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Adventure regime of tourism experiences

Short Title: Adventure regime of experiences

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the debate about how to conceptually understand adventure tourism experiences. Whilst previous literature is dominated by an agentic psychological view and to some extent a structuralist view, the discussion remains largely limited to how the relationship between individuals and various contextual levels may matter in adventure tourism. From a post-structural position in research on consumer culture we criticize the dominant perspectives. We theorize "adventure regime" as the conceptual tool that may aid researchers in interpreting the formative role played by structures of social interaction that orchestrate practices of liminal adventure tourism experiences. This paper offers empirical illustrations from a study of winter experiences in Arctic Svalbard and discusses how entities of the adventure regime, together with tourism practices, influence meaning negotiations on tourists' three-day journey by dog sledge.

Keywords: adventure tourism, adventure experience, consumer culture, tourism experiences, winter adventure, adventure regime

Introduction

Studies on adventure tourism experience are frequently referring to “extraordinary adventure tourism experiences” in consumer research (Loeffler, 2004; Ritchie & Hudson, 2009), and Arnould and Price's (1993) classical white-water rafting study seems to be the most popular reference article. Extraordinary adventures are long lasting and involve emotional and hedonic qualities when tourists travel away from a stressful urban life towards places that provide liminal and memorable experiences (e.g., Beedie, 2003b; Buckley, 2007; Loeffler, 2004; Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). The essential conceptual elements in adventure tourism are often thought of as individual perception of risk and the challenges that risk creates for participants (Beedie, 2003a; Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2004; Varley, 2006; 2011), whereas broadening attempts seem to involve somewhat static views of the macro level meanings that influence experiences (e.g., Buckley, 2012; Mossberg, 2007).

From a post-structural perspective, the micro-social approach fails to account for the cultural complexity of social action (Moisander, Valtonen, & Hirsto, 2009) while the broad macro-social (sociological) approach tends to render tourism adventure experiences as ethically remote. We suggest expanding the contextualization of adventure experiences by theorizing how the systemic and structuring influences of social systems may precondition individual responses, which is not necessarily felt or experienced and therefore not necessarily discursively expressed (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). Our aim is to contribute with an extended version of adventure experiences by bridging an individual focus with a structuralist categorization. We rely on a post-structural position which expands the contextualization from the lived experiences of tourists to that of the (tacitly) structuring of markets, institutions and adventure culture. For doing this we rely on consumer culture research which allows us to

focus on the different rules, conventions and values that coordinate social practice (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). On the one hand we acknowledge that culture and environments are the very fabric which influences how tourists select symbols, tell stories and thus use myths during adventure experiences. On the other hand, however, we acknowledge the danger that a structuralist position might lose sight of the emic practices that take place during tourism adventures.

In the following, a focused review of the adventure tourism literature and the consumer culture research literature call attention to the concept of "regime" which we define as the formative role played by structures of social interaction that orchestrates practices of adventure tourism experiences. We contribute with a new model of adventure experiences which focus on how tourists create meaning in the dialectic relationship between adventure regime and tourist practices. We illustrate the new conceptual tool through fieldwork from winter adventure to the Arctic Svalbard.

The individualistic focus of adventure tourism experiences

Adventure tourism is a term that covers a multitude of meanings and it intersects with various forms of tourism activities (Buckley, 2012). It has, not least, been linked to popular outdoor tourism activities that can be characterized as soft adventure (Beard *et al.*, 2012) and it has been more narrowly defined as a type of Special Interest Tourism (Trauer, 2006). Within these more delineating epistemological approaches there are variations on which dimensions are emphasized, leading to various sub-forms of adventure tourism.

The essential conceptual elements forming the adventure experience are the perception of risk and the personal challenges that the risk creates for the participants (Beedie, 2003; Gyimóthy

and Mykletun, 2004; Sung *et al.*, 1997; Taylor, Varley, & Johnston, 2013; Varley, 2006, 2011; Weber, 2001). Gstaettner *et al.* (2018) show the underlying psychological processes and the negative outcomes as well as potential benefits involved in risky nature-based adventures. Imboden (2012) refers to dimensions associated with risk and uncertainty such as perception versus reality, control versus freedom, production and promotion versus consumption, soft versus hard as well as the adventure commodification continuum of Varley (2006).

Rantala, Rokenes & Valkonen (2018) suggest that adventure tourism is not to be considered as a concept but rather as a “category” that entails several sub-categories, and Laing & Croach (2009) argue for a paradigmatic understanding of adventure tourism based on a narrative approach producing “overarching categories or typologies that unite these themes” (p.130). For example, travels to frontiers of the world would be based on a common discourse “of the performance of adventure, where the traveller is following the footsteps of the explorers” (Laing & Croach, 2009, p.136).

Relating to the mastering of challenges that participants of adventure tourism activities are exposed to, the flow framework of Csíkszentmihályi's (1990) remains a frequent point of reference among tourism researchers (e.g., Buckley, 2012; Weber, 2001). Walle's (1997) classical mastery (or insight) theory calls attention to “playfully exploring” of adventure tourists who combine the pursuit of “sublime thrills” (Cloke & Perkins, 2002; Imboden, 2012) with the exploration of particular places (Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2004; Weber, 2001).

