

**EXTRAORDINARY CONSUMER EXPERIENCES: WHY IMMERSION AND  
TRANSFORMATION CAUSE TROUBLE**

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**Acknowledgments:**

The research is sponsored by The Research Council of Norway through the project Northern Insights: Service Innovation and Tourist Experiences in the High North

**Post print version of article published in Journal of Consumer Behaviour.**  
[10.1002/cb.1516](https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1516)

## ABSTRACT

This paper presents and discusses how consumers are transformed in and out of immersion during extraordinary, long-lasting wilderness canoeing experiences. Based on a hermeneutic multi-phase empirical approach we show how extraordinary experiences can be dynamic, multi-faceted and emergent. The positive connotations of prior research are questioned as we find that consumers face various paradoxes and ambiguities throughout the various consumption phases. While a major part of research today focuses on the co-creation efforts of consumers when they combine various on-site resource of experiencescapes, our findings point to the importance of understanding consumer resources. The distinction held between the ordinary-extraordinary does not hold within the present context, and we discuss how role conflicts may influence transformation and immersion during consumption of experiences.

**Key words:** Consumer transformation, immersion, extraordinary experience, consumer challenges, consumer paradoxes, consumer experiences.

## INTRODUCTION

For the consumer the wilderness forest can be experienced as an alien, marginal, and detached world. Canoeing in such an environment for several days is not a normal activity for most people. For tourists, wilderness canoeing would be regarded as an extraordinary experience apart from ordinary activities, consisting of special and particularly memorable moments (Abrahams, 1986) that are distinguished by emotions during immersion at the expense of the cognitive dimension (Carù and Cova, 2003). Consumers often seek such experiences out of a desire for adventure and escape (Varley, 2011), so extraordinary experiences are highly valued among consumers (Arnould and Price, 1993). However, how do urban consumers ascribe meaning to such adventurous experiences?

Experiential consumption was introduced to the field of consumer research by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), and this phenomenon was first studied empirically by Thompson et al. (1989). It was not until Arnould and Price's (1993) study of river magic that the commercial dimension was addressed, which led to an interest in how consumers could receive a satisfactory experience when wilderness and other nature-based experiences are mediated increasingly by specialized businesses (Arnould, Price, and Tierney, 1998). Commercial packages are offered to people who seek holiday experiences that differ from their everyday lives (Ladwein, 2007). In consumer research, experiential consumption is mostly studied in cultural contexts (e.g., Kozinets, 2002; Mossberg, 2007; Schmitt, 1999; Schouten, 1991; Thompson and Haytko, 1997), and the focus is not on how consumers are actually consuming an experience. This aspect was addressed by Carù and Cova (2003, 2006, 2007a), who refer to Pine and Gilmore (1999) and Firat and Dholakia (1998) when they introduce immersion as the conceptual tool for understanding how consumers consume experiences. From our point of view, the concept of immersion is not sufficient if we want to understand how consumers consume experiences, especially if the experiences take place in the wilderness or extreme nature where consumers have to be engaged agents.

For Carù and Cova, "immersion is when the distance between the experience and the consumer is reduced by what has been called 'operational appropriation'." (Carù and Cova, 2006: 6). Their empirical setting is a concert hall: "Classical music concerts were chosen for this research since, in popular imagery, they represent the archetypical boring experience in which immersion appears impossible for the non-connoisseurs" (Carù and Cova, 2006: 6). We think there are many experiences which cannot be compared to the reality described in Carù and Cova's study (2006), and we want to expand the inquiry into consumer experiences

by studying extraordinary experiences among consumers who canoe in Norway. To do this, we will try to elaborate on the concepts we use in our attempt to gain a better understanding of the consumption of experiences. We think consumers get beyond mere immersion when they consume experiences in wilderness settings. The consumer must go through a transformation from an everyday identity into something else in order to handle this type of situation and get the full experience in such a context. The concept of transformation is already introduced by Gaviria and Bluemelhuber (2010), who report how a person goes through the transformation process when moving to another country, getting a job, getting married and having children. Hamilton et al. (2012) show how researchers' identity is transformed when they are immersed into a research setting in a sensitive context and during the analysis of the data based in this type of study. The result of the transformation is the acceptance of multiple roles as a researcher in striving to delve deep into the research setting in order to obtain quality data. To do the job the researcher goes through a transformative process where the everyday identity has to be set aside and the researcher's identity and the many roles will be present.

We think too little research focuses on the process of transformation in and out of immersion during long-lasting wilderness experiences. It is also assumed that extraordinary experiences are romantic and communitarian in delivering intrinsically meaningful experience (Arnould and Price, 1993). However, attention is also needed towards the coping of challenges and conflicts of such transformation processes (Tumbat and Belk, 2011). We ask the following question: How do consumers cope with transformations in and out of immersion throughout long-lasting extraordinary experiences?

This research shows that transformation in and out of immersion may mark consumer experiences to a significant extent. Instead of the theorized immediate or progressive transformative processes towards immersion, our findings show multi-phasic, dynamic and emergent characteristics of transformation. While many transformations can be distinguished as positive processes leading to magical and sublime immersion, consumers also reveal challenges, which primarily have their origin in role conflicts. We present and discuss such transformative challenges in detail and argue that much consumption dynamism may stem from reinvention and desired roles that represent a misfit during experiential settings. We conclude that consumers' resources that are brought to the experiencescape are important for understanding transformative processes in and out of immersion during long-lasting extraordinary experiences.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Transformative dynamic experiences**

In an early contribution to the experiential view within consumer research, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) suggested a focus on the subjective and emotional dimension of experiences through “fantasies, feelings and fun”. Consumers consume products/services not only for utilitarian reasons but also because of the symbols and meanings rendered possible by products (Carù and Cova, 2007b; Levy, 1959). This research assumes that the consumer experience is a complex whole that cannot meaningfully be decomposed into isolated parts (Holbrook, 1995). Referring to extended consumption contexts, such as entertainment, art, museums, concerts, and leisure activities (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982: 134), this stream of research began focusing on topics such as consumer identity (Belk, 1988; Thompson and Haytko, 1997); how symbols imprint experiences (Mick and Buhl, 1992) through, for example, imagination, fantasies, and daydreams (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982); how experiences can be intrinsically motivated by enjoyment and pleasure (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982); and how cultural meaning may distinguish experiences (Sherry, 1990).

In his seminal contribution, Belk argues that consumers’ relationships toward “persons, places and things to which one feels attached” (Belk, 1988: 141) can be seen as extending, expanding and strengthening their sense of self. Belk points to the important symbolic and existential meanings that may influence (extended) consumer experiences. Experiences are thus never two-way relationships (i.e., person-thing), but “always three-way” (Belk, 1988: 147), i.e., things, surroundings and other people will always to a certain extent mark the consumers during extended experiences.

