

FROM REGIONAL AIRPORT TO INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT DESTINATION: THE CASE OF AALBORG AIRPORT IN NORTHERN DENMARK

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how Northern Denmark is becoming an international flight destination through the strategic route development in Aalborg Airport and the integrated collaboration with regional tourism actors. Aalborg Airport is primarily a regional airport serving primarily the people living in the northern part of Denmark, but in the past decade the airport has experienced growth in the number of international arrivals. This paper explores who these international travellers are and why they fly to Northern Denmark. Both Aalborg Airport and Northern Denmark in general has an interest in increasing the number of international arrivals, and in the effort to attract more visitors, a better understanding of this group of travellers is necessary. This paper explains that a significant number of the foreign arrivals come to Northern Denmark to visit friends and relatives, and that the geographical reach of the airport is larger than expected. This finding challenges the current approach to regional development associated with the airport and this paper suggests two new focus points for the further strategic route development in Aalborg Airport: awareness of the geographical reach of the airport and incorporation of the knowledge that the international travellers are arriving in order to visit friends and relatives or to do business.

Keywords: Aeromobility, Tourism, Regional Airport, Airport Development.

JEL Classification: R11, Z32, Z38

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past five to 10 years, Aalborg Airport in Northern Denmark has experienced an increased number of arrivals by international travellers who come to the region on either leisure or business travel. Traditionally, Aalborg Airport has been an airport from where the people that reside in Northern Denmark depart, and as such the airport has been a strong regional player in making Northern Danes aeromobile. Aalborg Airport was established in 1936, and has been operating from its current location since 1938 (Jensen, 2005). It is Denmark's third largest airport, after Copenhagen and Billund airports, and facilitates air travel for an increasing number of passengers: 1.5 million in 2016 (Danmarks Statistik, 2017). It hosts the largest domestic route in Denmark; each year the route transports more than 800.000 passengers between Aalborg and Copenhagen (Aalborg Airport, 2017a). This domestic traffic is the main activity in the airport, but in the last decade, the airport has supported an increasing number of international routes and charter traffic.

Historically, travellers from Northern Denmark have only been connected to international route networks through Copenhagen Airport, which limited their destination choices;

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therefore, over the last twenty years, it has been a focus point for Aalborg Airport to become connected through other international routes and route networks other than just the ones provided via Copenhagen Airport. The transformation process that began twenty years ago with a change of the airport ownership (from state ownership to ownership by local municipalities in Northern Denmark), the investment in a new large terminal and airport facilities, as well as the employment of a new airport CEO (who fundamentally changed the strategic role of the airport) has together resulted in the number of international routes from Aalborg Airport increasing by 93% from 2005 to 2016 (Aalborg Airport, 2017a). This new connectivity means that the region is now linked to other European hub airports, enabling travellers to use hubs other than just Copenhagen. This, in turn, gives the traveller access to other airline alliances, such as Sky Team in Amsterdam. In addition to this increased connectivity, point-to-point routes to a number of European cities, primarily driven by low-cost carriers, have also been established.

This internationalization of the route network has led to more and more international travellers arriving in Aalborg Airport. There are no statistics available on how many of these incoming international arrivals are not Danish residents, but the airport staff have reported observing a larger number of foreign passengers (Interview with Søren Svendsen, CEO Aalborg Airport). Incoming tourists and business passengers are a welcome group in the airport and the region. This is an important element of the regional growth strategy (Business Region North Denmark, 2015), and while Northern Denmark has a significant number of tourists and business travellers arriving by car and ferry, there is a potential for attracting more travellers arriving by air, as this remains a relatively unexplored channel within the region for both tourism and business tourism (Kellerman, 2010; Business Region North Denmark, 2015). However, there is very little knowledge in the region and at the airport regarding who the international tourists and businesses passengers are and how existing tourism and business strategies, policies, and organisational structures actually meet the demand of this new group. This should be considered in light of the changing role of the airport not only as 'just' serving the arrivals and departures of international passengers, but also acting to produce more international travel through the airport (see below). To explore this further, the airport teamed up with Aalborg University, regional tourism actors, Aalborg Municipality, and Region North Denmark in order to research the rationales and practices of these international travellers so that more strategic development efforts can be made to attract more people from this visitor group to the region. This research was conducted using both surveys and interviews, thus drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data (for a full account of the research project, see Jensen *et al.*, 2016). The first objective of this paper is to show who the international travellers arriving in Aalborg Airport are and explore their traveller profile. This aids in the fulfilment of the second objective of the paper, which is to discuss the implications this new knowledge about the international travellers has for existing regional strategies, policies, and organisational structures in the region in the light of the changed roles of airports in relation to regional development.

The rest of the paper is divided into three sections that also reflect the threefold aim of the paper. Firstly, the paper examines the historical, contextual, and changing role of Aalborg Airport, nested in the theoretical framework of 'aeromobilities in situ'. Secondly, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the rationales and practices of the international travellers through Aalborg Airport is presented. Thirdly, the results are discussed and analysed in relation to existing regional tourism strategies, policies, and organisational structures. Finally, in conclusion, the more general research implications of the study presented in the paper are elaborated upon.