These contributions reveal a dominant focus on the individualistic or psychological perspective on the one hand and on the constructivist perspective on the other. The individual focus is preoccupied with conceptions such as motivation, perception, involvement and

mastering whereas the constructivist orientation emphasizes the symbolic and subjectivist significance of adventure tourism experiences.

Buckley (2012) involves the external context when conceptualizing adventure tourism activities, and distinguishes between "Internal, performance of activity", "Internal/external, place in nature" and "External, social position" (Buckley, 2012, p. 962). The macro level ("External") of adventure experiences would involve significant contextual meanings, such as an "extreme" Arctic environment (Gyimothy & Mykletun, 2004), and associations with risk and myths that can influence the experience (Laing & Crouch, 2009) and lead to positive outcomes, for example improved social status, image and identity formation as becoming part of a group (Gstaettner *et al.*, 2018). Another avenue is suggested by Hall and Weiler (1992) and Mossberg (2007) who argue that the external environment is basically an arena in which adventure activities take place. A limiting aspect of such theorizing is that the role of the "external" signifies a subordinate and static ambient entity or stage in which experiences may unfold.

Giddy & Webb (2018) add to the above view that the environment plays an important role in attracting adventure tourists towards specific destinations and thus constitutes a particularly significant component of the experiences. This stream of research involves the external setting due to its relative importance for market segments and an activity type. Whilst some people will have an instrumental purpose for using a particular environment, others might be attracted by intangible benefits of, for example, wilderness areas linked to an aesthetic dimension (Walle, 1997). It has, for example, been promoted that environments play an essential role for adventure experiences in extreme destinations such as Queenstown (Cater, 2006), Spitsbergen in the Arctic (Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2004), Northern Norway (Jensen,

Chen, & Korneliusson, 2014) and Swedish "wilderness" (Imboden, 2012). Such environments capacitate experiences of spirituality and an escape from urban modernity or might correspond with tourists' desires for self-image within certain adventure segments (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Soft adventure tourist experiences are assumed to be secured from "extreme" environment-related risk by the commercial providers and their tour guides (Bentley, Cater, & Page, 2010; Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Gstaetter *et al.*, 2018). Such practices contribute to create "a paradox where risk as a perceptual construct becomes blurred within social and cultural systems of managed modern leisure provision" (Gstaetter *et al.*, 2018, p. 1795).

The environment as resource for adventure experiences can be regarded from an instrumental and symbolic perspective depending on type of adventure product and its significance for the consumer. In emphasizing the distinction between different types of and motives for adventure tourism it is assumed that the environmental setting could have various degrees of importance related to market segments and forms of adventure activities. As particular "favourable conditions" in some destinations, for example the features of the terrain (Buckley, 2007) and weather conditions (Valtonen, 2010a; Bentley *et al.*, 2010), can be of significance for skilled persons who regularly carry out more specialized adventure activities (Buckley, 2012), such as trekking or climbing in the Himalayas, other people might be attracted by intangible benefits of wilderness areas, for example linked to aesthetic dimensions, and could thereby even experience some sort of transcendence (Walle, 1997, p. 277).

Giddy & Webb (2018) point out interactions with the natural environment as a decisive factor when people search for adventure tourism activities and claim that human-environment interactions are relatively unexplored in contrasts to empirical research on psychological states. Whereas psychological factors such as risk, thrill and novelty, have been regarded as

motivational push factors, natural environment can likewise be considered as a significant external push factor. Furthermore, an environmental focus tends to shift the analytical focus from motivation to experience research (Giddy & Webb, 2018) with also embrace experiences associated with struggle and challenges under dynamic environmental conditions.

To sum up, a dominant trait of the literature on adventure tourism experiences is within psychology or the individual lived experience and involves to a lesser degree the role of social, institutional, environments and cultural systems. Contributions with a macro approach tends to be from a structuralist stance signifying how culture and environments deterministically structure experiences. Whereas conceptions such as individual motivation, hedonistic experiences, flow and mastering are clearly relevant for adventure tourism, it can be significant to inscribe the lived experiences within a larger macro context based on the researcher's theoretical insight. This observation supports the legitimacy of proposing collective structures, environments and cultural meaning as an epistemological and ontological point of departure for studying adventure tourist experiences. Thus, the movement of researchers' focus towards the hegemonic effects of cultural level analyses requires an analytical movement from individual agency (e.g., the hedonically immersive experience) towards one that invokes agency on meso and macro levels (e.g., cultural resources that structure adventure experiences). In the sub-sequent section, these aspects will be illuminated by drawing on consumer culture research.

Cultural consumer research

Consumer researchers have for long been preoccupied with experiences that signify fantasies, feelings and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), that embrace magic and passion (Firat &

Venkatesh, 1995), that are relational, transformative (Arnould & Price, 1993) and highly dynamic and multifaceted in nature (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993). Such experiences are often referred to as extraordinary experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993; Hansen & Mossberg, 2013; Tumbat & Belk, 2011). This stream of research points to a social constructivist position where consumption experiences never only consist of two-way relationships (e.g., consumer-thing practices), but "always three way" (Belk, 1988, p. 147), i.e. constituting a consumer-thing-surroundings complex circularity in which meaning, identity and the environment co-construct experiences. Thus, early research contributed to an understanding of how identity has become important for understanding consumption in extraordinary contexts, and how "macroenvironmental influences" impact dynamically on the development of motives and experiences during consumption as consumer's "world view" changes (Celsi *et al.*, 1993, p. 3). This development has resulted in theoretical orientation towards subcultures of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) and neo-tribes (Cova, 1997; Cova *et al.*, 2007) that has moved the level of analysis to the social group in which the member not only seeks identity but also community belonging in which rules, conventions, values and rituals impact the experience.

