affect the willingness of managers to be a member of a tourism alliance?

RQ2: Are these factors affected by the Managerial experience?

This study is limited in two tourism alliances located in Sweden, Finnforest and Hälsingland. Furthermore, this study has investigated the Managerial perspectives regarding this topic by using the questionnaires and interviews from both alliances.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

After having presented the aim and research questions of this master thesis and pointing out the importance of the research in chapter one, the second chapter argues the theoretical framework used to clarify the phenomenon of Strategic Alliance within Tourism organizations. The theories applied in this thesis cover interaction in tourism networks and investigate the motivation factors from manager perspectives of engaging in such networks. Furthermore the third chapter provides the methodology used in order to answer the research questions. Quantitative as well as qualitative methods are discussed and developed. In a next step the empirical findings are presented in chapter four and in the fifth chapter they are discussed in close connection to the applicable theory. Finally in chapter six conclusions are developed from this study and the research questions are answered.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following chapter we are discussing the chosen theory which guided us in developing our research frame and answering our research questions. We analyze the structure of Strategic Alliance in general and of Tourism Alliance in particular, investigate the main motivation factors leading to the interaction of competitors. Finally we found previous articles to better understand the implications of strategic alliances and the willingness of Manager of being a part of it.

2.1 Strategic alliance

To introduce to the topic of strategic alliance is important to get a general understanding of how and why this business network is formed. Due to the growing phenomenon in the business world, networks such as alliances have been a subject of academic research for a long time. A strategic alliance is

.... *“an agreement between firms to do business together in ways that goes beyond normal company-to-company dealings, fall short of a merger or a full partnership” (Wheelen et al., 2000, p. 125).*

Furthermore these firms have common interests to work together and in this network there are specific roles. According to Elmuti (2001) these firms are partnership and work together to achieve strategically significant objectives that are mutually beneficial. The contributions to the field of strategic alliances focus on several factors that are summarize by Benimon's (1999) executive guidelines:

- . Assimilate the competencies of your partner;
- . Think of your partner as today's ally and tomorrow's competitor;
- . Share power and resources, but share information wisely; and
- . Structure your alliance carefully.

2.2 Factors of entering an alliance

When investigating the phenomenon of networks such as an alliance, it is crucial to bear in mind all possible effects that a network can have on its members. Gnyawaliet et al., (2001) supports that by stating that advantages gained through the membership in a network vary from firm to firm, which may lead to different levels of motivation to contribute to the network.

Firms have to value many factors before entering an alliance. Several researches have been conducted to better understand what the benefits are for the firms that decide to be a part of this network. Furthermore previous studies have found different results that are related to many firm's factors: the market (Elmuti et al., 2001), the time (Ohmae, 1992), the organization (Robins et al., 1995), the mission (Drago, 1997), the relationships (Gulati, 2000), the business size (Page, 1998), the Competitors (Gnyawali, 2001).

Elmuti(et al, 2001, p206) during his research pointed out that growth strategies and entering new markets are relevant factors of being a part of a network. The last concept is also confirmed by Drago (1997, p.53). In fact he affirms that when firms are entering new markets are more likely to enjoy the benefits of strategic alliances. Furthermore companies do not have the time to establish new markets one by one (Ohmae1992, p. 485).

Furthermore, Robins et al. (1995) in their research point out the importance of achieving competitive advantage and how it has been the object of extensive researches. This concept is also argued by Morris et al. (2006) when he has found out that increasing the networks, benefit the firms in terms of competitive advantage.

Therefore, in order to be surviving in the arena of competition gaining new technology and converging is relevant factor of entering the network. As Drago highlights (1997, p.56-57) firms with goals of becoming "technology sponsors" or creating future "industry standards" are more likely to enjoy the benefits of strategic alliances.

As far as us investigating the phenomenon of networks, it is essential to reveal the motivating factors for businesses to engage in an alliance since these networks consist of companies from the same business area competing for customers. As it was already mentioned the concept of achieving competitive advantage, it is also undertaken by Gulati et al. (2000). In fact he affirms that companies

are able to develop a competitive advantage and stick out in today's competitive business world through the engagement in different relationships on the network. Furthermore, it is clear that the network creates relationship between the firms and Burgers et al. (1993, p. 425) found out that strategic alliances are formed as a mechanism for reducing uncertainty for parties of the alliance.

Many organizations enter alliances with great anticipation about learning from their partners, whether as the primary goal or as a derivative of other objectives, such as creating new products and technologies or penetrating into new markets. Organizational learning occurs when a firm acquires, assimilates, and applies new information, knowledge, and skills that enhance its long-run performance and competitive advantage (Todeva et al, 2005, p. 157). According to Page (1998) alliances are particularly alluring to small businesses because they provide the tools businesses to be competitive. Companies in order to be competitive they need to have clear and highly integrated goals. Global strategies are highly integrated, more centralized strategies that are used to take advantage of the synergistic potential of all resources of an organization in terms of competition (Yip, 1989, pp 35). Gnyawaliet al.,(2001 p.432) point out four potential reasons for being a member in an alliance consisting of competitors from the same business field. First it can give you access to resources of other actors, secondly additional capabilities can be created within the network and complement the own resources, thirdly a well-structured network can further increase the rate of return from investments made by the network and finally there is a constant possibility for new resources and cost sharing when attracting new members to the network due to positive performance.

As it can be seen from the discussion above an often approached topic when investigating motivation factors to join a network is the phenomenon of developing and learning together with other. Bengtsson et al., (2000) further discuss the degree of cooperation and competition in networks. They point out that relationships can be dominated by either cooperation or competition or consist of a mixture of the two. Gnyawaliet al. (2001), further stress that companies often engage in relationships that are competitive and collaborative at the same time.

2.3 Disadvantages of entering an alliance

Being a member of an alliance can bear disadvantages as well as advantages. Being competitor and partner at the same time consist the factor of sharing information and knowledge. Nowadays, we live in a knowledge society, in which knowledge is the most important means of production (Drucker, 1993) The meaning of the word “knowledge” is subject to a number of different interpretations, with the difference mainly resulting from the different types of organizations authors address when they discuss knowledge (Zehrer , 2011, p. 50). This factor is very essential for companies because they have to trust their partner. Thus, the role of trust appears important in inter-firm alliances because alliances entail substantial risk (Das, 2005, p 497). Morgan et al. (1994, p 27), define trust as “*one party’s confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity*”. According to Fadol et al, (2011,p.108) in alliance context, *the partners’ trust is defined as an individual’s belief or a common belief among a group of individuals that another individual or group:*

- *makes good-faith efforts to behave in accordance with any commitments, both explicit and implicit;*
- *is honest in whatever negotiation preceded such commitments;*
- *does not take excessive advantage of another even when the opportunity is available*

Additionally, when partners do not trust each other, they keep information or take biased advantage of each other if they have opportunity. According to Lewis (1992), many alliances have failed due to the lack of trust causing unsolved problems, lack of understanding and despondent relationships. Furthermore, firms that enter in a strategic alliance must have the same goals and objectives to achieve. A lot of companies even if they enter alliances for the right reasons, they fail because they do not have the same aim. But the question that arose is why they fail. The key is that they have to cooperate in all issues (Elmuti et al, 2001 p. 209). Managers should set clear goals and do the proper research in order to achieve them.

As it was highlighted before coordination and cooperation is an essential need for the alliance with the purpose of being succeeded. As far as they want to have a good partnership roles should be separated and respected. According to Drago (1997 p54) the roles of each partner must be understood and actions taken through the alliance must be managed and monitored to the satisfaction of all parties. This, in turn, can require considerable time and effort from managers within the organizations of the alliance.

Another disadvantage that comes out of the theory is the relational and performance risk between the partners. Relational risk is concerned with the probability that partner firms lack commitment to the alliance and that their possible opportunistic behavior could undermine the prospects of an alliance (Elmuti et al, 2001 p209). According to Das (et al,) performance risk include environmental factors such as government, policy changes, war and economic recession; market factors such as fierce competition and demand fluctuations; and internal factors such as lack of competence in critical areas or sheer bad luck. Sometimes firms in alliances are acting opportunistic and care about their company's success and not about alliance's success. Such opportunistic behavior includes shirking appropriating the partner's resources, distorting information, harboring hidden agendas and delivering unsatisfactory products and services. To sum up, partnering with other component parts suppliers, especially powerful ones, can reduce operational uncertainty by increasing knowledge and/or increasing the company's ability to influence future directions (Drago, 1997 pp58). There are several factors that are responsible for the failure of a strategic alliance. The reasons include a breakdown in trust, a change in strategy, the champions moved on, the value did not materialize, the cultures did not mesh and the systems did not integrated (Kalmbach et al.,1999). From the above discussion, it is obvious that joining a strategic alliance requires a cost/benefit analysis by managers.

2.4 Tourism alliance

As an industry based on import and export activities, tourism promotes currency flows between countries and/or regions (Ladeiras et al, 2010 p 357). It has become a common practice for tourism organizations to form alliances in cooperative marketing efforts (Jetter et al, 2010, p 131). Tourism marketing alliances are voluntary arrangements between tourism organizations involving in marketing and promoting the destination in a collective way, and can occur as a result of a wide range of motives and goals, take a variety of forms, and occur across vertical and horizon boundaries (Wang et al. 2007, p 873). In today's global economy, tourism presents an important economic activity for both developed and developing economies. The study of tourism as a discipline is relatively new when compared to other industrial disciplines such as manufacturing (Yilmaz et al, 2005, p371). The demand for tourism is met by the focused marketing efforts of a wide selection of tourist services. Together these services form the world's largest and fastest-growing industry (Halloway, 1998). Tourism industries opposed to

manufacturing provide services. Producers are – sometimes called principals – carriers, accommodation places, man-made attraction ventures, car rental firms, restaurants and other destination based tourism enterprises (Yilmaz et al, 2005, p376). Service improvement is a major concern for managers in the tourism sector and it is linked with quality and customer satisfaction (Ingram, 1995, p 45). As Marentakis (et al, 2010, p 127) illuminate in their article the access of new technology is one of the main ways to reach improvement in the tourism services. Specifically, speaking in their own words,

The wide diffusion of internet and the penetration of mobile communications support the development and operation of effective markets as well as innovative and revenue-generating services; the tourism sector is no exception

As far as tourism sector provides services have different needs and characteristics of service products. As a service product, tourism cannot be divided into production and consumption phases in general (Buhalis, 2003). The production and consumption of service are devoted. Customers have direct experience of the production of the service and they are an integral part of the service process (Baker et al., 2000). All these various characteristics mentioned above make the tourism sector independent. As Evans(et al, 2003) highlights this interdependence between sectors is effective in the overall service quality that the consumers perceive. Yilmaz (et al, 2005 p 378) takes one step further and claims that:

This high level of interdependence in the tourism industry suggests that various organizations need to work together as a value chain, to add value and deliver product and/or services to the customer

As far as tourism alliances are a subcategory of strategic alliances they have similar advantages and disadvantages. As tourism is a special factor has some distinct characteristics such as collaborative arrangements and destination marketing. Collaborative arrangements in the tourism industry involves a number of stakeholders working interactively on a common issue or problem domain through a process of exchange of ideas and expertise and pooling of financial and human resources (Vernon et al. 2005).Collaboration is a process in which two or more individuals possessing complementary skills and attributes interact to create a shared meaning or understanding that could not have been created without the other individual (Selin, 1993, p 231). Bramwell et al. (2000) argue that by combining knowledge, expertise, and capital resources, collaborative strategy can produce consensus and synergy, leading to new opportunities, innovative solutions, and a greater level of effectiveness that would not have been achieved by the partners acting alone.

