

1. Introduction

The concept of experience economy has, during the last decade, been much debated within the academic field and likewise among companies and municipalities regarding business and city development. Additionally the concept is frequently referred to within the tourism industry, which more or less has been considered the epitome of the experience economy (Lorentzen, 2011).

In recent years the concept has been applied in several Danish urban development projects in an attempt to create attractive environments for tourists and hereby attain better economy and additionally improve the competitiveness compared with other cities (Lorentzen, 2011. Giddens, 2002).

Especially the towns want to strengthen their ability to compete against larger and more attractive cities that often are advantaged in terms of size and resources. Several experience economical initiatives have been implemented in Danish towns, but their understanding of the experience economy seems to vary, as the practical approaches have differentiated significantly. Simultaneously researchers are continuously discussing the understanding of experience economy, as new arguments change the way of approaching the concept. This is believed to have a great impact on how experiences within the tourism industry are created.

In the following a problem area is presented in order to provide necessary information before the research question. With point of departure in a few examples, this problem area will question the understanding of experience economy through an examination of two main positions, respectively the first and the second generation, which additionally leads to the research question of the project.

2. Problem Area

2.1 First Generation of Experience Economy

The city of Frederikshavn, Denmark, can be mentioned as an example of a small/mid-sized ¹ city in which different partners throughout the last decade have been working hard to turn the situation from unemployment and pessimism towards a new situation with economic progress, optimism and people moving to the city (Lorentzen, 2011).

The field of experience economy and the tourism industry have been in focus, hoping that it would create the necessary economical development.

¹ citizens: 62.391: <http://www.boligsiden.dk/kommune/frederikshavn/>

In 2003 they inaugurated Arena Nord in Frederikshavn, which is a huge multi arena hosting concerts for some of the greatest names worldwide. The same year both Ice Centre Nord became a reality as an acknowledged ice hockey centre and The House of Music was build.

Additionally Frederikshavn was to get a huge indoor ski run, as the one found in the arabic Las Vegas Dubai. However the project was unfortunately never realised due to conflicts of interest, but instead Project Palm Beach became a reality in 2004, where palms were planted on the beach in Frederikshavn, as if the beach was brought directly from the Caribbean Islands (Lorentzen, 2011).

In the last few years initiatives of similar character have been taken in cities as Herning, Fredericia and Viborg, where arenas and huge attractions have been build in order to, among others, attract tourists.

The policy behind these new initiatives trusts that the experience economy can become the rescue of the city economy and a point of departure for growth in many areas. In the case of the cities mentioned above, several initiatives have been taken in order to supply the citizens and tourists with entertainment and great attractions, hoping that this will attract people and hereby add value to the city. The approach is often connected to the first generation of the experience economy, which was presented by Pine and Gilmore² in the book “The Experience Economy” in 1999 (Lorentzen, 2011).

2.1.1 Critique

Several researchers are critically questioning this approach to experience economy (Prahalad, 2004. Binkhorst, 2005. Boswijk, 2007. Richards, 2006). Among them is Greg Richards³ who refers to this approach, as the cultural serial reproduction of culture. In other words, by copying the attractions and events of cities worldwide and by holding similar events, Frederikshavn loses its uniqueness and its ability to differentiate, which furthermore results in a weak competitive position.

“... as more cities and regions compete in (re)producing and promoting themselves for tourism and culture employing the same formulaic mechanisms, their ability to create uniqueness arguably diminishes, often assumed to lead towards the ‘serial reproduction’ of culture” (Richards, 2006; 2).

² Pioneers within the field of experience economy. Published the book “The experience economy” (1999) and were some of the first researchers to study how the experience dimension add value to goods and services.

³ Professor of Leisure Studies at Tilburg University. Director of the ATLAS Cultural Tourism Project. Tilburg University, The Netherlands.

This approach to the experience economy is criticised for the company⁴ centric perspective, which makes little room for the tourists⁵ to engage in the designing of experiences, as most experiences are staged and controlled by the companies supplying⁶ the experiences. The reproducing of culture furthermore leads to a lack of authentic experiences.

Moreover an issue in this perspective is the insecurity, which is related to the staging of experiences. Due to lack of dialogue with the consumers and hereby the possibility to gain information about their in depth needs and thoughts, it might be difficult to successfully stage experiences which meet the consumers' needs.

2.2 Second Generation of Experience Economy; Co-Creation of Value

The last decade since Pine and Gilmore and the publishing of "The Experience Economy" (1999), several researchers have felt a need for further development and clarification of the concept. This new perspective emphasises the human being and subjectivity in the creating of experiences instead of solely focusing on the companies (Prahalad, 2004. Binkhorst, 2005. Boswijk, 2007. Richards, 2006, Florida, 2002). In the book "The experience economy - A new perspective" Albert Boswijk⁷ describes it as:

"Rather than being approached merely from the perspective of business economy, it should be more attuned to the way individuals themselves see the world" (Boswijk, 2007; 27).

Tourism and experience development are believed to have been hindered by the way it were traditionally framed. Much research has focused on economic, political, historical and cultural perspectives in regards to tourism development and growth. Specifically with a point of departure in the company as the supplier of staged experiences, which the tourists are to choose between.

The new perspective claims that it is essential to rather focus on the human being in relation to his or her time spatial context. Thus experiences are not only presented to the tourist as finished

⁴ There will be no distinction between company and supplier in this project.

⁵ There will be no distinction between the terms individual, consumer, customer and tourist in this project, even though different meanings can be ascribed to each of them. This choice has been made with the point of departure in the theoretical approach in the project. The approach acknowledge that the individual, the consumer and the tourist is the same person. The blurring borders between these concepts are further explained in the theory section of the project. However "tourist" as a term is primary used in the project.

⁶ Referring to a company that supplies the consumers with experiences for payment.

⁷ Founder & CEO of the European Centre for the Experience Economy, The Netherlands.

products and staged scenes, but rather a process which call for a collaboration between the supplier and the tourist.

Esther Binkhorst⁸ describes this new focus as a “second generation of experiences”

“‘The first generation of experiences’ date from the late 1990s and are characterised by merely staged entertainment and fun. In the meantime, the ‘second generation of experiences’ based on co-creation have developed and take the individual as a starting point” (Binkhorst, 2005; 314).

This requires even more of the suppliers of experiences, as it is not enough to present the experiences as fixed arrangements, but instead it has to be experiences designed in collaboration with the consumer (Seldby, 2004. Binkhorst, 2005. Firat, 1997).

The role of the company hereby becomes to support the individual with landscapes⁹ in which such experiences might take place. These landscapes have to be created in corporation between the supplier and the consumer, as real co-created experience is neither company nor product centred. The value in co-creational experience occur through dialogue between the company and the consumer (Binkhorst, 2005). When the consumer experiences this kind of involvement and co-create personal experiences, he or she is adding meaning to life (Boswijk, 2007).

The second generation of experience economy rises the question why such change is taking place and what conditions in the society induce such new direction.

In order to obtain more insight into this the next section will discuss the consumer behaviour from a societal perspective in a Danish context and the conditions the Danish consumers assign to. However the section will only focus on the societal economic situation which is believed to have changed the conditions for consuming and thus also the tourist behaviour.

2.3 Change in Conditions Through Prosperity - A Danish Context

The field of entertainment has more or less always been interesting to both public and private investors in the attempt to reach the heart of the consumers. In spite of this the academic research in

⁸ Owner of Co-Creation, Barcelona Spain.