However, such a position could be criticized for a micro-social focus in which constructions in the end appear as an agency-like project. Research on cultural approaches to experiences relies therefore on a much broader analytical framework (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Peñaloza & Venkatesh, 2006). McCracken (1986) is one of the first proponents for what could be referred to as the cultural turn in consumer research and his main argument is that "culture is the 'lens' through which the individual views phenomena" and it co-ordinates social action and specifies objects and behaviour (McCracken, 1986, p. 72). The significance of adventure tourism experiences, then, "rests largely in their ability to carry and

communicate cultural meaning." (McCracken, 1986, p. 71). This means that the symbolic meaning of adventure contexts belongs to a broader cultural context, or a special version of the world, that distinguishes perception of time, space, nature, persons, ideas and values (Jensen, Lindberg, & Østergaard, 2015).

The cultural turn has consequences for epistemology and methodology since the researcher cannot only rely on what is discursively expressed by the individual. Since systemic and structuring influences of social systems are not necessarily experienced by consumers, trying to make inquiries into the cultural complexity of social action would fail (Moisander *et al.*, 2009). It is suggested that people must be studied as members of groups, communities and cultures (Moisander & Valtonen, 2012, p. 249). The ethnographic approach is a research strategy that is suggested because it allows the researcher to study people in sociocultural settings (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994) that belong to larger analytical frameworks that are bounded by a certain socio-historic context. The goal of post-structural endeavour is to enable researchers to "situating market agents, practices and discourses in their particular place and time." (Peñaloza & Venkatesh, 2006, p. 312).

Towards adventure regime of experiences

Our aim is to propose an approach that allow for a renewed understanding of how culture may constitute the very fabric of experiences and meaning of tourists. We suggest "adventure regime" as the conceptual tool for a consumer culture approach beyond a structurally remote theorization *or* an individual-oriented interpretations of adventure experiences.

Jantzen, Fitchett, Østergaard and Vetner (2012) introduce a regime-understanding of emotional experiences. They suggest that the desirability and practicality of specific

experiential emotions are "regulated by 'emotional regimes' which serve to assess and instruct which emotions are socially valuable and how such emotions could or should be properly practiced" (Jantzen *et al.*, 2012, p. 140). Arsel and Bean define "taste regimes" as a "discursively constructed normative system that orchestrates practice in an aesthetically oriented culture of consumption" which may be articulated by a centralized authority (e.g., influential magazines, peer groups) or emerge from loosely linked sources (e.g., blogs, TV and advertising) (Arsel & Bean, 2013, p. 899). The argument is that the concept of regime may aid the researcher in understanding how conventions, logics, norms and myths impact on adventure tourist experiences and meaning creation.

We suggest that adventure regime can be understood as the formative role played by normative structures (i.e., conventions, logics, norms, myths) that orchestrates practices of adventure tourism experiences. From a post-structural position, adventure regime would not be structurally deterministic, but rather regulative for justifications related to tourist practices in liminal contexts. Thus, we argue that tourist evaluations may involve disagreement about what is valuable, what is worthy, what counts (Stark, 2009) within the normative structures of an adventure regime. This means that adventure experiences depend on practical dimensions such as nature conditions, tourists' willingness to become actively involved, their mood and degree of skills. The desire for and subjective qualities during adventures, are nevertheless regulated by the regime structures (through e.g., corporate communication) within which people learn about the adventure myths, the romantic connotations and its potential value and meaning. Through a Turnerian lens (Turner, 1969) one may argue that the "boring" structures of modern life turn adventurous experiences into an antistructure goal that presupposes an adventure regime that "guides" consumers towards the exciting and good life. Some argue

that marketers design ever more spectacular and extravagant environments for attracting and maintaining the interests of tourists (Ritzer, 2005).

Adventure regime orchestrates not only visual and material resources (Arsel & Bean, 2013), but also immaterial resources, such as emotional goals, procedures for mental and embodied control and ideals of cultural meaning (Reddy, 2001). Consumer culture theorists have emphasized that extraordinary experiences are often marked by liminality, *communitas*, exotic myths, liberatory ideologies, shared rituals and common goals (e.g., Arnould & Price, 1993; Belk & Costa, 1998; Celsi *et al.*, 1993; Kozinets, 2002; Tumbat & Belk, 2011).

Commercial adventure environments thus always *begin* as pre-designed, mythic and imagined spaces that are designed for a specific liminal purpose or set of objectives. The cultural resources, both material (e.g., nature) and immaterial (e.g., myth), would represent the fabric of how meaning would be co-created within a specific adventure regime of experiences.