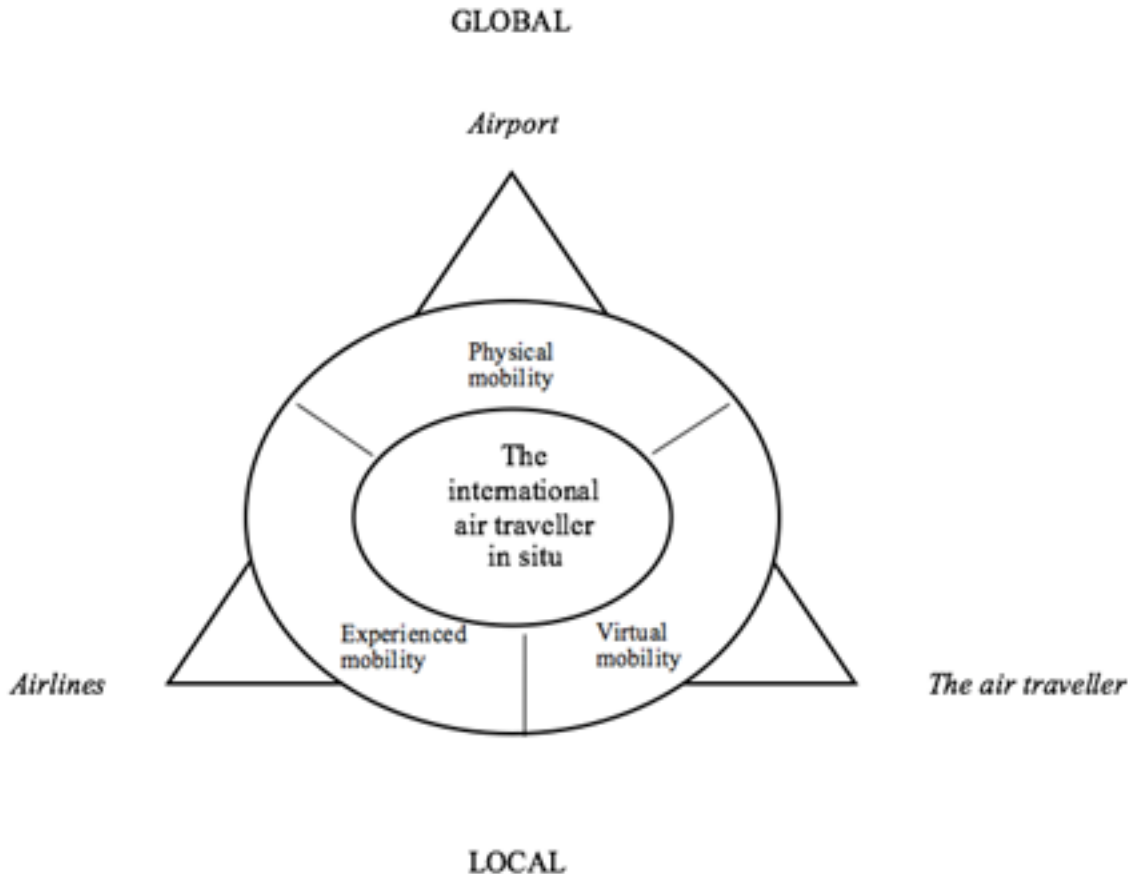
2. AEROMOBILITIES IN SITU

Theoretically, the foundation for the analysis of air travellers through Aalborg Airports as well as our understanding and way of exploring airports and aviation in this paper is captured in the term *aeromobilities* (see Lassen, 2006; Cwerner, 2009). Aeromobilities is an upcoming research field that is concerned with how aviation affects society and its development, within a multidisciplinary focus (Cwerner, 2009). Traditional research into aviation has been focused on a 'predict-and-provide' paradigm (Whitelegg, 1997: 88), where the prime goal has been to improve aviation technology and infrastructure in order to optimize on cost and time expenditure (Goetz, 2015: 363). The main focus has been on the relationship between airlines, airports, and the air travellers, which has been viewed as a closed system that does not have or receive much interference from the surrounding context (Bloch & Lassen, 2015). In contrast, the theme of aeromobilities research, instead of being regarded only as a simple air transport theme, indicates a need for bridging multiple scales connecting international air systems to particular local urban transformation processes and their consequences (Jensen & Lassen, 2011). Opposite the more conventional mono-professional and quantitative orientated 'predict and provide' (Whitelegg, 1997; Lassen, 2005) aviation research, the foundation for this aeromobilities research is also transdisciplinary with multiple focuses on aviation research and methods (Cwerner, 2009: 10-11).

Aeromobilities is a conceptual part of the recently emerged mobilities turn, which represents a shift in the understanding and analytical approach to contemporary society, where the main unit of analysis is no longer the society itself, but rather the mobilities that shape societies (Urry, 2000; 2007). The argument is that the contemporary society is increasingly constituted by the movements of people, goods, ideas, etc. (Lash & Urry, 1994). This makes mobilities one of the central sociological elements of development, and understanding societies and peoples' place in it requires understanding the actual, intended, experienced and virtual movements that binds the society together (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Within the framework of aeromobilities, the relations that exist between the technical elements of aviation and the societies that these aviation technologies exist and work within are explored, from a social science perspective, making the aeromobilities analysis one that 'must account for the complex interdependencies between different mobilities, networks, systems, institutions, risk, cultures and territories' (Cwerner, 2009: 4).