⁹ Derived form the concept of experiencescapes presented by Tom O'Dell; Associate professor at Lunds University, Helsingborg.

this field has never been much emphasised, as cultural experiences primarily have been consumed by a minority of elite¹⁰ consumers (Lorentzen, 2011).

However in the last decade the characteristics have changed, as the prosperity among the Danish consumers has increased and the middle class has become larger. Today almost everyone are more or less cultural and materialistic consumers and can afford a diversity of different products and experiences (Barker, 2008. Vestergaard, 2007).

As a consequence of this increased material wealth, researchers argue that a majority of the Danes have now reached a point of material satiety, as almost “anything” is reachable economically if prioritised (Vestergaard, 2007. Lorentzen, 2011).

Hereby it becomes difficult for the companies to differentiate the consumers through segmentation processes, as everyone is now capable of consuming a diversity of products and experiences. This requires that companies start to interact with consumers on an individual level in order to understand their in depth needs and consumer behaviour in general.

Additionally in a society where material wealth has reached its peak, the focus turns toward the need for self realisation and a demand for psychological satisfaction. Researchers believe in a post modern society which is characterised by intimate values based on a holistic way of thinking where all parts of life have to make sense according to personal persuasion and beliefs. This induces a change of lifestyle where the projects of daily life to a higher extent becomes of aesthetic character (Schulze, 2005. Binkhorst, 2005. Hauen1).

Greg Richard argues that consumers not only seek the experience in itself, but also want to become transformed through the chosen experience (Greg Richard). Additionally Joe Gilmore states:

“People don’t want more stuff, in this post-growth global economy people start questioning what they really value and that is experiences with others, loved ones, colleagues, friends, etc.” (Cuccureddu, 2010, Interview).

The tourists want to consume meaningful experiences which are related to personal values and often experienced together with loved ones. Additionally there is need for tourists to engage and interact with the companies in the process of creating experiences for consumption.

These conditions change the way that experiences are sold, which might entail difficulties for the companies who are used to control this process. In order for companies to succeed in selling

¹⁰ Referring to the concept of Pierre Bourdieu: Consumers who are the economic elite.

experiences to this new type of tourist, they have to know them better and approach them not only as tourists, but as human beings with values, identity and demands (Firstmove presentation, Appendix 5).

However it is unclear how such meaningful co-creational experiences are practically approached. The discussion has primarily appeared at a theoretical level and very few practical examples exist. Therefore the next section presents an example of a project which focuses more actively on engaging the tourists in the process of designing experiences and hereby has elements of co-creation. This example is furthermore constituting the basis for the research question in this project.

2.4 Lillebaelt Waters - Middelfart, Denmark

In the town of Middelfart, Denmark, it was in December 2011 decided to start an EU supported project in order to approach the issue of how to make Middelfart attractive to tourists families, especially in the summer holidays where many hotel beds are empty.

The primary group of partners consisted of hotels, but representatives from the municipality and the business council of Middelfart were also represented.

In the same way as in Frederikshavn, Middelfart has economic issues and wants to turn the situation. The experience economy is believed to be an essential factor in changing the situation and hereby the desire to create an environment in Middelfart in which the tourists can consume optimal experiences.

Middelfart does not have any large attractions, which draw tourists to the city, as seen in for example Billund, Frederikshavn and Herning.

Middelfart offers tourists a nature environment with water, wildlife and history. In this context and with an appreciation of nature, the partners were asked to suggest different solutions on how to brand and sell this unique and authentic environment to the tourists, in order for Middelfart to become a platform for great experiences.

The result of the project led to the launch of the concept “Lillebaelt Waters - the reason to go”¹¹ on June 14th, 2012. This is a unique concept which emphasises the engagement of the tourists in the creation of experiences in Middelfart.

¹¹ www.Lillebaeltwaters.dk

The main idea behind the concept is that experiences are taking point of departure in the history and the authentic environment of Middelfart which therefore is not a copy-paste approach.

Additionally the partnership among the companies in the project seems to be a new and pathbreaking initiative, which has rarely been seen in the tourism industry in Denmark. Instead of being competitors they cooperates under the label of Lillebaelt Waters in order to solve the issues.

2.5 Delimitation

From a societal point of view, the increased material wealth among the Danes might have changed the way tourists approach experiences and consumption in general.

The tourists of the contemporary society want authentic experiences which give meaning according to personal believe and values and additionally they want to be transformed by the experiences. Furthermore the tourists want to be a part of creating the experiences, in order to ensure that every single experience is 100% optimised and gives meaning from a holistic way of living.

These conditions are believed to have an impact on the way experiences are staged by the partners in Lillebaelt Waters. There are still very few examples worldwide of how companies in the tourism industry are co-creating experiences and therefore more research is definitely needed. Lillebaelt Waters might become a role model for other towns and cities who wish to engage tourists in co-creational experiences.

On the basis of the perspectives presented and discussed in the problem area, this project will examine the concept of co-creation in order to identify practical suggestions on how to co-create meaningful experiences. The concept of Lillebaelt Waters in Middelfart is chosen as a relevant case for the research of this phenomenon, as they are currently working on a strategy with this new type of tourist in mind. Additionally the partners of Lillebaelt Waters are the main focus of this project, as they are the ones who are practically responsible for engaging the tourists in this kind of experiences. Therefore this project will emphasise the partners' perspective and their opportunities for co-creating experiences with the tourists. It is within this case that the practical suggestions for co-creating experiences will be identified.

Hereby the following research question is presented.

3. Research question

How can the partners of Lillebaelt Waters engage the contemporary tourist in meaningful co-creational experiences?

It is acknowledged that several approaches are possible in the attempt to answer this research question, as it is a complex discussion which has different perspectives depending on how it is approached. In order to ensure that the project does not become too comprehensive, three sub questions are asked which provide a focus and structure for the perspectives examined in the project. The sub questions therefore work as a guideline in answering of the research question.

3.1 Sub-questions

- 1. What are the characteristics of the contemporary tourist?*
- 2. What are the communicational opportunities in order to engage the contemporary tourist?*
- 3. What are the benefits of the cooperation between the partners of Lillebaelt Waters in order to engage the contemporary tourist?*

The research question will be answered on the basis of the three sub-questions.

Sub-question 1 analyses some of the characteristics that the society ascribe to the contemporary tourist, which is assumed to affect the tourist's behaviour. Theory of sociological character will be applied in the understanding of these societal characteristics, which create new conditions for the individual. These conditions are also assumed to be decisive for the choices made on individual level.

Additionally the data material is analysed on the basis of these societal characteristics and the findings are included in the answer to how the partners can co-create meaningful experiences with the tourists.

Sub-question 1 is the most emphasised sub-question in the project, as an understanding of the tourist behaviour is considered essential if the partners are to co-create experiences with them.

Sub-question 2 concerns the communication between the partners and the tourists. This question is purposed to obtain knowledge regarding the communicational opportunities for co-creating

experiences with the tourists. Additionally the question will concern some of the communicational challenges, as these challenges are assumed to identify where the partners need to focus in order to co-create with the tourists.

Sub-question 3 concerns the possibilities, which are found within the cooperation between the different partners. With Lillebaelt Waters as the focal point, it is assumed that partners together are able to co-create with the tourists.

