

Ann Heidi Hansen

Memorable moments. Consumer immersion in nature-based tourist experiences

Life is not measured by the breaths we take,
but by the moments that take our breath away

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When I started my PhD studies four years ago, I had a mental picture of myself standing on a high diving board ready to take a big leap into the unknown. I wanted to challenge myself by doing something new, daring, exciting - out of my comfort zone. And I certainly did get my challenge! I have many times felt my stomach turn as I have felt myself flurrying in the air like a baby bird learning to fly for the first time. However, I have also shared many wonderful moments together with fellow colleagues and PhD students. At the end of what has been a four year journey, I feel very privileged to have been given the opportunity to study and learn more about immersion, a concept which I feel lies at the heart of the tourist experience. Writing this dissertation has indeed been *an experience* in its own right! It has given me new perspectives, both on an industry in which I have worked for all my adult life, on what it means to be a researcher, and, indeed, on my own life.

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dedicate a warm thank-you to my informants who chose to spend their precious time with me, sharing their personal feelings and reflections. I hope I have done you justice and shown respect in the way I have analyzed your stories.

Finally, I just hope that I, after this dissertation, will still be able to become immersed myself without ruining this feeling through meticulous analyses. The poet David Whyte (1994, p. 154) wrote that there is a portion of us “that understands physically what it means to live in eternity, where eternity is not an endless amount of time but an experience out of time, free from the stress of never being enough or having enough, a numinous experience of the present where we forget ourselves in the consummation of the moment.” Being immersed in the moment is a wonderful feeling and an important essence of life. It has been a privilege to write this dissertation and to get to know this feeling more intimately.

Ann Heidi Hansen

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ABSTRACT

Peoples' desire for experiences has received increased research attention during the last decades and has become the platform for business development in firms. The quest for memorable moments is at the heart of the tourism experience. Norway is an expensive destination, and the country therefore has to develop extraordinary experiences in order to give tourists value for money. To ensure a prosperous tourism industry in the North we consequently need to transform our many natural wonders into memorable and accessible experiences. One important element of extraordinary experiences is consumer immersion. Consumer immersion refers to those experiences when the individual is totally focused on what is happening in the moment. Immersion can be characterized as intense, extraordinary and transcendent moments of being 'here and now'. They represent meaningful, valuable and memorable moments for the consumer. Some people describe them as the "goose bump moments".

The purpose of this study is to contribute towards the conceptual and empirical exploration of consumer immersion within nature-based tourism experiences. This dissertation consists of six articles; four conceptual articles and two empirical articles. The first two articles discuss and elaborate on a multi-relational understanding of consumer experiences within tourism. The third article addresses the current understanding of consumer immersion as a key to extraordinary experiences. Article number four and five explore the role and performance of tour guides in co-creating immersion for the tourists, whereas the last article is an empirical article exploring how tourists become immersed during nature-based tourist experiences.

The study makes several contributions. The first strand of contribution is linked to the multi-relational approach to the consumer experience. A conceptual model based on a being-in-the-world ontology is proposed using four core concepts wherein consumers are situated in and across; time, context, body and interaction. This relational perspective emphasizes the dynamic and holistic aspects of the tourist experience. Second, contributions are made to the conceptual understanding of immersion. A new definition of immersion is proposed incorporating both the spatial and temporal elements of the consumer experience. In addition, a conceptual model for the underlying foundations and facilitators for immersion is presented. The third strand of contribution comes in the form of new theory development regarding the importance of tour guides' role and performance in facilitating consumer immersion. A theoretical model is developed and subsequently explored empirically. The final strand of contributions is linked to an empirical study focusing on where, when, and how tourists experience immersion within nature-based tourism experiences. The findings identify two types of immersion; immersion as 'being', which is triggered by connectedness with the beauty of nature or gazing at wildlife, and immersion as 'doing', which is triggered by moments of mastering physical activities. The two different types of immersion are mutually exclusive, appear during different stages of the experience and provide different values for the tourist. The study both confirms that immersion is pivotal to tourists' value creation during nature-based tourism experiences and also expands the existing theory by suggesting multiple types of immersion that require different facilitation.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and motivation

“To live in the moment, for the moment, is an amazing thing if you can find some way to do it. I think this is one of my top five experiences for sure. Absolutely, yeah! Just staying in an extraordinary landscape, and I loved the bonding with the animals and experience of something that was just so different from my everyday life.” (Sophie, 46 years, London)

This comment was made by Sophie, one of my informants, a few days after we had participated together on a three days winter dog sledding experience on Spitsbergen, an island in the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard in the Arctic. I think many of us dream about, long for, and struggle to “live in the moment, for the moment” as Sophie here points out. Various scientific disciplines, such as for example psychology and consumer behavior, have been interested in understanding these special moments, and one of the concepts used to describe these moments is *immersion*. This dissertation investigates consumer immersion within nature-based tourism experiences. The concept of immersion refers to those memorable experiences when the individual is totally focused on what is happening in the moment. It is an intense, emotional, extraordinary and positive peak moment when nothing else seems to matter, and time either seems to fly or stand still. Some people describe these moments as the “wow” or “goose bump moments” making a lasting impression and which you remember best after the experience. Immersion can of course occur in all aspects of life. However, many of us seek these kinds of experiences when we choose our holiday destinations and activities. We are searching for good memories. We seek the value inherent in the powerful

experience of seeing or doing something meaningful and which ultimately becomes an important part of our life story. Immersion is important in order to understand how consumers consume in extraordinary contexts. The intriguing question is - what makes tourists become immersed?

Writing this PhD dissertation is of course influenced by who I am - as a researcher, as a human being, and as a result of the life I have lived. I will first therefore give the reader an idea of why I am a tourism researcher and why I ended up studying immersion. I grew up on a farm in a small and beautiful place in Northern-Norway called Ågskardet. The summers are one of the busiest times at a farm, and we never had time to go on holidays during this season. The only two exceptions being one week when I was 7 years old and one week when I was 14 years old. The summers in the north were so rainy during those years that our family had to escape across the border to Sweden to “dry up”. So how did I, a girl from a farm with little holiday experience, end up working in the tourism industry? Well, my own interest for the tourist experience was sparked on my first “real” summer job. During the summer of 1987 I was one of two German and English speaking youngsters working at the tourist information at the maelstrom Saltstraumen outside Bodø. People swarmed to this attraction from all corners of the world to see this phenomenon which is the world’s strongest maelstrom. Many of them visited me in the little tourist information office trailer, which was a converted hot-dog stand - still with a subtle smell of frankfurter sausages in it. My job was to give national and international tourists the timetable for the maelstrom, exchange their traveler-checks, help them with their bookings, answer questions about my region and help solve all their minor and major problems. Some of these encounters turned into longer and interesting conversations. I invited them into my trailer for a cup of tea and they enthusiastically told me about what they had experienced and what had made an

impression on them. They talked about the fresh air, the “magic” light, the beautiful scenery and how they enjoyed the solitude and lack of people. They were thrilled to see a moose, to catch a fish and to hike all night in the midnight sun. I was surprised and fascinated. I saw my own place through their eyes. Everyday experiences that I took for granted, were small adventures for them and made their eyes shine as they told me their stories. It made me reflect on my own life, and it sparked my interest in the intriguing tourist experience. Why can people have such different experiences of the same phenomenon? What makes the deepest impression on people on holiday and why? What constitutes memorable moments? I started my academic career by entering a bachelor study in tourism at Finnmark University College that next autumn and continued by taking a MSc in Tourism at University of Strathclyde in Scotland.

My original fascination for the tourist experience followed me during my 16 consecutive years of working within different tourism development projects in my home county of Nordland. During this time I have always felt very privileged and humble about being able to work in the tourism industry. We work with one of the most precious and valuable times in people’s lives – their holidays. It is a time for realizing dreams, learning new activities, seeing something new, recharging the batteries and spending time with loved ones. Therefore, I have always had deep respect for what I consider to be the core essence of tourism – to give the visitors to our part of the world the best experiences of their lives. Prior to commencing on this PhD, I worked as brand manager at Nordland Tourist Board.¹ In the processes of working together with the local tourism industry to develop brand strategy, we had to condense the essence of what the tourist experience in our region might entail. Thus, at the heart of the brand strategy the focus was on the experience of the

¹ which was merged with Troms and Finnmark Tourist Boards and became Northern Norway Tourist Board in 2009

individual tourist. How do their encounters and interactions with the natural surroundings, local communities, culture, and the tourism industry itself shape their experiences? How can the tourism industry facilitate positive experiences and contribute to satisfied customers? In this process we realized that there was a need for more knowledge about the tourist experience and systematic development of valuable competence for the local tourism industry.

In the same period, two major development projects focusing on the tourist experience were established; the Arena Innovative Experience project and the Northern Insight project. I became involved as a project administrator² for the Arena Innovative Experiences project. This has been a 4 year project, initiated by the local Innovation Norway office in Nordland, and started up in 2008. The Arena Program is a national programme intended to promote more innovation in business and industry through collaboration between businesses, research and development institutions, and the public sector (the so-called “triple helix”). Arena Innovative Experiences included 33 small and medium-sized tourism enterprises in Northern Norway and the arctic island of Spitsbergen. All participating companies were involved in experience production and focused on increasing the quality of the experience for their customers. The vision for the cluster was “Together we shall inspire our guests with world-class experiences” and the main goal was to double the turn-over within 5 years. The Arena project was invited to discuss relevant research questions for the tourism industry by University of Nordland in their application process prior to the Northern Insight project. This project is a consortium of 6 research and development institutions in Northern Norway. It started up in 2009. The main aim is to carry out high quality research into service innovation in experience-based tourism and into co-creation of values for companies, consumers,

² A 20 % position

and the tourism and experience industries in Northern Norway (Northern-inSIGHTs, 2009). The project focuses on three central thematic areas (work packages) and includes a total of 15 sub-projects. The five-year Northern Insight project was the largest tourism research project ever financed in Norway in its time.

The idea of and opportunity for writing this dissertation was born in this dynamic triple helix collaboration. My absence from academia had lasted a long time, but when the PhD position within the Northern Insight project was announced, I found it enticing and my former work experience aroused my curiosity about the concept of consumer immersion. In January of 2010 I started my PhD work linked to one of the seven sub-projects within working package 2, “adding value in experience-based tourism”, which aims to develop a scientific knowledge base to help determine what makes Northern Norway's experiences valuable for our guests and hence also of course for companies (Northern-inSIGHTs, 2009). This study is further connected to sub-project 2.6, “extraordinary experiences and packages”, where the main objective is to explain immersion and consumer participation and involvement in creating experience value within the tourism system. The topic required that I literally had to immerse myself in previous research regarding the tourist experience in the fields of marketing, the social sciences and the experience economy.

1.2 Prior research and knowledge gaps

There is an increased focus on the subjective and emotional elements of the hedonic consumption, and on creating competitive advantages through meaningful experiences for the individual consumer (e.g., Addis and Holbrook, 2001, Holbrook, 1999, Lyck, 2008, Pine and Gilmore, 2000). Experience economy studies have emerged as a scientific paradigm during the last decade, and can be described as “a

scientific and management approach that deals with business and economic activities related to peoples' experiences" (Sundbo and Sørensen, 2013, p. 1). Hence, peoples' need for experiences has become a topic that has attracted increased research attention and as well as becoming the platform for business development in firms (Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013). The quest for new and meaningful experiences as a goal in itself is also an important aspect of tourist motivation and "reason to go" within recreational and leisure travelling. Although the search for new experiences is not a phenomenon limited to tourism, the tourism industry is founded on consumers' willingness to pay for memorable experiences (O'Dell, 2005). Tourism is one of the world's largest industries, reaching a record of 1,087 million arrivals in 2013 according to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer (WTO, 2014). Understanding different aspects of the consumer experience could be argued to be at the heart of the tourist industry. Knowledge about how to offer valuable experience for the customers is pivotal for the long term economic sustainability of tourism enterprises. One of the main puzzles of tourism research is therefore linked to what triggers memorable experiences.

The concept of experience (*Erlebnis*) was first used by German philosophers during the Romanticism (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). However, according to Gadamer the noun "Erlebnis" first came into prominent use in the 1870s, and refers to Dilthey's essay on Goethe in 1887 (Risser, 1997). It was used in an existential perspective in order to explain how people related to the world. The debate about how to understand and define 'an experience' is still ongoing. In Germanic languages there is a distinction between the participation in an on-going experience, *Erlebnis*, and accumulated experiences over a longer time period, *Erfahrung* (Larsen, 2007). Hence, both the way tourists relate to and participate in the activity as it unfolds "here and now", and what they actually remember afterwards, are

important elements of the experience construct. The difference between on-going and retrospective experience is apparent in the research on the peak-and-end effect (Kahneman et al., 1993) which argues that the peak and end moments are most important for what we remember. Hence, even though experiencing can be seen as a dynamic and an on-going activity, some moments stand out from the rest. The citation below is from Professor Daniel Kahneman who describes this phenomenon during a lecture.

There are about 20,000 moments of 3 seconds in a 16-hour day, so this is what life consists of, it consists of a sequence of moments. Each of these moments is actually very rich in experience, so if you could stop somebody and ask what is happening to you right now and a great deal is happening to us at any one of these moments. There is a goal, there is mental content, there is a physical state, there is a mood, there might be some emotional arousal. Many things are happening. And then you can ask, 'What happens to these moments?' And of course they're lost forever, they're lost without a trace mostly - that is we don't remember, we keep memories very selectively (...) [Life from the view of the remembering subject] is a narrative that consists of significant moments by their selected moments so there are moments that count, there are beginnings, there are peaks, there are endings and that's how we think of our own stories and our own life. Professor Daniel Kahneman (Mitchell, 2003).

Immersion represents one of these moments that count and can be characterized as intense emotions of being deeply involved in the on-going experience, and these are the moments that are more likely to be remembered after the event (Tung and Ritchie, 2011, Fredrickson, 2000). Consumer immersion can be argued to be

important within the experience economy and consumer research; however, very little previous research has been conducted on this concept. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) introduced experiential consumption to consumer research in their seminal article on consumer fantasies, feelings and fun. However, Thompson and his fellow researchers (Thompson et al., 1989) were the first to study the phenomenon empirically. The first study which addressed experiential consumption in a commercial nature-based tourism context was Arnould and Price (1993) in their seminal article “River Magic” about white river rafting in the Colorado river.

However, the concept of immersion has gained new interest in relation to the experience economy. Focus on how consumers are actually consuming an experience was addressed by Firat and Dholakia (1998, p. 96) who argue that there is a connection between experiences and immersion in that “life is to be produced and created, in effect, constructed through multiple experiences in which the consumer immerses”. Next, Pine and Gilmore (1999) include immersion as an one of four elements in their experience realm figure and define immersion as “becoming physically (or virtually) a part of the experience itself” (p. 31). However, the authors do not explore immersion in depth, and their use of immersion and absorption as opposite poles has been criticised as unclear (e.g., Holbrook, 2000). Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007), who subsequently tried to empirically test the experience realm concept (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), recommend further exploration on how immersion might constitute a deep esthetic and/or escapist experience related to the experiential state of flow. In addition, authors like Jantzen, Rasmussen and Vetner (2006) have criticized the ontological foundation for Pine and Gilmores’ approach to consumers as passive recipients of staged experiences.

Main contributors to the immersion concept after the millennium shift have been the two authors Carù and Cova with several articles on immersion related to consumer behaviour (Carù and Cova, 2003, Carù and Cova, 2005, Carù and Cova, 2006, Carù and Cova, 2007a, Carù and Cova, 2008). Their seminal research has focused on immersion during classical music concerts, and they argue that immersion is the means by which the consumers can access the experience (Carù and Cova, 2007a). According to their findings, a good experiential context must be thematized, enclavized and secure, and the firm can facilitate consumer immersion by managing the experiential context (ibid). Within psychology, researchers such as Mainemelis (2001, Mainemelis, 2002) have investigated immersion in relation to creativity at work. In this context, absorption is used in defining immersion; “the feeling of being fully absorbed, surrendered to, or consumed by the activity, to the point of forgetting one’s self and one’s surroundings” (Mainemelis, 2001, p. 557). Lastly, immersion has been the subject of research within gaming and virtual reality (Calleja, 2011), where immersion is described as the deepest stage of involvement when playing computer games. Jennett et al. (2008, p. 657) argue that “immersion involves a lack of awareness of time, a loss of awareness of the real world, involvement and a sense of being in the task environment”. In the gaming community, immersion is often argued as being important for the result of a good gaming experience and as being critical for game enjoyment. However, Jennett and her fellow researchers (2008) call for more research to explore what exactly is meant by immersion and what causes it.

There is a lack of research on consumer immersion conducted in a tourism context. However, several studies have been carried out on related concepts such as, for example, extraordinary consumption (e.g., Arnould and Price, 1993, Mossberg, 2007b), play in adventure tourism (Gyimóthy and Mykletun, 2004) or the tourist as a

peak consumer (Wang, 2002). This previous research touches upon the phenomenon, but does not directly address immersion. In their seminal article on extraordinary consumer experiences, Arnold and Price (1993, p. 42) argued for “more attention to the temporal moments of a consumption experience when assessing satisfaction”. In 2007, Arnould still maintains that researchers need to know a lot more about “the operations of transportation or immersion” in order to “fully understand the value of experiences to consumers and how marketers could successfully co-create them with consumers” (Arnould, 2007, p. 191). There is a need for a better conceptual understanding of consumer immersion in order to contribute to the knowledge of how the tourism industry can create and construct extraordinary experience contexts. Mossberg (2008) advocates more research into preconditions for consumer immersion related to storytelling and extraordinary experiences. This study helps fill the knowledge gap regarding how immersions occur during extraordinary nature-based tourist experiences. When, where and why does the tourist become immersed? An increased insight into immersion during tourist experiences will hopefully enhance the tourism operators in developing more engaging and valuable experiences for their guests.