The exploration of who the international travellers arriving in Aalborg Airport are and what their rationales for traveling to Northern Denmark by air are, is therefore theoretically moored in the 'aeromobilities in-situ' model. This model is inspired by the 'mobilities in situ' model for understanding how and why mobilities are produced and performed as developed by Jensen (2013) but adapted to exploring the complex situation that is aeromobilities (See also Jensen & Lassen, 2011). Contrary to the conventional way of conducting aviation research, the aeromobilities concept draws the wider context for aviation into the research scope. The reason for this is that aviation plays an increasingly important role in society, generating economic activity and becoming a central element of the everyday lives of more and more people, whether directly through them flying more, or indirectly through the changes aviation makes for our consumption habits and our local and global environment (Cwerner, Kesselring & Urry, 2009). In order to fully understand aviation's impact, such factors need to be a part of the research, which is facilitated by the societal perspectives introduced by the aeromobilities research field. Obviously having a very broad scope for what can be viewed as important for an aeromobilities-focused research endeavour, theoretical frameworks offering a tighter view on aeromobilities is needed. For this specific research into who the international travellers arriving at Aalborg Airport are, the 'aeromobilities in situ' is used as a theoretical pin board.

Figure 1. The Aeromobilities in situ model



Source: Jensen *et al.* (2016)

The 'aeromobilities in situ', which is shown in Figure 1, strives to facilitate an understanding of how the international air traveller is 'created' in the field between physical, virtual, and experienced mobilities within the nexus of airports, airlines, and a series of relationally connected places, be they physical and/or virtual, on scales that reach from the local to the regional to the global.

Each of these units have a set of more specific focus points attached to them, that are to be explored empirically and analytically:

- *The air traveller*: socio-economic profile, preferences, rationales, and similarities and differences between various groups of travellers
- *The airport*: experience of the airport
- *The airlines*: which airlines do the international air travellers travel with on their journey to Northern Denmark
- *Physical mobilities*: the air journey and other transport and mobilities modes linked to the air journey
- *Virtual mobilities*: the use of virtual technologies as preparation for the journey, and as part of the journey
- *Experienced mobilities*: imaginations about places and experiences, and experiences as the air travellers passes on to others

This list of attributes is, of course, theoretical and as such not all of them are represented in the analysis presented below, as they do not possess the same relevance in relation to all specific cases of aeromobilities-in-situ.

2.1 The history, context and changing role of Aalborg Airport

As a contextualising starting point, we will look at the changing role of airports generally and in relation to this, the changing role of Aalborg Airport historically and contextually. Previously, airports were neutral state owned and/or regulated traffic hubs working as ‘flow machines’ (Fuller & Harley, 2004), where the focus was on safe and punctual transfer between two points, primarily ‘managing the complex logistic service involved in the boarding and the de-boarding of people and objects’ (Pascoe, 2001; Urry, 2009: 138). Today, an airport is, in addition to being a traffic hub, also a strategic focal point for societal development and business ventures; not only are airports responsible for handling air travel, but also in creating and developing it (Kesselring, 2006; Dobson, 2017). Airports and their associated route networks to other airports are thus stronger local and regional development drivers than they used to be. This change in the airport’s role for the society and region it is placed within necessitates a new approach to how aviation is understood and analysed, and how it is placed in a broader development context. As Lassen, Smink, and Smidt-Jensen (2012) have shown, aeromobility is used as a core element in the development of new urban strategies of experience and transformation of urban spaces.

Navigating in this world ‘on the move’ (Cresswell, 2006) requires a range of different infrastructures. On a continental and global scale, airports are a central, albeit complex, piece of infrastructure of pivotal importance for producing and practicing aeromobilities. The airport is both a physical place with a massive material presence through terminals, runways, parking lots, service buildings etc., but it is also a node in a transportation network that connects land and air traffic. This makes the airport a place (rather than a non-place (Augé, 1995)) imbued with meaning, identity, and power (Cresswell, 2004), resting on top of the physical materialities that are visually perceptible by the traveller (Cwerner, Kesselring & Urry, 2009). Especially through the associated route network in an airport, it is clear that the airport is more than just a physical place and it is this route network that makes the airport an important driver for development in the region where it is located. As Cidell (2006) argues, airports are not just passive players of globalization processes and infrastructural extension. She shows that ‘history, governance, airline service and the regional economic situation all play a role in mediating the effects of the processes of globalization on individual place, and in shaping those processes in turn’ (Cidell, 2006: 651). Through the airport, the region acquires the status of a node in a network, where the region is connected to other places, and it is via such connections that regional development through business and leisure can progress. Airports have become ‘interfaces’ (Kesselring, 2006), linking the local and the global, and it is no longer meaningful to view an airport’s interests as primarily linked to the local place in which it is situated.

Airports are no longer passive responders to air travel demand, but are themselves a central actor in creating the demand for air travel (see for example www.routesonline.com on the changing role of airports), and this is a reality that aeromobilities research needs to acknowledge

The change in the role of airports is highly visible at Aalborg Airport. The airport was established in 1936 at its present location as a simple airfield, but during World War II, the Germans converted the airport into a military aerodrome, ‘Aalborg Fliegerhorst West’, and extended the airport to 5000 barrels of land with the longest runway in Europe at the time. After the war, the airport was taken over by the Danish Government (Overgaard, 2013). In

the following years, the domestic route between Aalborg and Copenhagen, operated by SAS, was the primary activity for the airport. Aalborg Airport was a typical example of a state-owned airport that had a relatively passive approach when it came to route development and airport investments. During this period, the airport was considered a pure local airport which only served the inhabitants of Aalborg and the surrounding municipalities with domestic service and some charter flights (Overgaard, 2013) (see figure 2 for a geographical presentation of Aalborg Airport and the Region of Northern Denmark).