As it was mentioned above strategic and destination marketing is a relative factor for tourism alliances. Strategic and destination marketing is a collective effort that requires various organizations and businesses in a geographically limited area to harmoniously work together to achieve a common goal (Vernon et al. 2005) The advantages of marketing a tourist destination by involving both public agencies and private businesses in the production and promotion of tourism products has been widely acknowledged (Buhalis et al, 2001) For tourism firm as long as wants to be successful in tourist market has to understand and satisfy the desires of their customer. According to Soteriades (2012, p. 109), a tourism company has to identify appropriate ways of segmenting the markets in which they compete, develop and launch the appropriate products and effectively communicate with potential visitors. According to Buhalis (2000, p 100), the marketing competitiveness of a destination increases when using tourism alliances to promote the specific destination. Thus, destination marketing becomes increasingly efficient it is difficult, if not impossible, for touristic firm to survive as single company. There are several more disadvantages and problems connected to the existence of an alliance in tourism sector. First of all, partner's size is important for the alliance. Tourism alliances may involve weak or unequal partners. According to Rajasekar(et al,(2009) p 99) partners' size and performance is one of the significant factors that influence the successful outcome of the proposed alliances. But if they do not have the same power or size problems might appear. According to Selin (1993,) all tourism firms and organizations cannot always be represented, because the membership in an alliance can be expensive. Another problem that may appear is cultural differences between the partners. Last, because tourism alliances require organizations to share resources in some ventures, and compete for resources in others, stakeholders may be reluctant to join in collaborative tourism planning. Literature has also suggested that the decision to participate or form strategic alliances is largely influenced by the perceptions and characteristics of managers, including education, and work experience (Carpenter et al., 2004)

2.5 Implication in Tourism Alliance

Grant et al., (2004, p.61) developed the knowledge-accessing theory of strategic alliances: the two main benefits of alliances are: first, to allow a more efficient integration of the different types of knowledge

usually requires developing a new product, and second, to maximize the efficiency of utilization of knowledge that may be accessed through partner organizations.

The importance is also pointed out by Hjalager (2000), when he has affirmed that sharing of knowledge is critical for the competitiveness of tourism destinations. A recent study shows that hospitality management considers Knowledge and information to be relevant concepts, but they are confronted with too many unclear KM strategies, activities and implementation techniques (Bouncken et al, 2002, p. 3). The KM concepts that are studied by Nonaka et al., (1995) in the literature are mostly developed from a manufactured and multinational perspective; on the other hand Tourism Organizations that provide services has been studied more recently than in the past and nowadays the literature does not have several studies to cover adequately this topic. According to Kahle, (2002, p.20) the tourism industry that according to Kahle (2002, p. 20) has all the necessary features to be characterized as a “new economy” industry for several factors (the abundance of available information, the high velocity of information transfer, the change of transaction cost structure and the impacts of the special attributes of knowledge), assets in an intercultural area of action and creates a special situation for the people involved in the tourism industry.

However, Hallin et al, 2010, p.15 has affirmed that KM has revealed some strong indications of potentials and obstacles for the hospitality industry and hospitality companies. This is also confirmed by Scott et al., (2006 p. 9), when during his studies he found out that Knowledge sharing raises issues of power and control. This creates tensions between the individual and the organization and focuses attention on the difficulty of sharing knowledge in tourism destinations where operators both compete and cooperate.

Therefore, several studies have pointed out the importance of the network such as a tourism alliance and how it is related to sharing knowledge. According to McLeod (2010, p.1664) there is an association of networking with knowledge sharing: Tourism and hospitality businesses require knowledge for innovation. An understanding of inter-organizational networking between people in tourism and hospitality businesses along with the knowledge shared enables tourism and hospitality professionals to re-consider their network connections carefully. For tourism, as has been seen, a particular concern is the fact that most destinations comprise small and medium enterprise, organizations which tend to be knowledge averse and therefore public sector intervention is needed to establish cooperative frameworks and networks at the destination level. In other words, the theoretical

interest in understanding the processes of knowledge transfer in a complex system such as a tourism destination is crucial from the point of view of practitioners (Baggio et. al, 2010, p.1769).

Furthermore (McLeod, 2010, p.1666) suggest that there are distinct characteristics that result in differences between formal and informal business knowledge networks. Egos and alters have different roles and positions in each. The opportunity for, and behavior of, information sharing is facilitated, to different extents, by network characteristics such as density, structural hole, and brokerage. Prominent findings are the connectedness of the information sharing within the tourism destination and the fact that such patterns may be measured to understand how the tourism destination functions.

The destination can use the knowledge to determine its marketing strategy and tactics in real time, as changes develop in the marketplace and new tourist demands arise. (Pyo et al, 2002 p.401). But the maintenance and utilization of a knowledge information system requires constant knowledge input. Consequently, hospitality business needs to motivate their staff generating and accumulating valuable knowledge into the database. (Bouncken, 2002, p. 45).

KDD (knowledge discovery in database) provides relevant knowledge to the destination users by extracting useful knowledge from the data warehousing. Recent knowledge about new tourist market trends should be incrementally updated after the data analyses with current data. However, the interpretation and usefulness of information generated from machine learning will still, to a large degree, depend on human interfaces (Pyo et al, 2002 p.401).

2.6 Factors that influence the willingness of Managers to cooperate

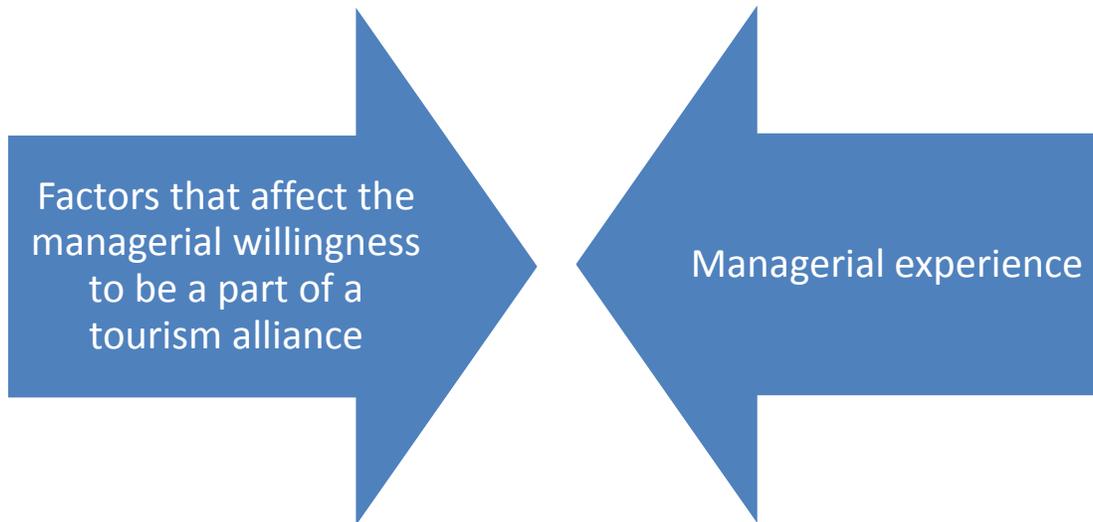
Sharing knowledge frequently requires patience and effort as the sender attempts to understand the receiver's perspective, answer questions, provide feedback and convey knowledge (Edward, 2009, p. 1412). Furthermore Edward (2009, p.1419) supports the view that the organizational culture influences operational processes, and we found that a knowledge-sharing environment positively influences knowledge sharing between colleagues in an organization, with employees needing their colleagues to provide service and product information to their customers.

Additionally, Studies have suggested that the willingness for managers to participate in strategic alliances is partly based on their specific characteristics, such as experience and background (Carpenter et al.,2004). Jetter(et al., 2012, p.141)highlights that managers with more industry experience reported participating in strategic alliances more frequently than those respondents with little experience. These results affirm that tourism professionals with less experience need more encouragement or motivation to participate in these strategic alliances.

2.7 Theoretical framework

In order to answer the posed research questions, many different theories have been discussed in the previous chapters. Before starting the analysis of the conducted empirical material,we are introducing the following figure showing the advantages and disadvantages of being a part of an alliance. Furthermore, we want to investigate if the managers perspectives regarding the advantages and disadvantages of being a part of an alliance are affected by their experience. This model is summarizing our interpretation of the theoretical framework and it has been used as a framework, guiding our analysis.

Figure 1: Relationship between factors affecting the willingness to be a member of an alliance and managerial experience



Source: Own construction / adapted of Elmuti et al., 2001; Gulati et al.,2000; Gnyaali et al., 2001; Drago, 1997; Todeva et al., 2005; Lewis, 1992; Kalmbach et al., 1999; Carpenter et al., 2004

The point of this figure is to give a brief but comprehensive view of advantages and disadvantages to be a member of tourism alliances. Furthermore our study wants to investigate if the advantages and disadvantages are related to the managerial experience. As it was discussed above previous studies have found out that the decision to participate or form strategic alliances are largely influenced by the perceptions and characteristics of managers, including education, and work experience(Carpenter et al., 2004). Consequently, according to the literature review, the figure shows that the most important factors that affect the willingness of the Managers to be a part of tourism alliance are divided in advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, the study wants to investigate if these factors are affected by the managerial experience. This theoretical framework has been continued with the empirical material in the presentation of the data according to different categories in its own chapter (chapter four). In a second step in chapter five the material has been analyzed based on the presented model.

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter is introducing and explaining the methods used in order to answer the posed research questions. After introducing the selected case for this study, the focus lies on the combination of a quantitative questionnaire providing an overview of the alliances examined and qualitative interviews in order to identify the importance of strategic alliance in tourism sector.

3.1 Choice of the case

In order to have a clear view about the advantages and disadvantages of joining a tourism alliance we selected two alliances Hälsingland Tourism and Finn forest (Finnskogarna). The first one Hälsingland Tourism was formed in 2006 and other one Finn Forest has been created in March of 2013. The umbrella organization Finnskogarna started working together with just under 50 local businesses and associations to make known the story of the Forest Finns. Finnskogarna, or the Finn Forest, offers a wide range of tourist experiences, all telling the story of the people that came 400 years ago from east Finland to made this land their own. Hälsingland, on the other hand, is an alliance created by 203 local businesses. The primary mission of this network is to promote and coordinate the marketing of this province as a tourism destination. All information was provided by Coompanion. Coompanion is a nonprofit organization with twenty five offices nationwide which help companies to cooperate and individuals to start their own business. Coompanion's corporate advisors are experts in cooperative entrepreneurship. Their aim is to provide people who want to realize ideas together with information, advice and training, based on their individual requirements – from idea to successful company.

Their participation, in the creation of alliances, has included advice and information in legal matters, in organizational matters and in practical matters. As far as our research is linked to the aim of this study, it was a significant need for us to combine questionnaires and interviews. Yin (1985, p 50) differentiates between single and multi-cases studies. Applying this differentiation to our research case it shows that we are working with a multi case study. This means that we are studying two cases, Finn Forest and Hälsingland Tourism, highlighting the difference of experience between those two alliances

that we are surveying. The size and structure of the chosen cases thus enabled us to generate rich empirical data with insights into the alliances in Sweden.

3.2 Quantitative and Qualitative research

Bryman (2008, p 53) sees the mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods as a possible solution for the shortcomings of each method. On the other hand, Layder (1998, p 110), states that this mixture is not useful anymore. In our opinion, the use of qualitative and quantitative method is essential as long as makes our findings reliable and valid.