1.3 The purpose and problem statement of this study

The overall purpose of this study is to contribute to the conceptual and empirical exploration of consumer experiences and immersion in nature-based tourism experiences. Six articles are presented and discussed in relation to four main research questions. Articles one to four are conceptual contributions and articles five and six are empirical contributions. The conceptual articles are, however, illustrated and discussed related to consumer experiences in a tourism context, i.e., the individual is referred to as a consumer, but all examples are related to nature-based tourism. In the empirical articles the contributions are more directly related

to a tourism context and the individual is referred to as tourist. However, tourism and tourists can be seen as representing one specific category of consumption experiences.

RQ 1: How can the tourist experience be understood from a multi-relational perspective?

The first research question addresses the need to clarify the ontological understanding of the tourist experience. A conceptual understanding of tourist experiences as multi-relational is presented and discussed in two articles, one published covering international conference proceedings (Hansen et al., 2011) and one journal article (Lindberg et al., 2013). The articles are based on consumer and tourism research and being-in-the-world ontology and propose a multi-relational approach for understanding consumer experiences in tourism.

RQ 2: How can the concept of consumer immersion be understood?

The second research question addresses the conceptual understanding of consumer immersion. There is an ongoing debate on what immersion is, and in order to work empirically with the concept, it is first necessary to explore the current understanding of consumer immersion as a key aspect of experiences (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013). Different definitions of immersion are discussed and the relations between immersion and other concepts like extraordinary experiences, peak experiences, peak performance and flow are investigated. In addition, the article focuses on the underlying foundations and facilitators for immersion.

RQ 3: What is the role of the guide in facilitating consumer immersion?

The third research question addresses the knowledge gap concerning what role the guide plays for consumer immersion. The guides' many different roles are well-debated within tourism research, however, we have been unable to identify any previous research on the guide's role in facilitating consumer immersion. The fourth and the fifth article address research question number three. Article four is a conceptual article (Mossberg et al., forthcoming) focusing on how guides and tourists co-create experiences for tourist immersion. A model is presented showing how tour guides' performances may facilitate tourists' immersion by performing what is named a 'guide plus' role. The model is explored further in article five which is an empirical article (Hansen and Mossberg, forthcoming). We conclude that a good tour guide can enhance tourist involvement and enable immersion, thereby transforming regular experiences into extraordinary experiences.

RQ 4: How do consumers experience immersion during nature-based tourist experiences?

The fourth research question addresses the lack of empirical research on consumer immersion within a tourism context. The article addressing this question is empirical with data from different nature-based tourism experiences such as : whale safari, dog sledding, kayaking and mountaineering (Hansen, forthcoming). The findings reveal two different types of immersion (immersion as 'being' and immersion as 'doing') which are mutually exclusive and appear during different stages of the experience.

Since the purpose of this study is related to consumer experiences and immersion, the applied literature is primarily anchored in consumer research in the marketing and research fields conducted on tourist experiences within the tourism literature. Research on tourist experiences, consumer experiences and immersion is, however, inspired from sociology and psychology and, to some extent, philosophy and anthropology (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, Carù and Cova, 2003, Uriely, 2005). The growing research literature within the experience economy has also been applied to a certain extent.

CHAPTER 2: PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

METHODOLOGY

Scientific research designs include the discussion of ontology, epistemology and methodology (Veal, 2011). Ontology originates from the Greek word of 'being' (Hollis, 1994), and refers to a way of looking at the world and to the nature of reality assumed by the researcher (Veal, 2011). "What is the nature of the 'knowable'? Or, what is the nature of 'reality'?" (Guba, 1990, p. 18). Epistemology is concerned with the relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon being studied and the methodology. It explains the ways in which data was gathered and analyzed and therefore knowledge was established (Veal, 2011). Ontology, epistemology and methodology are complimentary, and the first two inform the latter (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010). This section will address reflections on philosophy of science, discussion of research design, description of the empirical data gathering and analyzing processes and, lastly, reflections on some methodological challenges associated with the study. Acquiring knowledge is a dynamic and continuous endeavor, and this has indeed been the case throughout the whole period of writing this dissertation.

2.1 Philosophical approach

2.1.1 Research paradigms

Looking at the literature describing the development of science, it is apparent that the philosophy of science is a continuous evolving undertaking. New generations of researchers keep contributing to the understanding of what science involves and how it should be executed. This is what Kuhn (1996) refers to as the revolutionary character of scientific progress (Chalmers, 1999). Hence, science in itself can be seen

as a social construct which is *“a product of a wide range of influences”* (Thomas, 2004). How scientific research is designed depends therefore on ‘the rules of the game’ at different historic times and within different scientific communities.

Positivism and constructivism are two broad and contrasting positions within social science (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). According to Hollis (1994, p. 41) the broad end of positivism embraces *“any approach which applies scientific method to human affairs conceived as belonging to a natural order open to objective enquiry”*. Hence, evaluating the tourist experience from a positivistic paradigm would imply that one particular way of experiencing a tourist activity is closer to the “truth” or how it should be experienced than another. It should be possible to define and measure the concept of the experience, and the undifferentiated commonalities of many single observations would make predication possible. Constructivism, on the other hand, regards reality as something that *“is socially constructed and given meaning by people”* (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, p. 29). In other words, individuals make sense of the world by communicating with other people about their experiences, feelings and thoughts. From this perspective, the “truth” is not out there to be observed, but rather depends on who you ask. Positivism and constructivism hence indicates two opposites with major differences in ontology, epistemology and methodology (see Table 1). A range of paradigms can be located between the extreme positions of positivism and constructivism, for example of post-positivist and critical theory (Guba, 1990). The research questions in this dissertation focus on consumer experiences and immersion, and the ontology chosen lies closest to the constructivist paradigm. This will be elaborated on in the next sub-sections.

Table 1: Guba’s Comparison of Prevailing Paradigms (adopted from Guba, 1990, pp. 23-27).

PARADIGM	ONTOLOGY	EPISTEMOLOGY	METHODOLOGY
Positivist	Realist – reality exists “out there” and is driven by immutable natural laws and mechanism. Knowledge of these entities, laws and mechanisms is conventionally summarized in the form of time- and context-free generalizations	Dualist/objectivist – it is both possible and essential for the inquirer to adopt a distant, non-interactive posture. Values and other biasing and confounding factors are thereby automatically excluded from influencing the outcomes.	Experimental/manipulative – questions and/or hypotheses are stated in advance in propositional form and subjected to empirical tests (falsification) under carefully controlled conditions.
Post-positivist	Critical realist - reality exists but can never be fully apprehended. It is driven by natural laws that can only incompletely be understood	Modified objectivist - objectivity remains a regulatory ideal, but it can only be approximated, with special emphasis placed on external guardians such as the critical tradition and the critical community.	Modified experimental/manipulative - emphasizes critical multiplism. Redresses imbalances by doing inquiry in more natural settings, using more qualitative methods, depending more on grounded theory, and reintroducing discovery into the inquiry process.
Critical Theory	Critical realist - as in the case of post-positivism.	Subjectivist - in the sense that values mediate inquiry.	Dialogic, transformative - eliminates false consciousness and energizes and facilitate transformation (via praxis).
Constructivist	Relativist – realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experimentally based, local and specific. Their form and content depend on the persons who hold them.	Subjectivist – inquirer and inquired into are fused into a single (monistic) entity. Findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two.	Inter-subjective, dialectic – individual constructions are elicited, compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of generating one (or a few) constructions for which substantial consensus exists.

2.1.2 The interpretive turn in research on tourism experience

It can be argued that there has been an interpretive turn within the social sciences, and that this can also be seen within tourism research. Uriely (2005) has analyzed the conceptual development of the tourist experience and argues that “*growing attention (...) is given to the role of subjectivity in the constitution of the tourist*

experience” (p. 207). This development follows the shift from the modern to the post-modern perspective in tourism. The modern perspective was influenced by the positivist traditions of quantitative motivation research (Thomas, 2004). This research had a strong interest in classification and construction of tourist typologies and strived to produce standardized and robust scaling systems of tourist motivation. As tourism research evolved, it became obvious that some of these theories failed to explain central empirical findings, and the rather complex picture of reality (Thomas, 2004). Uriely (2005), for example, found that not only do different people engage in different experiences; even the same consumer engages in different experiences during the same trip. Thus, the complexity of tourist experiences reveals research as complex as well. This challenges the well-established typologies and calls for a different approach.

The post-modern perspective represents a development towards a more subjective understanding of the tourist experience. According to Uriely (2005, p. 205), there has been a “growing notion of the tourist experience as a diverse and a plural phenomenon” and that the postmodernist realization is that all knowledge is socially constructed. Pernecky and Jamal (2010, p. 1068) argue that the “truth is not constructed regardless of the external world but rather in intricate relationship with it”. This implies a heightened focus on the diversity, plural reality, context and subjective negotiation of meanings as determinants of the individual experience (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). As a result of the interpretive paradigm, phenomenology and hermeneutic research approaches has become increasingly popular within social science and tourism research as they are concerned with the study of lived experiences (van Manen, 1990, Pernecky and Jamal, 2010). Phenomenology is a research paradigm that ranges from positivistic (e.g., Husserl) and post-positivistic approaches (e.g., Merleau-Ponty), to interpretivist (e.g.,

Heidegger) and constructivist approaches (e.g., Schutz). However, tourism research has been criticized for failing to acknowledge these different theoretical perspectives and their significant variations (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010). This lack of clarity has contributed to the prevailing confusion regarding how to study the tourist experience (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010). Choosing a scientific orientation in the study of consumer immersion is therefore important to address how I, as a researcher, understand the tourist experience. In this dissertation, I have chosen an interpretive and multi-relational understanding of the experience. The reasoning for this choice is developed in the first two conceptual articles in this dissertation (Hansen et al., 2011, Lindberg et al., 2013) and is shortly presented below as it constitutes an important ontological foundation for the whole dissertation.

2.1.3 Moving towards a multi-relational approach to the tourist experience

The multi-relational approach focuses on a broader and more holistic understanding of how different interactions and processes contribute to the co-construction of meaning in the tourist experience (Lindberg et al., 2013). The experience is understood as dynamic, socio-cultural-historical, situated and multi-relational. This implies that the lived and on-going tourist experience must be understood as being intertwined with the everyday life of the tourist, in line with interpretive and post-modern contributions within tourism literature (Uriely, 2005). We argue that the tourist is situated within and across four co-existing core components throughout the experiences and meaning constructions; in context, in time, in interaction and in body.

First, the tourist experience must be understood in relation to how the tourist interacts with the physical, cultural and social context. Depending on the familiarity

or novelty of the context, these interactions might be more or less tacit to the tourist. Individuals are always in relation to the physical context, whether it is landscapes or man-made elements like the interior of a restaurant, and they may be interpreted differently depending on the individual tourist. The meaning of the physical context can therefore be argued to be partly constructed by the tourist throughout the experience (Ek et al., 2008). The tourist is also always embedded in a cultural pre-understanding providing the tools for the initial meaning creation. Hence, tourists with different cultural horizons may attach different interpretations to one and the same activity. Social interactions and relationships are the final contextual element influencing the experience. Who you are travelling with, and how the social relationships within a tourist group work, affects the experience.

Second, temporality (in time) influences the tourist experience. Tourists relates to the experience in time before (pre-understanding), during (on-going temporality) and after the activity (memories). In the dynamic and on-going experience, tourists often incorporate both the past (e.g. previous experiences) and future (expectations) into their present being-in-the-world experience (Cotte et al., 2004). The concept of consumer immersion focuses on the episodes when the tourist manages to become deeply involved in the moment (here and now). One can argue that being immersed is a way of accessing the experience (Carù and Cova, 2007a).

Third, the experience must be understood as embodied. In addition to cognition and awareness, the body is our primary connection to the world and an integrated part of our experiential being. The body is engaged in various sensory, emotional and functional situations during the activity. Hence, different bodily relations inherently affect the experience, even though many of them might be more or less tacit to the

tourist. Feeling hungry, seasick, struggling with a physical activity, or the joy of mastering a new skill or bonding with dogs, are all examples of the embodied aspect of experiences.

Fourth, the nature of interactions with self, others, animals and objects influences the tourist's experience. Interaction with self encompasses revelations, reflection, reflexive awareness, attention to feelings and thoughts, and awareness of needs and desires during the activity. Social interaction with travel companions, other tourists, the guide, other representatives from the tourist enterprise, or local inhabitants may affect the experience, both positively and negatively. The same is true for those tourist experiences involving encounters with animals. Interactions with animals tend to be less verbal and more embodied, but never the less may represent strong emotional relationships. Interactions with objects include both how to interpret unfamiliar objects and how to use or handle physical objects such as a kayak oar or a dog-sledge.

The multi-relational perspective focuses on the tourist's lived experience as a complex and dynamic phenomenon in which meaning is continually negotiated through on-going interpretations and is inspired from the being-in-the-world ontology. Hence, this approach represents a philosophy of science where the ontological perspective is integrated into the epistemological and methodological aspects of the research design.

2.2 Research design

2.2.1 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is an established research strategy of studying lived experiences and where the main objective is *“to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience”* (van Manen, 1990, p. 41). Hence, it gives the researcher an opportunity to explore *“how tourists’ meaningful experiences come about”* (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010, p. 41). There are several approaches within hermeneutics (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). However, this work is first and foremost inspired by alethic hermeneutics (originating from the Greek word, aleētheia, meaning truth) because the philosophical roots are the same as for the chosen multi-relational approach. Alethic hermeneutics focuses on *“truth as an act of disclosure”* (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009, p. 91) where objectivity is unattainable, and how we understand the world depends on how we interpret the world (ibid). Hence, the researcher develops the pre-understanding of the research problem into an enhanced understanding through dialogue with the informant. The dialogue is characterized as an on-going process of explanation and interpretation (Hansen, 2003) where the researcher remains open to multiple interpretations and understandings (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010). The process of *“revealing something hidden”* (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009) is viewed as a core concept of alethic hermeneutics. The phenomenon of consumer immersion is complex and can be characterized as a concept of high abstraction. The tourists might not think about whether they are immersed during the experience or not, let alone have reflected on the reasons why they became immersed. The *“revealing of something hidden”* (ibid) is therefore relevant for the research on immersion.

The hermeneutic process is a circular or spiral movement where the underlying meaning of the phenomenon is revealed through dialogue (Alvesson and Sköldberg,

2009). A good informative dialogue is a process where the informant and researcher together discuss and develop an understanding of different and perhaps “unrevealed” aspects of their experience. The result implies arriving at an improved and a common understanding of the phenomenon, often referred to as the merging/fusion of horizons (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009, Pernecky and Jamal, 2010). The interpretation of data is an on-going process throughout the hermeneutical process and *“understanding and interpretation are indissolubly bound up with each other”* (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010, p. 1068). Data is often referred to as “text” within modern hermeneutics and include everything in the interpretive process of the phenomenon, e.g., theory, verbal and non-verbal communication, observations, social acts etc. The analyzing process is a circular movement between pre-understanding and understanding, and between parts and whole (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). Fundamental in this process is the realization that the researcher cannot be without a pre-understanding and that this pre-understanding affects the interpretation during the research process. *“Our suppositions, assumptions, and the existing bodies of scientific knowledge, predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question”* (van Manen, 1990, p. 46). The interpretation process implies repeated shifts between different parts of the data and the holistic whole in order progressively to arrive at a better understanding of both. Throughout this dialogue with the text, the researcher is looking for internally and externally consistent patterns of interpretation with and between the various text elements (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). The ontological perspective regarding how a tourist experience can be understood therefore becomes pivotal in the interpretation of the text (see Table 2).

Table 2: Hermeneutic phenomenology: preliminary guidelines for research in tourism studies (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010)

REASON FOR RESEACH	To study lived experience and understand how experiences are interpreted and understood (the meaning of these experiences to the participants involved)
ONTOLOGY	(Being-in-the-world) Realist: The world and nature can be addressed by means of our <i>being-in-the-world</i> : we make sense of our being and <i>lifeworld</i> (the world we live in) through reflective representation and analysis. All understanding of our <i>being-in-the-world</i> is perspectival and shaped by pre-understanding, historicity, culture, practice, background, language etc. There is “realness” to the world and to our experiences; <i>Da-sein’s</i> involvement plays a key role in constructing “truth”
EPISTEMOLOGY	Hermeneutic: The main focus is on interpretation, context and language; what counts as “truth” is based on interpretation, co-construction and reflexive participation. Both the researcher and the participant are self-interpreting beings who live in the “real” world and hence both play an important role in the process of arriving at understanding through dialogue and interpretation. Language plays a key role.
METHODOLOGY	Interpretive and dialogic: The researcher seeks to interpret and understand the lived experience; searches for meaning, analyses, critiques, and negotiates between theory and data, and is guided by hermeneutic phenomenology. The focus is on relationship between self and other, rather than “subjective” or “objective” stance.

2.2.2 Strengths and challenges with the chosen design

The concept of immersion in nature-based experiences is complex highly abstract. Articulating and describing emotions is difficult since language cannot replace or fully represent an emotion. Exploring experiences of immersion is therefore challenging both for the informant and for the researcher and requires a high degree of self-reflection. The strength of the hermeneutical dialogue is that it provides the opportunity to explore the individual tourist’s experience of immersion, meaning-making process and reflections through the creative use of

language and metaphors. Co-construction and reflexivity allow for the interpretation of meaning (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010). The hermeneutic process also incorporates adjustments according to new ideas as they emerge, and is concerned with retrieving tacit information from the process. However, the analysis and interpretation of the data is an arduous process, especially for relatively fresh researchers (such as myself). In addition, both the gathering and analyses of data is resource- and time-consuming.