In contrast to Belk’s view of identity as a function of core self and extended self, later contributions suggest identity as structured in terms of a narrative (e.g., Ahuvia, 2005; Fournier, 1998; Thompson, 1997). Thompson argues that experiential meanings as narratives are “contextualized within a broader narrative of self-identity” which itself is contextualized within a “complex background of historically established cultural meanings and belief systems.” (Thompson, 1997: 440). Not only does the three-way relationship between consumers and tangible/intangible entities matter. Consumer experiences can be viewed as dynamic self-narrating activities, where current consumption acts are strung together with the consumer’s broader life narratives from the past and into possible imaged futures (Ahuvia,

2005). One can therefore argue that experiences can be understood figuratively as something that happens across time and between various narrative structures. The narrative approach thus provides insight into the meaning of three-way relationships because the symbolic past or future may matter in addition to the more subjectively extended-self phenomenon. For example, Ahuvia found that consumers' relationships to "loved objects" may point to stories involving family members, traditions, and social groups (Ahuvia, 2005: 180).

Cultural consumer research has emerged with a focus on the consumer as essentially a tribe member (Maffesoli, 1996) who engages in experiences that "rest largely in their ability to carry and communicate cultural meaning" (McCracken, 1986: 71). From this perspective, consumer experiences, and the inherent values, are essentially constituted by cultural meanings and social interactions. The question of transformation thus becomes a question of how cultural meaning influences the role in which the consumer is presently involved. Conducting naturalistic research at consumption contexts such as swap meets (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf, 1988), flea markets (Sherry, 1990), art shows, souvenir shops, parades, riverboat cruises and county fairs (Belk, 1991), this stream of research contributes to our understanding of how rituals, tradition, myths, socialization and status mark consumer experiences. More recent research argues that consumer experiences can be a function of social-cultural communities (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), although consumers claim to be doing "their own thing while doing it with thousands of like-minded others" (Holt, 2002: 83). In line with this research, one can view consumer transformations as a matter of consumer-in-socio-culture conformity or (fake) deviance.

A dialogical model is suggested by Thompson and Haytko (1997). They argue that identity and transformative experiences depend on socially situated consumers as interpreters between macro-societal structures and cultural meanings. Studying fashion discourses, they found that consumers derive meanings through "tension among historically predominant countervailing meanings or between traditional beliefs and contemporary views" (Thompson and Haytko, 1997: 36). Examples of such tensions are traditional versus non-traditional models of femininity and masculinity, moralizing narratives condemning ostentatious display versus glamorizing symbols of social status and material affluence. Rather than understanding consumer transformations as unified and culturally dominant, it is expected that consumers are involved in a complex "interpretive dance" (Thompson and Haytko, 1997: 37) in which they dialogically switch between various interpretive positions throughout experiences. We

use the term transformative experiences to refer to the experiences that consumers undergo during the switch between various interpretive positions in a consumption context. It is expected that such switches can be dramatic for high involvement and intense extraordinary wilderness experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993).

### **Extraordinary experiences**

Inspired by psychology (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997; Maslow, 1964; Privette, 1983) and hedonic consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), Arnould and Price define the extraordinary as “intense, positive, intrinsically enjoyable experiences.” (Arnould and Price, 1993: 25). They argue that the experiences must have a sense of newness of perception and process, that they are triggered by unusual events and that interpersonal interaction is an important trigger. Studying river rafting, they report “communion with nature, *communitas* or connecting with others [...] and renewal of self” as essential for extraordinary experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993: 31). Turning to anthropology, they show how extraordinary experiences can provide absorption and integration within the context, and how romantic cultural scripts contribute to the transformation of consumers, which means they may return to an everyday world as renewed individuals. Celsi et al. (1993) show how a high-risk identity is developed through reciprocal dynamic processes in which risks are normalized and motives are escalated towards the skydiving activity. Rather than viewing experiences as static with a focus on single and isolated constructs, they argue for viewing experiences more holistically as interdependence between constructs.

Kozinets’ (2002) ethnography of the anti-market event “Burning Man” shows how extraordinary experience can take the form of inversion rituals “against the orderly, planned, pre-programmed, boring, and imitative aspects” of everyday marketplace existence (Kozinets, 2002: 36). The acts of consumer imagination must be viewed as complex and multifaceted (Sherry, Kozinets, and Borghini, 2007). Kozinets (2002) shows how consumers’ creative, cooperative and collective efforts may enhance construction of a re-enchanting community away from the mundane. In contrast to most research on extraordinary experiences, Tumbat and Belk (2011), studying climbing Everest, argue that extraordinary experiences might not be as romantic and communitarian as the previous reviewed studies suggest. Based on classical sociology (e.g., Turner, 1969) it is a common assumption that people seek participation in extraordinary and transformative experiences because modernity tends to exclude mystery, magic, passion and soul (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Tumbat and Belk

(2011) argue that the extraordinary is contrasted by the everyday mundane and that prior research tends to focus on enchanting experiences. Reporting on numerous experiential tensions, however, Tumbat and Belk argue instead that consumers may join various relationships out of necessity and not to transcend everyday structural norms (into *communitas*) and that participants can be “more interested in touting their individual accomplishments.” (Tumbat and Belk, 2011: 57). Their key finding is that consumers may face tension within uncertain and insecure contexts and that consumers must be expected to negotiate between various dualities of the everyday mundane and the extraordinary enchanting.

### **Transcendence, immersion and transformation**

Extraordinary consumer experiences are often marked by transcendent experiences (e.g., Arnould and Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993) or consumer immersion (Carù and Cova, 2006; Hansen and Mossberg, 2013). Based on psychology (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990; Maslow, 1964; Privette, 1983), Schouten, McAlexander, and Koenig define transcendent consumer experiences as “flow and/or peak experiences that take place in consumption contexts.” (Schouten et al., 2007: 358). A transcendent consumer experience can be characterized by total absorption in an activity, and can be distinguished as either an extreme focus on a particular task (challenge/skill/flow) or as originating from outside the individual (sacred/epiphany/peak) (Privette, 1983).

In their review of immersion related to consumer experiences, Hansen and Mossberg (2013) argue that immersion is key for understanding extraordinary experiences. They define immersion “as a form of spatio-temporal belonging in the world that is characterized by deep involvement in the present moment” (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013: 212). The intensity of extraordinary consumer experiences would depend on high attention towards the activity at hand and low attention towards aspects of the past or the future (Abuhamdeh and Csikszentmihalyi, 2012). In their research on music concerts, Carù and Cova argue that immersion depends on the process where the consumer becomes “plunged in a thematized and secure spatial enclave where they can let themselves go.” (Carù and Cova, 2006: 5). The transformative process towards immersion can be viewed as either total and immediate or partial and progressive (Carù and Cova, 2007a).