Firstly we designed a quantitative questionnaire which was sent to 40 members of Finn Forest and 60 members of Hälsingland Tourism, in order to get a general idea of each network's activities as well as an overview of the atmosphere in the network. In the second stage of the research we conducted qualitative interviews with Katarina Ceder-Bäng, who is the CEO of Hälsingland Tourism, with Lars Findahl who is the project Manager of Finnforest, and with Ulf Karlsson and Ingrid who are advisors of Coompanion and were involved in the beginning of each alliance. Additionally, we did an interview with Ingrid Engelbrekts, the manager of Coompanion. As far as the information reached from the questionnaire was standard, so as to acquire more detailed information we did a qualitative research as well. Interviews were based on the information obtained from the questionnaire to get in-depth knowledge about the network, learn about specific examples, situations and possible problem areas. As Neuman (2006, p 114) emphasizes interviews allowed us to see the activities and the decisions through the eyes of the project manager and advisor they were interviewed. Further the personal interviews allowed us get a greater contextual understanding of the situation (Bryman et al., 2007 p264). Thus the development of the questionnaire as well as interviews will be explained in the following section.

3.3 Questionnaire

As it was pointed above quantitative research was essential for our research. We formed 100 questionnaires and we received in total forty eight full filled questionnaires from both alliances.

3.4 Purpose of questionnaire

The first step in conducting empirical material was carried out through a questionnaire, one of the main methods within quantitative research (Bryman, 2008, p 58). Smith (2010, p 119) even goes as far as calling questionnaires the most important method in tourism research. For this research project a questionnaire is an appropriate method to start with since it served as the foundation to answer the proposed aim and research questions. Firstly the questionnaire allowed us to get a general understanding of the network and have a clear view for the advantages and the disadvantages of being a part of the alliance. Secondly we were capable to reach members of each network through the questionnaire, who are geographically spread. Summarizing it can be said that the questionnaire served as a general foundation to find out what to ask in interviews in order to answer the aim and questions in detail.

3.4.1 Creating the questionnaire

Considering the research aim the questionnaire is based mainly on two different foundations. First of all, we used the posed theory that exists in tourism alliances as a framework for designing our questions. Knowing what other researchers have written about tourism alliances helped us structure our research. Previous research provided us with guidelines of what we needed to find out in order to answer our research questions concerning the advantages and disadvantages of being a part of an alliance as well as being a part of a tourism alliance are influenced by the experience. On the other hand we looked at the website of each network and used the information in order to present them. This information guided us to ask the right questions in order to obtain the information necessary to answer

the research aim and research questions. In total we posed eleven questions. We started the questionnaire with some introductory questions about the company such as the number of the employees, when and why they joined the alliance and if they are a member of any other alliance. The questionnaire further asked about the benefits of being a member of an alliance as well as the disadvantages. Even though this needed further investigation through the interviews, the data collected through the questionnaire enabled us to ask the right questions.

3.4.2 Types of questions

Bryman (2008, p 255) discusses different ways of asking questions in a questionnaire. Researcher can choose between open and closed questions depending on what information is wanted. Both question types have several advantages and disadvantages. While open questions give the respondents the possibility to answer freely, closed questions provide the answers to choose from. On the one hand a big advantage of closed questions over open questions from the researchers perspective is, that they are easier to code and therefore to analyze. Both types of questions were used in the questionnaire depending on the question asked. In total our questionnaire consists of 11 main questions, 7 open, 2 closed and 2 likert scales(appendix p 58).The first questions that were posted in the questionnaire asked about general information such as how many employees has the company and why company decides to enter in the alliance. Furthermore, we asked from the respondents to point out (1-3) a likert scale (1: most important, 3: less important) the most important advantages for them which are desirable to join an alliance. Advantages were reached from the theory, which was developed in the theoretical part of this study. Some of the answers which we placed there were: entering new markets, growth strategies, access to new technology, converging technology, cost sharing, pooling of resources, reduce financial risk, costs of research, developing products, obtain best quality, achieve or ensure competitive advantage, complementarity of goods and services to markets, sharing information and sharing knowledge. In the second likert scale of our questionnaire were posted the disadvantages of joining an alliance as they were presented in the theoretical part of this study. Some disadvantages are lack of trust, lack of clear goals and objectives, lack of coordination and relational and performance risk. Additionally, we asked if there any other benefits and disadvantages that were not listed in our scales.

3.4.3 Distribution of the questionnaire

Bryman (Bryman et al., 2007 p252) is discussing different ways of distributing a questionnaire, for example via personal distribution, email or through an online survey. We found beneficial to use email survey. This was important to us because it made it more comfortable for the respondents to fill out the questionnaire without any distraction. After creating our questionnaire we needed to attach it to network members. The website of Hälsingland Tourism provides an index of all members with their contact information. Concerning Finn Forest we reached their addresses from Coompanion. In our email we briefly described the purpose of our thesis and asked from the members to support in conducting our research. It was not difficult for us to reach the answers as far as the advisor of Coompanion informed them about our thesis. We sent the emails in 40 managers of Finn Forest and 60 managers of Hälsingland alliance. After one week we received 20 answers and we sent emails in order to remind them to answer the questionnaire. At last, we reached 48 full filled questionnaires. Even if it was important for us to receive more answers it was not possible due to the difficulty of some manager to use the technology. Almost half of our respondents were not familiar with the use of email and they did not speak English.

3.4.4 Coding

We collected the data and categorize them in two categories managers with experience (Hälsingland's managers) and managers without experience in tourism alliances (Finn Forest's managers). After having received 48 questionnaires we started the process of coding and analyzing the answers. In order to do a data analysis we used excel program. Then, we presented our data in frequency tables. A frequency table is providing the number of the people and the percentage that belonging to each of the categories for the variable in question (Bryman& Bell, 2007 p 357). We used the frequency table to show the most important advantages and disadvantages of creating a tourism alliance. This table is placed in our findings. When constructing the questionnaire we left out questions that required a detailed and long answer, these questions were later on asked in the personal interview. In this first step we rather focused on generating information enabling us to get a general understanding of the operations in networks.

3.4.5 Interview

We have conducted in the second step semi-structured interviews in order to extend the information received from the questionnaire which will further allow us to answer our research questions. According to Smith et al (2010, p 61), questionnaires are not suitable to conduct in-depth data. Therefore we believe the interviews can increase rich data for this purpose. Although Roulston et al (2010, p199) point out that students – irrespective of their discipline or topic – draw on commonly used forms of qualitative data such as field notes and observational data, documents and texts, and video and audio-tapes of interaction in research settings and interviews. Of all these forms of data, the most commonly-used data source is that of qualitative interviews. In this specific case face to face interviews enabled us to get a more detailed insight into the working processes of Strategic Alliance and the different perceptions of the members within the network.

Furthermore, we decided to adopt face to face interviews because we got the impression from the beginning of contacting potential interviewees that they were more willing to talk to us by face to face we can reach more information about the alliances. As presented earlier we did four interviews with the contribution of Ulf Karlsson, the advisor of Coompanion, who already was in contact with them. He arranged us the appointment with the project manager of Finn Forest and the CEO of Hälsingland. Additionally, we did two more interviews with Ulf Karlsson and Ingrid Engelbrekts and who were advisors in each creation of the alliance. The interviews were planned to take about one hour which was known and agreed to by the interviewees in advance. The first interview with the project manager of Finn Forest took place in the library of University of Gävle as far as the association is new and their offices are not ready to host us. The duration of the interview was forty five minutes. In order to have the second interview with the CEO of Hälsingland Tourism Katarina Ceder-Bång, we travel to Bollnäs where the association is located. Our interview lasted one hour and fifteen minutes. The third and fourth interview took place in the Teknikparken in Gävle as long as Coompanion is located there. The third interview with Ulf Karlsson made us capable to reach information about the association of FinnForest and explained as his role as an advisor in this network the duration was forty five minutes. The fourth interview with Ingrid Engelbrekts enables us to reach all the necessary information for our research and explained us the key role that she had in the creation of Hälsingland association. All interviews were recorded.

The first step was to organize the interviews and to create a guide in order to facilitate the work. According to Turner (2010, p 757) the most helpful tip with the interview process is that of interview preparation; this process can help make or break the process and can either alleviate or exacerbate the problematic circumstances that could potentially occur once the research is implemented.

Our interview guide was based on the results from the questionnaire survey. At the time of designing the interview questions we received 48 filled out questionnaires to work with. This demanded a first analysis of the conducted data. According to Denscombe (2010 p 181) there is likely to be more benefit from the interview if the researcher is well informed about the topic and has done the necessary homework on the issues that are likely to arise during the interview. In our case we wanted to find out more about the perception of strategic alliance regarding the tourism corporations as well as the advantages and problems connected to such a membership. We started off with introductory questions to get a feeling of the company interviewed as a member of a strategic alliance, asking the network members to give a short description of the network and how long they have been working together. The first question takes on a particular significance for the interview, it should offer the interviewee the chance to settle down and relax (Denscombe et al 2010 p185). That question aimed finding out what is the experience of the company regarding the alliance. Furthermore, according to the questionnaire we asking about the importance of the communication since it became obvious that sharing information is an essential factor of the alliance. In the case of FinnForest, since the alliance is forming nowadays, we wanted to find out the perception of the company regarding sharing information in a future perspective. At last we asked several concluding questions regarding the other factors Even though we had prepared questions in advance; we were also prepared to change these questions depending on the interview situation. Since we were prepared for a semi-structured interview we were able to adapt to these changes easily.

Since the interviewees already knew the general direction of the questions from the previous questionnaire, we decided against sending the interview questions to the interviewees beforehand. We decided this strategy to avoid influencing the interviewee's answers and to receive more honest information. Furthermore the results of an interview depend on the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. Burnard (1994 p 69) contends that the interviewer has to pay special attention to the phrasing and clarity of his or her questions. That the companies have considered being relevant according to the questionnaires. We have recorded the interview in order to be facilitated for the transcription subsequently. Interceding during and transcribing after the interview is essential when

conducting qualitative interviews. When going over our transcribed interviews we constantly had our research questions in mind. We looked for statements regarding the motivation to be a member of the alliance, benefits and limitations received from the network and finally information regarding the experience of the companies to be partners.

Therefore we wrote down all important key words from the transcripts in a first step and in a second step divided those key words into topics following the natural flow regarding the strategic alliance. In a third step we formed links between our empirical findings and the chosen theory in order to find out in what aspects theory and empery agree and where our empirical findings went beyond what has been discussed in the theory. Based on that information we were able to answer our research questions.

3.4.6 Critical reflection

After having discussed the methodological approach we have reflected critically the decisions made in this process. First we want to discuss about the language issue. Since we decided to investigate Swedish Companies for this project and we are not able to speak Swedish, we have used English as language for the qualitative and quantitative research. In this case both researchers and respondents are not native speaker; consequently some important concepts could be missed or interpreted wrong. A further important consideration when conducting research is that we were aware of the subjectivity of the questions we asked, the answers we received and the way we interpreted the information. We tried to avoid letting our subjective perception prevent us from creating knowledge regarding the given situation, but we were aware that our understanding of a given situation might differ from the understanding of a second person.

