How to attract new types of tourists to coastal destinations through urban planning and cultural attractions

1. Vision, objectives and novelty

This three year demonstration-project intends to examine how classic coastal tourist-destinations, exemplified by the municipality of Ringkøbing-Skjern (RKS), can attract new and higher-spending groups of tourists through urban and cultural tourism development with a continued focus on nature.

The Danish government has for the first time in history set up a law about growth in the tourism industry. The law emphasizes the need to strengthen coastal destinations, which have decreased in growth with 27.5 pct. during the past ten years. Meanwhile, city breaks have increased with 78 pct.

Tourism is an important occupation in extensive parts of Denmark, where municipalities are experiencing vacating and centralization of jobs to the larger cities. Ringkøbing-Skjern is such a municipality.

RKS’s turnover on tourism in 2012 was 2.7 billion kr. and 3.3 million bed nights were registered in 2014. This means that tourism generates 8.3 pct. of the total economic growth and 8.7 pct. of all jobs in the municipality of Ringkøbing-Skjern. For comparison, the average economic growth in Denmark is 2.6 pct., and RKS has appointed tourism as one of the four corner stones in the municipality’s politics of growth.

Nature and the North Sea is the reason—to-go for 68 pct. of the destinations’ tourists. Nature plays a major role in the municipality not only in regard to tourism but also in relation to relocation and leisure time activities in general. Therefore, RKS’s political vision is to be Realm of Nature, which is a positive signal to many of the destination’s existing tourists.

Videncenter for Kystturisme (CKT) has passed on a lot of valuable knowledge about coastal tourism and tourists. Coastal tourists spend 396 kr. a day and so-called cultural tourists spend 510 kr. (Danish tourists) and 590 kr. (foreign tourists) a day. 52 pct. of coastal tourists are couples without children, 48 pct. are families, and holiday homes and camping are the most popular type of accommodation among the segment.

Furthermore, the analyses show that first-time visitors, young people up to 35 years and families with small children are more unlikely to spend their holiday at the beach in Denmark. The coastal tourists are unimpressed by the town-centers, shopping possibilities, restaurants, public toilets and the relationship between price and value. They find the small cities along the coast rather boring, unauthentic and lacking in attraction. This suggests that rebuilding or adding new urban design to the coastal facilities would heighten the tourists’ opinion about the destinations.

In light of the above, the thesis of this project is that the next generation of coastal tourists share many of the same needs and demands as cultural tourists have today. 34 pct. of Danish and foreign visitors are defined as cultural tourists (tourists with a culturally motivated reason to go) and 58 pct. of all tourists visit one or more cultural sights or activities during their holiday in Denmark. Except from extending the season and/or offering more beds, the most obvious way for coastal tourism to grow is to attract higher-spending and culturally interested tourist groups, which will give coastal tourism destinations a more comprehensive share in the national tourism economy. It is the hypothesis of this project that developing pleasant urban spaces and offering culturally as well as nature based activities, the coastal destinations exemplified by RKS can re-enact with the increase in Danish tourism, which for the past ten years has been concentrated in urban destinations such as Aarhus and Copenhagen. The cross-disciplinary research

1 “Turismens økonomiske betydning i Ringkøbing-Skjern Kommune”, VisitDenmark, 2012-tal.
3 “Kulturturister i Danmark” (2014) VisitDenmark.
4 “Kystturister i Danmark”, Videncenter for Kystturisme.
5 ”Kystturisters tilfredshed med feriesteder i Danmark” (2013), Videncenter for Kystturisme.
based on ethnography and linked with a research-by-design approach of the architectural discipline will further more comprehend both the physical and symbolic perspectives of the project and contribute knowledge about interdisciplinary research.