2.3 Empirical research

2.3.1 The empirical settings

The Northern Insight project focuses on research into nature-based tourist experiences in The High North. How to define nature-based tourism is still an ongoing debate amongst researchers (Vespestad and Lindberg, 2011), but for this study a broad definition of nature-based tourism as *“experiences or activities directly depending upon nature”* (Mehmetoglu, 2007) has been chosen. Informants for the study were tourists participating in commercial nature-based activities in Northern-Norway and on Spitsbergen. A tourist is defined as a person who *“travels to and stays in places outside their usual environment for more than 24 hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited”* (WTO, 1995). This study is based on tourists with a holiday purpose, and hence does not include business travel or the MICE (meeting, incentive, conference and exhibition) segment. Tourist activities were chosen among companies participating in the Arena Innovative Experience project. They were all companies with a special focus on the experiential elements of their products. All the companies contacted responded positively to my request for participant observation and interviews with tourists related to their activities.

The different tourist activities that constitute the empirical data are described below and more details are given in Table 3 (see page 35). All informants were new to the place and/or to the activity in which they engaged.

1. Arctic Horse Trekking

Arctic horse trekking was a three-hour guided horseback riding session on Spitsbergen using five Icelandic horses (hence, maximum group size is four tourists and one guide). The stables were situated a short car ride outside the village. The tourists participated in the grooming and riding of their own horse. The track was located in a relatively flat area and followed a circular route along a tall fence surrounding an airport. The actual riding trip took approximately 90 minutes, including 3-4 short stops to gather the group. Back at the stable, the tourists returned their helmets and the guide unsaddled the horses and drove the tourists back to their hotels.

2: Arctic Wildlife Expedition

The arctic wildlife expedition was a three-day tour with the themes arctic nature and wildlife on Spitsbergen and involved staying two nights at a former telecommunications station. The station had been redecorated by designers and positioned as a luxurious wilderness hotel. There was no telephone, internet connections or roads in this area, adding to the feeling of being away from civilisation. Briefing and de-briefing sessions with the guide at the departure hotel marked the start and end of the trip. For safety reasons, all participating tourists had to sign a security form acknowledging they would accept the guide's instructions during the trip. The tourists were fitted with survival suits and warm clothes before they entered rib-boats. The first day included a three- hour boat trip with several

stops on the way to the station, and a guided tour of the station and its surroundings. The second day was primarily spent as a guided rib-boat tour to several fjords in the area, with frequent stops to watch bird life, seals, glaciers, the remains of historic settlers and present settlements. The third day involved a hike to a nearby lake and the return to the departing hotel.

3: Arctic Dog Sledding on Wheels

Arctic dog sledding on wheels was a four-hour activity riding a wagon on wheels pulled by six Alaskan Huskies on Spitsbergen. The tourists were taught the basics of handling and harnessing the dogs and how to drive the wagons. A briefing session with the guide at the departure hotel marked the start of the trip. All participants had to sign a compliance form in which they agreed to follow the guide's instructions at all times during the activity. The group was then transported to the dog yard, which was situated a few kilometres outside the village. The dog yard was constructed as a replica of a traditional trapper station. The group was divided into teams of two and the guide gave instructions on how to harness the dogs and drive the wagons. The group then took turns driving the dog equipages in a line, following a gravel road towards a closed-off mine which also marked the return point. At the return to the dog yard, the tourists de-harnessed their dogs and put them back in their respective dog-houses. The guide held a debriefing in the dog yard before transporting the tourists back to their hotel.

4. The 3 days winter dog sledding

This dog sledging experience at Spitsbergen represents an extended experience encounter lasting several days. The start of the experience was similar to the Arctic dog sledding on wheels, but different sledges were used. All participants were given

training on how to harness and drive their own equipage of six Alaskan Huskies. The first day the group drove off from the dog yard, made a stop on top of a glacier with lunch and walked in one of the glaciers crevasses, before driving further into an unpopulated part of the island where we stayed the night in a cabin. The next day included a long dog sledding trip (70 kilometres) before returning to the same cabin at night. The last part of this leg was driven in the dark. On the third day, the group drove back to the dog yard and had a debriefing session with the guides at the hotel. The group spontaneously held a joint dinner at one of the restaurants in Longyearbyen on the evening of the third day.

5. Whale safari

The whale safari experience is situated in Andenes in the northern part of Nordland county. Here, the edge of the continental shelf is closer to land than anywhere else along the coast of Norway. A special deep sea area, called the Bleik Canyon, is the home of fish and deep sea squid, which are the main food for Sperm whales. A stable stock of young male Sperm whales can be found on this feeding ground only one hour's boat trip off the coast. The whale safari activity includes a guided tour of the Whale Centre and a boat trip lasting 4-8 hours depending on the weather and the number of sightings. Whale researchers participate on each tour together with tour guides who are mostly marine biology students. When the boat approaches the whale watching grounds, hydrophones are launched into the sea and both researchers and tourists listen for the sound of any whales approaching the surface. The boat maneuvers close to any located whales and waits while the whale spends a few minutes breathing on the surface. The peak moment occurs when the whale rises its fluke out of the sea, as if 'waving goodbye', before diving down into the deep again. On average 4-5 whales are sighted per trip. Whales are spotted during

95-99 % of the safaris and the company therefore provides a whale guarantee (ticket reimbursed or new trip provided if whales are not seen).

6. Mountain trekking at Mount Stetind

The guided hiking trip to Mount Stetind (1392 meters above sea level) is a goal-oriented and physically challenging activity. Stetind has been famous amongst mountain climbers for a long time and is described as a perfect obelisk in pure granite with sweeping ridges rising straight from the fjord. My informants participated on a guided tour following the `normal route` to the top, which is the easiest way up. The tour starts from sea level with a trail through the forest, before reaching an area filled with boulders. The main crux of the route is the Mysosten block which requires the participants to rope up and make a difficult climb along a vertical crack with an 800 meters drop beneath. The group then continues to the top which is a large flat area. On the return participants have to make 30 meters of abseiling from the Mysosten block before hiking down the trail back to the starting point.

7. Kayaking

The company is a profiled ecotourism kayaking company situated in The Lofoten Islands. I interviewed participants on a two-day kayak course and on a four-hour guided sea kayaking tour. Both activities represented physical activities in which the learning aspects were central. The kayaking course lasted in total for 16 hours and resulted in the participants qualifying for the NPF (Norwegian Canoe Association) WetCard. The first day starts with a three-hour theory session before the participants put on the required equipment (dry suits, neoprene shoes, kayak, and life jackets). The rest of the first day was spent at the water's edge becoming

familiar with the kayak, different paddling techniques, rescues and body movements. Day Two mainly included a kayak tour with lunch in the nearby area where the participants get to practise their new skills. The other four hour guided sea kayaking tour included two participants in a double kayak and one experienced tour guide. The tour guide gave the participants instructions on how to paddle. A short kayak tour, including a lunch break on a white sandy beach, then took place in the same area. The guide mainly focused on improving the participants kayaking skills and on storytelling about the nature and culture in the area.

2.3.2 Empirical phases and data gathering

2.3.2.1 Empirical phases

The several empirical phases of the study were planned in 2010 after having participated on the two PhD-courses in Philosophy of Science and Qualitative Research. A preliminary phase of interviews and participant observation was conducted during the festival “World Championship Cod Fishing 2011” in Svolvær (Lofoten Islands) during late March 2011. Two groups, representing two different firms, participated on an incentive trip and teambuilding activities respectively. Over the course of four days, I participated and interacted with them during four different activities (see Table 3). A total of six personal interviews were conducted and transcribed. This preliminary phase gave me valuable insight into procedures for selecting and interacting with informants, testing the interview guide, and reflections related to both the interview situation and analyzing processes. Some minor changes were made in the interview guide (see appendix) and I gained new awareness of my own role as a researcher during these interviews.

The main empirical data collection was conducted during the summer season (July and August) of 2011. In July I conducted eight interviews with fourteen informants at four different locations in Northern Norway. The informants were individual tourists participating on whale safaris, a kayaking course, a guided kayak trip and a guided tour to Mt. Stetind. Some of the interviews included multiple informants, for example couples, and parent and child. In August, I was part of a group of researchers from the Northern Insight project that arranged a study trip to Spitsbergen. The whole group of five researchers participated in three different activities. The researchers engaged in the activity together with other tourists. Group interviews with the research group were carried out after each activity. This allowed for a combination of an introspective approach to immersion having access to first-hand experience (Richardson and Hallam, 2013) and reflective discussions among researchers knowledgeable about consumer experiences from different theoretical standpoints. The last period of data collection was March 2012 on a 3 days dog sledding trip at Spitsbergen. Personal interviews with all the tourists participating on the trip were conducted shortly after the activity had taken place.

Table 3: Overview of empirical phases and data material

Inter-view #	Informant # and name	Sex	Age	Nationality	Type of activity	Duration of activity	Time of interview	Type of interview	Application in dissertation
1	1 Alfa	Male	55	Norwegian	Fishing trip, guided tour of fishing village, dinner show	2 days	March 2011	Personal	Preliminary interviews
2	2 Beta	Male	26	Norwegian	Fishing trip, guided tour of fishing village, dinner show	2 days	March 2011	Telephone	Preliminary interviews
3	3 Gamma	Female	34	Norwegian	Fishing trip, guided tour of fishing village, dinner show	2 days	March 2011	Telephone	Preliminary interviews
4	4 Delta	Male	49	Norwegian	"Seafood theatre" (fishing trip, guided tour of cod liver oil factory, dinner), nature safari with rib-boat	2 days	March 2011	Personal	Preliminary interviews
5	5 Epsilon	Male	32	Norwegian	"Seafood theatre" (fishing trip, guided tour of cod liver oil factory, dinner), nature safari with rib-boat	2 days	March 2011	Personal	Preliminary interviews
6	6 Digamma	Male	59	Norwegian	"Seafood theatre" (fishing trip, guided tour of cod liver oil factory, dinner), nature safari with rib-boat	2 days	March 2011	Personal	Preliminary interviews
7	7 Anna	Female	39	Norwegian	Whale safari	4-8 hours	July 2011	Personal	Article 6
	8 Birger	Male	41						
8	9 Clara	Female	69	Danish	Whale safari	4-8 hours 4-8 hours	July 2011	Personal	Article 6
	10 Daniel	Male	69						
9	11 Emma	Female	25	Swedish	Whale safari	4-8 hours 4-8 hours	July 2011	Personal	Article 6
	12 Frida	Female	55						
10	13 Grete	Female	37	Norwegian	Whale safari	4-8 hours	July 2011	Personal	Article 6
11	14 Hans	Male	35	Danish	Whale safari	4-8 hours	July 2011	Personal	Article 6
	15 Ida	Female	32						
12	16 Johanne	Female	35	Norwegian	Guided kayak tour	4 hours	July 2011	Personal	Article 6
	17 Klaus	Male	35						
13	18 Lisa	Female	29	Swedish	Kayaking course	2 days	July 2011	Personal	Article 6
14	19 Markus	Male	54	Norwegian	Mountaineering at Mt. Stetind	1 day	July 2011	Personal	Article 6
	20 Nils	Male	21						
15	21 Pernille	Female	42	Norwegian	Arctic boat trip	3 days	August 2011	Group interview	Article 5
	22 Pippi	Female	55	Swedish					
16	23 Per	Male	49	Norwegian	Arctic boat trip	3 days	August 2011	Group interview	Article 5
	24 Pål	Male	60						
17	21 Pernille	Female	42	Norwegian	Dog sledding on wheels, group interview	4 hours	August 2011	Group interview	Article 5
	23 Per	Male	49						
	24 Pål	Male	60						
	25 Pandora	Female	48						
	22 Pippi	Female	55	Swedish					
18	21 Pernille	Female	42	Norwegian	Horse riding	4 hours	August 2011	Group interview	Article 5
	23 Per	Male	49						
	24 Pål	Male	60						
	22 Pippi	Female	55	Swedish					
19	26 Olivia	Female	38	British	Winter dog sledding	3 days	March 2012	Personal	Article 6 + illustrations in article 1, 2 and 3
20	27 Peder	Male	71	Norwegian	Winter dog sledding	3 days	March 2012	Personal	Article 6 + illustrations in article 1, 2 and 3
21	28 Richard	Male	43	British	Winter dog sledding	3 days	March 2012	Skype	Article 6 + illustrations in article 1, 2 and 3
22	29 Sophie	Female	46	British	Winter dog sledding	3 days	March 2012	Telephone	Article 6 + illustrations in article 1, 2 and 3
23	30 Thomas	Male	49	British	Winter dog sledding	3 days	March 2012	Telephone	Article 6 + illustrations in article 1, 2 and 3

2.3.2.2 Selecting activities and informants

I was looking for rich descriptions in personal accounts from a variety of nature-based activities in order to explore the concept of immersion from different angles. Activities with expected potential for consumer immersion were selected. Moreover, both active and passive activities, as well as activities of different duration, group sizes and seasons (summer and winter) were combined. Informants were selected based on the criteria of variety and engagement. Potential informants were observed either at the start or at the end of an activity. They were then approached and asked to participate in an interview. If the tourist(s) were willing to participate, appropriate times and places for the interview were agreed. In the selection process I wanted to recruit a variety of informants with regard to gender, age, and occupation. At the same time, I was looking for tourists who seemed motivated and engaged in the activity. During the main data collection, only informants from Scandinavian countries were approached. The reason for this was that it allowed both the informants and the researcher to communicate in their respective native languages. In order to ensure rich data, it was important that the informants were able to use the full capacity of their native tongue when trying to verbalize emotions and self-reflection related to immersion. Four informants from Great Britain are included in the sample from March 2012. However, the same principle was applied since these interviews were conducted in English.

2.3.2.3 Interviews

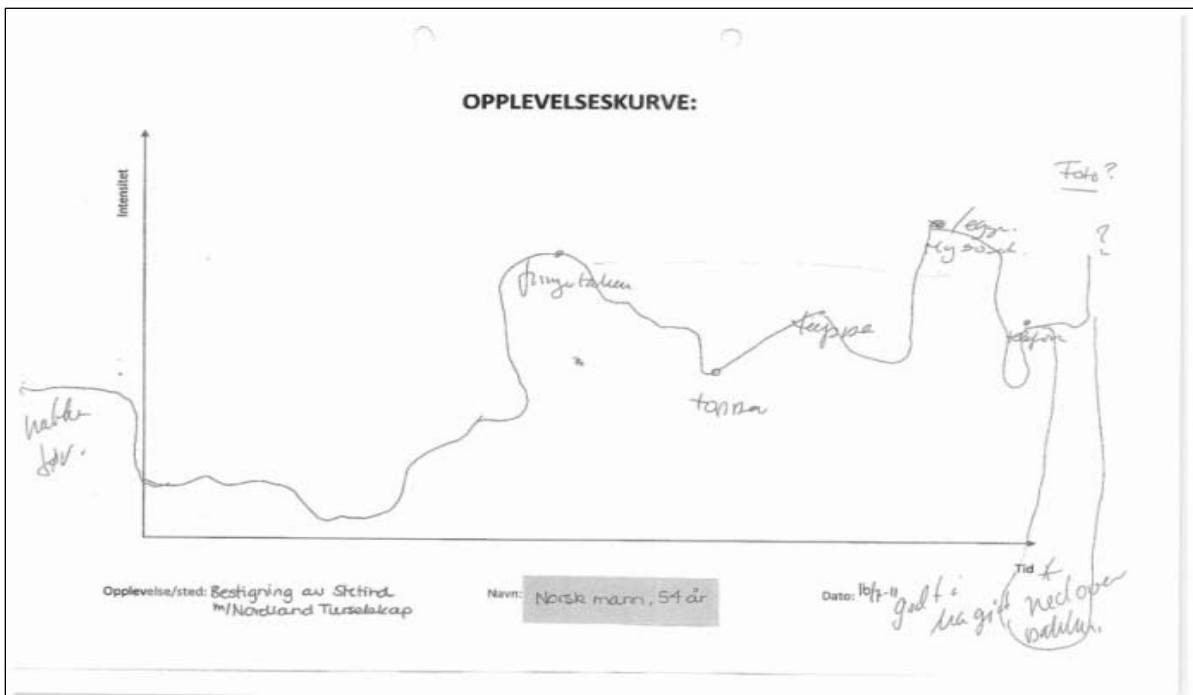
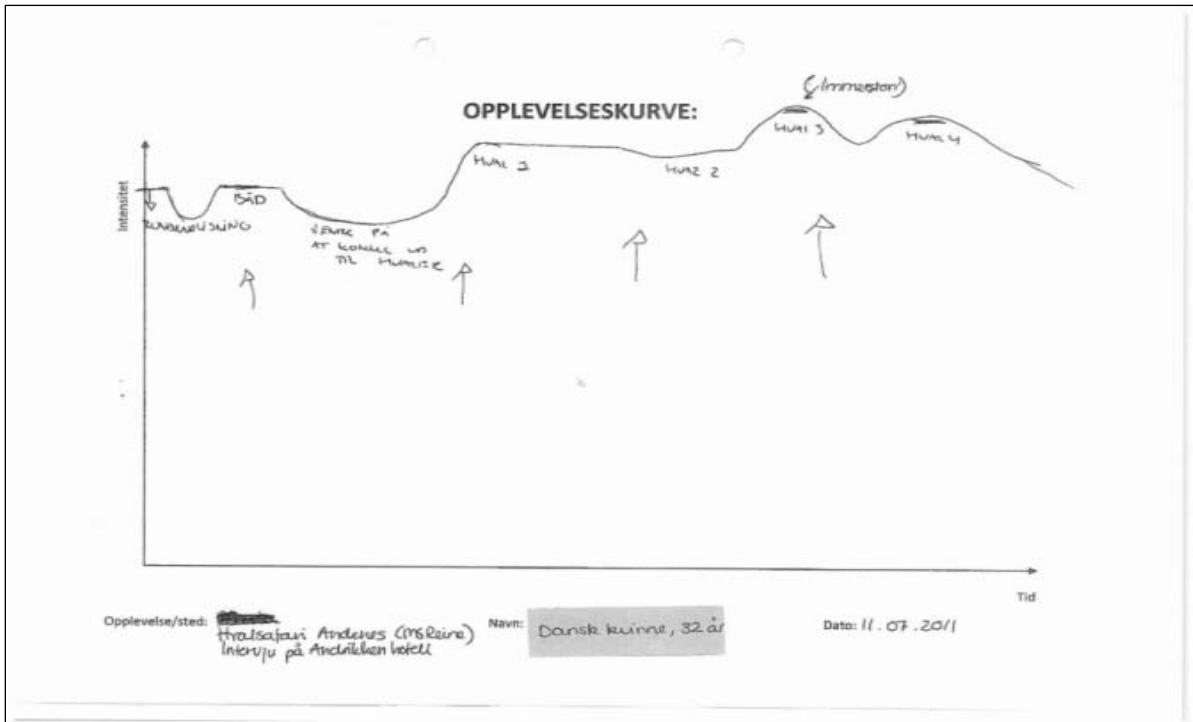
The long interview is a means of exploring and gathering experiential narratives that enable the researcher to develop a richer and deeper understanding of the

human phenomenon under investigation (van Manen, 1990). Given the multi-relational perspective, it was important to give the informants the opportunity to elaborate the details of their experience and discuss issues related to immersion that were important to them. According to McCracken (1988, p. 9), this is one of the strengths of the long interviews as it *“gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves”*.