While transcendent consumer experiences can only occur as total absorption through peak or flow (Schouten et al., 2007), immersion involves more broadly a state of deep

involvement that blur awareness of time and erases self-consciousness during consumption. However, the situations in which they appear are often during task activities and/or through relationships towards something outside the consumer (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013). Consumption can be distinguished by emotional experiences of intensity, epiphany, newness, extreme enjoyment, oneness with surroundings, and extreme focus of attention (Schouten et al., 2007). Some experiences are so strong that they have resulted in dramatic life- and perspective-altering changes (Arnould and Price, 1993). Research on consumption rallies such as Jeep gatherings (McAlexander et al., 2002) and Harley-Davidson events (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) have revealed both peak and flow experiences on an individual and communal level. Furthermore, researchers report transformative issues such as “conversion from sceptic to believer, of revelation, of the metaphorical opening of eyes, and of unity with nature and humanity” (Schouten et al., 2007: 358). Experiences may also dynamically emerge as a thrilling experience in the beginning, via personal achievement and periods of individual and shared transcendence later during consumption phases (Celsi et al., 1993). Consumers may face extensive changes in mood, involving apprehension, fear, frustration, awe, and exhilaration (Arnould and Price, 1993). The attention involved during experiences would vary (Abuhamdeh and Csikszentmihalyi, 2012), and the experiential dynamics of high/low attention would depend on personal factors, trip related factors, task factors and the experiential environment (Mainemelis, 2001; Walls et al., 2011).

### **Multi-phasic and emerging experiences**

Based on theories on service and experiencescapes (Bitner, 1992; Mossberg, 2007) and within adventure literature (Beedie and Hudson, 2003; Borrie and Roggenbuck, 2001; Talbot and Kaplan, 1986), a packaged tour can be conceptualized as dynamically emerging through multi-phases. According to Mossberg (2007), experiencescapes consist of the consumer, personnel, other customers, products and the physical environment that are enhanced through the symbolism of theme and stories. This research does not focus on the resources that are brought to the experiencescape. Service-Dominant Logic holds that the consumers and their skills, knowledge and understanding, depicted as operant resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), contribute as resource integrators when physical, social and cultural dimensions are at stake (Arnould, Price, and Malshe, 2006). Cultural meaning will permeate experiencescapes, e.g., through adventure company communication and fashion. It is suggested that wilderness consumption is perceived as a magic adventure with a focus on untouched nature and

mysticism (see Arnould, Price, and Otnes, 1999). Stories of wild animals and ancient settlements may also distinguish romantic consumer experiences.

Arnould and Price (1993) show how ritual aspects (rites of passage and integration) assist consumer transformations between ordinary and extraordinary consumption contexts. Inspired by Turner (1969), Arnould and Price argue that rites of passage involving the process of separation, transition and reintegration, “helps us understand the sequencing of events in the delivery of extraordinary experience.” (Arnould and Price, 1993: 27). Furthermore, it is assumed that the rites of integration, defined as planned social interactions by the provider, will help the consumer transform into a “temporary sense of closeness” towards the extraordinary context (Arnould and Price, 1993: 27). Within tourism, Jafari (1987) and Beedie and Hudson (2003) emphasise the transformational nature of tourist experiences by suggesting phases of an experience. Like the process of rites of passage, tourist experiences begin in the ordinary, progress to states of heightened immersion, and then, return to ordinary. This does not mean that the on-site immersion experience can be viewed as monolithic (Hom Cary, 2004). Instead, the heightened experience phase can instead be viewed through notions such as high and low points (Graburn and Barthel-Bouchier, 2001) or dynamics of high/low attention (Mainemelis, 2001).

Borrie and Roggenbuck (2001) apply a multi-phasic frame to understand how experiences dynamically emerge during on-site wilderness experiences. They found that feelings and cognitive focus transformed significantly from the entry phase, through the immersion (or transcendence) phase, to the exit phase of wilderness experiences. A focus on the environment and self/introspection dominated the exit phase, whereas feelings of humility, primitiveness and oneness (with nature) distinguished the transcendence phase (Borrie and Roggenbuck, 2001: 202). Talbot and Kaplan (1986) found that worries were reduced when participants learned the necessary skills, knowledge, and approaches needed to cope in the wilderness. With time, positive emotional experiences became more intense, and towards the middle of the course, many people developed feelings of revelation, awe and exhilaration as both the environment and sense of self revealed new meanings. Borrie and Roggenbuck refer to the state of “wilderness way of being” understood as immersion with fewer distractions, attention to what is immediately at hand, comfort with one’s ability and the tasks to be carried out, and the affordances of the immediate environment (Borrie and Roggenbuck, 2001: 208). It is expected that various interpretive positions may distinguish various phases of a wilderness experience. Beedie and Hudson argue that as mountain adventure tourists gain

experience throughout an experience, perceptions of risk decrease and perceptions of competence increase, and tourists may “become” like mountaineers (Beedie and Hudson, 2003: 630).

Focusing on wilderness adventures, Pohl, Borrie, and Patterson (2000: 422) identified the experiential characteristics of escape (from norms, everyday demands, and distractions), challenge and survival (physical and mental), new opportunities (learning new skills), natural awe and beauty (connection to nature), and solitude (isolation, time to focus, mental revitalization). They not only found evidence of a variety of experiences as they unfold during the leisure activities, but the experience also had “transferable meaning” on participants’ everyday lives through self-sufficiency, change in perspective, connection to others, and mental clarity (Pohl et al., 2000: 423). The extraordinary outdoor experience thus has the potential to engage the whole person over time (Loeffler, 2004).

The purpose of this research is to investigate how urban consumers ascribe meaning to extraordinary experiences. We have shown that there is a consensus in the literature (e.g., Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Carù and Cova, 2006) that the first requirement to get an experience is the capability to immerse oneself into the experience. Nevertheless, we do not think that immersion is sufficient if we are talking about extraordinary experiences. Through our data analysis we will show that the consumers in such a context need to be engaged agents and that this can be challenging. We argue that consumers have to go through a transformation to get a wilderness experience and hereby addressing an important discussion regarding the relationship between immersion and transformation, which is underdeveloped in the literature on consumer experiences (e.g., Arnould and Price, 1993; Carù and Cova, 2007a; Tumbat and Belk, 2011). This more profound understanding of the relationship between immersion and transformation would enable consumer experience management (e.g., Vargo and Lusch, 2004) to becoming aware of how experiences are consumed in their specific business, and subsequently pay attention to the proper relationship between immersion and transformation for supporting an appropriate experience for their customers.