## 2. Content, method and organisation

### Subproject 1: Coastal tourism between nature and culture

The project departs from the challenges identified above concerning the development of the tourism sector in coastal destinations. The ambition of the research project is to support the move towards new forms of tourism in the region. While departing from the typology at play in the visions formulated by RKSK between coastal and cultural tourists, the project intends to focus on the specific kind of tourists that the area might be able to attract. It works from the hypothesis that the new tourists on one hand are to be identified as a hybrid between the coastal and the cultural tourist, and on the other hand will have particular features, which intersect with a particular way of framing the attractions of the region.

The coastal tourist is sedimentary (holiday home, camping) preferring a relaxed and peaceful living. While adding exotism to the experience, nature is predominantly seen as a zone of comfort. Urban spaces have a secondary status. The cultural tourist is much more mobile and drawn towards urban spaces with its cultural attractions, events and heritage sites (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). The project will draw on existing research into tourist typology (Granås and Viken, 2014; Richards, 2001) to map a type of tourist which engages with nature while at the same time targets culture. It is further assumed that this type of tourist will fit perfectly with a reframing of the region as more than the Realm of Nature. We furthermore assume that the model tourist in his or her engagement will redefine the traditional opposition between nature and culture. Research on ecotourism has opened a field for understanding nature as a factor in a historical and cultural context (Björk, 2000). Heritage studies have highlighted the role of culture in constructing natural heritage. We assume that engagement with the entanglements between nature and culture is what the new tourists will be seeking in coastal destinations such as Ringkøbing-Skjern (Harrison, Pile and Thrift 2004).

The identification of the new tourist will be based on data collected through ethnographic studies of tourist practices and interviews. Different target groups of tourists will be selected for interviews in order to determine motivations and expectations. Practices will be observed at different sites (heritage, landscape, urban space), and tourists will be directly involved in reporting on their activities.

Along with the theoretical mapping of the new tourist, the project will also rethink the ways that cultural and natural attractions in the municipality of Ringkøbing-Skjern are framed and narrated by the different tourist operators. As a first step in this rethinking we propose to view Ringkøbing-Skjern as a region with particular features (Dredge and Jenkins, 2004). This regional identity will expose RKSK as different from other regions in the coastal area and contribute to knowledge about how to brand coastal destinations in a differentiated manner. This regional perspective will thus have to penetrate all presentations of RKSK as a tourist destination.

A second step in the reframing of the destination will be to consider the special relation between nature and culture. This relationship is particularly marked in the historical configuration of the urban space. The old market town, Ringkøbing, withdrawn from the seaside, represents the region’s official functions, commercial life and citizenship. Hvide Sande is the harbour town which symbolizes the close encounter with violent nature, and Søndervig tells the history of the popular seaside vacation, which gradually domesticated nature. The dynamics of culture and nature in the region is thus played out in the urban layout with its different poles, the market town, the harbour town and the sea resort. This particular dynamics will be the basis for a rethinking and reframing of Ringkøbing-Skjern as a destination for the new tourist. The methodology will be based on discourse analysis and narratology. Based on a critical reading of the existing branding strategies, the various presentations available from heritage institutions...
and tourist operators, the project will develop new stories of RKS as a region and contribute to general knowledge about development of coastal destinations.

The two parts of the analysis, the identification of the new tourist and the reframing of the destination, will be followed by a set of proposals concerning the tourist sector in RKS. The project will particularly look at how the three areas, regional identity, heritage and mobility impact on the services offered.

**Regional identity** must be clearly present in the service offered. Quality must be combined with a strong regional narrative based on the dynamics between nature and culture. Gastronomy, accommodation, shopping and events must demonstrate the regional features. The regional ‘heritagisation’ of services is a strong tool in tourism promotion (Bessière, 2013).

The presentation of heritage is crucial for the reframing of RKS. The municipality hosts an ecomuseum, which plays out the intricate relationship between culture and nature. But there is a need to review the narrative in which the heritage of the region is presented.

Infrastructure allows the tourist to move. Mobility is central for the new tourist. The project will propose infrastructures pertaining the new forms of tourism.