The average interview lasted for 1.5 hours and all interviews were audio-taped. At the beginning of each interview, the informant(s) were told that their anonymity would be ensured, and they were asked to focus on being as ‘honest’ and personal about their experience as possible (e.g., it was specified that couples might have two different accounts of the same experience and that this would be interesting to me). A semi-structured interview guide was used during the interviews (see appendix). However, this guide was used with flexibility (Cassell et al., 2009), and I explored interesting comments from the informants in follow-up questions. I wrote field notes with reflections after each interview.

To enhance the informant’s reflections, some of the informants were asked to illustrate their experience by drawing a curve showing the intensity of involvement and possible immersion during the tour. I did this approximately half-way through the interview, and after the informants had verbally explained the various aspects of their experience. The drawings were used to support the discussion of immersion during the interviews.

Figure 1: Examples of experience curve drawings



2.3.2.4 Participant observation

Participant observation was important in order to interpret the interviews. First, verbalising and expressing emotions, feelings, and senses is challenging. Reason (1993) argues that we cannot express experience directly, not even to ourselves. As one of my informants pointed out, as he was struggling to explain his feelings, *“You can use words like ‘fantastic’, but it does not cover and explain it all I think”* (Peder, dog sledding). Second, one could argue that we cannot directly access the experiences of anyone else than ourselves. As a researcher, I can only access the informant’s narrative about their experiences and life stories. Snel (2013, p. 132) elaborates on this by arguing that:

“The mental agency exerted and the temporal dimension involved make experiences inherently personal and unique. Because of this one can hardly expect someone else to fully understand one’s experience, let alone determine and manage the objective characteristics of an experience for someone else. The other person has a different narrative and life horizon, has different knowledge and experience, and will therefore interpret events in a different way. This is what makes it so hard, or even impossible, to truly share an experience with someone who has not had the experience” (Snel, 2013).

Therefore, participant observation becomes important for the researcher to understand the setting, context, and events during the experience. Observing tacit and embodied aspects of the experience also contributes to the researcher’s empathic sense-making of the informants’ accounts (Hinds, 2011).

Observational data was sometimes presented during the interviews to stimulate the informant's reflections on the experience.

2.3.2.5 Own reflections on the data gathering process

I found discussing immersion with the informants to be easier than first expected. In general, all the informants quickly recognized immersion as a phenomenon and were able to relate to the concept and identify the episodes of being immersed. Even though they found it challenging to explain the different aspects of why they became immersed, the majority of the informants were motivated to discuss this and were able to reflect on immersion episodes during the interview. My overall impression is that being immersed was a positive feeling which was important for them, and which they sought after throughout their tourist activities. Informants seemed to be interested in and enjoy an in-depth discussion of their experience and some of them even expressed this as gratitude at the end of the interview (here illustrated by a citation from my informant Ida).

"It is interesting to be interviewed because we evaluate the trip much more thoroughly than we otherwise would have done between ourselves. We would have talked about the trip over a meal, you know, 'what did you think?', and discussed some of the issues that we have talked about now [during the interview]. But we would have used just 5-10 minutes on it while eating. Now we have been talking about it in a very concentrated and in a different way, and that is very interesting. Many of the things we have discussed now are things I personally reflect upon. We do talk about the experience, but because we [she and her husband] often have

different experiences [of the activity] I don't normally share these personal elements which I know I'm the only one who had. I just reflect upon them myself" (Ida, Whale safari).

Interviewing informants in pairs created a positive dynamic between the two informants where they provided new reflections to the others' statement (e.g., comparing it with previous events). This often provided useful information to me as a researcher in trying to understand the different relations between their current experience and their lived life. Sometimes one informant would also comment or articulate a different perspective on the other informant's personal descriptions, motivation, or portrait of themselves. There were also nice discussions related to the drawing of the experience curves. Some of the informants were astonished about how differently they had drawn the curves and this usually resulted in both laughter, interest in the drawings of their travelling companion and, not least, useful discussions and reflections about their experiences.

Did I become immersed myself during the activities? The answer is that I found it difficult to become immersed while focusing on the observation of informants. My reflexive engagement changed the focus from my own experience towards observing the informants' reactions. However, I did experience moments of immersion during some of the activities on Spitsbergen. The focus during the activities together with the research group was to participate as an ordinary tourist and with an introspective perspective, before sharing and reflecting on our own experience in the group discussions afterwards. I also experienced episodes of immersion during the long and

challenging winter dog-sledding experience. This research design allowed for a combination of a detached and engaged observation of immersion that was valuable to me as a researcher.

2.3.3 Data analysis

All audio-taped interviews were transcribed word-for-word, generating a text which allowed for a systematic approach to the data analysis. The text from personal interviews was imported into the NVivo software and then encoded into broad meaning categories. The NVivo software was used to provide an overview of the data and easier access to retrieving different themes from the interviews.

The analytical approach used a hermeneutically grounded interpretive framework (Thompson, 1997). First, a holistic and sententious approach was used (van Manen, 1990). Interviews were read and then reread by the researcher in order to gain an understanding of their entirety (Patterson et al., 1998). Each interview was evaluated according to internal consistency (communicative validity) and narratives were compared with observed actions (pragmatic validity)(Kvale, 1989, Sandberg, 2000). I continued to search for themes emerging from the interviews. Key themes and patterns of meaning were first identified in the individual interviews and then across interviews. In this process I focused on having an open mind, letting the text “speak” and suppressing my own pre-understanding. A similar process took place going back and forth between the literature and empirical data to compare and inform the findings from the interpretive analysis. The empirical data was then analysed according to my research questions. Examples of themes were; when

did informants become immersed?, how do they describe moments of immersion?, what are the main interactions involved in the process of immersion?, in which situations are immersion facilitated or hindered?

2.4. Quality of the research and ethical issues

2.4.1 Quality of the research

Understanding the principles of interpretive research can be argued as being easier than actually executing them. According to other researchers (Cassell et al., 2009, p. 521), it is “extra-ordinarily difficult to make the connection between understanding the interpretivist perspective and being an interpretivist”. Despite these challenges, there are principles which should be followed in order to ensure the quality of qualitative research. Quality is related to all the different stages of the research process and general principles often discussed are consistency and transparency, and reflection and reflexivity (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009, Cassell et al., 2009).

According to Cassell et al (2009) consistency implies using a form of systematic approach that helps the reader understand the analytical process, while transparency advocates that the researcher makes transparent and discusses her/his choices and assumptions in relation to ontology and epistemology. In this study, the researcher tried to establish a pre-understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen research design prior to the data-gathering process. This was achieved using ontological and epistemological discussions in two course articles related to the philosophy of science and qualitative research, and was then further developed through the co-writing of

the two conceptual articles on a multi-relational approach to the tourist experience. In addition, the researcher's ability to respond flexibly throughout the interview process was strengthened by the experiences made during the preliminary phase (in March 2011).

According to Alvesson and Sköldböck (2009, p. 269) reflection implies *"thinking about the conditions for what one is doing, investigating the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement affects interaction with whatever is being researched, often in ways that are difficult to become conscious of"*. Related to this, reflexivity can be defined as *"the critical appraisal of the researcher's taken-for-granted assumptions about their research and their own role within it"* (Cassell et al., 2009, p. 525). In practice, I have tried to reflect and critically interrogate my own practice and experiences throughout the whole process. One example is that I, during interviews, have let the voice of the informant be the dominant voice and followed up statements by asking open questions like; "What do you mean by that?", "Can you explain this in more detail?" and "Can you give an example?" (Sandberg, 2000). However, reflections and reflexivity remain complex issues in interpretive research. One could argue that even though researchers know that they impact the research process and that reflexivity makes them more self-conscious about how, it is likely that much of this aspect remains tacit.

2.4.2 Ethical issues

I have striven to keep a high ethical standard throughout the research process of this dissertation. I have aimed at providing honest and accurate answers to

the research questions posed in this study. The analytical interpretations and translations of the informants' experiences have been conducted to the best of my ability. I have also been open about my identity as a researcher during my participation in the different activities. All informants have been treated with respect and have voluntarily agreed to participate in this research project. The informants' anonymity has been ensured by providing pseudonym names and all information was treated with confidentiality throughout the analytic process and in the articles. The person hired to transcribe some of the interviews signed a confidentiality statement prior to her work and the sound files and transcribed interviews were exchanged using a designated and closed group at Dropbox. This study has received no financial support from any commercial, public or profit organizations.

CHAPTER 3: PRESENTATION OF THE STUDIES AND DISCUSSION

This section briefly presents and discusses the aims, research questions, findings and contributions of the six individual articles. The section is organized using four headlines related to and answering the four main research questions of this dissertation. The discussion is illustrated using different examples from my empirical data. I start by presenting a table showing the relationship between the main research questions and the articles (see Table 4).

Table 4: Overview of research questions and articles in this dissertation

Research question	Articles	Type	Title	Authors	Status
RQ 1: How can the tourist experience be understood from a multi-relational perspective?	Article 1	Peer reviewed conceptual conference paper.	A multi-relational approach to the study of tourist experiences	Hansen, Ann Heidi Lindberg, Frank Eide, Dorthe	Published in 2011: Proceedings: <i>Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management</i> Gursoy, D. (ed.), Istanbul, Turkey (best paper)
	Article 2	Peer reviewed conceptual article	A Multi-Relational Approach for Understanding Consumer Experiences within Tourism	Lindberg, Frank Hansen, Ann Heidi Eide, Dorthe	Published online in August 2013: <i>Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management</i> . Paper version forthcoming
RQ 2: How can the concept of consumer immersion be understood?	Article 3	Peer reviewed conceptual book chapter	Consumer immersion: a key to extraordinary experiences.	Hansen, Ann Heidi Mossberg, Lena	Published in 2013: Sundbo, J. & Sørensen, F. (eds.) <i>Handbook on the Experience Economy</i> . Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elding Publishing Limited
RQ 3: What is the role of the guide in facilitating consumer immersion?	Article 4	Peer reviewed conceptual book chapter	Guide Performance - co-created experiences for tourist immersion	Mossberg, Lena Hanefors, Monica Hansen, Ann Heidi	Approved for publishing in 2014: Prebensen, N., Chen, J. & Uysal, M. (eds.) <i>Value Creation in Tourist Experiences</i> . CABI
	Article 5	Peer reviewed empirical article	Tour Guides' Performance and Tourists' Immersion: Facilitating Consumer Immersion by Performing a Guide Plus Role	Hansen, Ann Heidi Mossberg, Lena	Submitted in December 2013 to: <i>Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism</i> . In review.
RQ 4: How do consumers experience immersion during nature based tourist experiences?	Article 6	Peer reviewed empirical article	Moments that Count. Consumer Immersion within Nature-based Tourist Experiences	Hansen, Ann Heidi	Submitted to in February 2014 to: <i>Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism</i> . Awaiting editor evaluation and peer review.

3.1 The multi-relational perspective permeates the understanding of the tourist experience

The first two articles address the first research question in this study: How can the tourist experience be understood from a multi-relational perspective? The aim of both articles is to discuss the tourist experience on a conceptual level, and the articles will be discussed jointly as they are related to each other.

The first article, titled “A multi-relational approach to the study of tourist experiences” (Hansen et al., 2011), was published as a conference proceeding related to the international conference of “Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management” in Istanbul in June 2011. The article received “Best paper Award” and we were subsequently invited to submit our article to the journal sponsoring the award, *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*. It was published online in August 2013 with the title “A multi-relational approach for understanding consumer experiences within tourism” (Lindberg et al., 2013) and has been proof-read for paper version publication in February 2014. Both articles argue for a relational and holistic approach to the tourist experience, but the focus in Article 1 is more directly related to tourist immersion, while the perspective in Article 2 is broader and looks to understand the consumer experience within a tourism context.

The research question in Article 1 and 2 is: How can a multi-relational approach contribute to the conceptualization of consumer experience within tourism?

A holistic and multi-relational framework for understanding the tourist experience is proposed. A conceptual model using four core concepts wherein consumers are situated ontologically in and across; (1) time, (2) context, (3) body and (4) interaction, are presented and discussed with practical examples from the tourism industry. The first article explores the Heideggerian ontology which is the original inspiration for the model (Heidegger, 1927/1996). This ontology involves the discussion of how humans interpret and understand the world, and is often referred to as hermeneutic phenomenology (Sass, 1988) or alethic- or existential hermeneutics (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 1994). A fundamental argument in this ontology is that humans cannot be understood outside the person-world fusion. We are always in relation to the world, and since we cannot escape from the world, we always include the world in our thinking, feeling, acting and experiencing. This ontological understanding of the human existence influences how the tourist experience should be interpreted. Focus is turned to the tourist's being-in-the-world and how s(he) is directed and focused during the tourist experience. This relational perspective accentuates the situational and dynamic aspects of the tourist experience. The tourist is always situated in a certain socio-cultural horizon of understanding. Likewise, the tourist is always in relation to their lived life which forms their fore-understanding. Both these horizons of understanding act as a frame of reference for the meaning creation throughout the experience. Hence, every experience is embedded in a web of relations to the world. These relations are often tacit and taken for granted by the individual during every-day life and when situated in familiar contexts. However, a tourist involved in a new situation, activity or unfamiliar socio-cultural context faces possible challenges with regard to how to interpret and relate to the world and therefore become more aware of his or her own belonging. This is how we may learn new things

about our self, others and the world while being a tourist. Tourist immersion can be argued to be one specific and identifiable state of being-in-the-world characterized by a temporal focus on being in the moment and a transcendent experience.

The second article, titled “A multi-relational approach for understanding consumer experiences within tourism”(Lindberg et al., 2013), includes the discussion of the being-in-the-world ontology, but also introduces and reviews relational contributions within interpretive consumer research, extraordinary experiences and tourism research. There has been an interpretive turn within consumer and tourism research over the last decades (e.g., Arnould and Thompson, 2005, Carù and Cova, 2007a, Pernecky and Jamal, 2010, Uriely, 2005, Arnould and Price, 1993, Celsi et al., 1993, Sherry et al., 2007). Interpretive research has either focused on the experiential relationships of the individual consumer (e.g., Belk, 1988, Carù and Cova, 2006, Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982, Thompson, 1997) or on the socio-culturally based meaning construction (e.g., McAlexander et al., 2002, Holt, 1998, Arnould and Thompson, 2005). The being-in-the-world ontology incorporates both these perspectives. Consumers co-create their own experiences through their interactions and relations to the world around them (e.g., Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). The quest to enable memorable consumer experiences has turned attention towards extraordinary experiences (Abrahams, 1986, Carù and Cova, 2006, Mossberg, 2007b, Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Consumer immersion is one of several concepts describing intense and extraordinary aspects of the on-going experience.

The most important theoretical contribution of these two articles is the proposed conceptual framework for understanding the consumer experience based on the being-in-the-world ontology. All four core components (in time, in context, in body and in interaction) that consumers are always situated within and across during the dynamic experience and meaning-making process co-exist simultaneously throughout the experience, but are discussed individually for analytical purposes. The theoretical contributions are summed up in three points. First, the articles contribute to an understanding of consumer experiences as largely socio-cultural-historical. This emphasizes the relational and shared aspects of the experience as all tourists always exist in networks of meanings affecting their experience. Second, the multi-relational approach highlights the dynamic understanding of the experience. The tourist's being-in-the-world changes dynamically as he or she moves through and interacts with different aspects of place and time. Third, the focus on relationships in and across experiences in time, context, body and interactions, implies that researchers must focus more on the dynamic experiences and interpretive meanings of tourism. This represents a broader and more holistic perspective regarding what the experience means to the tourist.