The adventure regime of experiences can be further conceptualized as the dialectics between the world of material and immaterial resources of adventurous contexts *and* the structural conditions of a modern way of perceiving the experiential society. Regarding the latter, Jantzen *et al.* argue that "corporate capitalism and welfare economics have shaped the structural conditions for abundance, giving citizens in the western world access to pleasurable products, goods, services and experiences" (Jantzen *et al.*, 2012, p. 149) in which wealth has created comfort, but at the same time disenchantment (Ritzer, 2005). The desire for adventures then would be a learned cultural socialization which translates through (corporate) promotion and which influences the imaginations of tourists (Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003). Thus, the discourses, convention and ideology of adventure regimes in a commercial context signify some extraordinary experience which tourists have learned to desire, express and

access as a legitimized life goal, but which is not without tension, conflicts and compromises because the experience is a short moment of magic.

To sum up, we suggest a post-structural approach for studying adventure tourist experiences that turns attention towards the socio-culturally normalized and institutionalized ways of thinking, talking and representing knowledge as related to adventure tourism. We call attention to the concept "adventure regime" as an analytical framework for understanding how the structures surrounding adventures orchestrate practices and meaning of experiences. Relying on contributions primarily from consumer culture theory, the conceptual tool of adventure regimes can be distinguished by 1) *socio-history*, at a most abstract level, investigating how the adventure experience in question is a pre-learned hedonic strategy, and 2) *cultural structures* such as ideology, myths, conventions or norms, 3) the *material resources* represented by the agency of the place and, 4) *the immaterial resources* represented by the fabric of emotional structures such as emotional goals, procedures for mental and embodied control and cultural meaning. Consequently, the focus turns towards a broadening of agency from a micro-social level towards the macro level and we acknowledge that individuals often have limited consciousness of the prevailing adventure regime that distinguish liminal experiences and negotiated meaning on an individual level.

Methodology

The empirical work was inspired by an ethnographic approach (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994; Valtonen, 2010a; 2010b) which means that we "live" the Svalbard context as tourists and join soft adventure activities. Before the visit we investigated the Arctic Svalbard with focus on 1) socio-history, e.g. how Svalbard and its adventures can be a pre-learned hedonic strategy, and 2) cultural structures, e.g. how ideology, myth and conventions constitute the material and

immaterial world of the Arctic Svalbard. For this paper, informal interviews have been used since the purpose first of all is to substantiate the suggestion of an alternative approach of adventure regime structures as illustrated by a commercial soft adventure trip, dog sledding. The field study also enabled us to collect data during our stay, such as informal conversations during the trip and at the hotel. We focused on how discourses related to the place and the trips informed elements of an adventure regime.

The data on-site was collected about; a) information about activities, firms, DMO, government (e.g., newspaper, web sites) and knowledge about Svalbard tourism, b) informal interviews with tourists and conversations with management, staff/guides (see table), and c) participant observations at the hotel, in the Longyear City and during experiential activities.

Table 1: Participants

Role	Age	Sex	Nationality	Predisposition*
Tourist	Mid 50s	Male	Germany	No experience Photo tourists
Tourist	Mid 50s	Male	Germany	No experience Photo tourists
Tourist	Early 60s	Female	UK	No experience Trapper culture
Tourist	Late 20s	Male	UK	No experience Wild Arctic
Tourist	Late 20s	Male	UK	No experience Wild Arctic
Tourist	Early 60s	Female	UK	No experience Seeking authentic
Tourist	Late 60s	Male	UK	No experience Seeking authentic
Tourist	Late 40s	Female	Norway	Some experience Wild Arctic
Tourist	Early 50s	Male	Denmark	Some experience Wild Arctic
Guide	Late 20s	Female	Norway	
Guide	Early 30s	Female	Norway	
Manager	Early 40s	Male	Norway	

*Covering previous experience with Arctic Svalbard and motivations.

A total of 12 participants were involved: 1 manager; 9 tourists (from UK, Denmark, Germany, Norway) and 2 guides. We stayed on Svalbard for one week. The dog sledding trip was a three-day trip with two overnight stays during which the tourists handled their own sledge with six dogs. The tourists had little or no experiences of Arctic Svalbard and the activity they attended. Most tourists acknowledged several motivations for the trip, but they highlighted pull factors such as photo of the Arctic and the Northern Light, the trapper culture, and the authentic and wild Arctic.

The focus during the interviews with the tourists were related to their expectations, preparations, their views of and meeting with Svalbard, and how they experienced the commercial soft adventure trip they attended. The interviews with the guides and the manager covered the same topics but with an emphasis on their views about market perceptions about Svalbard as a destination. The analytic strategy has been a hermeneutical approach searching for condensed meaning units (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) related to the adventure regime perspective where the focus was on the underlying structural and organizing principles of the tourists' experiences.

Adventure regime illustrated: Svalbard experiences

Only organized trips are available to tourists visiting Svalbard. Traveling there is not without risk and accidents and deaths among tourists have restricted visitors' ability to walk freely around the Longyear City. Tourists are normally picked up at their hotel by a guide when joining a trip. They must all sign a “declaration of conduct” in which they agree to act according to guides' instructions mainly due to the polar bear threat, and then they are transported by minibus to the dog yard. Subsequently we identify and illustrate four adventure regime dimensions within the contexts of our study.

The sacred Svalbard: The mythical structure of majesty and exploration

Stories and signs of business and governmental communication refer to Svalbard as "one of the world's largest areas of untouched nature" that awaits at 78 degrees north (visitsvalbard.com) and "the history of Svalbard is the history of hunters, trappers, mining communities and amazing expeditions." (sysselmannen.no). The images of the place today thus contribute to translate such historical markers into the "authentic" adventure trip outside the mainstream (inauthentic) structures of normal life, not unlike extreme experiences of places such as Kilimanjaro (high altitude climbing) or Sahara (desert hiking).