The common purpose of the three sub-questions is to assist in answering the research question. Moreover the purpose of the sub-questions is to practically suggest how the partners in Lillebaelt Waters can co-create meaningful experiences with the tourists, as it is not wanted to conduct a solely theoretical project.

Additionally the project will answer the research question and the appertaining sub-questions based of several of theories, instead of just one theory, in order to get more perspectives to the answer. The reason is that it is assumed to be more useful to the partners of Lillebaelt Waters to obtain knowledge about multiply ideas on how to co-create meaningful experiences with the tourists.

3.2 Clarification of Concepts

A clarification of concepts is relevant before continuing with the methodology and theory of this project. It is acknowledged that such concepts can be defined in different ways, and thus a discussion is necessary due to the complexity of the concepts.

Furthermore the discussion provides a clarity regards to understanding the concepts, which is essential when conducting the interview guide, as the theoretical themes work as a guide for collecting relevant data.

3.2.1 Contemporary Tourist

The target group of Lillebaelt Waters is the three generational family with specific focus on the children and the activities addressed to them. This project approaches the tourist in a broader perspective, where the children are not necessarily the primary focus. The reason for this is first of all that the majority of the partners in Lillebaelt Water are hotels. According to the Vibeke Stentoft¹² from Sixtus and the receptionist chief at Comwell, it has been difficult to focus that much on the

¹² Managing director at Sixtus Hotel Middelfart

children, as this is not their primary target group. However for the project to get economic support from EU, it was a requirement that the children were a primary focus in Lillebaelt Waters¹³.

Additionally it has been proved that for vacations longer than 2-3 days¹⁴, it is mainly the parents who decide where to go. Thus it is relevant to also focus on the adult as a tourist without the children in mind. At the same time it is acknowledged that the parents probably do not want to go to destinations without having their children in mind in the decision-making process.

From a theoretical perspective it is acknowledged that the definitions of a tourist, and when an individual becomes a tourist, are many.

In this project the individual enters the tourist zone when he or she decides to consume experiences which differs from the experiences related to the sphere of everyday life.

However it is not essential for the research of this project to fully define and frame the tourist into one way of understanding, as a more open approach is wanted.

This project will examine the tourist as an individual, which could be anyone. Each tourist is a case in itself and is believed to have unique characteristics. However it is acknowledged that factors such as age, sex, cultural background and nationality might have an impact on the chosen tourism experience, even though specific criteria have not been chosen in this project.

The methodological part of the project is to clarify the use of the term even more in regards to the selection of data material.

It is still found necessary to delimit in terms of whether the project focuses on the business or leisure segment. This project is solely going to focus on the leisure market, as this is the focus of Lillebaelt Waters.

3.2.2 Partners

The partners in this project are the ones who officially are a part of Lillebaelt Waters. These are:

- Severin Lillebaelt, (hotel)
- Comwell Kongebrogaarden, (hotel)
- Hindsgavl Slot, (hotel)
- Hotel Sixtus (hotel)

¹³ Referring to conversations with the different partners.

¹⁴ Presentation by Kirsten Poulsen from Firstmove, Appendix 5

- Fjeldsted Skovkro (Inn)
- The Tourist Bureau of Middelfart
- The Municipality of Middelfart
- The Business Centre of Middelfart
- LoL - Kids n' Tweens
- The European Union

The primary focus will be on the hotels as partners, as they were the first to join the project after being contacted by the Business Centre of Middelfart, and they furthermore invested economically in the project¹⁵

Additionally the hotels are interesting, as the idea of co-creation challenges the traditional way that the hotel industry works. The hotels are used to create the staged, organised and fixed experiences as well as delivering great service in controlled environments. This approach is challenged by the idea that tourists want to interact and engage with hotel staff in order to design meaningful co-creational experiences, and not only want to buy a hotel room as an experience.

This is a new requirement from the tourist, which the hotels in Middelfart are facing in Lillebaelt Waters. Even though the hotels are of primary interest, other partners are also mentioned as they all working together under the label of Lillebaelt Waters.

3.3.3 Meaningful Co-Creational Experiences

Not all co-creational experiences are necessarily meaningful. This project will primarily concern meaningful co-creation, though co-creation without the meaningful dimension is acknowledged as well. However it is believed that when a tourist is actively engaged in a co-creational experience, this specific experience will be meaningful to that person.

A more detailed clarification is presented in the theory section of the project.

In the next part of the project the operationalisation is presented. This part will clarify the research design, scientific approach and methods applied when answering the research question.

¹⁵ Interview with Niels Christensen Hammerlev (Appendix 7).

4. Operationalisation

4.1 Research Design

The strategic design of the project is chosen with point of departure in the experiences of Middelfart and Lillebaelt Waters as a case. The perspective will be on specific characteristics and interesting phenomena which emerge in this case.

The case study as a design is related to both qualitative and quantitative methods, but the choice of which to use when depends on what kind of knowledge/data the researcher finds relevant in the specific case.

In this project the principle of triangulation¹⁶ is applied, where the researcher does not choose only one method, but rather draws on different techniques in order to research the phenomenon from different perspectives, which gives a varied picture of the studied phenomenon.

Even though triangulation will be implemented, the qualitative approach is the most prioritised, since it allows a sensitivity towards the interpretation of the social life in the context of the individuals and partners interviewed in the case.

The qualitative approach is characterised by the collection of empirical data through in-depth interviews and observing field work, as meaningful experiences are subjectively constructed (Antoft, 2007. Bryman, 2008. Brannen, 1995).

This project will emphasise the a-theoretical case study, which focuses on generating new empirical knowledge through the study of already existing data. The a-theoretical case study stresses the research of social phenomena in specific environments, which are explained and analysed on the basis of elements from a larger social context in the society.

This approach is relevant as Lillebaelt Waters is a case in itself in which stakeholders, such as the hotels and the tourists, are interacting in order to create value. Through the interviews with the different stakeholders and the secondary empirical data, phenomena are expected to occur which might explain how the partners are able to co-create experiences with the tourists (Antoft, 2007. Bryman, 2008. Brannen, 1995).

However the a-theoretical understanding is only acknowledged as an ideal typology, as it is believed that no case study can be interpreted without the influence of theory. There will always be a theoretical pre-assumption in a research (Antoft, 2007).

¹⁶ For more information about the choice of triangulation (4.4.1 in data section).

In this project it is unclear whether the researched case and the phenomenons occurring are part of a larger social connection in the society. It is an assumption though that the results of the analysis might add relevant knowledge to the discussion of the changes taking place within the experience economy.

The philosophy behind this way of thinking is explained as a phenomenon being social constructed and therefore can not be studied as isolated from the outside world and it's context, since it only gives meaning as true knowledge when it is related to a larger social reality. Hereby it becomes possible to relate the empirical knowledge, which is found in the case of Lillebaelt Waters (the subjective experience and understanding), to a larger societal and theoretical connection.

According to Robert K. Yin the qualitative case study becomes especially relevant when the researcher epistemologically assumes that a connection between the studied social phenomenon and it's context is taking place.

This is also the case in this project because of the presumption that the phenomenon of meaningful co-creational experiences is taking place in the context of Middelfart and Lillebaelt Waters (Antoft, 2007. Brannen, 1995).