Figure 2. The geographical location of Aalborg Airport in the Region of Northern Denmark



Source: Map produced with data from SDF (2017)

However, in 1997 thirteen municipalities in Northern Denmark took over the ownership of the airport from the Danish Government. An important point to note is that the new municipal owners were not allowed to earn money from the airport, but were required to reinvest any profit to better airport facilities (Overgaard, 2013). This meant that the airport invested in a completely new airport terminal in 2001, which subsequently was expanded in 2007 and 2013. Further, the airport invested heavily in expanding free parking spaces, a new airport hotel, and starting in 2019, the airport will be linked to the national rail network via a new direct train to the airport. In addition, after the change in ownership, the airport also employed a new airport CEO who fundamentally changed the airport's strategy and role from a passive airport management strategy to an active route development

strategy (Overgaard, 2013). This can be seen, as one example, in the airport's far more active participation in the World Routes conferences and networks, as well as a much more pro-active route development approach which among other things this has meant that Norwegian Air Shuttle within 24 hours took over after the Cimber Sterling routes closed in 2012 (the former main *low-cost carrier* at the airport) when this airline went bankrupt. The CEO of Aalborg Airport explained the following about how he sees the changed role of the airport today:

“Our role is to create the best possible infrastructure in Northern Jutland. That is, in reality, the main thing (yes) but we have one leg out of the four we stand on, we say that we are holistic, so we don't just sit out here and say that now we want some airlines to come here. We are also looking for the tourist to come, that is also of value for our region. Well, one thing is to create good infrastructure out of the region, and possibly to some companies but, in reality, one of the things that we can make a living out of in the future here in Northern Jutland is [incoming] tourism... I view our role as the role of pushing these things [tourism initiatives and marketing] and we do it because of two things; we do it to benefit our own business, that is why we are here, but we also do it because the more development that comes to our region, the better it will be for everybody and that is the role we will have to play, this is where we can come into play. And instead of just looking into the airport, this has branched further out and we will all benefit from it” (Interview with Søren Svendsenn 2014, CEO Aalborg Airport).

The change in ownership, the new strategy, and ongoing investments in the airport are supported by the introduction of new international routes. In particular, the opening in 2011 of the route to Amsterdam operated by KLM/Air France has proven significant for the airport's international reach (Aalborg Airport, 2017a). There has also been an increase in international point-to-point routes mainly operated by low cost carriers and charter routes, especially those operated by Norwegian, Vueling, *Primera Air*, Ryanair as well as SAS from Aalborg to a number of European cities. This has greatly increased the international air accessibility of Northern Denmark. Thus, residents of Northern Denmark can smoothly travel to European hub airports, which is an obvious advantage. But getting to Northern Denmark has also become much easier as the route network increased significantly. This is especially true in relation to tourists and business travellers having easy access to Northern Denmark via the international route network in Aalborg Airport. This means that Aalborg Airport is in a situation where it is not just a passive player in relation to the flow of air travel through the region, it is also an active player in the creation of air travel to the region. However, the airport does not have much insight into the types of international travellers that are coming through the airport.

3. METHODS AND EMPIRICAL FOCUS

The analysis presented in this paper is based on data collected through a survey in Aalborg Airport and subsequent interviews with some of the survey participants. The survey in Aalborg Airport was conducted from June 30 to September 1, 2014. The survey was designed to provide general information about the travellers, and furthermore includes a string of questions that yield information about the travellers' rationales for their choice of Aalborg Airport and Northern Denmark as their destination. The survey also contains questions

that focus on the travellers' general attitude towards the activity of air travelling. The survey was answered by people residing outside of Denmark, who were approached by the research team as they were waiting for their departure flights after they had gone through the security check. In total, 478 travellers participated in the survey. Graphical visualisation has been applied to some of the quantitative data collected through the survey, resulting in the maps presented later in this paper.

Further, qualitative interviews were conducted with travellers strategically selected based upon their participation in the survey, in order to get more detailed information about their rationales and practices in relation to their travels to and around Northern Denmark after arriving through Aalborg Airport. These interviews were conducted via phone and Skype in the autumn of 2014, with five selected travellers. An interview was also conducted with Aalborg Airport CEO Søren Svendsen, focussing on the airport's experience with foreign arrivals. This research design generating both quantitative and qualitative data was deliberate and motivated by the fact that there didn't exist much scientific knowledge about the international travellers arriving in Aalborg Airport prior to this investigation. Therefore, data was required that would show both a broader statistical picture of the international travellers and data that would allow a more in-depth qualitative analysis of strategically selected travellers. The analysis of the survey data was statistical, and the interviews underwent a thematic content analysis based on the interview transcripts.

4. THE INTERNATIONAL AIR TRAVELLERS

The following section reports the main findings of the analyses of the international air travellers arriving in Aalborg Airport and beings to uncover their rationales for choosing Northern Denmark as a flight destination along with some of the mobilities practices they engage in while they are in the region.

In terms of who the international travellers arriving in Aalborg Airport are, the survey showed that three categories of international travellers arrive in Aalborg Airport: leisure tourists (32%), people travelling to visit friends and relatives (VFR-tourists) (29%), and business travellers (24%), and another 15% giving the reason 'other' as purpose for their journey to Northern Denmark. In comparison to the global distribution of travel purpose provided by WTO, 53% of all international tourist arrivals stated leisure as their purpose, VFR tourism accounted for 27%, and business travel for 14% (UNWTO, 2016). The proportion of VFR tourism is roughly the same, while the amount of business travellers is 10 percentage points higher in Aalborg Airport.