Many of our informants referred to Svalbard as a sacred place where natural beauty, majesty and the authentic wild evoke ecstasy and extraordinary experiences. However, tourists' motivations and expectations support the assumption that sacredness is not a quality of the place but rather a culturally ascribed value. For example, tourist rationales for visiting are "how the trappers and explorers lived" (UK tourist), "it is the closest you get to the North Pole" (guide) and the conviction that the Polar bears are a natural element that come and go just like humans (guide, field note). Additionally, symbolic and substantial staging (e.g., trips) also seem to have moved Svalbard towards the state of a contrived marketplace.

Conclusively, the interpretation of our findings offers two types of metaphorically expressed myths that make Svalbard sacred, which we refer to as a "majesty myth" and an "exploration myth". The majesty myth is one that reveals Svalbard through a kind of epiphany, with signs that refer to the majestic and powerful "authentic" Arctic nature (e.g., North Pole, Polar bear as Arctic King). The exploration myth is one that reveals Svalbard through feat-of-valour signs which refer to researchers, explorers and hunters who conducted expeditions and were able to live in this outer edge of the known world. These myths would, moreover, offer a

background for proposing why some tourists spend hours gazing out of the hotel window; i.e. hoping to see the Arctic King (field notes) and yet others desire dog sledding "expedition" discursively expressing how they receive awe, extraordinary or flow experiences.

Romantic imagery and masculine ideology

Many tourists accounted for reading about Svalbard in magazines, on the Internet and talking to friends and colleges, in addition to corporate communications, as sources for the mythic imaginary that dominate expectations. The tourists were not surprised when they met the rather restricted rules and regulations in the Longyear City (field notes). For example, when the tourists enter Svalbard, they are told stories of previous accidents and deaths (glacier calving and polar bears attacks) among visitors. These images have strengthened the continuous (re)shaping of the imagery of the mythic significations accounted for above. Tourism institutions, such as DMO (svalbard.net), Visit Norway (visitnorway.no) and company web sites (e.g., basecampexplorer.com) present Svalbard according to the myths contributing to reinforcing the romantic connotations focusing mainly on wild Arctic nature, the North Pole, Polar bears and Alaskan huskies with slogans such as "a touch of wilderness" and "Arctic spirit". Commercially, narratives of polar expeditions and trapper traditions were thus important themes of our trip e.g. the dog yard was named the "Trapper station", tourists lived in the "Trapper's hotel" and trips were branded as "Magic of the Arctic" and "Taste of the Arctic".

Our interviews and observations revealed a disposition of keeping up a masculine ideology, which is not unknown within the adventure tourism literature (Cater, 2013). The sociality among the guides was tough, signified through their (wilderness) clothing and objects (e.g., weapon) and their behaviour. Our guides' behaviour was effective and procedural to enhance

proper learning and ensure security and, in fact, to a lesser extent oriented towards meaning creation for tourists (field notes). The tone was ironical on the topic of risk and security and the gun was always close by in case of a Polar bear attack. The irony of the guides took the form of mediating between risk and safety, such as "the adventure is quite risky, but if you follow my lead it will be safe" (field notes). A masculine distance was created by combining different systems of logic (i.e., risk vs. safety). In fact, and as they told the tourists back at the hotel, the Polar bear threat was not very high this time of year and somewhat ironically, probably lower than the "threat" of tourist misbehaviour (guide). However, the masculinity coincided (well) with the image of Svalbard as a mythic place.

Adventure regime meets practice 1: The transformation of tourists and place

Based on the adventure regime approach we propose that when people enter Arctic Svalbard, they are transformed into the role of arctic tourists due to elements such as cold weather, polar outfit, dangerous animals and masculine ideology and myths. In many ways, the extreme nature (e.g., extreme cold, permafrost) and objects (e.g., clothing and weapons) distinguish tourists' embodiment, engagement and attention towards an arctic lifestyle. The narratives told by the provider substantiate the imaginations the tourists bring to the place.

“It was the experience of getting to understand how the trappers lived and must have felt, in that cold weather. I knew it was going to be hard and I didn't in any way fear it. But it was an adventure I wanted to experience, to try and feel how they must have felt.” (Female, early 60, UK)

In line with previous research (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015), our findings show that tourists' transformative rituals start when they inhabit the place and not when they start consuming the adventure experience (dog sledding). When the myths meet substance (e.g., arctic nature and weather, masculine atmosphere) the tourists go through a transformation where new rules,

norms and physical elements, i.e. guns, wilderness clothing, darkness, northern light and extreme climate, distinguish touristic living and how they view Svalbard (field notes). Or as one tourist states, "The magic has already begun" (Male, early 50, Denmark). Thus, acculturation on Svalbard seems to happen fast and is triggered by both immaterial resources, such as mystic and mythic symbols, and material resources substantiated by the harsh conditions of polar nature and a new social contract (e.g., where to go, how to dress, when to sleep).