In the next section a profile of Middelfart and Lillebaelt Waters is presented to give an idea of the field in which the case is taking place. The profile is build on personal observation from a visit in the town and furthermore on secondary statistics and qualitative data collected through surveys and interviews.

4.2 Middelfart: City Profile

The data presented is considered in order to its relevance in this project. Limited data has been chosen, as it is not the purpose to conduct a full analysis of Middelfart. The idea is rather to present the experiencescape based on subjective understandings, as this information is useful to the partners in Lillebaelt Waters.

Population: 37.701 in the municipality of Middelfart.

Location: Middelfart is located on Funen just next to the Lillebaelt bridge, which connects Jutland with Funen.

Tourism facts¹⁷

The total tourism consumption in Middelfart in 2010 was 729 million DKr.

- Business tourism 438 million DKr. Leisure tourism 291 million DKr.
- Tourism products: 73%. Retail: 17%. Other: 10%
 - Accommodation: 31%
 - Restaurant: 7%
 - Transport: 29%
 - Travel service: 3%
 - Culture and attractions: 3%



- 83% of the total tourism consumption is derived from danish tourist.

Research Trip

This section is an evaluation of the experiencescape in Middelfart in regards to potential, presented by Hind & Ko, Firstmove and Kvistgaard Consulting who were extern partners consulting the process of creating the concept of Lillebaelt Waters. 36 adults and 20 children participated in a research trip to Middelfart in order to establish a picture of the current situation regards to experiences, atmosphere and potential¹⁸

Some of the statements were:

¹⁷ VisitDenmark destination report 2012

¹⁸ Appendix 16

**"There is missing
information boards
everywhere"**

"It requires systematisation and making it visible"

**"Undreamt-of possibilities; Water, quality,
nature, Zoo, Lillebaelt experiences..."**

**"The place seethes of narratives, I
would like to know them..."**

**"There is missing a visibility
of activities, not much for
children..."**

**"We do not tell about the city, stands
are needed"**

**"Middelfart is very beautiful, lovely
view which always ends towards the
water "stands are needed"**

One of the main themes from the research trip were the many possibilities which are found in Middelfart. As one of the statements says "Undreamt-of possibilities". Additionally many of these experiences are unique and authentic experiences which are only found in that context. However one of the greatest problems is the lack of visibility of these possibilities.

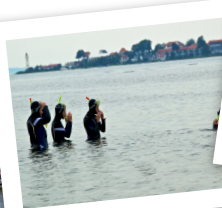
Lillebaelt Waters

This section is to present some of the experiences, which take place in Middelfart under the label of Lillebaelt Waters. The concept is "Do City at Sea" which is the result of the project process. The "Do" concept refers to the interaction between the tourists and the experiences, as it gives the tourists the opportunity to get closer to for example the nature and get involved in creating their own experiences. Picture 1 visualises an experience map with experiences taking place in Middelfart under the label of Lillebaelt Waters¹⁹

¹⁹ Refer to the website for more information: www.lillebaeltwaters.dk

Picture 1

Fishery and fun at the beach



Whales

Kayak



Snorkeling

Spearfishing



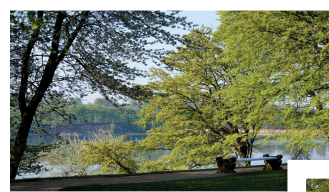
Do Water



Match race



Walk with the deers



The forrest's of Hindsgavl



Nature safari



Climbing in trees



Sensuous coffee experiences



Guided tour in the old part of the city

Do City at sea

Guided tours are historic castles

Do Local food



Produce your own chocolate



Local beer tasting



This business profile illustrate plenty of opportunities in Middelfart for the tourists to engage in co-creational experiences. However the lack of visibility, which is to a certain level the partners' responsibility, makes it difficult for the tourists to co-create experiences in Middelfart in spite of the many opportunities.

Additionally it is acknowledged that interesting attractions are not enough. The partners still need to create opportunities for dialogue with the tourists. This requires an understanding of the conditions that the tourists assign to, which is further presented in the theoretical section of this project.

The next section in the operationalisation concerns philosophy of science, which explains ontological and epistemological approaches in this project.

4.3 Philosophy of Science

4.3.1 Traditional Approaches

In order to gain knowledge about a certain area it is necessary to clarify how knowledge is understood, which depend on the chosen ontological position.

Traditionally a gap exists between two main positions, qualitative and quantitative research, which belong to distinctively different paradigms. How to approach and mix these different philosophies and methods depends on the researchers degree of traditional thinking. In order to discuss and understand the issues connected with philosophy of science, two main positions are presented as a point of departure (Kvale, 1997. Brannen, 1995).

Objectivism implies that the social phenomenon is confronting the individual with external facts, which are beyond the individuals' reach or influence. This position is often used in quantitative research and furthermore related to the philosophy of positivism. According to an epistemological positivistic approach quantitative research strategies, with its roots in the well established natural science, are the only methods that measure true knowledge through observable and quantifiable data only. In order to be acknowledged as a scientific fact, the certain researched phenomenon has to be separated from values and stances of the individuals involved (Kvale, 1977. Bryman, 2008. Kjørup, 1997).

On the contrary the constructivist approach refers to the social phenomenon and its meaning as being accomplished by social actors. In interactions between individuals and the surrounding world social phenomena are constructed, which are furthermore always in a constant states of revision. This ontological position is often connected with the position of social constructivism and phenomenology, which insists that the society is socially constructed and that phenomena always have to be interpreted from the social context in which it is found.

Additionally this position is a post-modern reaction against the understanding of knowledge as objective to the individual and instead it acknowledges social phenomena as constructed through interaction between the individuals and the surrounding social world. Epistemologically this is often referred to as interpretivism or perspectivism, as the researcher attains the knowledge through the subjective meaning of the social action (Kvale, 1997. Bryman, 2008. Wenneberg, 2002).

4.3.1.1 Critique

In this project a critical approach has been chosen towards the separation of the different philosophies and the related methods. Though the two paradigms differ in ontological view and

epistemological approach, it might in some cases be preferable to mix the methods from the different positions in order to broaden the perspective in a certain research. This is often referred to as triangulation and will be applied in this project, which additionally improves the validity and reliability of the findings in the project.

It is questioned whether it is possible to fully choose and distinct between different philosophies. It can be argued that another approach would be to consider the different paradigms as typologies, which are never fully reached, but instead function as ideals, which the researcher constantly strives for.

At the end of the day it often becomes a matter of the practical choice of appropriate methods for answering the research question, rather than focusing strictly and theoretically on which paradigm to choose (Kjørup, 1997. Brannen, 1995).

Additionally it can be argued that the demarcation criterion has lost its power with the emerging of postmodernism, as it breaks with the large narratives. According to Paul Karl Feyerabend²⁰ and his methodological thinking (*Against method and science in a free society*), no methodological rules should exist in science. He objected to any single prescriptive scientific method with the argument that such method would limit the creativity and activities of scientists, and thus limit the scientific process (Feyerabend, 1978).

In this project it is primarily endeavoured to achieve an understanding regarding the phenomenon of meaningful co-creational experiences through conversations. This is epistemologically researched through the interpretivist approach (Bryman, 2008). The interpretivist believes that the social reality has a meaning for the individual and therefore human actions are meaningful. This emphasises the possibility of gaining empirical knowledge through the individuals' subjective understanding of the interactions or phenomena they engage in.