Regarding reliability and validity of the study, which are both essential parts of writing a research study, we established them in our research. The validity and reliability of the collected data depends on the questionnaire structure and questions design, as this aims to reduce the possibility of being subjective in creating the questions and consequently to receive wrong answers (Saundrers et al., 2009). As far as our questions were created and the structure was designed under the guidelines of Bryman (2008), our research remains valid and reliable. Furthermore, our respondents were first contacted by Ulf Karlsson (advisor of Coompanion) to inform them about our research. Concerning

validity, Bryman and Bell (2007) highlight the connection with the accuracy and truthfulness. Our questionnaire respondents had no reason to conceal the truth as long as they own each tourism organization. Concerning the interviews, our interviews were asked about general information regarding each alliance without any purpose to investigate financial problems or essential problems that may appear in the alliance. Concluding, our references are consisted from scientific articles and books recommended from our supervisor.

4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In the following section according to the quantitative and qualitative research the empirical findings are presented. It provides an overview to the reader of general information of the companies and what are the most relevant advantages and disadvantages to be a part of an alliance. We divide this section in 3 parts. In the first part the results of the questionnaires are described. In the second part we present the answers of the interviewees. Finally in the third part we have pointed out the most relevant results of both questionnaires and interviews.

4.1 General information from the questionnaires respondents

It became apparent that the size of the member companies was of importance since the questionnaires pointed out that both of the alliances consist of small and medium sized tourism firms in order to describe the network. In addition, it became clear from the questionnaire results that the majority of the businesses consist of 10 employees or less and only some companies are bigger. We decided to classify as small firms the organizations with less than 10 employees and medium firms the organizations with more than 10 employees.

According the questionnaire results, we collected information from 17 small and 5 medium organizations that belong to Hälsingland and 22 small and 4 medium organizations that belong to Finnforest.

Furthermore it was stated by several answers that most of the organizations have joined Hälsingland Tourism in 2006 and only 4 of them have joined the alliance later. On the other hand Finnforest has been created in 2013 and all its members have joined the alliance at the same moment.

When asking for the reason of being a member of this specific network almost all respondents pointed at the importance of this alliance supporting the sustainable development of the tourism industry, the importance of working to achieve the same goals and of being in the same geographical zone.

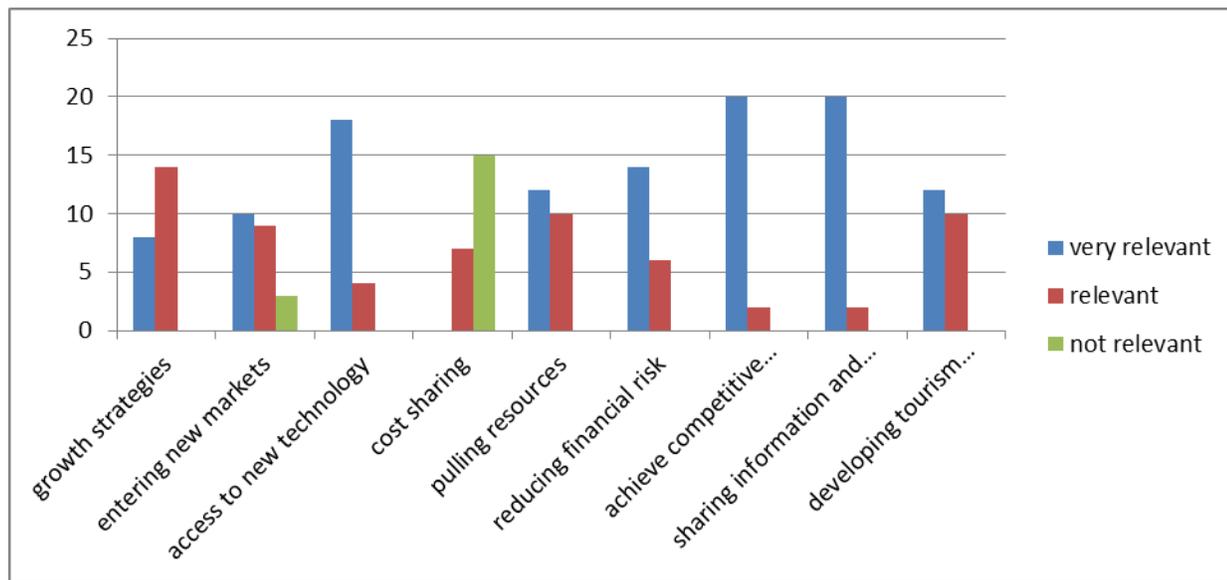
One answer describes this important factor as follows: “the engagement as supporting the development of sustainable tourism is essential for the alliance members in order to unite them”. Thus it seems that a

common goal such as sustainability is important for the formation of tourism alliance and the sense of shared identity of the network members. Additionally we found out that all the tourism organizations do not belong to any more alliance but they use different networks in order to be more visible. In fact the website booking.com is most common instrument used by these organizations to promote their business and to manage their reservations. In order to be give a clear a view to the reader, all findings from the questionnaire are posted in the appendix (p57).

4.1.1 What are the benefits of being a member of Alliance?

Illuminating the most relevant benefits of being a part of an alliance reveals information on how advantageous is for a company to be a member of an economic association. Hence, the following information made us capable to answer the research questions. In the questionnaire we quote nine advantages of being a part of an alliance giving three different possibilities to answer: very relevant, relevant, and not relevant. A brief but comprehensive presentation of results is stated in tables 1 and 2 (pp. 27-28).As far as we sent questionnaires to two companies the results differ from one company to the other.

Table 1: Advantages of being a member of Hälsingland Tourism

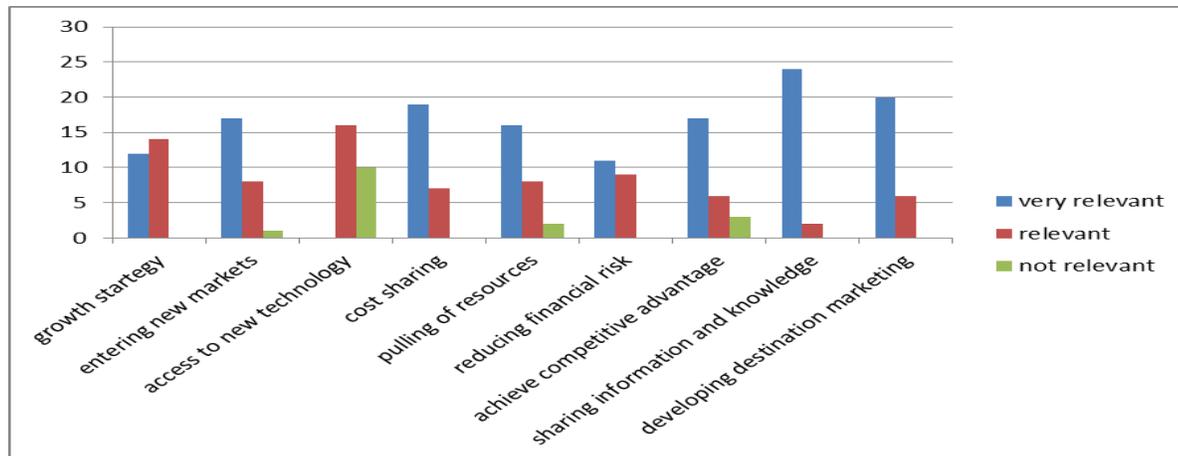


Source: Own construction

Regarding Hälsingland, it turned out that the majority (90.9%) of respondents believe that two factors are very relevant: the achievement of competitive advantage and sharing information and knowledge. Both of them are in the first position, while only two out of twentytwo respondents characterize them as relevant. The second factor which was pointed out as very relevant was the access to new technology. A large amount of the respondents (81.8%) believes that is very important and 18.2% (4 out of 22) qualify them as relevant. Additionally, fourteen respondents (63.7%) answer as very important factor reducing the financial risk, while 36.3% rated as relevant. In the sequel, answerers (54.5%) defined two more factors as very relevant: developing destination marketing and pulling resources. Almost half of our sample (45.5 %) ranked these two factors as relevant. In the six factors that were presented above none of the respondents rated them as not relevant. Further, 45.5% found very relevant the advantage of entering new markets, 40.9% categorized it as relevant and 13.6% as not relevant. There were some answers (36.3%) ranked the growing strategy as very relevant. While 63.7% ranked it as relevant and none of them placed it as not relevant. At last, no one of the answerers valued the cost sharing as very relevant, whereas 31.8 % range it as relevant and 63.7 % as not relevant. After the exposing of our factors we asked if there are any other advantages. A great share (86.3%) of respondents answered that the promotion of the province was also important. As far as Hälsingland is a

Province too this factor seems very relevant for the companies. Almost half of the sample (45.5 %), answered that being a member of the sample makes them feeling more powerful. Only 3 out of 22 respondents answered that all advantages were mentioned from the theory.

Table 2: Advantages of being a member of Finnforest



Source: Own construction

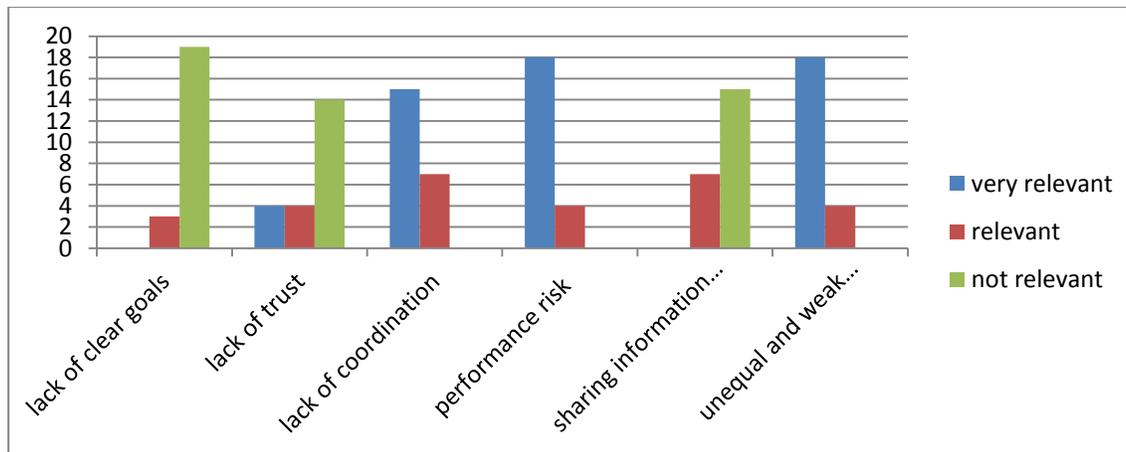
It evicted that the majority (92,3 %) of the respondents pointed out as a very relevant factor sharing information and knowledge, while 7,7% characterize it as relevant. In the second position is the developing of destination marketing. A great percentage (76.9%) found it very relevant whereas 23.1% categorized it as relevant. Furthermore, 73% stages as very relevant the cost sharing, though 23% ranked it as relevant. The forth factor that was ranked (65.4%) as very relevant was the achievement of competitive advantage, 23% stage it as relevant and 11.6% as not relevant. In the sequel, the advantage of entering new markets was tiered as very relevant by 65.3 %, while 30.7% found it relevant and only 4% believes that is not important. The benefit of growth strategy was ranked as not very relevant by Finn Forest companies, only 46.2 believes that is very relevant and 53.8 % characterize it as relevant. The results show that the reducing of financial risk is staged very relevant by 45.4% and the rest of the sample found them relevant. Either way, none of the respondents stages as very important the ability of access new technology though the alliance. Instead, 38.5% consider it as not important. The rest of the respondents (61.5%) categorized it as relevant. Additionally, when we asked about other advantages, fourteen out of twenty six notice the integrated services that they can offer now through the alliance.