In other words, the tourist is embedded in multiple relationships with the world. The dynamic, situational, temporal and contextual interactions with the world at any given time constitute our being-in-the-world. How we interpret our interactions with the world is an on-going process that cannot be separated from who we are as individuals. To understand the tourist experience, we must therefore look beyond the situated event or activity and include the tourist's life-world. It also implies that experiences cannot be orchestrated by anyone

else, or staged, as suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1999). The tourist cannot be reduced to a passive spectator (Ek et al., 2008) who reacts subjectively to external stimulus. On the contrary, each individual is relational and an active creator of his or her experience. These combinations of multiple relationships with the world cannot be controlled, neither by the individual nor by the tourism company (Jantzen et al., 2006). We cannot decide when we will have an awe experience. Sometimes we are caught by surprised about how we react in certain situations. We may, for example, wish or even expect to feel like an explorer when visiting Spitsbergen, but end up feeling scared or like an incompetent tourist because we do not know how to act. The multi-relational perspective emphasizes the dynamic and interpretive aspects of the tourist experience. It is about understanding how the tourist's relations to the world affect his or her experience. The challenge is that the knowledge about these relations remains tacit - both for the researcher, the tourist company, and even for the tourists' themselves. For example, employees in tourism companies might have an intuitive knowledge about these relations following their many years of working with different types of tourists, but most of this knowledge is probably tacit.

The strength of the multi-relational model is that it points to some main relations likely to affect the tourist's being-in-the-world, and as such can become a tool for unraveling and understanding key elements of the experience. In the following paragraphs I will therefore elaborate on these, often tacit, relationships by using examples from my empirical data (including some examples previously unused in the empirical articles). Hopefully, these

examples will prove helpful for researchers and practitioners alike in illustrating how multiple relationships affect the experience.

3.1.1 In context

The first core concept in the conceptual model focuses on the contextual relationships and interactions. Three major contextual relationships are highlighted; the physical context (interactions with nature and manmade environments), the cultural context (the cultural lens that provides initial interpretation and meaning) and the social context (social interaction with travel companions and strangers).

First, understanding the tourist's everyday life, or their everyday belonging-in-the-world, becomes an important element for understanding their tourist experience. What are their cultural, social and historical pre-understandings, and how do these diverge from the context in which the tourist experience takes place? Hence, visiting places and engaging in activities that contrast with the tourists' everyday social-cultural-historical belonging challenges their meaning creation processes. A British tourist would, for example, experience a larger contextual contrast when visiting Bhutan compared to visiting Australia. The unfamiliar socio-cultural-historical context would reveal and disclose what they normally take for granted. The effect of an unfamiliar socio-cultural-historical context can prove both positive and negative. It can make you more *"awake and alert"* as Olivia, one of my informants from London, said during her visit to Spitsbergen. You need to switch off the 'autopilot' of how you normally relate to the world, and you become more aware of your own relations. This can make you more focused on being *"in the moment"* (Olivia, dog-sledding on

Spitsbergen) and trigger reflections and revelations about yourself which give new perspectives into your own everyday life.

However, being out of the comfort zone can also prove problematical, intimidating or even scary for the tourist. You become aware of the fact that you do not have your familiar and habitual skills or previous experience to interpret or manage different environments. *“I was very aware of being a human in that environment, but you know had I not had the right equipment or being on my own or something had happened to me, you could really be in serious trouble out there”* (Sophie, dog sledding on Spitsbergen). During the tour Sophie had a conversation with the guide in which the guide said that she wouldn't know how to 'survive' in a big city like London. This statement made Sophie reflect on the fact that she would not be 'freaked out' by any big city in the world because she is used to the big city landscapes and logics. At the same time she realized that she would not be able to manage in the cold and rural landscape of Spitsbergen without the help of the guide. This illustrates how both the researcher and the tourist company should seek to understand how the tourist relates to the socio-cultural-historical and physical context at the tourist destination.

Similarly, the tourist's relation with the social context will affect the experience. It is by no means an indifferent matter who you travel with, and how your relationship to these persons is. Even if the tourist travels on her/his own, participating in the same activity with total strangers may create temporary social bonds and a feeling of camaraderie (Arnould and Price, 1993). This was the case when the group of the three days winter dog sledding on

Spitsbergen chose to dine together on the last evening together and talk about their experience. Travelling with children is another situation which may turn the focus away from one's own experience towards the child's experience. This happened to my informant Grete who described how she was watching the whales, standing at the gunwale together with her 4-year old son. *"I was very eager about Oscar [her son] seeing the whales. I said to him: 'Oscar, do you see the whale? It's a whale!' [...] Then I started thinking about filming the whale for the children's sake and so that we could watch it again together. So I was shooting the video and talking to Oscar at the same time and he was totally fascinated by the whale"* (Grete, whale safari). Her experience was influenced by her role and values related to parenting. She explained how she was an outdoor enthusiast and how she wanted her children to experience the many natural wonders of Norway as an integrated part of their upbringing. Another example of how social relationships can affect the experience is Thomas who had bought the dog sledding trip as a Christmas present to Sophie. He talked about how seeing his partner happy affected his own experience. *"The satisfaction I got from knowing that she was having such a great time, having bought her that gift, is something that was slightly different to a normal trip. So actually a lot of my enjoyment kind of came from her enjoying it, if you know what I mean"* (Thomas, dog sledding).

3.1.2 In body

The second core concept focuses on the tourist's embodied aspects of experiencing. Our body is an integrated part of our experiential being and functions as a primary connection to the world. The consumer experience must therefore be understood as a bodily relation-toward process (Küpers, 2005).

The bodily aspect is often tacitly knowing and depending on bodily skills in any given activity.

The body is involved in the experience through our senses, attunement, attention, movements, emotions and consciousness. Therefore, our relationship with the world is distinguished by whether the body is passively involved (e.g. sitting in a rafting boat) or actively involved (e.g. during kayaking). Activities that represent bodily challenges, for example climbing Mt. Stetind or paddling a kayak for the first time, require strong focus on what the body is doing. Mastering the activity becomes difficult if the tourist does not engage properly in the moment at hand. My informants Johanne and Klaus talked about how this affected their kayaking experience. *“K: Doing an activity where you have to focus on movements, in combination with the scenic nature experience, makes you empty your head because you need to be present. I think I emptied my head almost immediately because I had to focus. It is a new activity that you want to test and manage. J: Yes, and then you can’t be thinking about your shopping list... (...) It is a very good feeling. It is nice to forget all the things you should have done.”* (Johanne and Klaus, kayaking). Being involved in a new physical activity practically ‘forced’ them to focus on their body, let all other thoughts go and assume a present moment temporality. Hence, how the body is involved in the experience can affect the tourist’s being-in-the-world.

Even though our bodily existence is often tacit and not something we reflect on, we can become aware of our bodies when experiencing something out of the ordinary (positive or negative). Sometimes the body can act as a hindrance

for accessing the themed experience intended by the tourism company. Being seasick, scared, hungry, cold, tired or needing the toilet can become disturbing elements that directly impose on the other relationships within the experiencescape. For example, one of the informants on the winter dog sledding experience found it hard to enjoy the beautiful landscape when her hands and feet were freezing. *“There was one bit towards the end where the light was really lovely because of the sunset, but it was getting darker and I was really cold and I didn’t really enjoy it as much as I could have done because I was thinking about the cold more than the sunset”.* (Olivia, dog sledding). Thomas describes how being hungry encroached on his involvement in the experience and his ability to really get into the experience. *“The gap between breakfast and lunch became a problem for me after a little while, because I was just really hungry and thinking ‘Is it lunch time yet?’ (...) It makes it a bit more mundane, because you are reminded of very basic things. You are less able to lose yourself in experience because you are conscious of the basic need”* (Thomas, dog sledding). In this case, the basic bodily needs came to the forefront of Thomas’ attention and made it difficult for him to enjoy the experience of dog sledding. However, bodily needs or negative feelings are sometimes pushed to the background, if something positive happens. For example, feeling seasick was a big challenge for most of my informants during the whale safari. However, nobody vomited when watching the whales. The negative bodily focus was temporarily suppressed and pushed to the background and all the focus was directed at their relationship with the whale. *“Suddenly, you don’t feel your nausea anymore”* (Grete, whale safari). *“When you see the whale, you forget that you are seasick and scared [of being on the boat]. When you are 100% focused on the whale, you forget yourself”* (Frida, whale safari). Hence, how we are situated with our body is a central part of our

being-in-the-world, and sometimes the body becomes the centre of attention during an experience.

Positive experiences are also embodied. Engaging in challenging experiences often involve a learning curve where the struggles are eventually rewarded by feelings of well-being, immersion and a sense of achievement when mastering the activity. This represents an embodied being-in-the-world. Sophie describes moments of being immersed in nature during dog sledding as *“being very peaceful inside”* (Sophie, dog sledding). Klaus describes how he calmed down as his body found the balance in the kayak: *“It is the feeling in your body, that it is going to be fine. You are managing to balance”* (Klaus, kayaking). The embodied feeling in some situations can be so prominent that this becomes important for how we remember the experience. Ida, one of my informants participating on the whale safari, talked about how she would relate to her experience, looking back at her encounter with the sperm whales. She argued that the most intense moments would be linked to an embodied memory: *“I agree that when you look back at an experience, it can change. However, those moments when I was totally immersed – they do not change. I can remember those moments. I remember them with my whole body”* (Ida, whale safari). The multi-relational perspective allocates more attention to the embodied aspects of the experience compared to other relational approaches such as the experiencescape (Mossberg, 2007a, O'Dell, 2005) or servicescape (Bitner, 1992).

3.1.3 In interaction

The third core concept in the model is interaction. As the name indicates, these are interactional relationships taking place within the experiencescape. One could argue that this aspect represents more immediate or direct interactions, compared to the other relational aspects of context, time and body. We focus on four main types of interaction: with the self, with others, with animals and with objects. The interactions influencing the experience will vary according to the type and duration of the activity.

Social interaction can be regarded as an element in how the tourist examines and makes sense of the experiencescape (Lehn, 2006, White and White, 2008). Hence, it means something whether you share the experience with a romantic partner or with friends. Good social interaction becomes more imperative if the activity lasts for three days compared to a short trip lasting a few hours. The same would be the case if the activity requires the group members to cooperate and interact (such as during dog sledding) compared to a more passive activity (such as whale safari or rib safari). In a challenging activity (e.g. climbing Mt. Stetind) different skill levels amongst the tourists can affect the interactions in the group and therefore the individual experience. Markus, who had been dreaming about climbing this mountain for over 40 years, worried that his age and fitness would slow the whole group down. This made him lose sleep the night before and dominated his belonging in the world as the group was pushing up the steep mountainside. *"I was anxious about my own physical fitness. You are very keen on making it, and the group was very fit. I was twice their average age. (...) You don't think about anything else because it is so straining. You walk at your max, and you are nervous about breaking up old*

injuries, and you are performance-oriented because you are doing something very important. (...) I was thinking about my tasks, like the athletes, you know. 'How can I increase my step speed?'” (Markus, mountaineering).

Tours with multiple tour guides enable splitting groups into different skill levels. This occurred during the kayak course. It became apparent during the first course day that at least two of the participants had considerably less skills and learning capacity compared to the rest of the group. The less skilled participants were paid special attention during the training sessions. Moreover, they formed a separate group on the half day paddling tour on the second day where they paddled a shorter route and met up with the rest of the group for lunch. *“The different skill levels were apparent, and then it’s nice that one of them [help-instructor] pulled him aside so it doesn’t end up with just one person getting the main instructors attention all the time”* (Lisa, kayak course). Hence, balancing individual considerations and addressing group interactions can require caretaking and extra resources.

Compositions of the group become more critical with high challenging activities or extraordinary contexts. Hiking in places like Spitsbergen, for example, involves being able to adapt to an outdoor logic of being in nature with less facilities, rapidly shifting weather conditions and staying together as a guided group at all times due to the danger of polar bear attacks. If the group interactions are good they can enhance the whole experience and add elements of camaraderie and new friendships. However, groups with participants with heterogeneous expectations, values or skills may create tension and conflicts. This was the case on one of my fellow Northern Insight

researcher's arctic hikes, where some of the participants refused to join the arctic walk. They were not outdoor-oriented in the first place and found the trip more exhausting than they had expected. They were wet and cold and they wondered how to go to the toilet during the arctic walk. The challenge of joining the walk became too much when the guide told them that they could "pee behind a stone if they needed to", and they decided to stay put in the guesthouse (Lindberg and Eide, 2013). The absence of interaction with other tourists can also affect the tourist experience. *"I think that it is definitely the isolation and the sense of you being one of very few people that are experiencing this at that point is something that does increase intensity"* (Thomas, dog sledding). Not seeing or meeting other tourists hence made it easier for Thomas to engage in the explorer role rather than the tourist role.

The interaction with the tour guide is pivotal and therefore further discussed as a separate research question (see research question three and article four and five). However, interactions with other members of the tourist company may also have an impact on the experience. One situation illustrating this arose during the three-day dog sledding trip on Spitsbergen. Due to problems with flooding of the sea ice, there had to be last minute changes in the choice of route. The group had to be accommodated in a simple cabin with no electricity or running water, and this consequently stressed the company's cook. The informants had spent the whole day on the sledge and they had transformed into a feeling of being explorers of the Arctic. However, when entering the cabin they met the cook who lay all her frustrations about linen and sleeping arrangements on them. This incidence made them totally change their belonging-in-the-world. *"One of the things about the way that she [the cook]*

behaved is that it brought a certain sense of mundanity to that experience, which didn't feel exciting or out-of-worldly because she was moaning about practical issues. When you are in that lodge, you want to lose yourself in the romance and excitement of being in a lodge - not have her complaining about the fact there weren't enough pillow cases" (Thomas, dog sledding). One of the informants was a vegetarian and commented on the fact that the quality of the food and cooking skills was less than would be expected on a trip like this. *"She let the whole thing down, I think, their chef, or so called chef. Because she couldn't cook and she was in such a flap about the sleeping arrangements" (Sophie, dog sledding).* Since the group could not discuss their experience with the cook during the activity, this became one of the main topics of conversations when they dined together on the last evening.

Interactions with others also include interaction with local people. Meeting the locals may add to the authenticity of the experience, for example when the dog sledding group passed a group of locals on snowmobiles heading towards the Svea mine. *"People going to work, that actually felt like you were part of Svalbard. This is what people do when they live here" (Thomas, dog sledding).* Interactions with locals may also make tourists reflect more upon their own role as tourists or visitors at the destination. What feels extraordinary to the tourist is the everyday life of the locals. One example is handling the cold Arctic weather. Thomas describes how there was an intense cold wind blowing across the runway at the airport when they had to walk from the terminal building to the plane. The fact that he could be hurt by the weather made him feel like being on 'the edge' and having a remarkable experience, while he observed that the locals seemed unaffected. *"It was incredibly painful, just to walk a few*

yards in that wind with no hat on. By the time I got on the plane my ears felt like they were going to fall off. (...) So, even getting on the plane you felt you were sort of on the edge of the tourist experience you know. (...) All these hardy Scandinavians, they just strode across the tarmac without even batting an eyelid, you know. But I really hurt my head! It's kind of strange (laughter) (Thomas, dog sledding).

The human-animal encounter represents an alternative interaction with others. Although less verbal and more embodied, this interaction may result in intense emotions and a feeling of connectedness. Interactions with animals are described in the sixth article and can affect the experience both positively and negatively. Interactions with the big and mysterious whales are the main attraction of whale safari. The strong bonding with the dogs caught most of the informants by surprise during dog sledding, but became a major part of the whole experience. *"I didn't really think about the bond before I got here. Actually that is the main thing I take away from this, my relationship with the dogs"* (Olivia, dog sledding). Showing affection to the dogs and having the dogs as a common theme to talk about also contributed to the social bonding in the group. *"Everyone has got something [the dogs] that you can discuss, and you can help each other out. It is a good bonding exercise for a group that is going off into the wilderness"* (Sophie, dog sledding). However, if the interaction with animals becomes negative, it can also permeate the tourist's relation to the world. The horse-riding case in article five illustrates how the rooky tourists struggle with their bonding with the horse and how this becomes the overshadowing relation throughout the experience.

Interaction with self is the tourist's inner dialogue and can be considered a process of self-discovery and reflexive awareness. It can be directed towards the past (e.g., remembering previous experiences), the present (e.g., focusing on following the guide's instructions) or towards the future (e.g., thinking about a work related problem that has to be solved after the holiday). If these interactions become strong enough, they may affect the tourist's belonging in the world during the experience. A good illustration of this is Frida who suddenly became scared during the whale safari. Four years earlier she had been on a boat trip in Thailand in ten meter high waves during the monsoon. The boat almost capsized, people were screaming and she thought she was going to die. Being out on the whale safari boat in the rough weather brought the memories and feelings of the boat trip in Thailand back, and she became scared. *"So when the line drops here [explaining the experience curve] it is because the boat went far out into the open sea and I lost sight of the shoreline. I started to panic a bit, and I thought it was scary. (...) We lost sight of the shoreline in Thailand as well"* (Frida, whale safari). It was being in a situation with a boat at sea and feeling the waves that triggered the memory. Even though this had happened a long time ago, the interaction with this memory nevertheless managed to make her scared and influenced her whale safari experience.

Lastly, interactions with objects include any object that is imperative during the activity, e.g., kayak oar, bicycle or sledge. The nature of this interaction will affect the consumer's focus and attention during the activity.

3.1.4 In time

The last core element discussed in the multi-relational approach is relationships in time. Previous relational approaches within the service and experience marketing literature (Bitner, 1992, Mossberg, 2007a) have mainly concentrated on the relationships and interactions between the consumer and the physical surroundings. However, the tourist's temporality becomes important in a being-in-the-world ontology. We discuss two dynamic aspects of time; how the tourist relates to the experience over time, and the temporality of the tourist (the temporal aspect of being-in-the-world) during the experience.