4.1 Origin of the international air travellers

The international air travellers arrive from across the world, but primarily from Norway, the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden, Faroe Islands, and Germany (see figure 3 and 4). The international travellers are mainly from Northern Europe, with the United States being the noticeable exception. At the time of the survey, Aalborg Airport was connected to the hub airports in Copenhagen and Amsterdam Schiphol, so these are obviously the two transfer airports used by the travellers. The survey shows that Copenhagen Airport is the main transfer airport for the travellers with just over 60% having travelled through there en route to Aalborg Airport, while some 10% came through Amsterdam Schiphol. A similar percentage distribution is seen in the answers to the question of which airline was used as carrier, with SAS (based in Copenhagen) transporting 60% of the travellers, and KLM (based in Amsterdam) transporting roughly 10%. Additionally, 20% of the travellers were serviced by Norwegian, which also has a route between Aalborg and Copenhagen, but has

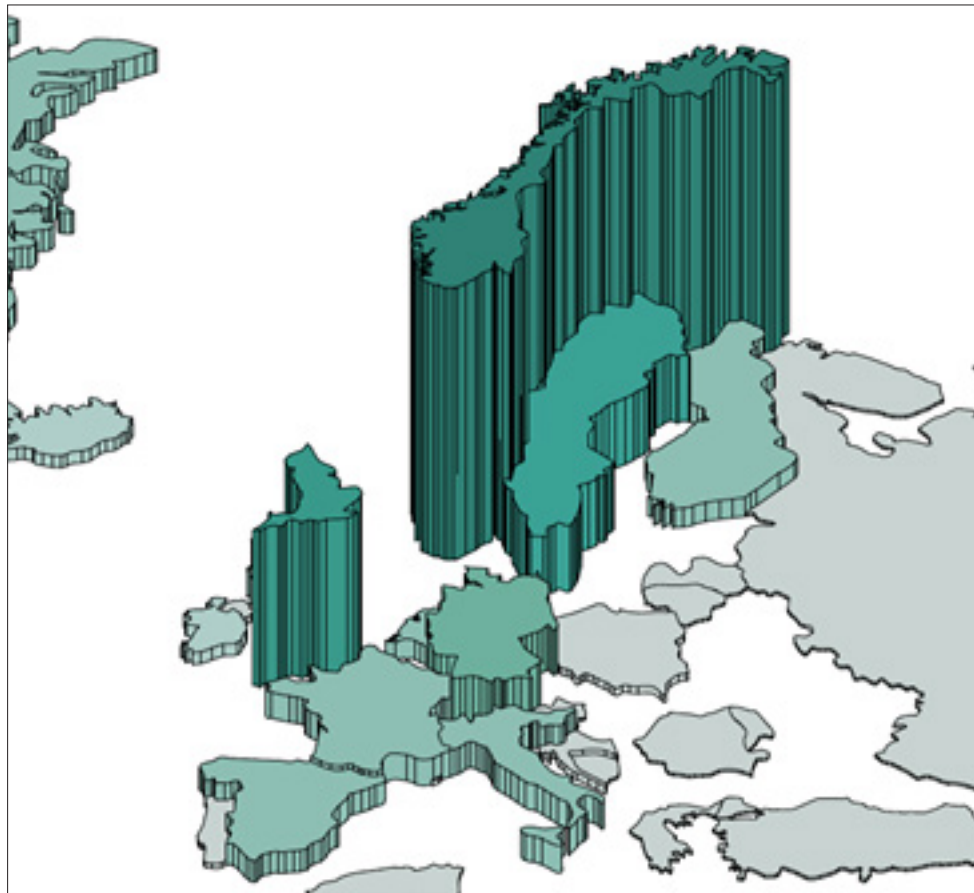
a point-to-point route to London. The top three international departure airports for the international travellers are Oslo, London, and Amsterdam.

Figure 3. Origin of the international air travellers in Aalborg Airport (N=478)



Source: Jensen *et al.* (2016)

Figure 4. Zoon-in on the origin of the international air travellers from Europe (N=478)



Source: Jensen *et al.* (2016)

4.2 While they are in Northern Denmark

Once they arrive in Aalborg Airport, the survey showed that their final destination was mainly Northern Denmark, but also that the rest of Denmark is attracting international travellers (see figure 5 and 6). The airport has a geographical reach beyond the regional borders, but as figure 5 shows, business travellers mainly stay in the region, indicating that when they choose to travel via Aalborg Airport, it is because they have business to conduct nearby. Most of the business travellers have their final destination in Aalborg Municipality, which is the economic centre of the region. A noticeable number also travel to Frederikshavn Municipality, where the main fisheries and off-shore industry is located, and the survey shows that these 'blue' and 'black' industries are in fact drawing a significant number of business travellers to the region. Of the main reasons given by the business travellers for their journey to Northern Denmark are these top five: meetings, visiting partners, daily work tasks, 'other', and conference/company visit with at least ten people. This emphasizes Urry's focus on the need for 'meetingness' as a strong driver for international business travel (Urry, 2007: 251).

Moreover, as the survey also shows, the need of just 'doing the job' in relation to various forms of work also seems to be a strong driver among some of the business travellers, exemplified by a male business traveller who installs GPS navigation equipment on ships, who views his journey as purely instrumental in terms of needing to be present where he needs to do his work. However, the interviews also illustrate, as many other studies have identified, how the boundaries between business and leisure tourism can be blurred (Lassen, 2006; Beaverstock, 2007; Kellerman, 2010). This can be identified in two ways. First, business integrating traditional touristic activities in-between work days:

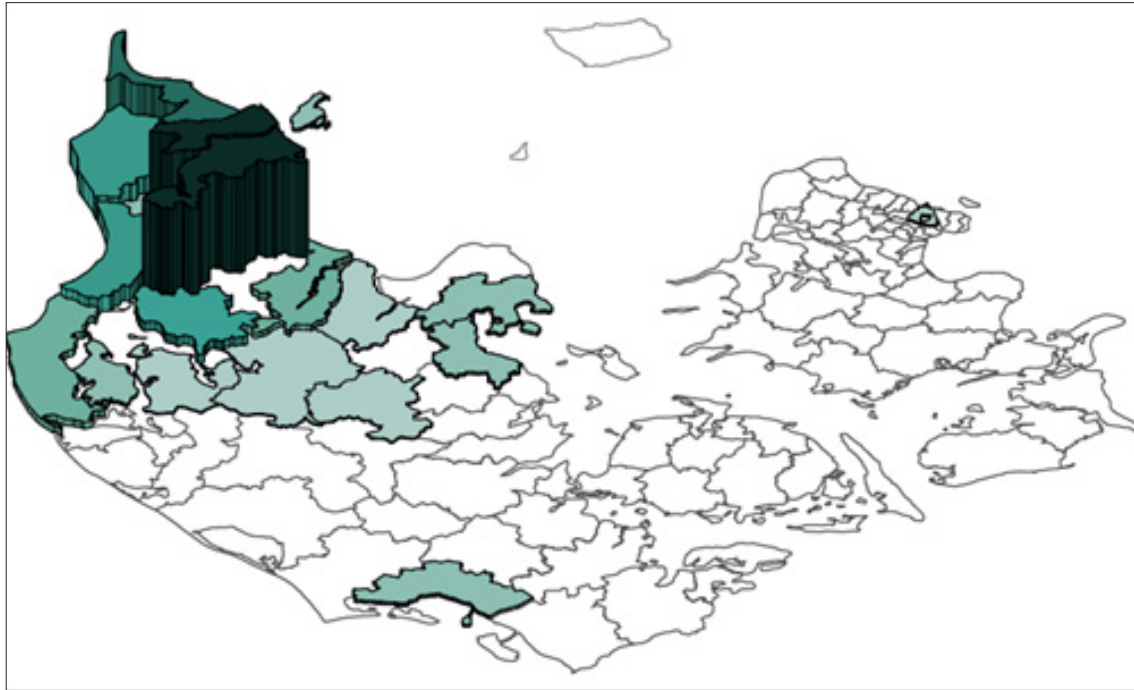
"We got the work done and it was done on time. The local area is a very nice area to stay there is a lot of amenities... swimming pool, tennis court, we can go to the cinema in Frederikshavn" (Interview with Scottish business traveller and fisherman getting his boat serviced at a yard in Skagen).

Second, the business journeys become in some cases the reason to go on a later holiday in the region:

"I think that it is the plan for next year. I will come over with the boat and they will fly over [his family] – they will maybe just stay for 2 or 3 weeks" (Interview with Scottish business traveller and fisherman getting his boat serviced at a yard in Skagen).

Generally, the examples above illustrate how business travel can be a hybrid journey (Unger, Uriely & Fuchs, 2016) involving many different elements. For some travellers whose main purpose is business, the journey only contains business activities, but for others, once the business part of the journey is over, they engage in leisure tourist activities as well.

Figure 5. Final destination of business travellers arriving in Aalborg Airport (N=478)



Source: Jensen *et al.* (2016)

The VFR travellers are a relatively overlooked group of travellers in the region compared to the historic focus tourism organizations have had on car-based cottage holidays. The leisure and VFR travellers have a slightly different geographical distribution than the business travellers (see figure 6), with Hjørring Municipality receiving the most of this group of guests, followed closely by Aalborg and Frederikshavn Municipalities. Hjørring Municipality is host to the most of the coast and sea tourism attractions in Northern Denmark, with Aalborg being the one (and in essence only) city destination. Skagen is also a popular tourism destination, which is located in Frederikshavn Municipality, and these three municipalities are the most populous, and thus also the most likely receiver of VFR-tourists.

A Danish emigrant to California exemplifies the region's overlooked VFR travellers. He tells how he combines three interests: music composers, genealogy, and family visits. He often travels around in the summer for one or two months to visit European cities with famous composers, and to visit historical archives in Northern Denmark to study his family roots and place history, and finally to visit his cousins living in the region:

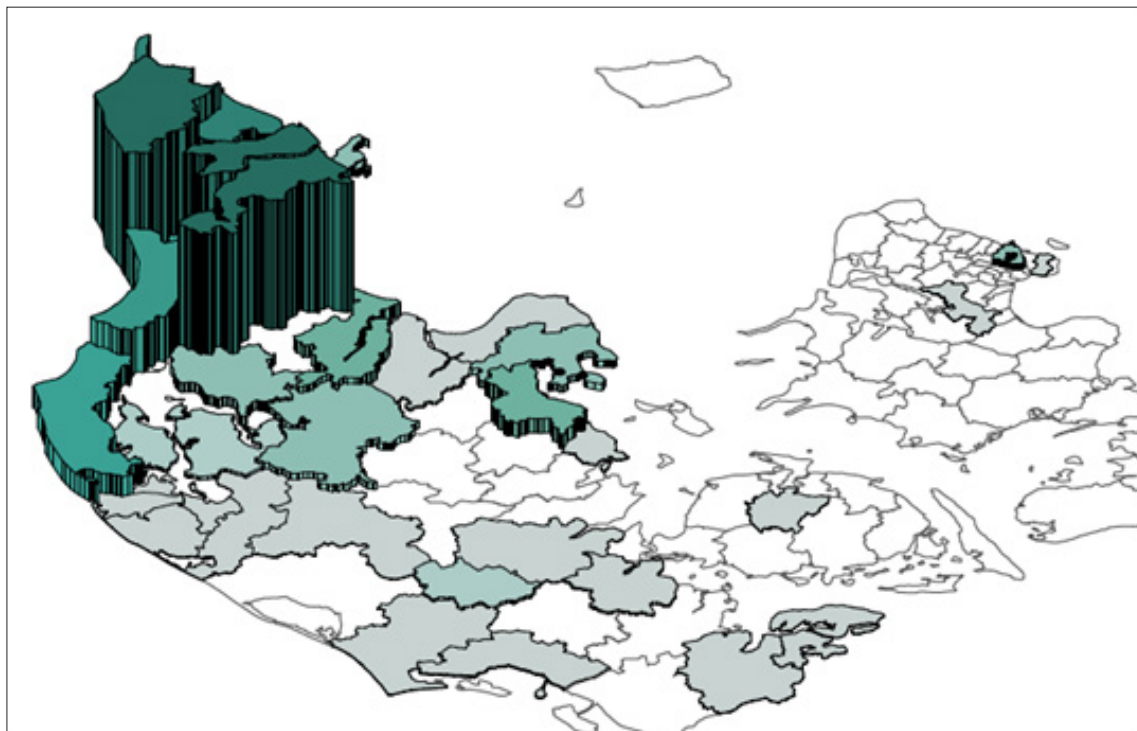
“It is something that I have done for years, because I have family in Himmerland [the southern part of Northern Denmark] so I visit them. Then I started looking into my family history in 2011, and then I combined that interest, which was completely new, with the old one, visiting family. So it became both. And then I have this third interest, to have a look around, get new experiences. But for Northern Denmark you can say that it starts with family. My mother was born in Himmerland, so we have routes there. It is always nice when my cousins say ‘when will you be back, will you be here this summer?... I am lucky that I have such nice cousins’ (Interview with Danish-American air traveller).

Another Danish emigrant, to Norway, also describes the journey to Denmark as a hybrid because the family gathers at her father's house and she then uses this as a base for summer holidays in Denmark:

“My oldest grandchild, her biggest dream was to have an entire summer holiday in her great grandfather’s house in Denmark. So it was actually her that gave us the idea, and we did it, and my cousin came back from USA. Everything fitted nicely” (Interview with Danish-Norwegian air traveller).

The family is thus gathered to visit the father and see each other in Denmark, but part of the time they also act as “traditional” tourists in the region. As Janta, Cohen and Williams (2014: 593) explain: “visiting friends and relatives combines the fulfilment of social obligations with opportunities for tourism activities”. Not surprisingly, the main “reason to go” for the VFR tourists is to visit friends and relatives (45%), but also for the group that characterizes themselves as leisure tourists this is the main reason for their journey to Northern Denmark (14%). The opportunity to spend time near beaches, the ocean, and lakes is the next highest stated reason to go for both leisure tourists (12%) and VFR tourists (9%). Below we will return to the question of the overlooked VFR tourists.

Figure 6. Final destination of tourists and VFR tourists arriving in Aalborg Airport (N=478)



Source: Jensen *et al.* (2016)

Although it represents a small part of both the tourist and business travellers, it is also important to note that, from the above maps, the spatial extent of international travellers is not exclusively linked to the region but extends beyond its borders. Airports do have fixed coordinates as Merriman (2007) has pointed out, but their vectoring ensures that it is hard to know where an airport ends and something else begins (Merriman, 2007: 109-110; see also Adey, 2011). This is a question we will also return to in the following discussion. In summary, two main points are to be drawn from the analyses of the survey and interviews with the international air travellers arriving in Aalborg Airport. First, the analysis shows that the passengers, once they have arrived, travel out into a geography that stretches beyond the regional borders of Northern Denmark. Aalborg Airport is a regional airport in the sense that it is owned by the regional municipalities, and that the policies and strategies related

to the airport's development are formed in a regional context, but this insight into the extra-regional travel practices of the passengers might call this regional development focus into question. Second, it must be noted that 53% of the international air travellers have either business or visits with friends and relatives as their main journey purpose and 'reason to go'. This again needs to be considered in relation to the region's desire to attract more air travellers within the context of the tourism offer the region provides and anticipates to provide for guests arriving by air.

5. DISCUSSION OF FUTURE REGIONAL TOURISM STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

The reason for exploring who the international travellers arriving in Aalborg Airport are is to strengthen Northern Denmark as an international flight destination. In order to achieve this, knowledge about who the travellers are, and why they travel to Northern Denmark is necessary as a foundation for further work by a range of regional actors. In parallel to the research project, whose findings are presented in this paper, Aalborg Airport took the initiative to set up an Airport Growth Committee. The purpose of this forum was to discuss the findings from this research and how they could be employed in the strategic route development at Aalborg Airport. The opening of new routes and collaboration with new airlines is a complex process, and direct impact of this research upon the Aalborg Airport route development is still to be seen. However, the research findings have been employed in relation to the establishment of an Incoming Bureau for Aalborg Airport and Northern Denmark. After the documentation of who the international air travellers arriving in Aalborg Airport are as provided by this research, this new knowledge was utilized by the airport to collaborate with the regional development organization Business Region North Denmark and the regional tourism marketing organization VisitNordjylland. Together they defined the scope for this Incoming Bureau and found the tourism partners that could take active part in the bureau's work. The main tasks for the Incoming Bureau is to make Northern Denmark more attractive and more accessible for international air tourists. The regional tourism agency Samson Travel has been chosen to conduct analysis of potential both in relation to attracting tourists and in relation to scoping the market for tourism products to offer the tourists (Business Region North Denmark, 2017; VisitNordjylland, 2017). One of the issues identified as part of this research in relation to attracting air tourists to Northern Denmark was that there was no clear product on offer for the tourists to buy. This issue is one of the focus points for the Incoming Bureau, who is now, in close collaboration with Aalborg Airport, working on a range of tourism offers that can be purchased by the air travellers to the region (Aalborg Airport, 2017b).