Furthermore, it was said by several respondents (5 out of 26) that surviving and being stronger due to the globalization were important for them.

4.1.2 What are the disadvantages of being a member of Alliance?

In the questionnaire we estimate six disadvantages of being a part of an alliance giving three different possibilities to answer: very relevant, relevant, and not relevant. A constructive representation of the results stairs in tables 3 and 4 (pp. 30-31). Outcomes are separated in two different paragraphs due to the existence of two alliances.

Table 3: Disadvantages of being a member of Hälsingland Tourism

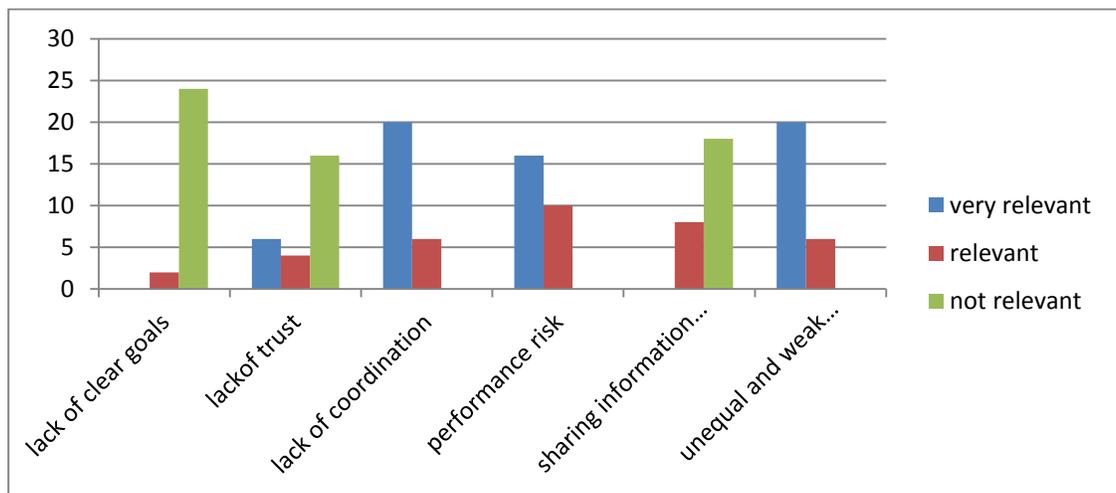


Source: Own construction

As concerns Hälsingland, it turns out that performance risk and cooperating with unequal and weak partners were pointed out as very relevant disadvantages by the majority of respondents (81.8%). The rest of the answerers stage it as relevant and none of them as not relevant. Thereinafter, more than half of the sample (68.2%) considers the lack of coordination as a very important disadvantage and the remaining answers categorize this factor as relevant, whereas there was no answer selecting it as not relevant. Henceforth, the minority of respondents (18.2%) tags as very relevant the lack of trust. While four out of twenty two (18.2%) believe that is relevant and the rest of the answerers pointed it out as not important for their collaboration. There was not one answer nominated as very relevant as concerns

the disadvantages of lack of clear goal and sharing information and knowledge. While three out of twenty two (13.6%) ranked the first one (lack of clear goal) as relevant and 86.4% as not relevant. Responding the last factor (sharing information and knowledge), 31.8% characterized it as relevant and 68.2 % as not important for them. Additionally, half of the respondents add as other disadvantage the sharing of the consumers as long as they use a lot of marketing tools in common.

Table 4: Disadvantages of being a member of Finnforest



Source: Own construction

Concerning Finn Forest, it was noticeable that the majority of the respondents (76.9%) believe that lack of coordination and cooperating with weak and unequal partners is very important disadvantage for them. While 23.1% in both cases found it as relevant factor. In the sequel, sixteen out of twenty six (61.5%) stage the performance risk as very relevant and 38.5% tags it as relevant. Lack of trust is not a very important disadvantage for the respondents. Only 23.1% finds it relevant, 15.3% believed is relevant and 61.6% tags it as not important. Lack of clear goals and sharing information and knowledge were not ticked as very relevant by any respondent. Furthermore, two out of twenty six answerers pointed out the lack of clear goals as important and 92.3 as not relevant. It seems that sharing information and knowledge is only an advantage for the respondents; because only 30.7% tags it as relevant disadvantage and the majority (18 out of 26) categorized it as not relevant disadvantage. Moreover, respondents add as disadvantage the lack of understanding the roles of each member in the alliance.

4.2 Interviews findings

In this part of empirical findings we have pointed out the results of our interviews.

4.2.1 The profile of interviewees

Our first interviewee was Ulf Karlsson. He is working in Coompanion stated in Gävleborg as an advisor the last twelve years (since September of 2001). His position requires providing information and advices to people who want to start up their own business and companies which are planning to set up a network. Due to the special legal form that stairs in Sweden for alliances the connection between the law and the economic association is, if not obligatory, essential for the cooperation. He is responsible to help the companies and bear out those actions are made according to the law. It was essential for us to have this interview as he is the advisor in the case of Finnforest.

Our second interviewee was Ingrid Engelbrekts. Ingrid is the manager of Coompanion in Gävleborg. She is working in Coompanion the last twenty years (since November of 1993). Through her position, she was providing information in the alliance of Hälsingland. Ingrid was born in Hälsingland, a rich area full of industries and mostly they produce woods. Her role in the creation of Hälsingland association was to write the necessary papers with roles in order the association to be created. Basically her part during the creation of the association regarded legal advices.

Our third respondent was Lars Findahl. Mr. Findahl is the project manager of Finnforest. As far as the network is new he does not have clear errands but he is responsible to sort out all the problems that maybe will appear. Additionally, he is organizing the cooperation between the members and keeping them together as long as he has a strong background in the tourism sector.

Our last respondent was Katarina Ceder-Bång, the CEO of Hälsingland tourism. Her background consist studies in economic and psychological studies. Furthermore she was working as a consultant in a lot of Swedish companies as well as international companies such as Ericsson and Sandvik. Her responsibilities are to manage the daily problems that appear, figure out the conflicts between the partners, and promote the brand of Hälsingland. Also she is organizing seminars for the members of the

alliance. Additionally, she is responsible for finance resources of the association and the booking system that they share.

4.2.2 Description of alliances

Since the aim of our study is to generate knowledge of the marketing advantages and disadvantages of creating an alliance from the members' perspective was essential for us to have a clear view of the alliances that we are investigating. During our interviews we asked to briefly describe the alliance in a couple of sentences in order to receive an overview of how they perceive the network.

Concerning the case of Finn Forest, the role of Coompanion has included advice and information in legal matters, in organizational matters and in practical matters. Coompanion informed the group about other similar associations in other parts of Sweden and have helped out in the process. Their participation has included several meetings with the project leaders, with a group that was established to prepare for the setting up of the economic association and during the beginning of the economic association when Mr. Karlsson was elected as the chairman of the constitutional meeting. Furthermore, the project manager of Finnforest declares that since the alliance was not completely created, many roles were not defined; in fact even his activities within the network were not still distinct.

On the other hand, Hälsingland was described by the CEO as an established alliance and well-coordinated. From Mrs. Engelbrekts's perspective the reason of creating Hälsingland was the results of several failures of the tourism corporations that realized the difficulties of working alone, especially for small organizations. At the beginning the organizations were working without anyone being responsible. So they did not have clear rules and strategies and they realized that they needed them.

4.2.3 Importance of the alliance

When we asked about the importance of the alliance the answers were quite different. From Mr. Karlsson perspective he explained that "chances before the alliance were limited for a small company, it is very difficult to survive alone". Additionally, he explained "nowadays, going global alone contains risk, together they are stronger". Either way, he clearly describe that being a part of the network help small companies to increase the quality and have innovative solutions to problems that may come up. The network provides the framework for building some sort of relationship between the members. Mrs. Engelbrekts declares that as far as they have clear goals this cooperation can end in a successful alliance with benefits for all the members who otherwise will be difficult to survive alone.

From managers view when we asked about the prominence of the alliance they focused in different reasons. Concerning Finn Forest he stressed that this cooperation was set up due to historical reasons, as long as they want to continue the history of the Finns from 16th century. Regarding, Hälsingland he said that they get in touch in order to make their province stronger and advertise it around the world. After we figured out the roles of the interviewees and the importance of the alliance, according to the questionnaires and our research questions we asked what are the most relevant advantages and disadvantages to be a part of an alliance. Both of the interviewers agreed with the results of the questionnaires. Furthermore they argued more relevant factors. The Project Manager of Finnforest said: "It is very difficult to convince the companies to work with social media because they do not have previous experience and education regarding the web". On the other hand the CEO of Hälsingland affirmed that the most important instrument to promote their tourism services is the social media. In fact since they started using social media they sharply incremented their visitors on the website. However this strategy was established after several years of training meeting.

Additionally, they pointed out the importance of the institutions. According to the CEO of Hälsingland their rapid growth was strongly influence by the financial resources of the municipalities. In fact 6 municipalities contribute with 1.5 million kr per year. She affirmed that the most difficult issue is to manage their relationship with the municipalities, especially when the politicians change and consequently Hälsingland sometimes receives the resources with delay. Oppositely, Finnforest does not receive any financial resources from the municipalities nowadays and the disagreement of the Project Manager was often pointed out. In fact the financial resource is from the members of the alliance.

From Coompanion´s perspective Mr. Karlsson denote “knowing your partner and having the same rules in quality and environmental issues is important factor for a successful alliance”. He sees trust and clear goals as requirements for the membership in a network because "the actions of one member reflect all the members". Thereinafter we asked him to highlight the most relevant advantages of being a part of an alliance. For his perspective, it was difficult to say what is most important as far as every cooperation is unique. In case of Finn Forest, sharing cost and entering new markets are the most relevant advantages. He concludes that combining ideas and the new opportunities that are offered through the membership are benefits for the company too. On the other hand, when asking for disadvantages he explained that "you can't get advantages without disadvantages and he added that being a partner and competitor at the same time is not so easy". Also, “follow common solutions which you do not agree will probably cause problems to each individual member, especially if there is lack of trust”. A problem that has been emphasized was the investment of money from each company which is not capable to know it will depreciate. Mrs. Engelbrekts on the other hand states that the most important advantage is the competitive advantage, is important for companies to achieve that advantage in order to survive in the global arena. Additionally, she said that sharing knowledge is important and she explained using an example from everyday life, the wedding. She stated that as husband and wife share their ideas in order to be more integrated that happens in the network. Moreover, as a disadvantage she note the weak and unequal partner. According to her is difficult to cooperate when you don't have the same size and strength. In addition, when we asked about more advantages and disadvantages she declares the complementary of services to market, as far as they are very small organizations so they need to cooperate to become more complete. As a disadvantage she notes that it is difficult to be professional and combine the ideas together and to keep respect and manage the ideas.

To sum up, the perspectives of the CEO of Hälsingland and the Project Manager of Finnforest are quite similar. But the experience of the organizations regarding the alliance influences the strategy of the business. However the Project Manager of Finnforest since his experience within tourism environment was positive regarding the future growth of Finnforest affirmed: “even if at the beginning most of the managers of the organizations are doubters, they will understand the importance of being together”.

In order to have a brief but comprehensive view from our most relevant findings we created three tables (table 5,6,7 pp. 37-38) with the most empirical findings. We separated them purposely in three different tables in order to be more understandable.