**Subproject 2: Transformative site-specific architectural strategies for a renewed tourist landscape in RKS**

As one of the key problems of this project is dealing with the relationship between the expectations and demands from the tourists to the physical environment, this subproject has its focus here.

This perspective aims to develop architectural strategies, which are situated in the specific context of RKS. The hypothesis is that architecture understood in a broad sense of both physical development strategies, landscape architecture interventions and transformation strategies for existing building structures is the key to providing enhanced attraction of tourists. The research contribution is to develop local architectural strategies, which are based on an innovative research-by-design praxis.

The architectural perspective is a continuation of recent projects such as the campaign *Stedet Tæller*[^6] with its site-specific architecture and the strategies developed in the highly successful National Tourist Routes in Norway[^7]. The question is how these strategies apply in an urban context, and with a more direct focus on the overall ambition to transform and update the tourist experience of the urban centers in the coastal region. This has not yet been researched and will contribute with comprehensive knowledge on the subject.

The main focus is, how architecture, when using a strategic design-based approach, can become catalyst for tourism as well as aesthetical transformation and growth within the small towns of the Danish coastal region.

The questions of research are how can recent successful landscape strategies become relevant when they are applied to a much more diverse and complex urban context with many physical cultural layers? Can these landscape strategies transform into cultural heritage strategies dealing with different layers of the cultural and built history of these small cities? Can they be developed if their objective is to stimulate economic growth within the tourism industry in coastal destinations? How are they developed when they have to fit spectacular architecture into an urban everyday landscape?

The methodological setup will be based on an research-by-design with these phases:

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[^6]: http://www.stedet-taeller.dk/
**Analysis of existing strategies** for transformation through case studies of both Danish and international examples as well as critical literature on the subject.

**Analysis of the existing situation.** The focus will be on using different mapping-methods to uncover the potentials of the built landscape. An important discussion is to uncover the different values assigned to the built landscape by the different users (locals, tourists, the tourism industry, the fishing industry, etc).

**Developing prototypes.** Based on these and in close dialogue with the results from subproject 1, which will be used as programmatic and content input, a series of architectural prototypes will be developed. These are tested and refined in an iterative process involving the local stakeholders such as tourist industry, the planning authorities both locally and on a national level, and tourists.

**Testing of prototypes** will be done through design-experiments on the actual site and evaluated through critical discussion of and reactions on the prototypes.

**Organisation and mediation**

A steering committee, which will evaluate the progress of the project every third month, will be the steering organ during the projects execution. The members are Ann Bjerrehøj, head of development at Ringkøbing-Skjern Kommune, Jan Ifversen, vice dean at Aarhus University, Arts, and Tom Nielsen, professor in urban and landscape planning, The Aarhus School of Architecture.

A project manager located at the city hall in Ringkøbing leads the project. The person, whom has not yet been selected, assures that the two perspectives on cultural and urban tourism development are aligned, benefits and develops based on each other’s findings. The project manager will be chosen based on the person’s ability to lead and coordinate all parties in the project including the tourism operators and officials in RKSK. The person’s ability to create synergies between academic research, local tourism operators’ practice and municipal strategy along with the ability to mediate research results and complex information at both a low-practical and political level will be weighted in finding of the right candidate. The project manager is responsible for mediating the results to tourist operators during the project and arranging all practical activities such as conferences, creating contact to extended partners and media-attention. It is crucial for the project that all knowledge and research is passed on to the municipality and the local tourism operators in order to implement the obtained knowledge and develop the coastal tourism in the area.

The two PhD-candidates, one from Aarhus University and one from The Aarhus School of Architecture, refers to their academic advisors and the project manager. They will be located at Innovest in Skjern as well as at their educational institution. Along with the project manager, they will take part in meetings with the steering committee as needed. Attachment C are examples of potential PhD-students and academic advisors in the field of study. The two PhD-programs will develop in close relation to each other’s results and share knowledge with VisitAarhus, as described below, starting the 1st of January 2016.