First, the tourist relates to the experience before the event as expectations, during the experience as perceptions (or as a belonging to the world according to a multi-relational perspective), and after the experience as memories (Larsen, 2007). Consumers have different timestyles, i.e., different ways in which they perceive and use time (Cotte et al., 2004). One of the elements of the timestyles is the individual's temporal orientation (Bergadaà, 1990), that is, the relative significance individuals attach to the past, present and future. All individuals relate to all three aspects of time, but some are more oriented towards the past, the present or the future.

All tourists have expectations of an activity that they have booked or a destination they chose to visit and these expectations will act as a fore-understanding of the experience. Some tourists may want to keep the expectations to a minimum in order to increase the intensity of the experience

in the present moment. One example of this is my informants Sophie and Thomas who booked their trip to Spitsbergen and then tried to avoid seeing or reading anything about the destination before the trip. They did not want their own expectations or other tourists' shared experiences in social media to permeate the experience as it unfolded. *"Whenever I do trips like this I like to book them and then not do too much research. Because, one of the reasons you travel is to be surprised by things and be excited. In the age of internet travelling you can research it until the whole experience is exhausted before you even leave"* (Thomas, dog sledding). In other cases, expectations can constitute special motivations or add a particular symbolic meaning to the activity. One example of this is in the case of Markus who had been dreaming about climbing Mt. Stetind for over 40 years. During the first ten years of his life, he lived with his parents just below the mountain. Coinciding with their move to the south of the country, both his parents died. This childhood experience made him emotionally connected to the mountain and to the place representing the time he shared with his parents. *"I used the word 'experience' in a SMS I sent from the top. I wrote 'life-experience', meaning an once-in-a-lifetime experience. And it was! We lived here for 10 years and looked up at this mountain, and I've been thinking 'Okay, you'll be on the top one day'. Now I've done it, and I am 55 years old. It is 45 years since I moved away from here and it has become a thing I just had to do before I die"* (Markus, mountaineering). This symbolic meaning and long-term expectations permeated the whole experience of climbing the mountain and his motivation for reaching the summit.

Relating to an experience when it is over is different than relating to the on-going experience. Some experiences are strenuous and challenging as they

unfold (“hell”), but still something we remember with pleasure afterwards (“heaven”). One important factor is the fact that we know the outcome or end result when we look back at the experience. The tension that might have been there during the activity (for example worrying about ‘will we make it to the cabin before the dark?’ or ‘will the kayak capsize?’) is released. Research within psychology has shown that our memories suffer a rapid decline in accuracy (Larsen, 2007). Our memory is selective and some events are remembered while others are forgotten. What we tend to remember is the peak and end experiences, the moments that are rich with self-relevant information and personal meanings dominate the way we evaluate past affective episodes (Fredrickson, 2000).

The second aspect of in time relationships is the tourist’s temporality *during* the experience or activity. The dynamic aspect of time allows us to incorporate the past and the future into the present moment, and the question is what temporality dominates the belonging to the world at any given time. How is the tourist’s temporal directedness? Is it directed towards the past, the future or is it directed towards what is going on here and now? Carù and Cova (2007a) argue that immersion and being in the moment is important in order to access the experience. However, there are many relational elements that may draw the tourist’s temporal awareness towards the past or the future. The use of mobile phones (White and White, 2007), updating of statuses in social media and the expectancy of being ‘online’ all the time are examples of activities that compete with the focus of being in present the moment. Lack of framing the experience is another example of how insufficient information can give the tourist a future oriented temporality. This was the case during the second day

of dog sledding when several of the informants spent much energy wondering about when the group would be back at the cabin, and where this future oriented focus disturbed their on-going experience.

Different situational elements may help the tourist become more focused on the present moment. Dramaturgical facilitated or spontaneous peak moments (e.g., when the whale surfaces) can make the tourist become involved. Participating in challenging activities (e.g., kayaking for the first time) heightens the intensity and turns the tourist's focus to mastering the on-going activity. Putting on costumes, for example dressing in similar clothes like survival suits (rib safari) or warm snowsuit outfits (dog sledding), may also help the tourist transform into a different temporality. Moving between different experiencescapes and changing the physical environment, e.g., leaving the modern hotel and entering the dog yard which was built as a reconstructed trapper station, may also help the tourist switch between different belonging in the world. These transformations are often tacit to the tourist. However, the change from one state of being to another sometimes become challenging. One of the guides' at Spitsbergen told me how he once arranged a dog sledding trip for a group of business people arriving directly from a conference. He observed that many of them struggled with the change from an urban "business identity" to the required "dog sledding identity" of the Arctic. The guide tried to help them change their temporal being-in-the-world by first discussing it with the group ("your bodies are here, but your heads haven't left the conference") and second by performing a "transformation ritual" where the group lay down in the snow for five minutes listening to the Arctic silence. According to the guide, the group changed into a more present oriented

temporality. It is this present moment oriented being-in-the-world which is the essence of consumer immersion and which will be discussed in the next section.

3.2 Consumer immersion is a key concept in order to understand extraordinary experiences

The third article, titled “Consumer immersion: a key to extraordinary experiences” (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013), addresses the second research question: How can the concept of consumer immersion be understood? This is a conceptual article discussing different definitions of immersion, related concepts, the underlying foundations for the immersion process and relations that facilitate immersion.

The first research question in the third article is: How can immersion be defined and understood?

The article discusses how different researchers have defined immersion in different contexts (Abuhamdeh and Csikszentmihalyi, 2012, Carù and Cova, 2006, Jennett et al., 2008, Mainemelis, 2001, Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Common to all these definitions is that they describe a special state of being-in-the-world characterized by a complete and deep involvement in the present moment and in the here-and-now-directed activity. During moments of immersion, the involvement is so intense that the individual may lose awareness of time and self-consciousness. Some of the definitions (Carù and

Cova, 2006, Mainemelis, 2001) also emphasize the notion of 'letting-go' and surrendering to the activity.

Even though Carù and Cova (2005, Carù and Cova, 2006, Carù and Cova, 2007a) have written a series of articles on consumer immersion within consumer behavior, they do not provide a concrete definition of immersion. However, they argue that *"the immersion concept literally implies becoming one with the experience and therefore conveys the idea of a total elimination of the distance between consumers and the situation, the former being plunged in a thematised and secure spatial enclave where they can let themselves go"*. (Carù and Cova, 2006, p. 5). Hence, the authors emphasize both the transcendental qualities of immersion (the letting-go process) and the consumer's directedness towards the present moment during immersion (becoming one, elimination of distance). They further argue that the context must be enclavized, thematized and secure (Carù and Cova, 2007a). The notion of distance or separation to the world (which is described as disharmony or divergence from expectations) becomes problematic in a multi-relational perspective. Based in a being-in-the-world ontology we could argue that the consumer is always situated in a relationship with the world. However, the consumer can have different belonging in the world and this will influence their directedness and temporality during the activity. Carù and Cova (2005) further argue that the consumers distance to the world can be reduced via the appropriation process. This theory is based on the appropriation of space and developed by researchers in environmental psychology (e.g., Prohansky et al., 1970, Serfaty-Garzon, 2003, Fischer, 1992). The goal of appropriation is *"to make something your own, to adapt it to yourself, thereby transforming it into*

something that is part of your expression of yourself” (Serfaty-Garzon, 2003, p. 27). Thus, the appropriation process focuses on the consumer’s interpretation and identity construction processes. Carù and Cova (2005) link immersion to the consumer’s interpretive understanding of the situation and argue that a certain level of familiarity is requested in order to become immersed. This constitutes the underlying foundations for the transcendental element of immersion (letting go).

Pine and Gilmore (1999) discuss immersion related to their experience realm model. The customer’s engagement is discussed along two dimensions; guest participation (passive or active participation) and the connection or environmental relationship uniting consumers with the event or performance (absorption or immersion). Absorption is defined as “occupying a person’s attention by bringing the experience into the mind” while immersion is defined as “becoming physically (or virtually) a part of the experience itself” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 31). The authors elaborate by explaining that if the experience “goes into the guest” (e.g. watching TV), he is absorbed in the experience, while if the guest “goes into the experience” (e.g. playing a virtual game) he is immersed in the experience (ibid). The experience realm model is problematical on multiple levels. Their view on experience as something outside the consumer becomes problematical in a multi-relational perspective. Moreover, their definition of immersion indicates a separation of the mental and physical elements of the consumer’s experience. But what do they mean when they argue that the person becomes a physical part of the experience itself? How can the consumer not be physically part of the experience? Consumers can be more or less physically active, and yet always part of an

experience. One can argue that the experience is not something that exists outside the individual and it cannot be deconstructed into isolated parts. Third, the operationalization into four subcategories in the experience realm is also problematical. One example is the escapist experience (combining active participation and immersive environment) which is labeled “diverging into a new self” and measured by testing factors like “The experience here let me imagine being someone else” and “I completely escaped from reality”(Oh et al., 2007, p. 121). Pine and Gilmore (1999) provide many examples of the escapist experience and yet no reasoning as to why escapism is directly linked to immersion. Pine and Gilmore’s (1999) ontological position has been criticized by several other authors (e.g., Holbrook, 2000, Jantzen et al., 2006).

The third article in this dissertation continues to discuss how immersion can be related to other concepts such as extraordinary experiences (Abrahams, 1986, Arnould and Price, 1993), and peak experiences (Maslow, 1967), flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990) and peak performance (McInman and Grove, 1991, Privette, 1983). Immersion shares at least two aspects with extraordinary experiences, namely the qualities of absorption and the phenomenon of letting go. Similarly, immersion endorses many characteristics of peak experience, e.g.; total attention, rich perception, unity of the world, the fusion of dichotomies, ego transcendence, lack of time and space consciousness, and fusion of the individual. Aspects shared between the two concepts of immersion and flow are; the merging of action and awareness, concentration on the task at hand, loss of self-consciousness and the transformation of time. Lastly, peak performance and immersion have strong focus and high intensity in common. Immersion can be seen as a pivotal part of all these related

concepts since they all describe intense and positive human experiences which share the element of immersion as a significant factor. However, they also have distinguishing characteristics and can therefore be regarded as different origins or types of immersion.

In order to answer the first research question in article three, and based on the discussion of the current research of immersion, we propose a new definition of immersion. “Immersion can be defined as a form of spatio-temporal belonging in the world that is characterized by deep involvement in the present moment. Immersion involves lack of awareness of time and a loss of self-consciousness” (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013, p. 212). This definition incorporates the multi-relational perspective and offers a more comprehensive approach to immersion. It focuses on immersion as a particular state of being-in-the-world characterized by intense and transcendental involvement in the here and now. This is a quality that immersion shares with a number of other related concepts such as extraordinary experiences, peak experiences, flow and peak performances. Is there just one type of immersion or could there be different nuances of this state of being in the world? It is clear that immersion both can be discussed as a phenomenon in its own right or as an important element of related concepts. We have chosen to discuss it as a singular concept because this state of being-in-the-world represents important moments in the consumer’s value creation process.

The second research question in the third article is: What are the underlying foundations and facilitators for immersion?

We claim that the underlying foundations for immersion can be found in the spatio-temporal dimensions of the experience (the tourist's interaction with space and time). First, Carù and Cova (2007a) argue that the underlying foundation for immersion can be found in our interaction with the experiential context (i.e. space). The context must be enclavized, secure and thematized and these are interrelated qualities that are discussed in the article. To enclavize the context implies establishing boundaries for the experience with a clear start and stop of the activity. This enhances the intensity of the experience by reducing interfering elements (Firat and Dholakia, 1998) and contrasting the experience with the tourist's everyday life (Quan and Wang, 2004). A sense of security is pivotal in order to 'let oneself go' and focus on being in the moment. This is especially important if the activity/setting is new for the consumer. The theme acts as a symbolic packaging for the context and can be regarded as the dramaturgical space (Edensor, 2000). How the theme is communicated is important for how the tourist understands and interprets the meaning and values of the experience.

Second, underlying foundations for immersion can be found in our interaction with the temporal aspects of the experience. Essential for immersion is the tourist's transformation towards a being-in-the-world which is focused on the present moment. Rites of passages, rites of integration and rites of intensification may increase the emotional intensity of the experience and hence assist the tourist's immersion (Arnould and Price, 1993, Turner, 1987). Jafari's tourist model (1987) emphasizes the transformational aspects of tourist experiences and the establishment of a liminal world, or tourist 'bubble', in which the tourist can immerse. According to reversal theory (Kerr and Apter,

1991), this psychological bubble defines a playful state which can be called a 'protective frame' (Gyimóthy and Mykletun, 2004). The protective frame enables the tourist temporarily to step outside his or her everyday life and engage in purposeless and playful activities (Gyimóthy and Mykletun, 2004). Successful transformation into this playful state enables a temporal focus on enjoying the moment.

In addition to the previous research, we argue that immersion can be facilitated or hindered by the consumer's interactions with the experiencescape (Mossberg, 2007a, O'Dell, 2005). Interaction with the physical environment (e.g., beautiful nature) is one of the main facilitators for immersion in nature-based experiences. Interaction with the company's personnel is another key element of most tourism experiences. The guide has the most prominent role as a provider of safety, knowledge, and as an initiator and moderator of socialization with and within the group. The last two relationships discussed are social interactions (with other tourists, locals or animals) and relationships with objects. How the tourist experiences all these interrelated and dynamic interactions during the activity has the potential to either facilitate or hinder immersion. Engaging storytelling from the guide may, for example, facilitate immersion by enhancing the tourist's interaction and understanding of the landscape, while feeling hungry or struggling to control the kayak oar are examples of what might hinder immersion. This emphasizes the importance of the tour guide's roles which is discussed in the next research question.

A conceptual model for the underlying foundations and facilitators for immersion is presented. The model incorporates the dynamic, spatial and temporal aspects of the tourism experience, and is argued as being generalizable in relation to different consumer experience contexts. This holistic approach to the understanding of consumer immersion emphasizes the importance of immersion as a concept within the experience economy, and can provide a better understanding of the factors that facilitate immersion during tourist experiences for tourism companies.

3.3 The tour guide plays an important role in facilitating consumer immersion

The fourth and fifth articles address the third research question: What is the role of the guide in facilitating consumer immersion? The fourth article, titled “Guide performance – co-created experiences for tourist immersion” (Mossberg et al., forthcoming), is conceptual and discusses how the guide’s roles and performance are crucial for tourists’ creation of value and immersion. The article presents a model showing the co-creational process and relation between tour guides’ performance and tourist immersion. The fifth article, titled “Tour guide’s performance and tourists’ immersion: facilitating consumer immersion by performing a guide plus role” (Hansen and Mossberg, forthcoming), provides empirical evidence that support these theoretical contributions. The two articles are presented and discussed together below.

The first research question in the fourth article is: What are the tour guides’ basic roles for tourist immersion?

A literature review of tour guides' roles and performances show that the tour guide is crucial for the tourists' meaning-making process and value creation. A variety of roles have been described, e.g., diplomats, entertainers, miracle workers, ambassadors, instructors, teachers, knowledge founts, tour-leaders and animators (Mancini, 2001, Holloway, 1981, Hughes, 1991, Zhang and Chow, 2004, Cohen, 1985). Meaningful experiences are co-created through personal interaction and involvement between the tourist and the tour guide.

The tour guide's performance can be discussed in relation to the establishment of an enclavized, secured and thematized context. The enclave involves establishing a 'tourist bubble' with specific boundaries and which helps the tourist to 'frame' the experience. The tour guides may perform several roles contributing to an enclavized context; for example as group leaders (e.g., Holloway, 1981), middlemen (e.g., van den Berghe, 1980), or interpreters (e.g., Almagor, 1985). Tour guides are also pivotal in establishing a sense of security for the tourists during the activity and in unfamiliar places. The tour guide may take on roles as the securer of the tourist's personal safety (e.g., Gurung et al., 1996), natural brokers (e.g., Almagor, 1985), problem solvers (e.g., Reisinger and Waryszak, 1994), surrogate parents (e.g., Schuchat, 1983) or trusted friends (e.g., Cohen, 1985). Lastly, tour guides play a central role in thematizing the context for the tourist. The thematized context acts as a symbolic packaging (Carù and Cova, 2007a) designed to stimulate the consumers' senses, smooth the meeting with other consumers or create a dramaturgical space. Tour guides are trained to enact roles that fit with the appropriate thematized context, and include their dramaturgical skills and role as

entertainers (e.g., Holloway, 1981), animators (e.g., Hanefors and Wong, 2007) and storytellers (e.g., Mossberg, 2008).

This conceptual framework developed in article four is supported by empirical data in article five. The empirical data is based on three case studies of tourist experiences on Spitsbergen. The three cases varied with regard to whether the guide successfully managed to perform his/her basic roles and plus roles. The first research question in the empirical article five corresponds with the first research question in the conceptual article four.

The first research question in article five is: How can the tour guide's performance establish a thematized and secure enclave within the experiencescape?

The empirical data confirms the importance of the guide's performance in establishing a thematized and secure enclave for the tourist. One of the cases, case 1, illustrates how the guide failed to perform his basic role. The guide provided no information about the schedule of the activity (enclave/framing the experience) and limited information about the theme. Even more critical was the lack of information about security issues, limited instructions and reluctance to interact with the tourists' during the activity. This undermined the feeling of security for the novel participants and focus was turned from enjoying the activity, into worrying about security issues. Hence, the prerequisites for immersion were not met. The two remaining cases exemplify how the guide's performance meets the requirements of the basic role and

therefore enable the tourists to establish a protective frame. The basic role performance includes, for example, briefing and debriefing sessions with information about the activity, communicating facts about nature, culture and history, and emphasizing safety through instruction and behavior.