4.3 The most relevant empirical findings

Several general outcomes of a strong network were brought up during the field work. The growing influence on the development of the tourism industry was one which was pointed out several times during the interview and included in the questionnaire.

In this context sustainable development is especially important to the alliance members. It was stated that due to the union of many small and medium sized companies they achieved to have a voice in public and be listened to which could not have been accomplished individually. It became apparent that one shared goal of the companies is to be more visible, which can be done more easily in a network than alone.

One respondent of Hälsingland said: “The united appearance enables the businesses to position themselves on a highly competitive tourism market and increases the popularity and recognition of every individual member”.

In fact the factor “achieve competitive advantage” was considered very important for most of the respondents who belong to Hälsingland. On the other hand it was found out that few respondents of Finnforest considered this factor not important.

It was pointed out with the questionnaire that Hälsingland and Finnforest have considered “sharing knowledge and information” the most relevant advantage to be a member of a tourism alliance. On the other hand “access to new technology” did not receive any very relevant response from Finnforest but it seems to be very relevant factor in the case of Hälsingland Tourism. Another difference between the two alliances is the advantage of cost sharing. Members of Finnforest categorize it as very relevant, contrariwise members of Hälsingland Tourism notes it as not relevant.

Furthermore the results regarding the factor “entering new markets” did not receive the same feedback from Hälsingland and Finnforest. In fact the 65,3% of Finnforest respondents have considered this factor very relevant. Differently the 45,5% of Hälsingland have considered very relevant this factor and 13,6% of its respondents have considered it not relevant.

It was further stated by several respondents that another advantage which results from uniting many small and medium sized business is the increased trust put into the quality of the products

Besides, according to the questionnaire and the interviews the answers regarding the disadvantage to be a member of a tourism alliance were considered mostly similar for Hälsingland and Finnforest. In fact the results pointed out that “unequal and weak partner” are considered the most relevant factor for both of alliances. On the other hand “Lack of clear goals” is resulted as the less relevant factor.

Table 5: Interviews findings

Interviewees \ Findings	Advantages	Disadvantages	Reasons of creating the alliance
Ulf Karlsson Advisor of Cooperation	Increase the quality of services and have innovative solutions to problems that may come up	Difficult to be a partner and competitor at the same time	Difficult to survive alone
Ingrid Engelbrekts Manager of Cooperation	Achieve competitive advantage. Complementary of services to market	Unequal and weak partner, clear communication	Failures of the tourism corporations, need of cooperation
Lars Findahl Project manager of FinnForest	Sharing cost and entering new markets	Lack of knowledge in technology, lack of experience	Historical reasons
Katarina Ceder-Bång CEO of Hälsingland	Rapid growth was strongly influenced by the financial resources	Manage their relationship with the municipalities	Promotion of the province

(Ownconstruction)

Table 6: Advantages reached from the questionnaires of being a member of a tourism alliance

Factors \ Alliance	The achievement of competitive advantage	Sharing information and knowledge	Access to new technology	Developing of destination marketing

Hälsingland Tourism	90,9%	90,9%	81,8%	54,5%
Finnforest	65,4%	92,3%	0%	76,9%

(Ownconstruction)

Table 7: Disadvantages reached from the questionnaires of being a member of a tourism alliance

Factors 1.1.1 Alliance	2.1.1 Lack of coordination	3.1.1 Performance risk	4.1.1 Unequal and unique partner
Hälsingland Tourism	81.8%	81.8%	68.2%
Finnforest	76.9%	61,5%	76.9%

Source: Own construction

5 ANALYSIS

In this chapter we have connected the empirical findings to the theory. We start with a short introduction where general information about the alliances that we have investigated, are linked with the theory. After that, in order to answer the research questions the main focus lied firstly on the advantages and disadvantages of strategic alliance. Subsequently the analysis of the different Managers perceptions regarding the alliance is addressed.

We chose to begin with an introduction to give the reader an overview of the cases study linked with the literature before the analysis. Then, we discuss about the advantages and disadvantages of strategic alliance since it directly corresponds to the first research question. Further the last section discusses data regarding the second research question. In order to make it easier to understand, the analysis we will follow a similar structure as the theory chapter and is based on our constructed model presented in the theoretical framework.

5.1 Introduction of the Analysis

Hälsingland and Finnforest are tourism destinations that decided to create an alliance with the organizations located in their geographic area. It is clear how the characteristic of tourism alliances differ with other alliances that provide tangible products. This is confirmed by Yilmaz et al (2005 p 376) when he says that tourism industries opposed to manufacturing provide services, in fact they are mainly carriers, accommodation places, man-made attraction ventures, car rental firms, restaurants and other destination based tourism enterprises. Furthermore, since tourism is a service product, it cannot be divided into production and consumption phase (Buhalis, 2003), customers have direct experience of the production of the service and they are an integral part of the service process (Baker and Crompton, 2000).

Hälsingland and Finnforest provide tourism products but they have been created in different periods (Hälsingland in 2006 and Finnforest in 2013. Vernon et al. (2005) affirms that strategic and destination marketing is a collective effort that requires various organizations and businesses in a geographically limited area to harmoniously work together to achieve a common goal. According to the Managers of

Hälsingland and Finnforest their goals is to promote their geographical area and consequently their tourism activities.

This concept points out the importance of creating an alliance within a tourism destination. Furthermore the CEO stressed the importance of the municipalities within the alliance. According to Buhalis et al (1998) the advantages of marketing in a tourist destination is to involve both public agencies and private businesses.

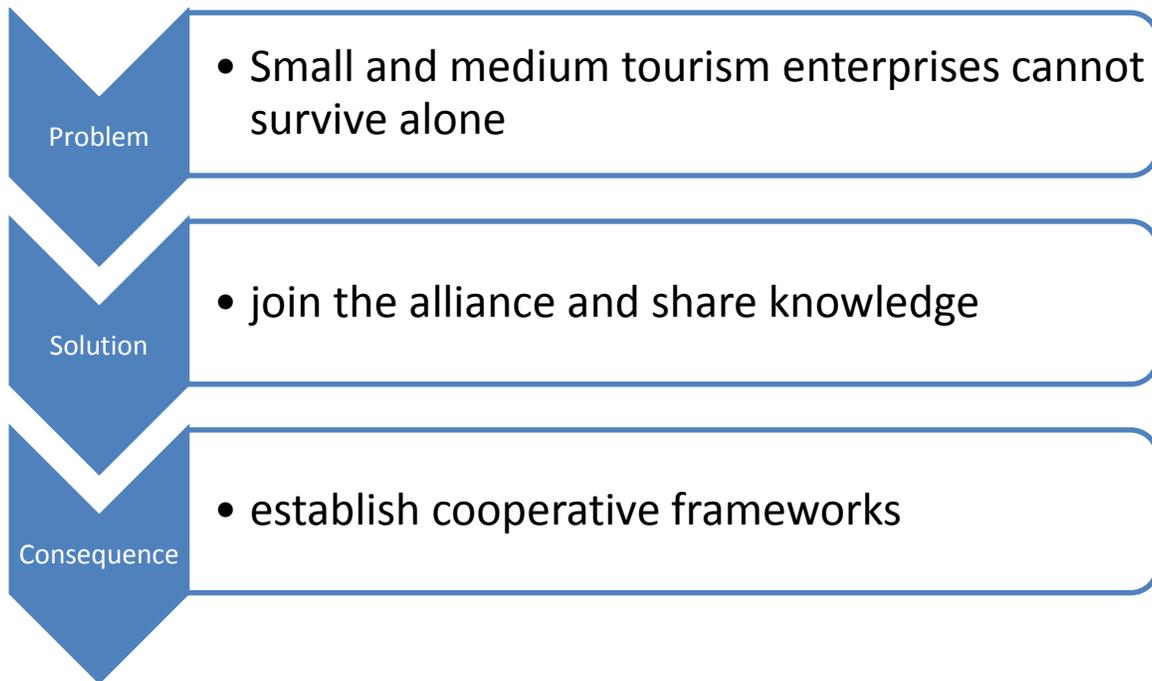
5.2 Advantages of tourism alliances

According to the empirical findings Hälsingland and Finnforest agreed that “sharing knowledge and information” is the most relevant advantage to be a member of a tourism alliance. Hjalager (2002), says that using and sharing of knowledge is relevant for the competitiveness of tourism destinations. Furthermore Davidson et. Al (2002) argues that the knowledge assets available to organization to create competitive advantage. Consequently we can say that Hälsingland and Finnforest, since they are tourism destinations, they share knowledge in order to promote their geographical area. This is also confirmed by Buhalis (2000, p 100), when he says that the marketing competitiveness of a destination increases when using tourism alliances to promote the specific destination.

As we have argued Hälsingland and Finnforest are composed by small and medium size enterprise and according to Baggioet. al (2010), since this is the characteristic of the most tourism destination, they tend to be knowledge adverse and he defined as crucial the knowledge transfer in a complex system such as a tourism destination. This concept was also mentioned during the interview of the advisor of Coompanion, who was the chairman of the constitutional meeting for the creation of Finnforest when he affirmed that is very difficult to survive alone for small companies and knowing the partner of the alliance and having the same rules in quality and environmental issues is important factor for a successful.

In this context we decided to develop this scheme that shows the connections with the theory and our empirical findings regarding sharing knowledge that is considered the most relevant marketing advantage of tourism alliance.

Figure 2: Main reason for joining an alliance



Source: Own construction / adapted of Hjalager, 2002; Davidson et al., 2002; Buhalis, 2000; Baggio, 2010

This scheme shows that the problem of small and medium size tourism enterprise is to survive alone. Consequently they join the alliance in order to avoid the problem and they have access to several resources such as sharing knowledge that is considered the most important benefits according to our research. As result these organizations establish cooperative frameworks that increase the promotion of the tourism destination.

Furthermore, Baggio et. al (2010) argues that the role of public sector is very relevant to establish cooperative frameworks and networks at the destination level. This is the case of Hälsingland; in fact during the interview of the CEO, she often pointed out the importance of municipalities within the alliance and how their financial contributions are essential to guarantee stability. Therefore several Managers stressed in the questionnaire the advantage to be a province. On the other hand the Project

Manager of Finnforest, during the interview has pointed out several time his disagreement with the municipalities that does not contribute financially for their alliance.

5.3 Disadvantages of Tourism Alliances

According to the questionnaires the most relevant disadvantage to be a member of Tourism Alliance is the "unequal and weak partner" factor. This answered was also confirmed during the interviews. Besides Rajasekaret et al (2009 p 99) argues that partners' size and performance is one of the significant factors that influence the successful outcome of the proposed alliances. Therefore Inkpen (1998, p. 72) observed that: *In some alliances, partners aggressively seek to acquire alliance knowledge while in others; the partners take a more passive approach to knowledge acquisition.*

Furthermore during the interviews it was added more answers regarding this argument. It was discussed from the Advisor of Coompanion that: *it is important trust the common solutions undertaken within the network in order to be able of sharing knowledge, otherwise some disagreement could create conflicts between the members.* In other words trust that is defined by Morgan and Hunt (1994, pp 27) as "one party's confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity" can influence the strategy of the network. Therefore According to Lewis (1992), many alliances have failed due to the lack of trust causing unsolved problems, lack of understanding and despondent relationships.

5.4 Discordant answers between Hälsingland and Finnforest

According to our second research questions, we have collected data from 2 different tourism alliances to better understand if the perceptions of the Managers regarding the cooperation with other organizations changes based on their experience. Hälsingland and Finnforest agreed that "sharing knowledge" is the most important advantages to be a part of a tourism alliance.