*** insert figure 1: Tourist with dog equipage (photo: first author)



Adventure regime meets practice 2: Unpredictable nature

When the tourists attend the adventure dog sledding trip it is minus 28 degrees Celsius. They have been dressed up in warm “coveralls”, polar boots, balaclavas, goggles, leather cap and gloves and follow the instructions given by the guides as to how to handle the Alaskan Huskies onto the sled. However, not everyone in the group is used to dogs and some even think they “look like wolves” (male, late 20s, UK). After learning dog handling and procedures, the group takes off with the sledges, but some equipages fail to follow the leading

sledge and some even turn over. When they reach the destination this day, which is a glacier cave, the wind increases to the strength of near gale and the sight is miserable.

***insert figure 2: Tourist in glacier cave (photo: first author)



The guides decide that the group cannot continue the sled trip and they seek shelter in the “Hunter’s lodge”. Each tourist receives a sleeping bag and a meal, and the guides set up a watch list in order to keep the wood-based stove running throughout the night. The atmosphere is calm, and the tourists discuss how this first day was harder than they had expected. Some even got bruises from falling off the sledge or scratches from handling the dogs (field note).

"Although it was a controlled adventure it was as extreme as it could have been under the circumstances, because you are out there in these sub-zero temperatures which is dangerous, can be dangerous, if you are not prepared." (female 1, early 60, UK)

"I think you have to be really fit, because it is hard work. Even walking through the deep snow and handling the dogs." (female 2, early 60, UK)

Based on our observations we moreover found that the trip turned out to be strenuous for several tourists and the guides had to change the program due to extreme weather conditions.

The fact that the weather also surprised the guides it seemed as if the trip was almost experienced as "too authentic" for some tourists (male, mid 50s, Germany).

"We had to learn how to handle the dogs super-fast due to the cold weather and then we headed for the glacier without much sledding practice. When we returned my sledge turned over 5-6 times while the weather got worse and worse." (male, early 50s, Denmark)

"When the weather turned bad the first day the guides had to change the whole trip and it got chaotic and people was cold, and the guides got grumpy [...] and several had bruises from falling off the sledge. It was a strange atmosphere." (female, late 40s, Norway)

These quotes illustrate how the weather becomes more than a "stage" or context in which the experience takes place. The environment rather becomes an important agency, or co-actor (Valkonen, 2009), that influence sociality and the emotions evoked in the community. This demonstrates that the environment as a material resource may create disorder as it acts unpredictably and not according to the "social contract" of a secure soft adventure trip. As observed on our trips, almost minus 40 degrees (effective) in stormy weather was a little bit too "real". Instead, nature seems to play an important corrective role to the expected safe, predictable and controlled tourism which shape imagination of the adventure regime, indicating that the previously mythic Arctic is re-interpreted and turns out to be too constraining this first day. We observed that nature created ambiguity and disorder for actors by conditioning practices differently than those that were imagined. For example, the weather shapes how the tourist activity are conducted, the meaning of equipment and (warm) clothing, how to move (wind in the back) and the manner of social interactions (gestures instead of talking) (field notes).

A distinct pattern emerging from our observations was that the weather, moreover, created a paradoxical negotiation of meaning driven by the social order of things, i.e. that the tourists

were supposed to experience the risky Svalbard in a safe and simulated manner, basically was violated.

Discussion

How can we bridge the dominant individual focus with an abstract structuralist categorization which dominates much adventure tourism research today? We propose to theorise adventure experiences by further developing *regime* as a conceptual lens for assessing how meaning is negotiated in adventure tourism. This allows us to explore tourist experiences of adventures not from the perspective of personal meaningful experiences (Loeffler, 2004; Ritchie & Hudson, 2009) or as structurally conditioned experience (Buckley, 2012; Mossberg, 2007), but rather as meaning negotiating encounters in-between adventure regime and tourist practices. The illustration from the Arctic adventure shows that it is not only the psychological or lived experience with its focus on individual motivation, hedonic experiences, flow and mastering that are offered during tourist adventures. Following a regime-understanding, tourists "find themselves" negotiating meaning within normative structures that play a formative role throughout practices, but which is often not clearly perceived or articulated by tourists (Lindberg, Hansen, & Eide, 2014).

Following a line of research that assumes that adventures have an ideological undertone, are culturally constructed and depend on socio-history (Cater, 2013), we suggest that the conceptual toolbox *adventure regime and practices* can be applied (see Figure 3). What the regime understanding provides is a conceptualisation of experiences that take place in-between the formative role of regime structures (i.e., socio-history, myths, romantic imagery, ideology with resources) and tourist encounters during adventure practices (i.e., entering cultural role, environmental setting and activities). We thus call attention to extending the

analytical scrutiny as well as bridging the approaches that are predominant within adventure tourism research.

With inspiration from consumer culture research (e.g., Arsel & Bean, 2013; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Jantzen *et al.*, 2012; Peñaloza & Venkatesh, 2006; Reddy, 2001), we argue that the adventure regime related to the soft winter adventures (dog sledding) can be regarded as a sacred spectacle for the satisfaction of a more intense life in a contemporary society where hedonistic values are independent goals linked to accessing "the good life" (i.e., *socio-history* in Figure 3). Our findings point at two *sacred myths* that condition images and imaginings of the place and the activities there; majesty myth ("authentic" nature) and exploration myth (feat-of-valour in outer edge), which shape the desire for the dog sledding "expedition" and the resulting experiences as referred to as extraordinary experiences (Lindberg & Eide, 2016). The masculine *ideology* which the tourists meet when arriving in Svalbard coincided (well) with the imagination of Svalbard as a mythic place.