Interpretivism has its roots in the hermeneutic interpretation, which is commonly used to analyse text material, such as transcribing an interview. In this project it has been chosen to make full transcripts of the interviews in order to conduct an empirical phenomenological analysis (Kvale, 1997). Hereby the phenomenon is researched and described on the basis of the subjective understanding of the interviewees. Furthermore their answers are transcribed in different relevant themes, which require the engagement and interpretation of the researcher in order to find meaning (Kvale, 1997).

²⁰ An influential researcher in the philosophy of science, and also in the sociology of scientific knowledge

Middelfart is chosen to be the case with point of departure in Lillebaelt Waters, as mentioned in the research design section. The phenomena, which are expected to be found through the research, will be interpreted in themselves and seen in the light of the theory. Additionally they will be compared and interpreted in terms of the surrounding empirical world, as this is a core idea in the social constructive approach.

“We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experiences, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experiences. ...We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth” (Wenneberg, 2002; 197).

Additionally in this project it is considered essential to acknowledge the interpretations and perceptions that the interviewees have about themselves and the world, and simultaneously conduct research that reconstruct these statements, so that they are translated into a scientific language by the application of theoretical concepts (Gilje, 2002).

The next section concerns the empirical data used in the project. This data will form the basis of the analysis.

4.4 Empirical Data

4.4.1 Triangulation

The empirical data in the project consists of both qualitative and quantitative data. The purpose is to triangulate, which means to apply different methods and theories as well as different researchers in order to add more perspectives to the phenomenon of how the partners can co-create value with the tourists in the case of Lillebaelt Waters (Brannen, 1995).

As a part of triangulation both with-in methods and between-methods are applied. The with-in method refers to the interviews with the different stakeholders. The stakeholders are both potential tourists and their perspective as well as the partners in Lillebaelt Waters. These two types of stakeholders are interviewed with the purpose of analysing the concept of co-creational experiences from different perspectives.

Additionally the between-method is applied so that quantitative and qualitative data is combined in order to bring different perspectives to the same case. In the case of meaningful co-created experiences in Middelfart this is found relevant to apply both types of data, as the quantitative data gives the perspective of trends and tendencies within a given society and might explain characteristics in a broader context, while the qualitative data only refers to the exact case (Brannen, 1995).

Research conducted by different partners working together is also preferable, as different individuals and partners brings different perspectives depending on discipline, theoretical stance or even gender, age and social backgrounds.

Multiple theories are applied in the data analysis. The reason for using different theories is that it broadens the possibilities for interesting and relevant findings in order to answer the research question. The discussion about meaningful co-creation is a complex discussion in which little academic research and theory exist. Therefore it is found relevant to keep an open approach to the phenomena appearing through the data.

It is acknowledged that this open approach might cause the research to become too comprehensive. However this will not be the case, as the theory is based on the same conceptual theoretical framework, which is presented in the theory section 5.2.1.

4.4.2 Secondary Data

This data section refers to the secondary data, which has been conducted by other researchers and found relevant in the context of this project.

4.4.2.1 Trend Study 2012 by Firstmove²¹

This survey was conducted as an extern consulting in Lillebaelt Waters which was to examine the current travel trends. 24 interviewees participated in the survey (14 adults and 10 children).

It is acknowledged that these interviewees are so-called first movers, which might influence the findings.

According to Kirstin Poulsen first movers are considered as individuals who set the trend and go first whenever a new characteristic is made. The first movers constitute about 5% of the Danish population. The reason for using first movers in a survey is because it might give an idea of how the future trends within a specific area. This has also been the case in this survey, as the partners in Lillebaelt Waters wanted Firstmove to conduct a survey gaining information about the contemporary tourist characteristics.

In order to differentiate between consumers who are first movers and the ones who are not, they have to take a test with several questions which indicate whether a certain consumer is a first mover or not.

Even though this survey is based on the so-called first movers, the findings are still considered valid to use in the context of this project. Critically it can be questioned whether it is possible to segment certain consumers into the category of first movers. A more appropriate approach in this project is to understand the concept of a first mover as an ideal typology, which provide information about consumer characteristics. Hereby more than 5% of the Danish population might have first movers characteristics in a few areas of consumption.

4.4.2.2 Target Groups in Danish Tourism, Economic Key Figures (2010)²²

This survey is conducted by VisitDenmark and Lighthouse Cph. Through a mixture between quantitative and qualitative methods, the survey presents a picture of the travel motives within different target groups.

²¹ Appendix 5

²² Appendix 14

In this project the survey has been used as quantitative data material for the measuring of travel motives, which has been compared to the qualitative findings in the personal interviews. Hereby it improves the validity of the findings in the analysis.

4.4.2.3 Tourism Travel Motives in 2011²³

This survey is conducted by VisitDenmark with the purpose of examining international travel motives when choosing Denmark before other countries. This includes an analysis of the possibilities for tourism experiences in Denmark, which gives an idea of the Danish competitive position compared to other countries.

The survey consists of 10.600 interviewees from five different countries (Netherlands, Great Britain, Germany, Norway and Sweden), between the age of 18-65.

These findings are interesting to this project, as they represent an international perspective. According to the tourism facts presented in the business profile section only 17% of the leisure tourism economy derives from international tourism. Gaining knowledge about the travel motives of international tourists when visiting Denmark, is argued to be relevant information for the partners in Lillebaelt Waters.

Additionally the survey analyses the characteristics of the Danish tourism experiences and compares them with experience characteristics in other European countries. This information is of great importance, as the partners thereby know why the international tourists prefer Denmark.

4.4.2.3 The Great Bicycle Experience²⁴

This research has been conducted by different partners²⁵ in Denmark in order to develop concepts of user-driven bicycle experiences. The research is specifically interesting, as it's point of departure is the human being and the characteristics of optimal experience. The bicycle experience contains elements of co-creation and examines how the tourists in practice perceives and navigates the relationship with the hosts and other stakeholders.

Hereby the partners in Lillebaelt Waters might learn from this bicycle experience in relation to co-creating experiences in other areas as well.

²³ Appendix 17

²⁴ Appendix 11

²⁵ Syddansk Turisme, Midtjysk Turisme, Friluftsrådet, Bornholm, VisitNordjylland, Dansk Cyklist Forbund, Horesta, Miljøministeriet (skov og naturstyrelsen), Wonderful Copenhagen, VisitDenmark, ØstDansk Turisme, Campingrådet, Aktiv Danmark.

4.4.3 Interview

The primary data is the interviews conducted in relation to this project. In this section considerations regarding the interviews are presented.

4.4.3.1 Before the Interviews

Interviewees Criteria

The interviews can be divided into two different groups; one group is in depth face to face interviews with four potential tourists and the second group of interviews is four phone interviews with different partners in Lillebaelt Waters.

Three of the partners interviewed in the project are hotels (Sixtus Middelfart, Comwell Kongebrogaarden, Hindsgavl Slot) and the fourth is the business council of Middelfart.

The three hotels differ in size, structure and style, which is why they have been chosen to bring different answers and perspectives into the discussion regarding how the partners can engage the consumers in meaningful co-creational experiences.

Hans Christensen from the business centre of Middelfart has been chosen for an interview as he, together with the project leader Anette Hellmund Werenskiold from Kids n' Tweens, was the one to initiate the project and got the idea of a corporation between the different hotels.