However we also found out discordant answers. According to previous researches sharing knowledge frequently requires patience and effort (Edward, 2009, p. 1412). In fact even if the questionnaires of Finnforest answered positively regarding the Manager's willingness of sharing knowledge, the Project

Manager during the interview showed his disappointment towards the organizations that are creating the alliance. He pointed out several times that most of organizations that belong to Finnforest do not have tourism qualifications and any experience regarding tourism alliances. For this reason their willingness to share knowledge and accept advices is low. Studies have suggested that the willingness for managers to participate in strategic alliances is partly based on their specific characteristics, such as experience and background (Carpenter et al.,2004). On the other hand the CEO of Hälsingland affirmed that all the organizations follow the strategies that are proposed by the head office. She also affirmed that this result was obtained after several year of training meeting. The literature suggests the importance of the organization within the network. In fact since Scott et al (2006 p.9) points out the difficulty of sharing knowledge in tourism destination, where operators compete and cooperate, Bouncken (2002 p 45) affirms that hospitality business need to motivate their staff generating and accumulating valuable knowledge. (Bouncken, 2002, p. 45). Furthermore the empirical findings show that the meetings with the managers of the alliances are essential in order to share their ideas and plan new strategies for the tourist destinations.

Therefore, according to the questionnaires, the Managers of Hälsingland have answered that achieve competitive advantage is very relevant, in fact it received the same percentage of sharing knowledge. This result was discordant with the answers of Finnforest that consider cost sharing and achievement competitive advantage more relevant. Organizational learning occurs when a firm acquires, assimilates knowledge, and skills that enhance its long-run performance and competitive advantage (Todeva et al, 2005, p. 157). Consequently we can affirm that Hälsingland considers achieve competitive advantage a consequence of sharing knowledge (acquiring knowledge from other firms).

Developing destination marketing was considered more relevant than achieve competitive advantage according to Finnforest answers. As we have already mentioned in the introduction of the analysis the marketing competitiveness of a destination increases when using tourism alliances to promote the specific destination (Buhalis 2000, p 100). This result was confirmed by the Project Manager of Finnforest who pointed out the need to promote the tourism destination more than Hälsingland since it already obtained important results in that sense.

Furthermore, according to our empirical findings, there is a huge different manager's perception regarding cost sharing between Hälsingland and Finnforest. In fact, most of Hälsingland's respondents considered this factor irrelevant; on the other hand it is has scored very relevant for most of

Finnforest's respondents. According to Elmuti et al, (2001, p. 207) some companies may find that the financial risk that is involved in pursuing a new product or production method is too great and too costly for a single company to undertake. In such cases two or more companies come together in order to share the risk and the cost of a new investment.

The last finding that we decided to analyze is the most discordant answer from the questionnaire between Hälsingland and Finnforest. Access to new technology was considered the second relevant factor for Hälsingland. On the other hand it was considered the less relevant factor for Finnforest. This result was also confirmed by the CEO of Hälsingland since the technology associated to the web was developing an important role within the network. She pointed out the importance of social media marketing and how it became the key of their increment of visitors on the web. The importance of the web within tourism alliance is also confirmed byMaretakis (et al, 2010, p 127) where he says that the access of new technology is one of the main ways to reach improvement in the tourism services due to the wide diffusion of internet and the penetration of mobile communications. The project Manager of Finnforest also agreed that the web has an important rule within the tourism alliance but he also pointed out that most of the Managers are not well educated regarding the web and probably they did not associate it with a new technology.

6 CONCLUSION

The theoretical framework in connection with the empirical material gathered enables us to answer the posted research questions. The following chapter enables us to answer the two research questions and to draw conclusions valuable for small and medium sized tourism industries when joining an alliance. In order to do it we are addressing two different aspects. Firstly we answer the first research question by discussing what are the advantages and disadvantages to be a member of a tourism alliance. Secondly in order to answer the second research question we are focus on the experience as far as we are investigating two different alliances one created since 2006 and the other one created in March of 2013. Finally in the last part we modify our theoretical framework according to the most relevant findings and the theory that comes out from our research.

6.1 According to the Manager's perceptions, what are the most important advantages and disadvantages to be a member of a tourism alliance?

Tourism presents an important economic activity for both developed and developing economies, the need for small and medium sized companies to work together is imperative. Therefore the aim of this research was to generate knowledge of the phenomenon of strategic alliances with special attention in the tourism industry. The process of illuminating the phenomenon of tourism alliances was started by discussing previous research on tourism network which is a subcategory of strategic alliances. We sustained with our research in form of a quantitative questionnaire as well as qualitative interviews reached by Coompanion.

Sharing knowledge is the most important advantage to be a part of a tourism alliance according to the Manager's perceptions. On the other hand unequal and weak partner is the most relevant disadvantage. These results came out from the questionnaires we sent to the members of the association and it was confirmed during the interviews. As it was argued, in the literature and in the analysis, sharing knowledge is the most important factor for tourism alliances. These alliances since they are small and medium size corporations need to be together and to share knowledge in order to be more competitive in the tourism market.

The importance factor of developing destination marketing plays also an important role in the tourism alliances. In fact, according to our research it was considered very relevant for several managers of both alliances (table p 28,29). We have argued in the literature part and in the analysis the importance of this factor and how it is related to the tourism alliance. During our research we have discovered that tourism organizations decide to create an alliance to promote their destinations. For this reason, we can say that tourism destinations acquire important benefits to create an alliance in terms of promotion.

Furthermore we found out different results from the cases that we have analyzed. Hälsingland tourism stated nowadays the use of social media and new technology in general remains an imperative need for the association. Besides, the cost sharing and the pulling of new resources are related to the success of the association. This state comes out from the theory as well as from the interview with the CEO who points out the importance of the sharing cost concerning the existence of the common website as far as the financial support from the European Union and the municipality. For Hälsingland tourism the creation of the tourism destination is not just an advantage but the main reason of the creation as far as they want to offer completed services to the customers and promote the province. On the other hand, regarding the case of Finnforest the most relevant advantages came out from the questionnaire were sharing of information and knowledge, the creation of tourism destination and the cost sharing. According to the interviews the creation of tourism destination is important as far as the aim of the association is to tell the story of Finnforest to the people. Moreover, the cost sharing remains an important factor as long as they do not receive any financial help and they have to pay by themselves everything. Concerning the factor of sharing knowledge it was important for them because they help to survive in the global arena alone.

On the other hand unequal and weak partner is the most relevant disadvantage of being a part a tourism alliance. According to our empirical findings is difficult to be partner and competitor at the same time.

Concerning Hälsingland, the existence of weak and unequal partner as well as the performance risk remains the core disadvantages of the cooperation. Additionally, the lack of coordination is a very relevant factor for the members of the alliance. It happens because of the different influence that members have. As the CEO of the association declares at the same time it worked as an advantage in their case. Specifically, in the beginning of the association small companies were influenced by the decision of big companies to enter the network. After seven years this disadvantage seems to disappear in that case. Concerning the lack of coordination, the members of the network realized that they can

increase their profit if they cooperate. We found out that in order to offer integrated services to the customer they collaborate tried to solve any conflicts that usually appear. Furthermore, the performance risk of the participants can be reduced as far as they have clear goals and they respect the common decision of the network. It was clear that because they trust each other and they can share knowledge, disadvantages seem to be minimized concerning the benefits that they get from the cooperation. This view became stronger from our interview with the CEO of Hälsingland that states in her own words *“that if they want to survive, they have to help each other”*. Regarding the case of Finnforest result seem not to differ so much. On the other hand the explanation of the Managers during the interviews was quite different. Speaking in the words of the project manager *“even if at the beginning most of the managers of the organizations are doubters, they will understand the importance of being together”*. Trying to explain this state, we reached that the results came out because of the lack of financial support. The investment of money from each company which is not capable to know if they will depreciate as well as following common solutions which they do not agree causes problems to each individual member, especially if there is lack of trust. According to our questionnaires lack of trust scores as not relevant, estimating this situation and combining it with our interviews we reached the point that this happens because the cooperation started recently.

6.2 Are the manager’s perspectives of these advantages and disadvantages affected by experience regarding tourism alliances?

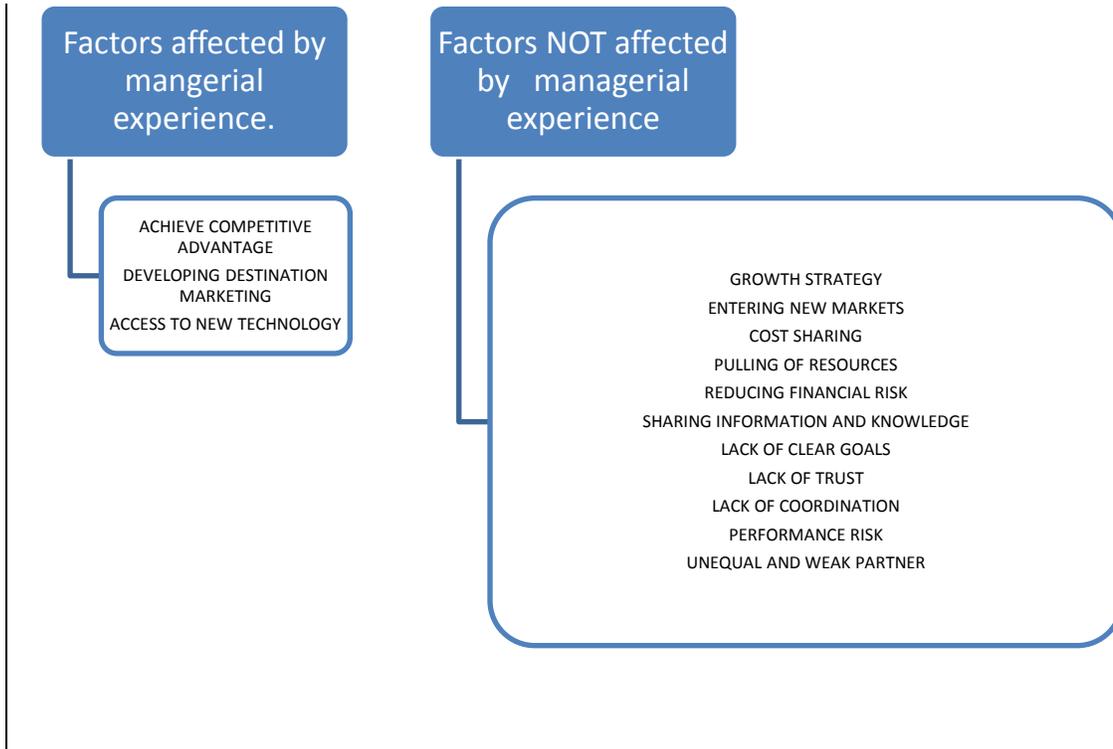
Our second research question was based on the main difference between the two tourism alliances that we are investigating. According to our empirical findings we can affirm that the experience affects the manager’s perspective regarding the advantages to be a part of a tourism alliance. As it was stated above the first alliance, Hälsingland, was created in 2006 and the second one, Finnforest, in March of 2013. Hälsingland after seven years of cooperation has a different perspective regarding the advantages and disadvantages due to the experience they have by working together. As far as Finnforest is a new association, the benefits and the difficulties they will have from this collaboration are not still clear in members mind. The most differences manager’s perception we found comparing the two alliances was regarding the access to new technology and cost sharing. Members of Finnforest do not believe that using new technology, especially social media, can bear great opportunities for the members and is an

important marketing tool. At that point we have to highlight that Hälsingland, at the beginning had the same problem during the creation of the association. They handled this problem by creating trainee courses for each member. As an explanation for this lack of knowledge concerning the access to new technology, the members of Finnforest are not still prepared of using social media as an instrument to promote their business. Additionally, we relate this factor with the development of tourism destination as long as concerns the main reason of the creation of both alliances. As it can be seen from the findings we already presented, creation of tourism destination remains a relevant factor for the Finnforest more than Hälsingland. Since Finnforest is a new alliance, the perception of promoting the tourism destination appears more important than Hälsingland.