Moving on then to the second research question which is identical in both the fourth and fifth article: how can the tour guide's performance facilitate tourist immersion?

In the conceptual article (article four) we propose that the tour guide's performance can be separated into three; below basic, basic and plus performance. A basic performance implies that the guide is able to establish a secure and thematized enclave in which the tourist can become immersed. The pre-requisites for immersion are not met if the guide is unable or fails at establishing this secure and thematized enclave and we labeled this a below basic performance. However, extra effort and a performance above the basic level of performance, e.g., through superior caretaking, entertaining, animation or excellent storytelling, can facilitate tourist immersion. We label this level a guide plus performance. The model proposes a relationship between the guide's performance and the tourist's willingness and ability to co-create the experience, and hence become immersed. The article is a theoretical contribution to the existing literature by elaborating on the tour guides' key role for consumer immersion.

The proposed model in article four is confirmed by empirical data in article five. In one of the three cases (case 3) the tour guide managed to perform a guide

plus role. She did this by giving the tourists good individual instructions regarding how to manage the activity, by being a good social mediator initiating social sharing and reflection, and by good storytelling and focusing on the individual meaning creation process. We conclude that the tour guide's performance during this activity had a positive effect on the tourists' involvement and immersion. Case 2 illustrates how the guide manages to perform his basic roles by focusing on safety and framing the experience for the tourists through good briefing and de-briefing sessions with information about the theme. However, he was unsuccessful at performing a guide plus role due to his introvert personality, limited language and storytelling skills, inability of mediating social interaction in the group, and lack of attention to individuals (e.g., did not ensure that all the tourists were provided with survival suits fitting them).

Consumer immersion can occur with or without the assistance of a tour guide. However, we conclude that tour guides play a key role in the co-creation process and that their performance can facilitate consumer immersion and co-create extraordinary experiences. This requires that their performance grows from being focused on service quality dimensions (basic role), towards focusing on the tourist's experience and meaning creation processes (plus role). As tourists we often seek new experiences and new destinations. A basic role of the tour guide is to provide safety in an unfamiliar place, help us interpret new surroundings, or teach us how to manage exciting new activities. If the guide does not manage to perform his or her basic roles by providing sufficient information, safety and framing the experience for the tourist, the opportunity to become immersed or have a good experience may be lost for the tourist.

The guide plus role illustrates how the guide can facilitate the tourist's involvement and interactions within the experiencescape as well as initiate and strengthen the tourist's meaning creation during the activity. Immersion is facilitated e.g., through the guide's engaging storytelling, individualized instructions (so the tourist can manage his or her performance of the activity), facilitating social interaction within the group (both through the guide's social skills and as a social mediator), and caretaking for the individual tourist.

3.4 Multiple types of immersion occur during nature-based tourist experiences

The sixth article addresses the fourth research question: How do consumers experience immersion during nature-based tourist experiences? The previous articles have explored the concepts of experience and immersion and looked at the tour guide's role for consumer immersion. This sixth and last empirical article, titled "Moments that count. Consumer immersion within nature-based experiences" (Hansen, forthcoming), explores where, when and how tourists become immersed during a specific type of tourism experiences (nature based tourism). The study focuses on tourism experiences which include challenging activities where the tourists have to engage through their own performance and experiences situated in sublime landscapes with high aesthetic qualities. Both these factors are renowned for triggering strong human emotions and immersion, are therefore likely to occur.

The research question in article six is: how do consumers experience immersion during nature-based tourist experiences?

To the best of my knowledge, little empirical research has been conducted to explore consumer immersion in a tourism context. However, tourism and recreational research have explored related concepts such as: peak experiences (e.g., Wuthnow, 1978), ecstasy (e.g., Laski, 1961), transcendent experiences (e.g., Williams and Harvey, 2001), awe (e.g., Powell et al., 2012) and extraordinary experiences (e.g., Arnould and Price, 1993). Even though these concepts originate in different scientific paradigms, they all share the transcendental quality of deep involvement in the present moment. One could therefore argue that being immersed is an over-arching and essential element of extraordinary and transcendent consumer experiences.

The empirical findings in the sixth article confirm that moments of immersion represent significant value for the tourists. The findings also indicate that the prospect of becoming immersed is a motivating factor and an important 'reason to go' when choosing the activity. The tourists experienced multiple moments of immersion during the activity. The study presents various examples of how the combination of nature, activities and animals (which is typical for nature-based tourism experiences) provide immersive and extraordinary experiences. The findings identified two different and mutually exclusive types of immersion, which I have labeled; immersion 'by being' and immersion 'by doing'.

First, immersion by being is triggered by relations to sublime landscapes, beauty in nature or gazing at wildlife (e.g., whales and reindeers). These moments are characterized by the feeling of connectedness or 'oneness' with nature or the animal. It is an effortless interaction which requires time for solitude, tranquility, contemplation, reflection and withdrawal from any

activities that might prevent the 'letting go' process. Second, immersion by 'doing' is triggered during the intense performance of mastering a challenging activity. These moments are characterized by the feeling of optimal performance and an embodied focus on the physical activity. Being immersed by doing, results in feelings of joy, empowerment, achievement and sense of relief on mastering the activity.

Both types of immersion did occur during the same tourist activity, but during different sequences of the activity, which indicates that the two types of immersion are mutually exclusive. This finding differentiates and expands the established theory regarding consumer immersion and suggests that nature-based tourism experiences can result in a larger specter of immersion as compared to classical music concerts (Carù and Cova, 2005), staged experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) or gaming experiences (e.g., Calleja, 2007). Similar patterns of the two types of immersion were found across multiple types of activities and experiencescapes, and this strengthens the trustworthiness and transferability of the study.

The two types of immersion indicate that the tourist's being-in-the-world is directed towards different relationships. While immersion in being is effortless and requires time for solitude and reflection, immersion in doing requires the tourist to master a challenging performance. For example, it is not possible to be immersed in the beautiful Arctic landscape at the same time as one is immersed in the challenging activity of driving the dog sledge along a winding and icy riverbed. Different triggers of the two types of immersion also indicate that they must be facilitated in different ways by the tourism providers. In

addition, the two types of immersion seem to add different types of value to the experience for the tourists. While immersion by being triggers existential reflections, revelations and pleasure, immersion by doing triggers a sense of achievement, learning and personal growth values.

Findings show that the tourists' moved in and out of immersion throughout the tour. This illustrates the dynamic and multi-relational aspects of the experience. The informants experienced both moments of high involvement and moments of total immersion. The transcendental and most intense moments of immersion are describes as short (seconds or minutes). However, some informants describe longer periods from 30 minutes (e.g., during whale safari), to four hours (e.g., during summer dog sledding) to whole days (e.g., during winter dog sledding) as time periods where they are more or less became immersed in the activity. At the same time the study shows many examples of how various challenges can prevent the tourists from becoming immersed during an experience. Several of these hindrances to immersion were identified in the data, e.g., bodily discomfort (such as being cold, hungry or seasick) and distractions (such as social tension and attention being required for something else). This can be linked back to the multi-relational perspective and dynamic aspect of the being-in-the-world ontology (see article one and two). Tourists move in and out of immersion throughout the activity. However, the findings of this study challenge the cyclical and one-way oriented process of appropriation which previous research has applied in order to explain the immersion process (Carù and Cova, 2006, Carù and Cova, 2005). My findings from nature-based experiences indicate a more flexible and dynamic process related to the on-going interactions within the experiencescape.

The study confirms that moments of immersion are pivotal to the tourist's value creation - also within nature-based tourist experiences. Immersion embodies the most valuable and memorable moments for many tourists'. This indicates that tourism providers, who facilitate for consumer immersion and focus on the individual tourist's meaning creation processes, may be able to achieve competitive advantages.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

My overriding aim in this dissertation is to contribute to the development of knowledge about consumer immersion within nature-based tourism. What did we learn from the studies? Each of the six presented articles has generated new key findings.

First, the multi-relational perspective represents a dynamic and holistic approach to understanding the tourist's value- and meaning creation processes. The being-in-the-world ontology represents a framework for interpretation and comprehension of the relational interactions that permeates the experience. In this way, the first two articles make theoretical contributions, not only to understanding the tourist experience, but towards a new fundamental understanding of consumption experiences in general.

Second, it is clear that consumer immersion is at the heart of the nature-based tourist experience and pivotal for how the tourist values the activity. The findings in this dissertation show how immersion represents key moments in the tourist's value creation processes. In article three we provide a new definition of immersion in accordance with a multi-relational perspective. Important prerequisites and facilitators for immersion are identified and discussed in relation to existing research literature. We argue that the underlying foundations for immersion can be found in the spatio-temporal dimensions of the consumer experience. Further, involvement and immersion

is facilitated through individuals' multiple and dynamic relationships with the world and their lived lives.

Third, our findings show that the tour guide plays a key role in facilitating customer immersion. This includes the performance of basic roles in establishing a protective frame in which the consumers can let themselves go. Regardless of the situation, the context must be enclavized, secure, and thematized, and this constitutes the underlying foundations for immersion. In addition, we propose and describe a guide 'plus' performance focusing on the extra efforts of the tour guides to facilitate for consumer immersion. In this guide plus role the tour guide focuses on the consumer's meaning creation process and on how the tour guide can facilitate involvement through their storytelling, animating, instructing and social caretaking roles and performances. As immersion is seen as a process of accessing an experience (Carù and Cova, 2007a), the tour guide's roles and performance can be argued to be a key to the co-creation of extraordinary experiences for the consumer.

Fourth, the prospect of becoming immersed in nature or during activities in nature is one of the motivating factors for buying this type of tourism products. The capacity for facilitating immersion (through the guide plus role) thus represents a potential competitive advantage for nature-based tourism firms. The empirical findings show that consumers experience multiple moments of immersion and that two mutually exclusive types of immersion can be identified during nature-based experiences; immersion by being and immersion by doing. The first type is primarily triggered by interactions and relationships with nature or animals, while the latter is triggered during own physical

performance. This extends previous research on consumer immersion and opens up for a more detailed and nuanced understanding of how immersion may occur.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Theoretical implications

Even though the interpretive turn in marketing and consumer research has created more interest in the diversity, subjectivity, context, and meaning negotiation when studying experiences (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, Uriely, 2005), much of this research has focused on how specific components may influence consumer experiences . Holistically oriented approaches still remain the exception to the rule (Carù and Cova, 2003, Carù and Cova, 2007b, Thompson, 1997, Walls et al., 2011a, Walls et al., 2011b). The main theoretical contributions of the proposed multi-relational approach is to suggest how one can understand consumer experiences through the investigations of lived experiences and meaning as these change in and across; time, context, bodily being, and interactions. Previous research has focused on the subjective and emotional dimension of experiences (e.g., Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), experiential meanings as narratives (e.g., Thompson, 1997), cultural dimensions of consumption (e.g., Arnould and Thompson, 2005), the importance of social interactions (e.g., Arnould and Price, 1993), experiences as a result of social-cultural communities (e.g., Schouten et al., 2007) or have emphasized the embodied and multi-sensory aspects of the experience (e.g., Joy and Sherry, 2003, Lehn, 2006). The multi-relational perspective tries to incorporate all these aspects and advocates an understanding of the consumer as a relational being that cannot ontologically be separated from the world (Hansen et al., 2011, Lindberg et al., 2013). We propose a new model of the

dynamic experience and meaning aimed at contributing to a broader and more holistic approach to the understanding of the experience.

One contributory aspect of this broadened perspective is that it span beyond the present situation and activity. The multi-relational approach focuses on how the consumer is involved, interprets, understands, and values the lived experience from his/her horizon of understanding (A. H. Hansen, et al., 2011; F. Lindberg, et al., 2013). While previous research has focused on how consumers are actually consuming an experience (e.g., Bitner, 1992, O'Dell, 2005, Schmitt, 1999) and the co-creative interaction between the firm and the consumer (e.g., Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004), we suggest that this perspective could be expanded and that the consumption experience could be understood as interconnected with other aspects of the consumers' lived lives. Findings in this dissertation show how, for example, elements such as previous experiences (e.g., scary previous boating experience), social relationships and roles (e.g., sharing the experience with a child), relationship to family history (e.g., symbolic meaning of a mountain hike) and events in interpersonal relationships (e.g., the tour being a personal gift) can influence an on-going experience. This means that it is not enough purely to focus on the situational interactions in the consumption moment in order to understand the multi-dimensional and multi-faceted nature of the experience. The consumers' resources, understood as personal history, skills and knowledge (Thompson, 1997), are always an inherent part of how the situational activity is interpreted and given meaning by the individual. We therefore argue that the consumer's experience and meaning creation process must be understood from a holistic viewpoint oriented towards 'who the tourist is'. Another aspect where the multi-

relational approach makes a theoretical contribution is the widening of the perspective on which relationships affect the experience. While previous research focuses on consumer's relationships with the physical context, social interactions, objects and theme (e.g., Bitner, 1992, Mossberg, 2007a, Belk, 1988), the multi-relational model underlines the equal importance of cultural-historical, embodied and temporal aspects in understanding the consumer experience. Furthermore, the model elaborates the role of the body (e.g., being cold, balancing the kayak) and temporality (e.g., how the lack of information can make the tourist oriented towards the future, rather than enjoying the moment) as potentially important relationships that directly affect the experience and change the consumers' focus and belonging during the activity (Hansen et al., 2011, Lindberg et al., 2013).

Second, this dissertation provides theory development related to the concept of immersion. While previous research has focused on the distance between the consumer and the situation (Carù and Cova, 2006) or immersion as a physical or mental amalgamation with the experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), we propose a new definition of immersion incorporating both the individual's spatial and temporal relationships with the world. Immersion is defined as "a form of spatio-temporal belonging in the world characterized by deep involvement in the present moment. Immersion involves a lack of awareness of time and a loss of self-consciousness" (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013, p. 212). This definition represents a broader and more holistic approach to immersion based in a multi-relational perspective. This implies that immersion can in principle occur in any of the individuals' multiple relationships and interactions with the world.

Previous research has discussed and compared the different, but related, psychological concepts such as flow, peak experience and peak performance (Privette, 1983) or transcendent consumer experience, extraordinary experience, peak experience and flow (Schouten et al., 2007). While previous literature on immersion also refers to and touches upon the psychological concepts of flow and peak performance (Carù and Cova, 2005, Jennett et al., 2008), this study contributes to a systematic discussion of immersion related to other concepts such as extraordinary experiences, peak experiences, peak performance and flow. We conclude that immersion can be seen as a pivotal part of all the aforementioned concepts, but that these concepts can alternatively be regarded as different origins or types of immersion (e.g., flow can be considered challenge-based immersion while peak experience is effortless immersion) and that various types may distinguish a consumer experience (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013). However, we argue that immersion is important for understanding consumer experiences and that our relational approach embraces more than the predominantly psychological perspective.

In addition, theoretical contributions are made by developing a new and more dynamic model for immersion within a tourism context (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013). While previous research has either focused on the qualities of the context being thematized, secure and enclavized (e.g., Carù and Cova, 2007a, Graburn, 1978, Farrell, 1979), the importance of creating a protective frame for the consumers (e.g., Gyimóthy and Mykletun, 2004), the creation of a tourist bubble (Smith, 1978) or a framed liminal world (Jafari, 1987), we propose a model combining these elements of the underlying foundations for immersion with elements that act as facilitators for immersion during the experience. Both

the importance of transformations between everyday life and the liminal world (entering the liminal world at the start of the activity and returning to everyday life at the end of the activity) and the facilitation of immersion by focusing on involvement and caring for the consumer's dynamic relationships and interactions during consumption are incorporated in the proposed model. The result is a more comprehensive approach with increased focus on the consumer's dynamic process of becoming immersed (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013).

Third, to our knowledge, there has been no previous studies directed at tour guides' and tourists' immersion. In previous research on immersion, Carù and Cova (2005, 2006) briefly discuss the role of the conductor since their empirical research is related to Discovery Concerts which includes a tutorial section where the conductor describes a piece of the opus to the audience followed by the orchestra playing relevant short excerpts from the classical piece of music (Carù and Cova, 2005, p. 45). However, there is no interaction or direct dialogue between the conductor and the individual participant in the audience. The same authors later touch upon the use of guides and referents as a way of providing support for consumer immersion (Carù and Cova, 2007a, p. 43), but they do not elaborate on in-depth on what this role might entail. Previous research by Pine and Gilmore (1999) focuses more on how the representatives from the company could act out their roles in a staged business 'theatre' performance, rather than on how their performance may affect consumer immersion. Lastly, previous research on immersion in a gaming context does not include interactions with a leader or guide in order to become immersed in the virtual world (Calleja, 2011, Jennett et al., 2008). This study makes

theoretical contributions by exploring immersion in a nature-based tourism context where the role of the tour guide is pivotal for several relational aspects of the individual's experience (Hansen and Mossberg, forthcoming, Mossberg et al., forthcoming).