## METHOD

The context of this study is outdoor life, learned through adolescence and practice, has a long tradition of being a meaningful activity in Norway. Wilderness life and canoeing, which are

concepts constructed by adventure companies and other mediators, can be argued as belonging to nature contexts that are traditionally valued in outdoor life contexts. The term “wilderness” has romantic connotation today and is used for promotional purposes by adventure companies (e.g., web and brochures). Today, most people who want to go canoeing do so through packaged tours. Similar to packaged river rafting (Arnould and Price, 1993) or mountain climbing tours (Tumbat and Belk, 2011), many adventure businesses organise canoe trips in areas that were not previously accessible. Such tours belong to an increasingly important experience economy sector of the western world, and nature is often an important experiencescape wherein experiences take place. Canoeing means to travel with family or friends. All tourists would have more than average interest in wilderness canoeing because extraordinary experiences are intense and framed (Abrahams, 1986), just as they require involvement and certain skills (Arnould and Price, 1993). Thus, in contrast to an experience-marketing ideal of pre-planning experiences (Carù and Cova, 2003), the adventure company would let consumers construct the experience more freely. However, the consumers would need to prepare, and this would typically involve studying the area and the provider on the web, brochure, paddling instructions, details of the track on the map, security check (including life vest, bon fire regulations), food/water supply, information about pick up zones and “what to do” in case of an emergency.

A hermeneutical framework was applied with a focus on the interpretation of meaning derived from consumption stories within socio-cultural and personal history (Thompson, 1997). This means that implicit meanings mark experiences through social-cultural practice and traditions (Thompson, Pollio, and Locander, 1994). Rather than relying on purely subjective or idiosyncratic constructions, narratives were derived from consumer experiences, which were interpreted on behalf of a broader life narrative and cultural meanings of the macro and meso contexts and adventures that were studied. To understand and interpret transformations between phases of the experiencescape, the researchers have interpreted the personal experiences through a circular interplay between the various empirical texts (e.g., interview), the cultural meaning of the adventure in question, the social practice of the groups, and the history of the person and the group. The interpretive background factors (e.g., socio-historical) do not need to be understood by participants of a study as part of their experiences and identity (Thompson et al., 1994). Pursuing transformations and challenges would instead call attention to reveal what is hidden through alethic hermeneutics (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009).

Overall, data collection aimed to gather experiences from multiple temporal perspectives (Arnould and Price, 1993). We focused on informant background, their socio-cultural expectations, contextual and situational experiences (e.g., forest wilderness), critical aspects during preparation and consumption experiences, critical aspects when returning, and postconsumption evaluation.

Although transformations within phases of the commercial experiencescape were the main emphasis, experiences that related to the past or future (e.g., reflecting about work related projects) were also thematised. Well educated participants, both skilled and unskilled, were chosen because skill is theorized as an important dimension for extraordinary experiences (Carù and Cova, 2006; Csíkszentmihályi, 1997). In light of the purpose of this research, urban participants were chosen because they would face radical shifts moving from the city to the wilderness. It was also assumed that well educated participants would be able to talk about the complicated subject of transformative experiences. The provider contacted consumers according to our sampling criteria and asked if they would participate in the project.

The trips lasted from 4 to 6 days, and the canoers lived as “wilderness people” relying on equipment such as tents and bonfires for cooking. The provider is located in a forested area in the eastern part of Norway. The consumers rented canoes and equipment, received information and training, and took off into a waters course running through small lakes, canals and rivers in Norway and Sweden. No guides followed the groups that we studied. In order to be able to understand the canoers, one of the researchers paddled the wilderness trip before the participants joined the project.

Inspired by Arnould and Price (1993), a multi-method fieldwork (phase 1) was accomplished first at the adventure provider (observations, informal conversations with participants and providers, and secondary information). Data were gathered through interviews (phase 2) before informants went out for understanding aspects such as prior experiences, expectations, motives, and socio-cultural meanings. They were asked to write a diary each day (phase 3), and interviews (phase 4) were conducted immediately after their return and approximately two months after the consumption experience (phase 5). Instructions were provided on how to write the diary; e.g. “Describe what has happened today and your reflections and feelings”. The main data, however, were generated on site through phenomenology inspired in-depth interviews (Thompson et al., 1989) where the informants

where asked to tell their experiential stories sequentially (from departure to arrival). Early in the interview after their return (see phase 4) the researchers would concentrate on follow-up questions (e.g. “how” and “why”), and only later in the interview the researcher would focus on transformation and immersion. The topics that appeared in the diary and during the first interview after their return (see phase 4) were discussed in more detail during the last interview (see phase 5) that took place at the participants’ home place.

The sample on wilderness canoeing involved data from 18 Norwegian consumers, distributed among eight canoeing groups. Three groups consisted of one canoe (two people), while five groups consisted of two canoes that travelled together. Half travelled with family members while the other half went with friends. One participant was selected from each of the eight canoeing groups for the extensive in-depths study (see phase 2-5 above), but all 18 consumers were present during informal conversations and observations at the provider (see phase 1 above).

Table 1 provides a list of the 8 main participants’ pseudonyms, and a brief description of their backgrounds.

\*\* Table 1 insert here \*\*

All interviews were recorded and transcribed, including researchers’ comments after each interview. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes (initial interviews) to three hours (interview at their return). In interview situations, the researcher must develop an atmosphere where the participants feel comfortable in speaking freely about personal experiences and feelings (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Each interview was conducted in a private room with only the researcher and the participants present. Food and drinks were served at their return to the adventure company, and an informal atmosphere was constructed. The fact that all had higher university degrees also helped to form a mutual co-interpretive fellowship. The phenomenological interview design let the informants dominate the initial course of the dialogue, but the researcher became more active as the conversation developed. The diary and sequential story that was told represented input for later conversations about transformative periods during the experience. This is how evidences from consumption practices guided the interpretations instead of mere ideographic accounts. The primary aim

was to allow participants to articulate meanings that constituted a personalized understanding of the focal wilderness canoeing experiences (Thompson et al., 1989). The data were analyzed according to the hermeneutic framework, i.e. through part/whole spiral logic of (pre)understanding-interpretation-understanding, and with the aim of meaning condensation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

## FINDINGS

### **The prospect of transformation: Consumer resources**

Consumer resources, understood as the personal history, skills and knowledge brought to the consumption experience (Thompson, 1997), are important for understanding extraordinary experiences with a high degree of consumer involvement, extensive co-creation effort, and intensive emotional experience (Arnould and Price, 1993). A socio-cultural overtone of the romantic wilderness was accounted for by all of canoeing consumers. They expected, for example, to see wild animals and live a basic life in nature. While the mystic connotations meant a lot to inexperienced consumers, a different type of romanticism applied to the experienced consumers. They emphasised a desire for a break from their daily urban life, and the wilderness “inside outdoor living” (Bernt, 3/11) capacitated an escape.