The personal interviews consist of four different interviews with potential tourists; two are married and have children, one is in a relationship and one is single.

- Theresa: 28 years old. Married to David and together they have two children.
- Steffen: 32 years old. Married to Louise and together they are expecting their third child.
- Ulrich: 33 years old. In a relationship.
- Andreas: 23 years old. Single. (pilot interview)

When the interviewees for the personal interviews were chosen only few criteria were applied. One of the considerations was to make sure that they differed in relational status, as well as whether they had children or not. These areas are believed to have an impact on the answers regarding travel experiences. Furthermore it was considered relevant for the partners in Lillebaelt Waters to gain knowledge about the tourists that are parents, couples without children or singles.

Additionally the interviewees were all chosen from the city of Aalborg and their nationality is Danish. The assumption is that tourists usually travel to places away from their home city and ordinary life. In this case it would be more interesting for the hotels to gain knowledge about the tourists from Aalborg than those from Middelfart, as the Middelfart tourists are expected to travel away from Middelfart during vacation.

Interviews with foreign tourists would also have been interesting, as their answers might differ compared to the Danish tourists' answers. However this was deselected as the interviews with Danish tourists is believed to be more relevant, since 83% of the tourist consumption in Middelfart is derived from Danish tourists. Thus it appears more relevant for the partners to gain further knowledge about the Danish tourists.

4.4.3.2 Interview Situation

The quality of the interviews is important if the data derived from them is to be useful for further analysis. In order to secure the quality, the interviewer has a responsibility of guiding and motivating the interviewee in such direction that the interview becomes highly informative.

Additionally in the interview situation it is important to avoid guiding the interviewee towards the answers that are desired by the interviewer, as this does not provide trustworthy and valid results. It is the interviewee's own attitudes and point of views that are important in order to conduct interviews of high quality. However it might, in some cases, be an advantage to guide the interviewee to ensure that he or she remains within a certain topic, as it contributes to the reliability of the answers, which furthermore improves the quality of the interviews (Kvale, 2001. Bryman, 2008).

In order to secure highly informative interviews an interview guide has been conducted, which contains theoretically based themes both regarding the partner interviews and tourist interviews.

4.4.3.3 Interview Guide

In the preparation of an interview guide it is important to acknowledge that the researcher, while conducting the interviews, might have some prejudices and fixed ideas about the potential outcome of the interviews, which might induce bias. There is a possibility that the interviewees will be influenced by the interviewer and therefore give answers that match the researcher's expectations. If this happens some interviewees might feel obliged to answer the questions differently than they intentionally wanted.

While formulating the questions in this project an awareness of the above-mentioned issue has been kept in mind, which should pave the way for the interviewees own interpretation and ensure that they feel free to answer in the direction they want (Kvale, 1997. Kvale, 2001).

Based on this discussion the semi-structured interview has been chosen as the technique when conducting the interviews. This technique requires that the researcher has a great knowledge about the research area before starting the interviews. This has been obtained through empirical and theoretical knowledge. The interview guide is furthermore based on theoretical themes, in order to assure that the questions are relevant according to the researched area.

The semi-structured interview will only function as a guideline for the interview conversation, as the questions not necessarily have to be asked in a certain order during the interview and other questions than first intended might be asked as well (Kvale, 1997).

The phone interviews with the partners were more difficult to conduct compared to the face to face interviews with the interviewees. The face to face interview as a method has it's strength by letting the interviewer and the interviewee get more personal. This leaves the interviewer with a better opportunity to observe the interviewee's reaction to the questions and furthermore whether or not it is okay to ask more in-depth questions.

Though the phone interviews were more complicated to conduct, they have still brought useful information to the analysis²⁶.

4.4.3.4 Pilot Test

A pilot test was conducted in order secure the quality of the questions in terms of getting the necessary information for the analysis. This pilot test was the reason for changing a few interview questions, as they were too difficult or too complex to answer. Few of the questions were irrelevant and additionally a few new questions were added.

As an example the interviewee Andreas was asked questions regarding values and lifestyle in order to bring information about the understanding of meaningful experiences. One of the questions was

“Do you consider yourself a value-based person?”

This question was not understood by the interviewee and it can be argued that it was due to the complexity of the question. “Value-based” is a term which should only be used at researcher level

²⁶ The partner interview is found in appendix 19 and the tourist interview is found in appendix 18.

and therefore not asked directly to an interviewee. Instead the same information can be obtained by asking for example three questions of more simple character regarding the interviewee's lifestyle. If asking questions containing complex concepts, it can be argued that only researchers themselves, or individuals associated with the academic field, will be able to answer such questions.

4.4.3.5 Theory Based Themes

For the researcher to reach the desired goal, it is necessary the he or she knows the exact purpose of the interview and furthermore which information this method brings to the researched phenomenon. This requires that the questions in the interview situation are well considered and designed purposefully to bring the needed information (Kvale, 2001, Bryman, 2008).

The concepts and themes in the interviews are deduced from the chosen theory and used as a guideline to ensure that the answers are valid in relation to the researched area. Furthermore it secures the link between theory, method and analysis.

In the following the different themes are presented in relation to respectively the tourist and the partner interview.

Tourist Interview

The questions asked in this interview concern three main themes.

Vacation and Leisure Time

The purpose of the first part of the tourist interview is to collect information about the interviewees' travel experiences, and hence provide the researcher with knowledge concerning characteristics of meaningful experiences. The concept of meaning is deduced from the term "Erfarung"²⁷ presented by Boswijk. The definition of meaningful experiences varies from individual to individual. Therefore the questions concerning meaningful experiences need to have an open approach in order to allow the interviewee to answer what he or she wants.

In this part of the interview the most important thing is to gain knowledge about the interviewees' travel behaviour and what makes an experience meaningful to them.

Consumer Engagement

This part of the interview is not based on theoretical stances, but nevertheless it is a relevant theme in order to gain knowledge about co-creational experiences. This area covers questions regarding

²⁷ Referring to the theory section of the project

the design of travel experiences and whether the interviewees prefer to buy fixed “all inclusive” packages or prefer to design the travels themselves. In other words this part of the interview attempts to clarify to what extent the interviewee wants to engage with the supplier in the planning of experiences.

Communication Channels

The last section of the tourist interview concerns the communication between the supplier and the tourist.. The Network Approach Theory ²⁸ initiate the discussion regarding the interaction between suppliers and tourists.

Therefore the interviewees are asked about the importance of the Internet and their use of social platforms when planning travel experiences. Furthermore they are asked how they prefer to communicate with travel agents. This information is believed to be important for the partners in Lillebaelt Waters.

Partner Interview

The purpose of the partner interviews has been to create a picture of the current situation at the different hotels in terms of how they engage with the tourists. This includes how they respond to the idea of the new type of tourists who want authentic, unique and meaningful co-creational experiences.

The design of the partner interview primary concerns the same themes as the tourist interview, which makes it possible to compare the answers from the two perspectives.

However a few other themes have been chosen as well.

Background and Involvement

The first theme in the partner interview concerns background information regarding the involvement in Lillebaelt Waters. This part gives an idea of the motivation for engaging in the project.

Cooperation Between the Partners

This theme is relevant due to the uniqueness of the cooperation between the hotels in Lillebaelt Waters and concerns the strengths and weaknesses it possesses.

²⁸ Referring to the theory section of the project

5. Theory

5.1 Reading Guide

In this section the theory of the project is presented and discussed.