The majority of the previous research on the role and performance of the tour guides has been discussed using a service quality perspective and focusing on tourist satisfaction (e.g., Ap and Wong, 2001, Bowie and Chang, 2005, Hughes, 1991, Lopez, 1980, Pearce, 1982, Quiroga, 1990). However, in our point of view, discussing immersion requires a departure from an experience economy perspective with a focus on how the tour guide can facilitate the tourists' meaning creation and multi-relational belonging during the experience. The fourth and fifth article in this dissertation therefore makes a theoretical contribution by discussing the tour guides' roles and performance in relation to tourist immersion (Mossberg et al., forthcoming, Hansen and Mossberg, forthcoming). The tour guide's roles are first discussed in relation to the underlying foundations for immersion. Guide performance is discussed related to their basic roles as risk eliminators, insurers of the personal safety of the tourist, facilitating involvement in the theme of the tour, acting as tour leaders and by establishing a sufficient framing of the experience. The guide's basic roles are associated with service quality measures and previous research which has shown that tourists are satisfied if the guides perform their basic roles (e.g., Wong, 2001). However, the basic roles may not be sufficient in order to facilitate tourist immersion, so we therefore propose a guide 'plus' performances following an experience economy logic (Mossberg et al., forthcoming). These are performances with extra focus on caretaking,

exquisite storytelling, entertaining or animation – all of which can help the tourists to become immersed. A theoretical model illustrating the relationship between tour guides' performance and tourist immersion is developed (Mossberg et al., forthcoming). Empirical evidence for the model is subsequently provided through three case studies confirming and exemplifying the theoretical model (Hansen and Mossberg, forthcoming). Hence, these studies identify how tour guides can be key personnel in facilitating consumer immersion in extraordinary nature-based tourist experiences.

This dissertation makes several theoretical contributions related to immersion within a nature-based tourism experience context (Hansen, forthcoming). First, while previous research on immersion has emphasized how moments of immersion result in “feelings of well-being, growth and gratification” (Carù and Cova, 2005, p. 46) or is “critical to game enjoyment” (Jennett et al., 2008, p. 641), this study not only confirms the significant value of immersion to tourists engaged in nature-based experiences, but also finds that the prospect of becoming immersed is a motivating factor for buying the activity (Hansen, forthcoming). The informants in this study actively sought these intense immersive moments of being interconnected with nature or engaged in new activities.

Moreover, evidence from this dissertation identifies two mutually exclusive types of immersion; immersion as being and immersion as doing. While previous research has discussed immersion as a singular concept (e.g., Calleja, 2011, Calleja, 2007, Carù and Cova, 2007a, Carù and Cova, 2006, Carù and Cova, 2005, Pine and Gilmore, 1999), this study has shown that this may not

hold for a variety of nature-based tourism contexts. Instead, the findings exemplify how the tourist's immersion can be triggered for example through relationships towards something outside the individual (such as sublime landscapes, wonders of nature and wild animals), or through embodied relationships being engaged in physical activities (Hansen, forthcoming). This indicates that immersion may be facilitated by different relationships and interactions that may vary between the various types of activities (e.g., short-long, passive-active, summer-winter, guided-not guided).

Evidence from this dissertation also challenges findings from previous research related to the process of becoming immersed (Carù and Cova, 2005, Carù and Cova, 2006, Carù and Cova, 2007a). Carù and Cova (2007) argue that the process of being immersed is either "something total and immediate, such as diving into water, or as something partial and progressive, such as a group of so-called appropriation operations" (p. 36). They further argue that the appropriation process is cyclic, progressing from the nesting stage, to the investigation stage and finally ending in the stamping stage (where the consumer can become immersed) before returning back to the nesting stage again (Carù and Cova, 2005, 2006). However, findings show that this may be different in nature-based tourism contexts on three different levels (Hansen, forthcoming).

First, while previous research on the appropriation process (Carù and Cova, 2005, 2006) suggests a cyclic process, the findings from contexts such as dog sledding, kayaking and hiking show that tourist's experience a more flexible, dynamic and varied range of transitions back and forth between different

stages of involvement throughout the whole activity (Hansen, forthcoming). For example, the tourists both experienced a fluctuation between stages of heightened involvement and total immersion (e.g., paying attention to the dogs and enjoying nature while dog sledding), and abrupt changes from being immersed to a different belonging in the world when confronted with a conflicting situation (e.g., the change from being immersed in the dog sledding activity, to entering the cabin and facing the complaints from the stressed cook). Second, while the appropriation process originates from environmental psychology and focuses on the individual appropriation of space (Carù and Cova, 2005), this study shows how immersion can be affected by alternative relationships such as the tourist's relation to their own body (e.g., feeling seasick, being physically strained, or having to pay attention to the paddling movement) or their temporality (e.g., focusing on past experiences or worrying about the future) or by social interactions (e.g., sharing the experience with a partner). Third, this study challenges the importance of the fundamental notion in the appropriation process of reducing the distance between the individual and the particular world, and where previous research claims that individuals only can become immersed during the stamping phase when "the individual attributes a specific meaning" to an experience (Carù and Cova, 2005, p. 44). Findings from this study show that the challenges of being in a new place (e.g., extraordinary experiences in the Arctic) or engaged in a new situation (e.g., kayaking or dog sledding) can also trigger involvement and make the informants feel more 'alive', aware of their own interpretations and help them focus their awareness towards being in the moment (Hansen, forthcoming). Hence, the emphasis on control and importance of familiarity implied in the appropriation process may be less prevalent during certain types of nature-based activities as long as the basic sense of safety is assured.

Finally, this study identifies an array of relational factors and concrete examples of how tourists may struggle with their immersion related to a nature-based tourism context (Hansen, forthcoming). While previous research on immersion has been related to experiences of short duration and controlled environments like concerts (Carù and Cova, 2006, Carù and Cova, 2005), theme parks (e.g., Firat and Dholakia, 1998), staged experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) and virtual realities (e.g., Calleja, 2011), this study has researched immersion in various activities including extended experience encounters (e.g., three days dog sledding), activities where the tourist must engage through their own physical performance (e.g., kayaking, hiking, dog sledding) and in situations that are less controllable with regard to environmental conditions (e.g., cold Arctic climate, changing weather and sea conditions) or unpredictable interactions with animals (e.g., dogs, horses and whales). In doing so, this research has elaborated on the multi-relational, complex and dynamic aspects of the immersion concept.

5.2 Practical implications

The findings from this study can have several practical implications, not only for nature-based experiences, but for any interactional consumption experiences where the consumer's meaning creation processes are central for value creation (e.g., cultural attractions, festivals, art venues etc). However, in the following, I will focus on implications for the tourism industry.

The theme of this dissertation has gained attention from many actors in the tourism industry. I know that some of the tourism providers who have read the published articles are frustrated and disappointed at the low level of accessibility for them. Therefore, in order for this dissertation to have practical

implications for the industry, the contributions must be further refined into practical tools. I hope I will have the opportunity to do this in collaboration with the industry, and I think several contributions can have practical implications.

The multi-relational understanding of the tourist experience provides a holistic approach focusing on some of the elements that contribute to the dynamic and on-going experience for the tourist. The tourism company cannot create experiences or 'goose bumps' for their guests; they can only try to assist their guests by helping them in their attempts to make their own memorable experiences. The multi-relational perspective can give new insights into management approaches and act as a tool to help the tourism company to care for the tourists' meaning creation processes and involvement in the activity. The main contribution of this perspective is on how to understand the different elements of the experience, especially related to temporality (e.g., transformations into and between experiencescapes, information and framing, sense of security), the embodied aspects (e.g., involvement of the body, use of senses, instructions in order to master physical challenges, catering for bodily needs), different contextual elements (e.g., choice of routes and stories about the landscape, how to facilitate a sense of social community, reflect on cultural differences, focus on universal stories) and the main interactions during the experience (e.g., role of the guide, interaction with other personnel, main objects involved, animals etc). As such it may inspire innovation and changes related to the planning of experience design, on how to act during co-creational processes, and ideas for follow up work after the experience.

The essence of the implications related to the multi-relational approach is centered around how the tourism company may care for the tourist's multiple relations to the world. If the company wants to inspire tourist involvement, immersion and meaning creation, they must care for the tourist's temporality and their embodied and contextual relationships and interactions during the experience (Hansen et al., 2011, Lindberg et al., 2013). This implies willingness to meet the tourist on a situational and existential basis. The company can for example start by discussing how the prerequisites for immersion can be met, i.e., focus on how the enclave, theme and security are established and maintained throughout the activity (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013, Hansen and Mossberg, forthcoming, Mossberg et al., forthcoming). This includes for example the choice and timing of the stories and information communicated, how the start and end of the activity is marked, and how the safety of the guests is ensured and communicated (information, action, behavior and appearance). Second, the company could discuss how the customers multiple relations and interactions during the activity could be additionally facilitated. By discussing where, when and why we think the customers will become immersed during the activity, the company can provide heightened awareness of how the activity is designed, planned and organized. To care for the tourist's temporality would for example mean focusing on transformations and on how the tourist can be assisted as they must change and face a different sense of belonging as they enter into, and move between, different activities and experiences. The company could also discuss how the guide should perform the basic and plus roles during the activity. The guide's role and performance will of course vary depending on the type of the activity, the size of the group etc. The opportunities to perform a guide plus role would probably increase with the length and quality of the interaction between the

guide and the tourist (e.g., in small groups, as described in this dissertation), however, the focus on the customers' meaning creation would be the same for all activities. Equally important to the focus on facilitating immersion is the identification of what might constitute possible hindrances to consumer immersion and how these hindrances can be eliminated or minimized (Hansen, forthcoming).

Hence, the findings in this dissertation may be applied in tourism companies when they plan, organize, test, perform and evaluate their experiential offerings. A systematic approach may result in organizational learning and innovations. In addition, the theoretical contributions made in this dissertation could be made available as lecture and educational material in diverse guide and tourism educational programmes.

5.3 Limitations of the study

Several limitations of this study need to be noted. Some of the main limitations are related to the challenges of exploring an abstract concept like immersion as well as to the phenomenological and interpretive methodology. First, research into an abstract concept of human experience such as immersion is associated with complexity and limitations. Despite the fact that the phenomenon of immersion can be identified in previous research within consumer behavior, psychology and gaming, it has remained a challenge to formulate precise definitions. I have experienced the same challenges writing this dissertation. The informants had no problems identifying the phenomenon of immersion. They also confirmed the importance of these moments in their own evaluation of what was the most valuable and memorable moments (Hansen, forthcoming).

However, verbalizing, describing or even understanding the processes culminating in immersion proved challenging and complex. This touches upon general limitations associated with the exploration of human experiences. Many aspects of our existence involve tacit knowledge and require deep and existential reflections.

Different individual life horizons make it impossible to truly share an experience with someone else (Snel, 2013). The fact that immersion is a phenomenon of high abstraction level and with transcendental qualities added to the complexity of this research process. As a researcher I therefore had to depend on the informants' own interpretation of the experience, and then on my own interpretation of their narratives and ability to explore important aspects of the experience by asking relevant questions. Time and exhaustion became limitations as sufficient time and focused reflection is required in order to explore the different multi-relational aspects of the experience.

Second, there are methodological challenges associated with studying immersion. In addition to the elements mentioned above, there are limitations to studying immersion as it unfolds. Mainemelis (2001) argues that the individual experience of the state of engrossment or timelessness cannot be articulated until one emerges from it because this articulation would require reflections which interrupt the state of immersion itself by making a distinction between the self and the activity. As a consequence, immersion, as a state of being-in-the-world involving engrossment and timelessness, can only be "described in retrospect after one has emerged from this intense state of consciousness" (Mainemelis, 2001, p. 557). Description and interpretations of

immersion will hence be biased in the same way as recalled memories (Larsen, 2007) and this then becomes a methodological limitation of the study. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, observation becomes important, but has its own limitations with regard to information and interpretation.

Third, the ontology of the multi-relational approach in the study is complex. Pernecky and Jamal (2010) argue that phenomenology in general remains complex for both researchers and practitioners. Developing the holistic and dynamic multi-relational perspective does not make the research process any less complex. Although this research was carefully conducted and was carried out to the best of my ability, the very complexity of this approach may increase the possibility for misinterpretations. However, the fear of misinterpretations should not impede on the usefulness of multi-relational investigations into the tourist experience.

Moreover, the complexity of a multi-relational understanding of the experience makes it challenging to develop detailed guidelines for the tourism industry practitioners. Embedded in the being-in-the-world ontology is the realization that the experience is dynamic, situational and depends on various relations with the world. No 'standards' can be applied. Likewise, the findings of this study cannot be generalized, replicated or transferred to other contexts. However, one can argue that the conceptual understanding of the experience (Hansen et al., 2011, Lindberg et al., 2013), the concept of immersion (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013) and the role and performance of the tour guide related to immersion (Mossberg et al., forthcoming) are theoretical contributions that can be explored further in various types of experiences and contexts.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

The multi-relational perspective needs further research efforts. All the core elements can be explored more in-depth both theoretically and empirically. The development of guidelines for the practical implementation of the multi-relational perspective could make it applicable to various consumer context and types of experiences.

It would be interesting to explore the concept of immersion in different types of tourist activities. This study has mainly explored how immersion occurs when informants are new to the experience. How does immersion vary between new and expert participants in the same activity? How can different skill levels be identified in advance and what consequences do different skill levels have in the co-creation process? Further, it could be interesting to explore the process of immersion from a multi-relational perspective. The appropriation process is founded in environmental psychology research and focused on the individual's relations with the context. The temporal aspects of the experience are equally interesting and it would be interesting to explore the dynamic aspects of this and transformations and directedness during the experience. The current findings suggest that there might be different dynamics than the cyclic logic of the appropriation process, at least within a nature-based context, and this would be interesting to explore further.

I believe that the findings in this study can prove useful for the tourism industry and help providers facilitate extraordinary experiences for their customers. This will indirectly ensure long-term profitability and compatibility for the tourism industry. However, more practical tools should be developed in order to

heighten the practical applicability of the study and make it easier for the tourism companies to facilitate for consumer immersion. Different types of tourist activities should be considered as practical examples. These more applicable “tools” should be developed and evaluated in close cooperation with tourism companies, for example in dynamic ‘experience labs’ (testing experience design, concepts and elements). The potential for innovations and innovation processes related to the immersion concept can also be further explored.

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APPENDIX

Interview guide

Participated in the following experience (firm, name of activity, date, length and price): _____

Theme	Question	Follow-up questions/comments
Background information	Name/Age: Residence/Occupation: Telephone number: Family situation:	Check if I can call if I need to follow up after the interview
Motivation	What did you know about the destination/activity prior to arrival? Who ordered/booked the trip/activity? What expectations did you have to the activity? Did you make any preparations (if relevant)?	Degree of prior knowledge When? How long ago? Main purpose/primary objective
Describe the experience you have participated in (the informant talks freely)	Tell me as much as you can about the experience How did you feel during the experience/how do you feel now? What did not happen	The informant talks freely about actions, thoughts, feelings Follow up if descriptions of immersion Did you miss something? Was anything different than expected?
Intensity/ experience curves	Can you try to describe you feeling during the experience What was the peak moment? Can you describe how you felt during the peak moment? Were there any low points? (wandering mind/thinking about something beyond what was happening in the moment) Can you please draw an experience curve?	What do you feel now after the experience? Why was this the peak moment? What happened (actions, activities or relations)? Did you experience shorter periods of immersion during the activity? Mentally, emotionally, physically? Immersion? Ripples or wow? Were you involved/engaged? Why? What happened? What did you feel?

	<p>Where there any moments of immersion? What was the duration of these?</p> <p>What part of the experience has been the most important?</p>	<p>Explore potential situations of immersion even deeper.</p> <p>Ask directly if necessary. When, where, why, how long?</p> <p>Why? What happened? Is it the same as peak moments?</p>
<p>Satisfaction? Evaluation of the total experience</p>	<p>Was it like you had imagined?</p> <p>How would you characterize this experience if you compare it with other experiences you have participated in?</p> <p>Have you told anyone (friends) about this experience? What did you say?</p> <p>Could you do this again/repeat the experience?</p>	<p>Better/good/according to expectations/bad/not at all as expected</p> <p>What has been new/special/different?</p> <p>Word of mouth</p> <p>Why/Why not?</p>
<p>Theme</p>	<p>Why did you participate? What does this mean to you?</p> <p>Have you done something similar before (previous experience)?</p> <p>Start: What happened the first 5 minutes?</p> <p>Stop: What was the end of the experience like?</p> <p>What could have been done differently?</p>	<p>Interest in theme, expectations, value, meaning, goal.</p> <p>Where, what is the attraction, why, expectations, value</p> <p>How did you feel (welcoming, framing, safety)</p> <p>How did you feel (cementing, end experience)</p> <p>How would this have affected you and your experience?</p>
<p>Skills</p>	<p>Which previous experiences (skills/knowledge) do you think is important for the experience you have had today? (educational, physical, social)</p> <p>Did you comprehend everything that was going on or were there situations where you wondered what was happening/were scared/uncertainties?</p>	<p>Why? Did you have them or were they acquired during the activity? How? What would have been different without this skill/knowledge?</p> <p>Describe. Why, how did you feel (belonging in the world)?</p>

Co-creation	<p>How did the following influence on your experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-travellers? • The other guests? • People from the tourism company? • Physical environment/nature/symbols? <p>To what extent did you feel like you could influence/adapt the experience to fit your needs?</p>	<p>Who did you travel with, how did they influence the experience (examples). How is your relation to each other here compared to everyday life?</p> <p>Who? How was the group atmosphere? How did it influence your experience? Give examples.</p> <p>Who? How did they influence? Examples Who? How did they influence? Examples</p> <p>Need for tailoring? Involvement.</p>
The experience as part of a package/wholeness	<p>What else have you done while you have stayed here? What did you do yesterday? What are you doing tomorrow? Length of holiday</p> <p>What has been the best moment(s)?</p> <p>What did you get from the experience (memorable moments, value, meaning)?</p>	<p>The day(s) before? Tomorrow? To what degree do you think this will influence/influenced this experience?</p> <p>Was it different than what you expected?</p>
Reflections	<p>Which reflections do you make after the experience?</p> <p>Have you had any new reflections during this interview?</p> <p>Do you have anything you want to say or express towards the end of the interview?</p>	<p>What made sense? What have you learned? Why?</p> <p>What? How did the interview influence this?</p>