*“I use the canoe to get into nature, out into quietness, to recuperate from daily matters ... I feel the term tourist is modern ... for those that only shall out on a canoe trip. It is what everybody shall do. A kind of fashion.” (Bernt, 1/5<sup>1</sup>, male, 26, post graduate student)*

*“I like nature very much. To be in nature is significant to me. Not to be watching nature from a distance, but to be in it.” (Magda, 1/10, female, 53, teacher)*

*“It does something to my interior and me. It has something to do with living in the city. It has to do with the contrast of living somewhat primitive. One has to use creative and different aspects of oneself during experiences ... It is the quietness and the calmness. One sees reality from a different perspective as compared to ordinary life.” (Trygve, 1/4, male, 26, graduate student)*

Several of the participants described their urban lives as a “juggling” lifestyle (Thompson, 1997: 137); i.e., feeling pressed for time, having to be continuously on the go, and being frustrated by all of the responsibilities that one faces. Being familiar with

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<sup>1</sup> This reference, (1/5), is to be read the following way: “1” refers to the first interview and “5” refers to the page of the transcribed document. The rest of the quotations follow this logic.

experiences “inside” wilderness, i.e., being situated according to the logic of nature, the skilled consumers knew that the upcoming experience was one among several nature-based experiences that they longed for.

*"To be happy means to have no influence over nature. Because I control my surroundings in relation to myself a great deal during ordinary life. And the feeling of not having control in nature; it is inconceivably pleasant." (Sanna, 3/7, female, 33, social worker)*

The prospect of an extraordinary activity is strung together with consumers' broader life narratives from the past and into possible imagined futures (Ahuvia, 2005). It was neither the canoeing activity nor the particular place that was most important to the skilled consumers. Instead, an escape into an “inside-outdoor nature lifestyle” (Bernt) together with friends and family was made possible. This is why the skilled consumers tended to distance themselves from the tourist role, as they viewed tourists as valuing the nature and the canoe trip, and not the nature lifestyle rendered possible through a canoe. The skilled consumers have an existential attachment to nature that exceeds the more romantic experiential focus of the unskilled consumers:

*"A wonderful, quiet river. Almost as being at the bottom of a canyon because the trees mirror in the water on both sides. The trees and the boughs make beautiful tree-sculptures. A lot of fishes leap by the bridge. Ducks with their family, brown head, grey, brown, black bodies. The ducks cannot be found on the West Coast. My daughter thinks it is beautiful: 'We can go here again - can't we?'" (Anna, diary/day 1, female, 40, teacher)*

### **The “twilight zone” between lifestyles**

Consumers who have prior experiences with outdoor life and wilderness can be described as “the skilled consumer” and they know how to transform into the wilderness experience. They have learned that a certain transformative period will occur during the preparation phase and perhaps early wilderness adventure phase. They know a priori that a state of inside-outdoor immersion will be reached, but none of the experienced wilderness canoers reported immediate transformation. Just like the concert consumers of Carù and Cova (2006), consumers face progressive transformation.

*"In a way, it does not happen consciously. Maybe the first two or three hours it happens consciously; I am sitting there thinking about problems. But then they*

*disappear into the subconscious, and I focus more and more on activities and aspects around me – before I achieve a here and now experience. It simply takes a while before I am able to distance from my work situation.” (Sanna, 3/2-3, female, 33, social worker)*

*“During the initial hours of the trip I had to leave my previous life behind. I had to sort things out. But it happened automatically in a way. There are some hours where I am not really doing what I am doing [paddling, wilderness experiencing]. A part of me is still occupied with yesterday and last week.” (Bernt, 2/5, male, 26, post graduate student)*

The activity of paddling and the novel surroundings are important to the social worker Sanna. She states that paddling distances her from everyday projects at work, and the demanding bodily activity of paddling helps her become more and more immersed. The preparation phase and the start of the wilderness adventure can be interpreted metaphorically as a “twilight zone” where the skilled consumers progressively leave an urban lifestyle behind and attain a wilderness lifestyle. From an experiential point of view, thoughts are distinguished by work projects while the body simultaneously belongs to a wilderness context.

During the preparation phase, all the tourists state that elements of everyday life appear as a condition for leaving it. Some tourists refer to the initial transformation metaphorically as a "process of liberation" from a modern strenuous living toward a “feeling of freedom” (Bernt, 2/5, Magda, 2/9). Others refer to the necessity of leaving behind “everyday stress” (Trygve, 1/5, Sanna, 2/7). Even when consumers belong to the wilderness adventure phase, the concerns for everyday life are still part of them. This is how Bernt reports everyday plans are sorted out the second day.

*“As usual, the day has provided quietness to enjoy life, even if it is physically strenuous and the rain is pouring down. I have a lot of plans for what to do when I get back home. The plans have become clear.” (Bernt, diary/day 2, male, 26, post graduate student)*

What distinguish the experiences during the twilight zones? The stories of the skilled consumers show that although communion with nature is the goal (see Arnould and Price, 1993), their experience is marked by “struggle” between realities or lifestyles. The urban lifestyle inhabits the mind (e.g., through work projects), while the wilderness lifestyle inhabits the body (through activities). Relying on Csíkszentmihályi (1997), the challenge of canoeing

is not enough to transform the highly skilled consumer. One could argue that their body adjusts to the canoeing activity too easily and that the psychic energy is not yet oriented towards the consumer context. These consumers suffer because they really desire the wilderness lifestyle but are unable to immerse into it.

The twilight zone is indicated as various processes of “assurance” that involve (1) assuring that one has remembered “everything”, (2) assuming that mending is possible when one gets back from the trip, or (3) solving projects self-reflectively or together with co-tourists.

*“It is about assuring myself that everything was ok when I left work, so that I may relax. For when I am finished with that process of assurance, only then am I able to dedicate myself fully to here and now.” (3/10, Bernt, male, 26, post graduate student)*

Yet others enter “inside-outdoor living” through the "meaning of forgetting through activities" (Sanna, 3/1). The following quotes refer to the latter:

*"To live at present is something I never do ordinarily ... Worries are related to planning. In nature, time has no significance. What tomorrow brings has no significance. Then, I am able to relax. That is freedom to me." (Sanna, 3/1, female, 33, social worker)*

*"To be happy means to have no influence ... Because I control my surroundings in relation to myself a great deal during ordinary life. And the feeling of not having control is inconceivably pleasant." (Magda, 3/7, female, 53, teacher)*

The wilderness canoers desire to *become* novel people for some time. When they go through the twilight zone and face the wilderness lifestyle, some refer to the emotional experience as a "feeling of intoxication" (Sanna, 3/14). Although they may face different transformations for reaching transcendence, each challenge can be interpreted as an experience of renewal. The skilled consumers know how to succeed in transforming towards renewal. To them, the cultural meaning of conversion in nature resembles a renewal ritual. One accepts that a certain rite of passage is necessary for reaching the emotional state of being immersed in wilderness. One could argue that the modern consumers try to restore a form of coherence (Ladwein, 2007), and the skilled canoers know what experience that capacitates conversion.

Time can be significant when consumers try to enter immersion during extraordinary experiences (Cotte, Ratneshwar, and Mick, 2004). The wilderness canoers are not only embedded in the past and future during present experiences, but their approach to time that they bring with them has an influence on how they cope with transformative challenges. Some are used to making productive use of time during everyday life (e.g., Sanna), while others are used to reassuring that they are on track with projects (e.g., Bernt), or both. It is a challenge to transform into temporality that demands an attitude of spontaneously moving along nature time. While research on transcendent consumer experiences find flow as a suspension of temporal reality and a sense of separation from the mundane (Schouten et al., 2007), we find that the temporal reality during the initial phases of the experience is marked by everyday life and that aspects of the mundane play an important role for the wilderness canoers.