The two important insights from the research presented here, which have implications for how the future development of Northern Denmark as an international air destination is approached strategically, are: the knowledge that the geographical reach of Aalborg Airport stretches further than the administrative region of Northern Denmark, and the knowledge that a majority of the international air guests arrive in the region because they want to visit friends and relatives, or do business. The first insight calls for rethinking how regional tourism development strategies and policies are produced, and the second insight must point to relevant tourism products being developed and marketed to the potential air travellers.

Currently, tourism development is mainly hosted municipally and regionally, but such administrative borders are of little significance for tourists, who are probably not even aware of them. The research presented here suggests that Aalborg Airport is no longer just a regional airport for Northern Denmark, but has a reach that crosses into the mid-Danish

region. This should prompt further consideration of the tourism development strategies and policies linked to attracting travellers by air, as these should reflect the geographical extent of the airport. There are, of course, challenges related to this, one being the presence in the mid-Danish region of Aarhus Airport, which is trying to cement its position as the main airport in that region (without, unfortunately, much success), making the issue of regional air tourism development a political one as well as a practical one. Such cross-regional collaborations on tourism development are not a novelty in a Danish context though, with Vestkystpartnerskabet being an example of three administrative regions teaming up in order to develop west coast tourism strategically (KL, 2015). This approach to coastal tourism development could serve as an example for cross-regional air tourism development.

The new insight into who the international air travellers arriving in Northern Denmark are is relevant for the work being done by the newly established Incoming Bureau and Samson Travel in their efforts to produce relevant tourism offers for guests to Northern Denmark. Northern Denmark has traditionally received leisure tourists, arriving by car or ferry to spend a week or two in a summer house by the coast, but the air travellers seem to have a different profile: they are in the region to visit friends and family (but also going to the beach while they are in the region, like the leisure tourists), or they are in the region to do business. This 'reason-to-go' profile needs to be considered when developing the strategies for how to attract more travellers, as such travel purposes would require other supporting facilities, marketing approaches and collaborating partners than would an effort directed towards the traditional leisure tourists.

6. CONCLUSION

The transformation of Northern Denmark into an international flight destination is a result of deliberate action taken by a range of regional actors, where each party has contributed their expertise. Being an international flight destination is not a given and is not something that happens overnight. Northern Denmark has emerged in the cross field between the regional airport and international destination deliberately by developing their strategic route network to include flights to airports in Europe that serves as hubs for airlines that are members of two airline alliances (Star Alliance and Sky Team). Thereby Aalborg Airport is connected to the widest possible route networks with a significant international geographical reach. This development work is done in parallel with the regional university analysis of who the international travellers are that already arrive by air in the region in order to obtain more knowledge about reasons to go and what they seek and demand in terms of activities etc. while in the region. This knowledge has since been used by regional tourism development organisations and institutions in an effort to develop their tourism value chains for the purpose of offering a suitable product that might attract international air travellers. Two main points from this research still need to be addressed: the need for a cross-regional tourism development effort that will better mirror the current use of the airport by international air guests arriving in Aalborg Airport, and a stronger focus on attracting and servicing the specific profile of the tourists arriving by air, which is different than the tourists arriving by car and ferry.

The theoretical framework of aeromobilities in situ used in this research informs this analysis of the international air traveller profile by providing the context within which these travellers must be understood, outlining that their travel behaviour is a product of the interplay between their personal rationales, practices, and abilities and the airports and airlines that facilitate their journey. In this research, this theoretical framework has been used on the single case of Aalborg Airport, but, adhering to the words of Flyvbjerg (1991;

2006), the knowledge produced from a single case study can provide insights of significance for other cases.

6.1 Recommendations

So, what knowledge can be taken from the Aalborg Airport case and transferred to other similar regional contexts that wish to become international air destinations? The main recommendations from this research for actors wishing a regional airport to become an international destination are:

- The airport needs to acknowledge, and act upon, the changing role of airports in contemporary society and become a proactive player in the strategic route development to the region.
- Development of an international air destination requires combined and deliberate efforts from regional actors, who need to work together to produce and market relevant and sellable tourism products.
- A quantitative and qualitative profiling of the international travellers already arriving in the airport will give a better picture of the types of people the airport and the region have the potential to attract via the airport.

Looking ahead into the international air travellers at Aalborg Airport, it is highly relevant to maintain an empirical focus on Aalborg Airport development in the future. The effects of the newly started initiatives by the Incoming Bureau and Samson Travel need to be documented in order to identify any quantitative and qualitative changes to the passenger profile these initiatives might cause. On a strategic regional level, research is needed into the ways in which a more integrated approach to developing Northern Denmark as an international air destination can be established, as the current steps in that direction are incipient and hold potential.

Ultimately, a stronger connection between Aalborg Airport and international hub airports will be a benefit for the residents and businesses in the region, and thus a continued combined regional effort to maintain and develop the routes that link Northern Denmark to the rest of Europe and the world through as strategic a route network as possible must be a focus point for all relevant actors. The aeromobilities in situ model has helped establish which factors are relevant for uncovering the important elements in such a route connectivity, and Aalborg Airport and the North Danish region are showing how to engage practically with these factors in a strive to make Northern Denmark an international air destination.

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