Furthermore, according to our empirical findings, we can affirm that the experience does not affect the Manager's perspective regarding the disadvantages to be a part of a tourism alliance. In fact the empirical findings show clearly that the questionnaire results regarding the disadvantages to be a member of tourism alliance are quite similar for Hälsingland and Finnforest.

Consequently we modify our theoretical framework in to present our research results in figure 3.

Figure 3: Result of how factors affect the willingness to be a member of an alliance and managerial experience



Our framework shows that achieve competitive advantage, developing destination marketing and access to the new technology are the factors affected by the managerial experience. In fact the Managerial perceptions regarding these factors are different. Since the Managers who are working in Hälsingland Tourism have more experience (the alliance was created 7 years ago), they believe that achieve competitive advantage and access to the new technology are more important than developing destination marketing. On the other hand, the managers of Finnforest believe that developing destination marketing is more important than achieve competitive advantage and access to the new technology.

Furthermore, the figure shows that the Managers of Hälsingland Tourism and Finnforest have the same perceptions regarding the disadvantages that affect the willingness to be a part of a tourism alliance. In fact both of the alliance believe that unequal and weak partner is the most relevant disadvantage.

6.3 Implications for the Managers sector and suggestions for future researches

The results of this research give a contribution to the tourism sector in Sweden. Due to the growth of the tourism in this country is important to know the most important strategies to increment the market. The tourism alliance plays an important role for the growth of the tourism destinations. But as there are advantages of creating a network between tourism corporations, there are also disadvantages that can create conflicts between the members.

For this reasons the Managers must value what are the advantages and disadvantages to be a member of a tourism alliance. Furthermore they have to understand if the potential benefits fit with their corporation size. According to our research small and medium size tourism corporations are willing to join tourism alliances, on the other hand big size tourism corporations do not need to share knowledge with other partners.

Furthermore, it is important to understand the important of the experience within the network. Our research found out that at the education of the Managers regarding the use of new technology plays an essential role within the network. Due to the lack of experience, the growth of the alliance can be limited. Therefore the role of the municipalities is also important in terms of resources.

For this reasons the contribution of this research is to give to the Managers who want create an Alliance the key to have access of relevant data that applies to alliances already formed.

We suggest for the future research to match more data regarding tourism alliance, focusing on the role of the municipalities due to the important impact on the network that we found out in our study. Furthermore due to the limitation of the study that focus on two tourism alliances in Sweden, we suggest extending the research to other Countries to understand if our findings are respected even in different cultural environment. Therefore other managerial factors can be investigated such as age, background and gender to better understand if they affect the managerial willingness to be a part of a tourism alliance.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Questionnaires

1. How many employees does your company have?
.....
2. When the Alliance with other companies has been created?
.....
3. Why did your company decide to become a member of an Alliance?
.....
4. Why did your company decide to join this specific network?
.....
5. Is your company a member of any other Alliance? If yes, which?
.....
6. According to the theory, it is believed that there are several advantages that influence the companies to be in Alliance. Please indicate your level of agreement by ticking the appropriate response.

	Very relevant	Relevant	Not relevant
Growth strategy	5.1.1	6.1.1	7.1.1
Entering new markets	8.1.1	9.1.1	0.1.1
Access to new technology	1.1.1	2.1.1	3.1.1
Cost sharing	4.1.1	5.1.1	6.1.1
Pulling of resources	7.1.1	8.1.1	9.1.1
Reducing financial risk	0.1.1	1.1.1	2.1.1
Achieve competitive advantage	3.1.1	4.1.1	5.1.1
Sharing information and knowledge	6.1.1	7.1.1	8.1.1
Developing Destination marketing	9.1.1	0.1.1	1.1.1

7. Do you see any other benefits of being a member that are not listed here? Yes No

8. If yes, which?

.....

9. According to the theory, it is believed that there are several disadvantages for the companies to be in Alliance. Please indicate your level of agreement by ticking the appropriate response.

	Very relevant	Relevant	Not relevant
Lack of clear goals	2.1.1	3.1.1	4.1.1
Lack of trust	5.1.1	6.1.1	7.1.1
Lack of coordination	8.1.1	9.1.1	0.1.1
Performance risk	1.1.1	2.1.1	3.1.1
Sharing information and knowledge	4.1.1	5.1.1	6.1.1
Unequal and weak partner	7.1.1	8.1.1	9.1.1

10. Do you see any other disadvantages of being a member that are not listed here? Yes No

11. If yes, which?

.....

Appendix 2. Interview to Ulf Karlsson and Ingrid Engelbrekts, Managers of Coompanion

Questions

1. How long have you been working in Coompanion ?
2. What is your working position within the company?
3. According to your information, Coompanion helped out in the process to establish an economic association called Finn Forest. In this process you included advice in legal matters and practical matters can you explain in depth these activities?
4. What was the role of Coompanion in the creation of other alliances?
5. As far as the aim of Coompanion is to increase the opportunities and reduce the risk, can you describe can achieve this goal?
6. In the questionnaire they we have sent to the companies we asked about several factors which influenced companies to be a member of the alliance, such as growth strategy, entering new markets,

access to new technology, cost sharing, pulling of resources, reducing financial risk, achieve competitive advantage, sharing information and knowledge and developing destination marketing. In your opinion which are the most important factors?

7. We also pointed out some disadvantages which maybe discourage companies to enter in the alliance, such as lack of clear goals, lack of trust, lack of coordination, performance risk, sharing information and knowledge, and unequal or weak partners. Can you highlight as the most relevant?

8. Do you believe that there also more advantages and disadvantages that we did not mention?

9. Nowadays as the competition is getting harder do you believe they is more difficult to create an alliance than in the past?

10. As we notice in your information alliances like Finn Forest and Hälsingland have a project manager. What are their responsibilities?

11. Which are the difficulties that alliances faced in their beginning and after the creation? How did companies handle this difficulties?

12. How did companies start being in contact with their partners?

Appendix 3. Interview to Lars Findhal, the Project Manager of Finnforest

Questions

1. Can you talk about your working experience before Finn Forest alliance?
2. When did the Finn Forest project start and when all the organizations will start working together?
3. How did the project of Finn Forest start?
4. How did the organizations start being in contact with their partners?
5. What are your position and your responsibilities within Finn Forest nowadays and what your position will be in the future?
6. How many organizations belong in Finn Forest?
7. How many employees approximately there are in each organization?
8. What are the main activities of the organizations?
9. In the questionnaire they we have sent to the companies we asked about several advantages that the organizations have being a member of the alliance, such as growth strategy, entering new markets, access to new technology, cost sharing, pulling of resources, reducing financial risk, achieve

competitive advantage, sharing information and knowledge and developing destination marketing.

In your opinion which are the most important factors?

10. According to the questionnaires that we have sent most of organizations answered that sharing knowledge and developing destinations marketing are the most relevant advantages. Do you agree?
11. We also pointed out some disadvantage sthat the organizations have being a member of the alliance, such as lack of clear goals, lack of trust, lack of coordination, performance risk, sharing information and knowledge, and unequal or weak partners. Can you highlight as the most relevant?
12. According to the questionnaires that we have sent most of organizations answered that unequal or weak partners is the most relevant disadvantage. Do you agree?
13. Do you believe that there also more advantages and disadvantages that we did not mention?
14. Why do you think is more common nowadays to see organizations joining alliances than in the past?
15. What are the most important difficulties you met during the creation of the alliance and what are your predictions for the future?

Appendix 4. Interview to Katarina Ceder-Bäng, the CEO of Hälsingland

Questions

1. How long have you been working in Hälsinglandnetwork ?
2. What is your working position within the alliance?
3. What is your main responsibility?
4. How many companies are cooperating in this network?
5. Nowadays as the competition is getting harder do you believe they is more difficult to create an alliance than in the past?
6. In the questionnaire they we have sent to the companies we asked about several factors which influenced companies to be a member of the alliance, such as growth strategy, entering new markets, access to new technology, cost sharing, pulling of resources, reducing financial risk, achieve competitive advantage, sharing information and knowledge and developing destination marketing. In your opinion which are the most important factors?

7. According to the questionnaire, sharing knowledge, achieve competitive advantage and access to new technology are the most relevant advantages. Do you agree?
8. We also pointed out some disadvantages which maybe discourage companies to be a member of the alliance, such as lack of clear goals, lack of trust, lack of coordination, performance risk, sharing information and knowledge, and unequal or weak partners. Can you highlight as the most relevant?
9. According to the questionnaire the most relevant advantage is unequal or weak partners. Do you agree?
10. Do you believe that there also more advantages and disadvantages that we did not mention?
11. Which are the difficulties that alliances faced in their beginning and after the creation? How did companies handle these difficulties?
12. How did companies start being in contact with their partners?
13. As we find out from the bibliography it's hard to be partner and competitor at the same time. How your members handle this situation?

Appendix 5. Findings from the questionnaire. Advantages of Halsingland Tourism

	Very relevant	Relevant	Not relevant
Growth strategy	36.3%	63.7%	0%
Entering new markets	45.5%	40.9%	13.6%
Access to new technology	81.8%	18.2%	0%
Cost sharing	0%	31.8%	68.2%
Pulling of resources	54.5%	45.5%	0%
Reducing financial risk	63.7%	27.3%	0%
Achieve competitive advantage	90.9%	9.1%	0%
Sharing information and knowledge	90.9%	9.1%	0%
Developing Destination marketing	54.5%	45.5%	0%

Appendix 6. Findings from the questionnaire. Advantages of Finnforest

	Very relevant	Relevant	Not relevant
Growth strategy	46.2%	53.8%	0%
Entering new markets	65.3%	30.7%	4%
Access to new technology	0%	61.5%	38.5%
Cost sharing	73%	27%	0%
Pulling of resources	61.5%	30.7%	7.8%
Reducing financial risk	42.3%	34.6%	0%
Achieve competitive advantage	65.4%	23%	11.6%
Sharing information and knowledge	92.3%	7.7%	0%
Developing Destination marketing	76.9%	23.1%	0%

Appendix 7. Findings from the questionnaire. Disadvantages of Hälsingland Tourism

	Very relevant	Relevant	Not relevant
Lack of clear goals	0%	13.6%	86.4%
Lack of trust	18.2%	18.2%	63.6%
Lack of coordination	68.2%	31.8%	0%
Performance risk	81.8%	18.2%	0%
Sharing information and knowledge	0%	31.8%	68.2%
Unequal and weak partner	81.8%	18.2%	0%

Appendix 8. Findings from the questionnaire. Disadvantages of Finnforest

	Very relevant	Relevant	Not relevant
Lack of clear goals	0%	7.7%	92.3%
Lack of trust	23.1%	15.3%	61.6%
Lack of coordination	76.9%	23.1%	0%
Performance risk	61.5%	38.5%	0%
Sharing information and knowledge	0%	30.7%	69.3%
Unequal and weak partner	76.9%	23.1%	0