These accounts point at paradoxes of consumer transformations. A hermeneutic-phenomenological inquiry (Thompson et al., 1989) into the consumer's lifeworld reveals a type of "schizophrenic" souring between various horizons of understanding because the lifestyle of daily life is more dominant than the consumer would wish for. While the elements of the experiencescape, such as other consumers, nature and the canoe help in changing the consumers towards a state of transcendence, it is not enough to engulf the person experiencing the adventure. The staging of the adventure company and the action (i.e., canoeing) is not enough to avoid a schizophrenic twilight zone. Compared to other studies of time-pressed consumers where products and services receive a higher-order benefit of reducing stress (Thompson, 1997), the wilderness canoeing context can instead be viewed as a therapeutic activity that enables a forcing out of one timestyle and into another. According to such a perspective, the higher-order benefit would be personal satisfaction because they compensated the time-pressured daily life with spontaneous inside-outdoor experience where little planning is possible. As such, the consumers would escape everyday projects for a while so that one may be able to retain complicated tasks in the future.

### **Challenges of facing the unknown**

The unskilled paddlers did not have any prior experience with wilderness canoeing. They lacked canoeing skills and how to live a wilderness lifestyle. After the rental firm provided an introductory paddling course, the consumers would improve their paddling skills at a lake nearby. However, improving paddling skills was not enough for mastering wilderness canoeing. Some spend two days adjusting to the logic of paddling, the wilderness lifestyle, or

the novel relationship to co-paddlers. Anna and Unni refer to their transformation as a “struggle to cope”.

*"During the two first days, we did not know how to cope, did not know what was ahead, and were not able to foresee things. We were not used to thinking; 'oh no, our clothes are wet and we need to dry them'. I am not used to thinking like that." (Anna, 3/14, female, 40, teacher)*

*"When one meets things that are unknown, that one does not know anything about, what is left is feelings and intuition. One has to tune into something other than the rational reason. One has in a way nothing which may help ... Although I know a little about the team partner and the nature - the natural forces - it is not a situation which I felt I mastered." (Unni, 3/15, female, 34, physic-therapist)*

Unni points to a lack of understanding as an obstacle in adjusting to nature. She is not talking about the inside-outdoor experience that the skilled consumers desired. Lack of understanding refers to how to cope as wilderness adventurers. Both Anna and Unni were travelling alone with their daughters, and they were trying to figure out how to paddle and how to understand nature signs together with their daughters. They are permeated by the widespread romantic ideal of the wilderness, but they are partly incapacitated as unskilled. This means that trial and error learning mark the first half of the experience. When the watercourse is easy (e.g., lakes), the teammates can focus on nature. However, when they face rivers and canals they are forced to resume focus on paddling.

While Arnould and Price (1993) found experiential themes such as *communitas* (positive connection to others) and harmony with nature as salient aspects of white water rafting, evidence from the unskilled consumers shows that part of the experience is marked by disharmony and conflict. No trace of the romantic could be found when Anna ended up in conflict with her daughter the second day of the trip. It started to rain, and they were faced with great challenges coping in wilderness. Anna expected her daughter to “get out of the mother-daughter thing quicker than she actually did.” (3/7). The crisis escalated into a climax where the daughter took off into the woods with a “goodbye mother”. The relationships the two first days were mainly mother-daughter, while the two last days they were described as a partnership. Their everyday roles were consequently distinct when they met challenges the first two days and they ended up in quarrels quite easily. During the interview two months after the trip, Anna realised that she had a goal of “making [her] daughter responsible” (3/8) during the canoeing holiday.

The unskilled consumers suffer because their understanding of the experiential context suffers. Consequently, they are not able to resume the proper thinking, reading, seeing, or judging of wilderness because interpretation in a way is incapacitated. During the first two days, Anna keeps resuming herself on behalf of activities (e.g., hiking) that are really a misfit within the current context. Although risk is argued to be an important ingredient of extraordinary experiences (Celsi et al., 1993), too little staging and supervision may devalue the quality of the experience. It may make an extraordinary experience dangerous and not very magical.

While research from river rafting shows the positive experience of magical emotions and how these change people's relations with one another (Arnould and Price, 1993), the result here shows that lack of coping through appropriate methods and logic can turn the magical into an experience of fear. Some of the unskilled even considered calling the adventure company to end the trip. Often, the magical is staged by providers through, for example, romantic themes and narratives (Mossberg, 2007). Evidence here shows that romantic constructions from the adventure company can complicate transformations because they may cause unrealistic expectations of the upcoming challenges.

### **Emotional frustrating transformations**

Although consumers immerse into an experience, this does not mean that they necessarily stay immersed for the rest of the experience (Carù and Cova, 2007a). Instead, several consumers account for how they are transformed in and out of a state of immersion throughout the adventure. This is often experienced as a surprise because it dramatically alters how they view themselves and their world. Towards the end of the trip, some consumers turn self-reflective:

*"The trip runs toward its end, and I have started to prepare for the journey back home. I notice that I think more about domestic activities. Things that have to be done, etc. I have a paper that must be delivered in 11 days." (Trygve, diary day 4)*

*"The stress starts again, and then I feel a bad conscience is arriving. It is about everything I should have done but have not been able to do yet. About everything I have postponed for 'tomorrow'. All this suddenly turned up this [last] day ... I think I am preparing for my return back to reality [laughter]." (David, 3/4)*

*"I should have been more clever in finishing things so that the resuming of everydayness would go more smoothly. Now I received a 'hangover'." (Trygve, 3/6)*

The consumers' reorientation involves transformations from the experience (presence) towards focus on projects that belong to their ordinary lifestyles. It is a type of awakening from immersion. Why do they sour away from the experience? Although extraordinary experiences are understood to be sacred with transcendental qualities (Tumbat and Belk, 2011) so that consumers may return to an everyday world as renewed individuals (Arnould and Price, 1993), the results here show that transcendent qualities may also represent paradoxical experiences when focus, during the end of the trip, is turned towards everyday projects again. Such transcendence is not necessarily experienced as a positive transformation.

The results show the experiential ambiguity that alternation between various worlds may resume. Consumers do not only experience a twilight zone of transformation during the initial phases of the trip; the twilight zone experiences later on the trip are accounted for as an emotional frustration because they "return" to the everyday projects too early. However, there is not only an individual transcendence. The diaries show that this is a topic between teammates and within the group of paddlers, and they try to make sense as to why it is happening. One could argue that they face a transformation that has its origin in the same challenge that they faced during the twilight zone at the initial phases. They become aware that everyday projects have an important impact on their lives, and this makes them "depressed" (Trygve and Sanna).