The introduction to the theory section presents a foundational framework for the understanding of co-creational experiences through the Service-Dominant Logic. This framework will constitute the basis for the rest of the theory.

After the introduction the theory section will consist of three separate parts. This is further explained in the introduction.

5.2 Introduction: Service-Dominant Logic - The Basis for Value Determination

As a concept the Service-Dominant logic (henceforth S-D logic) frames the purpose and nature of organisations, markets and societies. The foundational proposition is that markets, organisations and societies are concerned with the exchange of services rather than the exchange of goods (Goods-Dominant logic, henceforth G-D logic). The reason why the S-D logic is interesting to the project is that it embraces the concept of co-created value through the aspect of *value in experience*, which is concerned with a holistic understanding of value determination. The idea is that companies and consumers together find their way to the market instead of the companies informing the market and then afterwards the consumer (Lusch, 2011).

Additionally this is, according to C.K. Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy²⁹ who wrote “Co-Creation Experiences - *The Next Practice in Value Creation*”, a change in the market condition. Previously the market consisted of two distinct images. One image representing the consumers and the other image representing the companies and their autonomously acting when designing products, experiences, crafting marketing and controlling sales channels (Prahalad, 2004).

This understanding of the market has changed with the emergence of individualistic and active consumers who want to be a part of creating the products they consume. Hereby they want to interact with the companies in order to co-create value (Lusch, 2011).

²⁹ **Venkat Ramaswamy** is Professor of Marketing and Hallman Fellow of Electronic Business at Ross School of Business, University of Michigan. He is also Director of Executive Education, Global Co-Creation Community Founder, and Chief Mentor, Experience Co-Creation Partnership.

C.K. Prahalad; A University of Michigan professor whose provocative books about business management and global marketing made him one of the world's most influential thinkers on corporate strategy.

There are 10 foundational premisses³⁰ in the S-D logic. Of these 10 the 6th premise will function as the basis for the further theoretical perspectives:

P6: The customer is always a co-creator of value: There is no value until an offering is used - experiences and perception are essential to value determination (Lusch, 2011; 14).

This holistic determination of value creation, emphasises the importance of the companies interacting with the consumers, not only in the purchase experience, but also in the pre-stage of consumption, as well as afterwards when memories are created. Hereby value is created over the entire course of the consumer's experience.

This holistic approach to the determination value is illustrated in Figure 2³¹

Figure 2

Stage of customer experience	Value in exchange	Value in possession	Value in use	Value in experiences
1. Anticipated experience				
2. Purchase experience				
3. Consumption experience				
4. Remembered experience				

Turnbull, 2009;3

In order for the partners of Lillebaelt Waters to engage the tourists in meaning co-creational experiences, it is essential to gain knowledge regarding how "value in experiences" is created.

In the article "*Managing the Co-Creation of Value*" by A.F. Payne et. al.³² a theoretical framework contains this information emphasising the holistic approach.

5.2.1 A Holistic Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework recognises the processes as central to the idea of co-creating value. The S-D logic emphasises the importance of the company approaching the market together with the consumer in order to create a longitudinal, dynamic and interactive relationship (Payne, 2008).

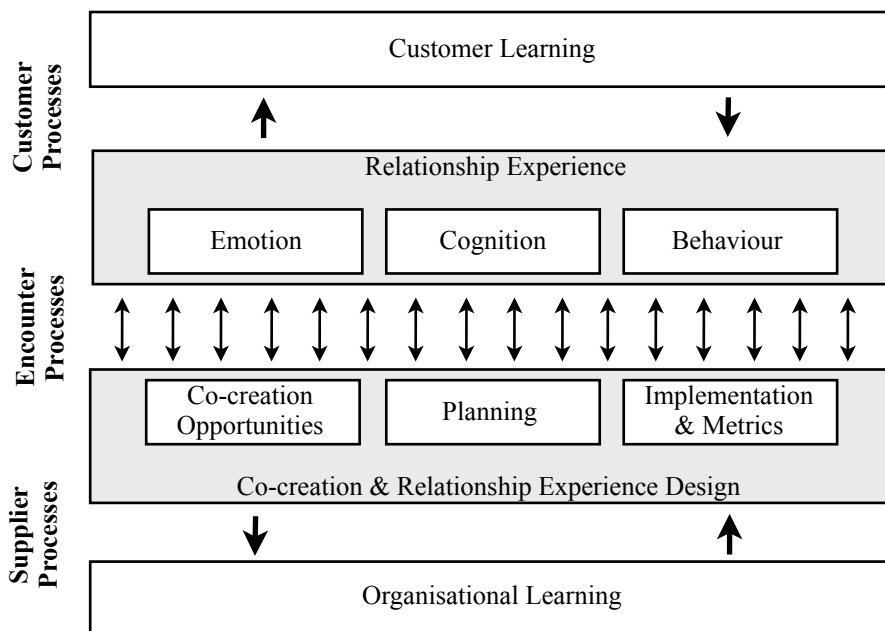
³⁰ All ten premisses are found in Appendix 10

³¹ The content of the figure is not further clarified, as it has no purpose for the further analysis

³² Adrian. F. Payne: Australian School of Business, University of New South Wales, Australia

The framework for co-creation is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3



A conceptual framework for value co-creation. Payne, 2008; 86

The conceptual framework consists of three main components. 1. *The Customer Process*, 2. *The Encounter Process* and 3. *The Supplier Process*.

These three processes are the essence of co-creational experiences and concern different perspective of co-creation. It is argued that in order for the partners of Lillebaelt Waters to achieve organisational learning, and hereby creating co-creational experience with the tourists, they have to work actively within all three levels.

The Customer Process is relevant as it gives information about co-creation from the perspective of the tourists. This includes tourism behaviour and societal characteristics, which is essential knowledge to the partners.

The Encounter Process contains information about the encounter between the tourists and the partners in a certain area at a given time. This process emphasises the importance of communication and the use of media.

The Supplier Process is analysing the partners' initiatives attempting to co-create experiences with the tourists. This requires a reconsideration of their own initiatives through self-reflection, in their attempt to co-create value with the tourists (Payne, 2008).

Additionally three elements are essential for a company to achieve organisational learning in terms of how to co-create value. These elements functions as tools, which change practical knowledge gained through encounters with the consumers into organisational learning (Refer to Figure 3).

- *Co-creation Opportunities*
- *Planning*
- *Implementation and Metrics*

All three elements are believed to be essential, but this project will focus on the element of *Co-creation Opportunities*.