Figure 3: Meaning negotiation in-between adventure regime and tourist practices during experience (illustrated by Arctic Svalbard adventure).

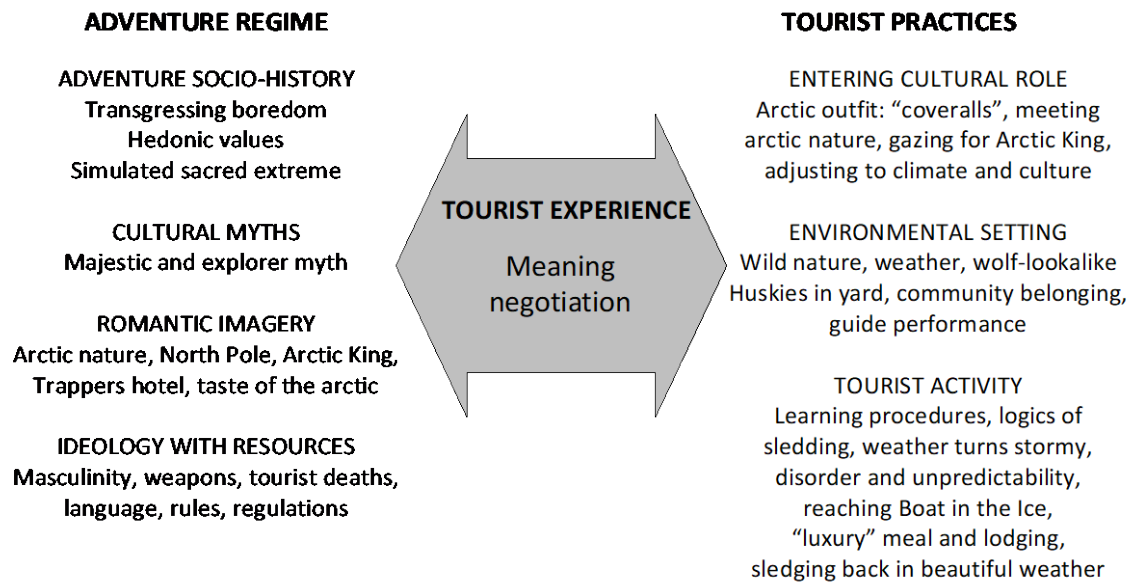


Figure 3 displays how adventure tourist experiences can be conceptualised as a dialectic relationship between adventure regime and tourist practices and how entities of the adventure regime condition and shape tourist experiences just as they are shaped during practices on-site. The "results" of the dialectical process are *meaning creation*, which is dynamically negotiated, often through ambiguity and paradoxes in contexts, such as the Arctic (Lindberg & Eide, 2016). For example, we have shown how ambiguity and paradoxes impact meaning creation when practices (the first day) that are supposed to be safe and simulated, become uncertain, unpredictable and risky. The tourists fail to adapt, not only because the nature turn bad, but also because the tourists expect soft adventures to be planned and predictable (Holyfield, Jonas, & Zajicek, 2005) and this, moreover, depends on a cultural convention. Consequently, a tourist experience might rely just as much on the adventure regime as on practices to become intelligible.

Our findings show that the Arctic *environmental setting* matters for how the tourists transform into adventure roles due to the harsh conditions of a polar nature and a new social contract (e.g., where to go, how to dress, when to sleep). Whereas prior research has emphasised the

environment as an instrumental value (e.g., Buckley, 2012), the symbolic value has occurred to be more significant in our context. With little or no prior experience with the Arctic, the tourists faced the contradiction between the calculative and low risk expectations provided by the *romantic imagery*, and the uncertainty and risk that the wild nature provided during the trip. While previous adventure research suggests that the paradox between risk and safety succeeds because providers emphasize one aspect while concealing the other (Holyfield *et al.*, 2005), or that other qualities such as challenge and play matter (Gyimóthy and Mykletun 2004), the adventure regime call attention to *how* the tourists are affected by the myths and romantic imagery of a place in their culture, and consequently not only by a provider. For example, many of the inexperienced, international, Arctic tourists expect to "live" the *majesty and exploration myths*. However, while risk was explicit to the Scandinavian tourists who had prior experiences with the Nordic nature and insight into stories of Svalbard accidents, it was largely concealed to the Germans and the UK tourists who relied more on provider information. Consequently, the adventure regime perspective extends the somewhat dichotomous theorisation of safety/risk and challenge/play when interpretations are moved from a micro-social analytical level to a macro-social level. The post-structural approach call attention not only to the adventure regime from a functionalist position but to the way *cultural meanings* impact on the interpretive horizon of various groups of tourists.

The findings demonstrate, further more, that the tourists face difficulties to adjust to the adventure context. When *cultural structures* (myths) and *romantic imaginary* (created by e.g. internet), which are embodied by the participants, "meet" practice with real forces of the nature and climate, a form of dissonance might occur in the sense that the translation from predispositions and expectations to real hash environmental practices have not been "satisfactory". However, there is a paradox inherent in the mythical *majestic* and *explorer*

tourist experience, i.e. between the "elements of role play and fantasy on the one hand, and the desire for authenticity." (Laing & Crouch, 2011, p. 1530). Our adventurers' *negotiation of meaning* is a collective one that in some respect is pulled by the quest of experiencing the Arctic frontier. However, the extreme climate conditions are not individually domesticated, and tourists' predisposition for the unpredictable frontier environment (Hall, 2002) depends on an unrealistic version of the "authentic". In soft adventures, the tourists might fail to adjust because the desire for the myths would overshadow the strenuous consequences of adventure practices. Our findings show that tourists view the (paradoxical) difficulties as meaningful because it makes them feel unique having been granted the opportunity to visit a place with mythic distinction which is not available to the mass tourism market.