### **The paradox of becoming a tourist**

Others account for a different type of transformation that turns out to be a quite paradoxical experience. The diary provided evidence of increased frustration during the trip. Already on the first day Bernt writes: "[I] think there may be too many others who are paddling. After four hours, we saw 10 canoes!" (Bernt, day 1). The fourth day culminates with the following statement:

#### *"Wilderness week.*

*There are too many people and too many traces of humans here to call it a 'wilderness week'. For example, all the recommended tent spots have been occupied." (Bernt, diary/day 4, male, 26, post graduate student)*

Bernt and his co-paddler state that they receive a "tourist feeling" the second day. They feel they "become" tourists due to the enclavised surroundings and the staged experience. It makes him reflect about the whole trip:

*“Today, I am hit by a feeling that we may be ‘tourists’ after all. Everything is decided in advance; Where we shall paddle, go ashore, and go into the water. The paddling tempo is almost the only thing we can decide.” (Bernt, diary/day 2).*

Bernt is one of the consumers who is hit by a transformation, which he really detests; i.e., becoming aware that he is a consumer. He faces a break when he realises that they travel according to the dramatization of the adventure company. Therefore, according to Bernt, they end up as “outside-outdoor experiencers”, just like the tourists.

The paradoxes that are accounted for here indicate the multi-dimensional and multi-faceted nature of extraordinary experiences. It is not evident that the extraordinary represents something distanced and magical away from the everyday mundane. Instead, results show how everydayness become an important aspect of the extraordinary through transcendent souring and that paradoxes may complement ideals about how positively renewing the extraordinary might be. Evidence here shows that sacred renewal according to a univocal romantic wilderness ideal may not hold for nature-based extraordinary experiences. Experiences emerge in a complex web of transformations during consumer experiences, and the dynamic nature in and out of immersion calls for a view where the romantic does not necessarily last throughout the experiences. One could argue that consumers might, at any time, be situated with a cognitive focus that does not match the bodily belonging at presence and that transformations throughout experiences may represent challenges to consumers.

## DISCUSSION

### **The ordinary aspects of the extraordinary**

Extraordinary experiences are believed to provide more intense, framed and stylish practices that stand out from normality as special and particularly memorable moments (Abrahams, 1986). Immersion and transcendence experiences have become interesting topics within consumer research (Carù and Cova, 2006; Hansen and Mossberg, 2013; Schouten et al., 2007). The present research shows that transformation in and out of immersion may mark consumer experiences to a large extent. Instead of the theorized immediate or progressive characteristics of transformation towards immersion (Carù and Cova, 2007a) through

operations of appropriation (Carù and Cova, 2006), and a linear understanding of entry, immersion and exit phases (Borrie and Roggenbuck, 2001), the present findings show a *multi-phasic, dynamic and emergent characteristics of transformation in and out of immersion*. Our results show that a more complex schema of transformation may occur throughout extraordinary experiences.

Extraordinary experiences are believed to offer magic, communion, spiritual enrichment and the sublime (Thompson, 2000) in contrast to the structure of everyday life. Consequently, research on consumer experiences, such as river rafting, shows that “the themes communion with nature, *communitas* or connecting to others, and extension and renewal of self” are important characteristics of extraordinary experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993: 33). Such characteristics were also reported by the well-educated, urban, wilderness canoers, but only during parts of the trip. This research shows that wilderness canoers also face transformations that are not only magical, filled with communion and spiritual enriching, *but also challenging and conflicting*. Extraordinary experiences can be distinguished by paradoxes and ambiguity when consumers move through the various phases of enclavised experiences. In addition to Arnould and Price’s (1993) findings, the various relationships (to nature, co-paddlers, self) turned out to be challenging transformations because *the theorised distinction between the ordinary and extraordinary does not hold for the present context*. Pointing at important transformations, the consumers end up talking about their desires, involvements, imaginations, and how the experiences are interconnected with other aspects of their lives (Desforges, 2000). Consumers report that everyday projects (e.g., at work), everyday roles (e.g., mother-daughter), and symbolic views on nature (e.g., the “inside-outdoor” ideal) tend to influence the experience in a paradoxical manner. In line with recent research (Prebensen, Vittersø, and Dahl, 2013), our results show that *consumer personal resources*, i.e., the personal history, skills and knowledge brought to the consumption experience (Thompson, 1997), to a large extent distinguish experiences and *the transformations* that consumers face.

### **Challenges during transformation**

The results show a distinction between skilled and unskilled consumers with regards to transformations. While the unskilled report a desire for the romantic mysticism of the wilderness, the skilled consumers have a goal of transforming into nature time (“inside-outdoor experience”). Similar to findings from kayaking (Varley, 2011), the unskilled canoers

have a goal of achieving adventurous escape sharing experiences of an alien, marginal, and liminoid world. Our results show that these consumers face challenging transformations when the activity in wilderness becomes too alien and cooperation is put to a test. The skilled, on the other hand, have a goal of transforming into a (familiar) contrast to everyday life that they know will provide a different lifestyle. *While the unskilled consumers feel connected to fellow team members as important, the skilled tend to focus on connection to nature.*

The more complex scheme of transformations occurs when the unskilled consumers do not reach immersion due to misinterpreting nature and lacking an ability to cope. The roles of the co-paddlers are put to the test, and reinventing their relationship is necessary for coping. Schouten (1991) argues that much consumption dynamism stems from the goal of reinvention and seeking desired roles. The skilled consumers face (twilight zone) transformations because they only partly succeed in reaching the inside-outdoor desired role. At any point of the experience, the inside-outdoor immersion may suffer because everyday projects haunt them or because the experience is incompatible with their self-image. Instead of coping as wilderness explorers, they cope with their self-identity turning self-reflective and to some extent existential.

The notion of community does not signify a singular community such as McAlexander et al. (2002), Kozinets (2002) or Celsi et al. (1993) report. The interpretations here support a *multi-faceted understanding of communities* (Tumbat and Belk, 2011), where canoe teams are independent of other teams but interdependent within the teams. For example, some skilled canoers hated it when they met other teams simply because they expected and wanted to paddle in the wilderness alone. Others struggled against other teams for the best paddling routes, fireplaces, and camping spots. *The sense of belonging that is theorised in much extraordinary consumer research is thus not supported here.* Most canoe teams are concerned about their own performance.

### **Role conflicts**

We think the consumers are *caught in different paradoxical situations* when they want to have an extraordinary experience in the wilderness. One example of such a paradox is the skilled consumer who wants to be a part of nature on his own premises, although he is on a packaged tour and therefore a tourist by definition. Another example is the unskilled consumer who wants a true experience of nature, but cannot get it because she must concentrate so hard on canoeing due to lack of skills.