### 3. Anticipated results

Cultural tourism is increasing and this demonstration project on tourism-development in coastal destinations exemplified by RKSK aims to examine how to target a new type of hybrid-tourists that focus on both nature and cultural attractions done through ethnological and research-by-design research. This knowledge will enable the tourist operators and coastal municipalities to adjust local strategies to the needs and demands of the future coastal tourist in order to revitalize coastal tourism and create growth.

Furthermore, it has great value to coastal municipalities and the tourism industry in these areas to act upon research-based architectural framework, which through its development has been discussed and evaluated in relation to the newest knowledge within the field, thus securing that it will work as a combining and strong basis for actual physical development in coastal Denmark.
### Aarhus University

The Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University, will contribute to the project with research on heritage and tourism. The research group on heritage studies as well as researchers from media studies and ethnography will be involved in the project, which will also include a PhD-project partly funded by the Faculty of Arts. The mission of the faculty is to strengthen knowledge exchange through close partnership with actors in society in order to maintain a strong commitment to social development. Since 2014, Aarhus University has had a privileged partnership with the municipality of Ringkøbing-Skjern and participates in a number of projects contributing to the development of the region. Through its research programs in heritage, contemporary ethnography and cultural transformations the Faculty has developed strong expertise in the topics dealt with in the application. Furthermore, the Faculty last year opened an international MA-program in sustainable heritage management. Students from this program have been engaged in cooperation with the Eco-museum in RKS. Through its engagement with tourists, local residents, authorities and actors in RKS, the faculty expects to further strengthen its profile in knowledge exchange and contribute to develop solutions relevant to coastal destinations exemplified by RKS.

### The Aarhus School of Architecture

The Aarhus School of Architecture (AAA) is contributing with a PhD-project. The overall strategy of AAA is ‘Engaging through Architecture’. This means to engage directly in society and dealing with actual and challenging issues. The strategy of the institution is to do this through direct collaboration with institutions, research environments and business outside AAA and the discipline of Architecture. This project in alignment with this strategy. Furthermore, AAA has a specific research strategy focusing on research-by-design using the actual design methods taught at the school and used by the architectural profession as tools in research. Finally, within the field of Landscape and Urbanism we have a specific interest in both transformation and cultural heritage. The project will add to already ongoing research focused on coastal regions as well as landscape strategies in a heritage perspective. We expect the project to contribute directly to the actual development of the coastal region and thus also expanding our network and research experience within this field.

### The municipality of Ringkøbing-Skjern

The municipality of Ringkøbing-Skjern (lead-partner in the project) is a so-called coast municipality or peripheral municipality, which alludes that the area is decentralized from Denmark’s cultural centers and in lack of economical and population growth. Tourism is one of the municipality’s strengths and the municipality of Ringkøbing-Skjern wishes through this demonstration project to identify ways to growth within the coastal tourism industry. RKS will contribute with local knowledge, contact with and mediation to the tourism operators, who along with the rest of Denmark’s tourism development shall benefit directly from the study-results. Furthermore, RKS expects the outcome of this study to enable the municipality to develop culturally and urban oriented tourism products and facilities in order to create growth in the destinations tourism industry.

### VisitAarhus

VisitAarhus has been selected as operator of Region Midtjylland’s focus on developing knowledge about - and targeting cultural tourists during a four year period. VisitAarhus therefore has great interest in sharing information and knowledge about cultural tourism with this project. Based on the cultural tourists mobility and request of cultural attractions along with the demand for nature-based experiences, it is a theme in this project and for VisitAarhus’ program to examine whether the new tourist in RKS can be attracted by the combination of the two destinations (RKS and Aarhus). As a partner of knowledge, VisitAarhus will examine and share their knowledge about cultural tourists, and
investigate tourists’ willingness to travel through the region in order to experience city culture, sites of heritage and shopping possibilities one or more days during their holiday in RKSK. This shared knowledge is beneficial for the project and has no economic commitment.