With Rojek (1997) one could argue that the myths are used by the tourist group to bring meaning to places visited. Our case adds to the common discourse of the performance paradigm assuming that the adventure tourist would follow in the footsteps of famous travellers or explorers (Laing & Crouch, 1999). Rather, we contribute with a holistic framework for understanding the cultural complexity of social action (Moisander *et al.*, 2009) in a situation where adventure sights and experiences no longer have a singular or original meaning. The regime-understanding thus calls attention to the sign economy and value universe behind adventure experiences where (branded) meanings are developed and circulated within an ideological setting (O'Reilly & Kerrigan 2013). Rather than focussing on role enacting play (Edensor, 2000; Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2004), the regime-understanding contributes with new concepts which may direct empirical investigations in directions of diversity and multifaceted meaning negotiations.

Finally, prior research on adventure tourism portrays tourist experience related to its individual aspects (Gstaettner *et al.*, 2018; Varley, 2006), depending of the activity (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016; Rantala, 2011) or mainly structured by environmental factors (Buckley, 2012; Giddy & Webb, 2018) and much attention has been towards experiences as the interplay between risk and competence (risk theory) or as a quest for insight and knowledge (insight theory). We extend such theorisations by suggesting adventure regime as the conceptual tool for understanding *how* adventure activities are orchestrated so that they can be (properly) practiced and socially meaningful. Thus, both researchers and the tourism industry should get an understanding of what takes place before (and after) the adventure tourist experience, rather than only during consumption. Much tourist experiences, including meaning negotiating, originate in everyday life just as it originates in tourism consumption (Lindberg *et al.*, 2014) and this calls attention to a broader (ontological) view of the individual as an interpreter. Consequently, interactions and relationships during an experience depend not only on the physical relationships between tourists or between tourists and environments. With the adventure regime we propose that symbolic relationships may be just as important, which would turn focus away from an emic relativist and an etic functionalist position. Where the broad macro-social (sociological) approach tends to render tourism adventure experiences as ethically remote, our focus on meaning negotiation in-between adventure regime and tourist practices is an attempt to theorise without losing sight of the practices. Our findings are thus illustrative of how focus on macro/meso level interpretations may reveal tourist meanings that are not only positive, romantic and communal, but also limited and conflict laden and as such may enlarge the domain of adventure experiences as seen from an individual level analysis.

Conclusions

Theorizing the adventure regime of experience can aid researchers and management in discovering the wider structures of adventure experiences that are not necessarily understood by the individual tourist, but which nevertheless shape adventure markets and the relevant micro-social practices (Lindberg *et al.*, 2014). A consequence hereof is that *meaning* is neither a function of subjectivism nor of culturalism and that empirical and analytical approaches should be carefully chosen for revealing macro and meso systemic forces (Gstaetter *et al.*, 2018). Conceptualizing adventure regime specifically contributes with a kind of bridging between an individual focus and structuralist categorization by acknowledging that meanings are dynamically and dialectically (re-)created in the midst of adventure regime, adventure environments, community and individual predisposition.

This paper does not suggest the abandonment of an emic focus by advancing the "grand" theories or a structuralist orientation. The strength of an interdisciplinary focus within adventure tourism is its emphasis on real life accounts by tourists. However, contemporary epistemology signifies that "knowledge does not directly reflect reality but is a theoretical structuration of it." (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011, p. 397). Without trying to enforce any particular theoretical approaches to reality, our attention is oriented towards the real-world circumstances in which adventure tourism experiences take place. However, our discussion has links to the debate about the role of context and theory in marketing (Arnould *et al.*, 2006). We agree about the danger of researchers' absorption into the emic context, at the cost of theoretical insight, but we think that applying the regime concept, with its variations in contextual levels *and* theoretical reflections about adventure tourism, may result in an interpretive circularity suitable for potent theoretical contributions. Thus, we suggest an

approach that enlarges the context outside the micro-social accounts without losing sight of the ethic dimension.

Theorizing adventure regime of experiences has consequences for the marketing of tourism adventures and especially soft commercial adventures that have been in focus within this study. Involving sociocultural macro and meso dimensions, such as socio-history (e.g., contemporary hedonism), cultural structures (e.g., myths), imagery (e.g., stories) and ideology (e.g., masculinity) and resources (e.g., wild nature) assume an emphasis on the wider contextual environment (both substantially and symbolically) to gain insights into how to enable market strategies, to develop brands, to conduct market communication and to design products. We suggest that introducing the adventure regime concept may advocate interpretations that are not necessarily traceable in tourists' accounts, but still of significance for understanding why and how people engage in adventure experiences, what tourist resources are at stake on micro-meso-macro levels and how tourists may contribute to the co-creative process that constitutes an essential aspect of adventure tourism and its experienced values.

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