It looks like we have results from our research that is not in line with the results reported by the literature we have reviewed here. To analyse our results we think a different theoretical approach is needed. We are dealing with *role conflicts at different levels*. The skilled consumers do have the role as a tourist, but some do not want that role. Bernt and his co-paddler discovered their role as tourists and hated it. It did not comply with their self-image as wilderness explorers. Trygve and his co-paddlers, who were also skilled, point at conflicts because their everyday roles as student or employee seem to preoccupy their thoughts at various points of the trip. The unskilled consumers strive to become tourists and thereby have the ability to experience the extraordinary. These consumers have difficulties in leaving the everyday role behind; e.g., as a mother, daughter or husband, and get into the role of the tourist. Unni and Anna have explicated such conflicts when travelling with their children. They have a role conflict because it is more or less impossible to leave the role as mother and child at home and define some other roles for this situation. Thus, there are tourists who desperately want to be a tourist but who have trouble in becoming one. There is more than a role conflict in this situation. There are different paradoxes connected to these role conflicts, which is why there are no easy solutions to the troubles these consumers find themselves in when they want an extraordinary wilderness experience.

A classical way to understand role theory and especially role conflicts is through Goffman (1972). For our purpose, Goffman's concept of "situated roles", which can throw light on some of the aspects in our results, is particularly important. Relevant in this context, his perspective refers to the fact that *people often do not want to incumbent the role they have*. This is either because people do not feel that they have the skills to perform the role as we saw in relation to the unskilled consumers, or because their self-image does not fit into that role, as it did with the skilled consumers who did not perceive themselves as tourists. Goffman defines this as a role distance where "the individual is actually denying not the role but the virtual self that is implied in the role" (Goffman, 1972: 95), and "the term role distance was introduced to refer to actions which effectively convey some disdainful detachment of the performer from a role he is performing." (Goffman, 1972: 98). For Goffman (1972), the role is always performed in a particular situated activity system and it is a premise that a person can have a simultaneous multiplicity of selves. Despite the different selves, which are not created by the person, but drawn from society, the person will always try to twist and turn these selves to have the controlling definition of the situation. When this manoeuvre is not possible, then *we have a role conflict which leads to role distance*. We have

seen this happen for both unskilled consumers who cannot handle the situation due to a lack of skills and the skilled consumers who perceive themselves beyond the role as a tourist.

We found two main ideal types of role conflicts among the consumers. 1) Those who do not want to be tourists but who have to accept the inevitability on this type of tour, 2) those who want to be tourists, but who are incapable throughout the trip due to a) lack of skills in these surroundings, b) cognitive transcendence away from the experience, or those who strive in c) developing appropriate social roles. In these situations, we find paradoxes at different levels. One way of theorising these paradoxes is by using Bateson's (1972) concept of Double Bind, which is not founded on a contradiction, but on a paradox. In popular terms, it can be expressed as: "You're damned if you do, and damned if you don't." (Wilden, 1980: 121).

Both the skilled and unskilled *consumers are caught in double bind situations at different levels*. The skilled consumer does not have to worry about how to manage the trip, but is instead in a role conflict because the role as an employer has to be left behind, which can be difficult. Our metaphor of the "twilight zone" shows that such transformation haunts the consumers with a "juggling" lifestyle (see Thompson, 1997). The last hindrance for an authentic wilderness experience is of a different character because it is a double bind situation where the role as a tourist does not comply with the consumer's self-image. However, the paddlers are tourists on a tour like this. To transcend the double bind situation they must either give up this type of tour or create an even stronger illusion of not being tourists and hope not to meet other tourists while canoeing. Or they must think, "I don't want to be a tourist, but I am!"

The unskilled consumer is caught in another double bind situation because he really wants the extraordinary wilderness experience but lacks skills and has to spend too much energy and concentration simply handling the canoe together with the co-paddler. This "I will, but I can't" is a double bind situation. It seems like the unskilled consumer has some of the same role conflicts as the skilled consumer. The unskilled are able to leave the role as an employee behind, but some end in a serious role conflict towards their co-paddler. The best example is the mothers who brought their children on the tour. It is a double bind because it is almost impossible to leave the role as parent and child, and all of the everyday troubles, behind.

## CONCLUSION

We asked the following question: How do consumers cope with transformations in and out of immersion throughout long-lasting extraordinary experiences? Based on a multi-phasic, hermeneutic, approach, our findings show how lasting *extraordinary wilderness canoeing experiences are dynamic, multi-faceted and emergent* as consumers face various challenges during transformations. While a major part of research today focuses on the co-creation efforts of consumers when they combine various on-site resource of experiencescapes (Mossberg, 2007; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004), our findings point to the *importance of understanding consumer resources that are brought into experiencescapes* in addition to on-site physical, social and cultural resources of experiencescapes (Arnould et al., 2006).

Our study shows that the *distinction held between the ordinary-extraordinary, with positive connotations about extraordinary experiences, do not hold within the present context*. A reason for this may be that prior consumer research has been too preoccupied with the extraordinary as communitarian, sacred and romantic, as a (dualist) contrast to the ordinary as mundane (Carù and Cova, 2003; Tumbat and Belk, 2011). Following consumer transformations throughout the various consumption phases *we also find evidence of struggle and conflict* related to theorised drivers of extraordinary experiences and we hereby questioning whether some of the well-known research within this area have an adequate perception of this phenomenon (e.g., Arnould and Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Sharpe, 2005).

Immersion and transcendence have been theorised to be important aspects of extraordinary experiences and for transforming into experiences (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013; Schouten et al., 2007). While skilled or expert consumers are theorised as competent to become *immediately immersed* (Carù and Cova, 2007a), *this does not hold for the skilled consumers of the present study*, and we have to questioning how this has been dealt with in previous studies (e.g., Carù and Cova, 2007a). The inconsistencies we have addressed in the immersion and transformation processes need to be studied in different contexts and supported by much more elaborated datasets.

We have shown that there are paradoxical experiences of role conflicts when everyday life has influence during extraordinary experiences. The role conflicts are not only between individuals and teams on-site, as Tumbat and Belk (2011) argue. They can also be a transcendent souring between roles, which is nevertheless experienced as a conflict. A

*common trait of the experiences is that they originate from everyday roles.* The consumers are annoyed because they are prohibited from reaching their experiential goals of inside-outdoor nature experience (skilled) or as tourists seeking the romantic wilderness from a canoe (unskilled). The paradoxical double bind situation is dramatic to the consumers because there are no solutions to this within the current frames of the experiencescape. How one copes with that in such situations could be the topic of further research. This indicates that studies of extraordinary experiences should consider going deeper into role theories. We have only scratched the surface of this phenomenon. Based on our study should role theory have a much more significant position in the study of experiences, both at the theoretical and empirical level.

This study has a limited empirical foundation. Instead of producing a positive contribution to the field, we have findings that give reason to questioning some of the taken for granted assumptions in our field. We have raised more questions than answers, but we are giving directions to future research, which could reveal prolific insights into the consumption of experiences.

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