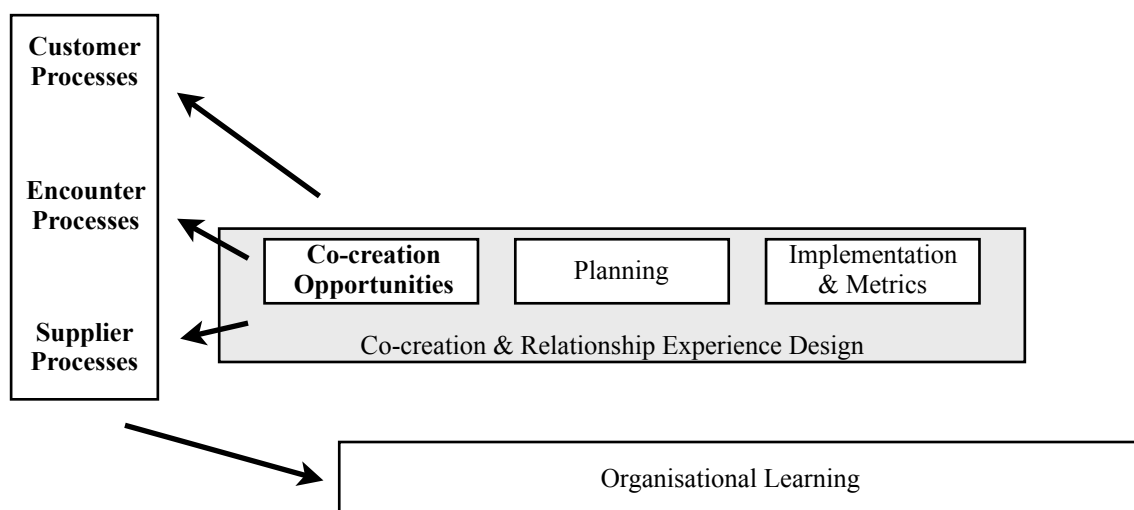
It is considered important that the partners of Lillebaelt Waters know the opportunities available for co-creating value and that they additionally learn to think in new ways of how to create new categories for co-creating experiences.

Through new and innovative categories the partners might, separately or together, expand their platform on which they interact with the tourists and hereby create new value for both parts (Payne, 2008).

Therefore the theory section will focus on how co-creation opportunities are created within each main process, which are visualised in figure 4.

Additionally the co-creation opportunities, which are found within the three main processes, are believed to lead to organisational learning.

Figure 4



5.3 Part 1: The Customer Process

From the company's perspective the first step is to understand how value is created for the consumer in the customer process. The consumer is always producing value independently based on context, personal beliefs and values, but it is the company's role to support the consumer in the creation of optimal experiences (Storbacka & Lehtinen, 2001).

In order for the company to create opportunities in this category they have to gain insight into the consumers' lifestyles. According to Prahalad the company has to approach the individual from a holistic perspective, as the consumers want all parts of life to make sense according to a coherent whole. Therefore it is expected that the consumption of experiences has its point of departure in everyday life and the appertaining values and personal beliefs.

The trend of the last decade has been towards increased individuality, which requires the companies to offer more individualised, tailored and differentiated experiences through one to one marketing. Thus it is relevant that the partners of Lillebaelt Waters are aware of what characterises the contemporary consumer in a societal context, in order to find opportunities for co-creating value.

The following section presents and discusses theoretical perspectives regarding the conditions and characteristics of the contemporary society.

5.3.1 Change in Societal Conditions

5.3.1.1 Segmentation to Fragmentation - A Post Modern Characteristic

According to Stephen Brown³³ the modern period was dominated by progress within rational science and technical innovation, as well as a search for objectivity, universal laws and the absolute truth (Brown, 1998).

Fuat Firat³⁴ relates to modern consuming as a time where consumers, to great extent, did everything rationally. Therefore the segmentation process of modern consumers was primary based on demographic and psychographic variables (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995).

A change occurred in the 1970's with the emerging of post modern characteristics. This was reaction to the modern society (Cova, 1999) and especially the dissociation with the modern institutions (Christensen et al., 2005).

³³ Stephen Brown is working as a professor in marketing research at Ulster University, Ireland.

³⁴ Professor of Marketing: The University of Texas-Pan American

Post modernity was characterised by *"fragmentation, indeterminacy and intense distrust of all universal or totalising discourses"*, and the paradigm is described as *"an era without a dominant ideology or utopia but with a plurality of currents and styles"* (Cova, 1996, 16).

In 1979 Jean-François Lyotard³⁵ published his major work "The Post Modern Condition". Lyotard's main thesis concerned the break with the ideals and the large narratives (Brejnrod, 2001). This approach is also acknowledged by Firat, who characterises post modernism as a fragmented culture:

"...where the consumer are neither committed to nor captivated by a single narrative, state of being, or self, and where they assert their existence through the power of the images they represent" (Firat, 1997; 195).

The fragmentation which is related to post modernity entails an insecurity for the companies regarding consumer behaviour, which makes the segmentation difficult as the consumers are experts in adapting and changing between identities and situations compared to the modern consumer who was more consistent.

Traditional segmentation theory is not compatible with a post modern context, as the post modern consumer easily holds a variety of different identities simultaneously, and furthermore finds meaning in life through a variety of experiences (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995).

Firat describes this tendency in the following:

"(...) growing quest on the part of the contemporary consumers for immersion into varied experiences. The postmodern consumers, who are growing in numbers and who establish the trends in contemporary consumption, seek varied and alternative experiences in trying to extract meanings of life in the present, and they wish to sample and try different experiences because they have lost their faith in or commitment to the possibility of a singular, best life alternative" (Firat, 2001; 113).

This fragmented consumer who wants to experience a variety of different experiences in order to extract meaning of life, more or less forces the companies to consider their approach to marketing and communication with the consumers. At a certain time the consumer might represent a specific image, which impacts the choice of experiences, and at another time the same consumer represents a different image and the experiences changes accordingly.

³⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998) was a philosopher and studied comparative literature.

5.3.1.2 Emotional Consumerism - A Hyper Modern Characteristic

Another movement in the contemporary society, which according to Gilles Lipovetsky³⁶ succeed the postmodern approach, is referred to as hyper modernism. This theory argues that the individual of the contemporary society has a specific need for meaning in life and does not achieve satisfaction through prestige, self-realisation or the staging of images, which is post modern characteristics.

Lipovetsky understands modernity and post modernity as representing different stages in the history of consumption; the first and the second stage. Through the study of these stages he concluded that a new stage of consumption occurs in the contemporary society, which entails new characteristics. Hyper consumption is understood as a form of introvert consumption, where previous consumption patterns, especially the postmodern, were expressed in extrovert manners through the consumption of symbolic props³⁷ in the creation of identity. This introvert hyper consumption is concerned with emotional consumption, which takes it's point of departure in the interests of the individual:

"Today, goods are purchased less with a view toward social distinction and more with a view towards personal sensations and satisfaction. Individualistic consumption now takes precedence over consumption commanded by what others think. Thus the hyper-consumer society coincides with the triumph of a consumerism that is driven more by emotion than by popular opinion, and is more about amusement than prestige" (Lipovetsky, 2005; 1).

Hereby hyper consumption differs from the post modern characteristics, as it does not emphasise the individual needs for staging of the self, but instead it focuses on consumption which leads to personal satisfaction.

5.3.1.3 Cultural Liberation

The break with the large narratives is according to Thomas Ziehe³⁸ a phenomenon that he describes with the concept cultural liberation (Ziehe, 1999. Pedersen, 2010). Both Ziehe and Giddens emphasise the fact that there are no longer any clear guidelines in which the individual can create his or her own identity. To a greater extend the individual becomes liberated from objective structures and traditions. The consequence is an appreciation of subjectivity, as the individual's own

³⁶ French philosopher, writer and sociologist: Professor at the University of Grenoble.

³⁷ Sociological term used by Erving Goffman. Refers to the symbolism and the signaling effect in consumption

³⁸ Thomas Ziehe, (1947). German professor in pedagog at the University of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Hannover Germany

understanding and interpretation become important for the creation of identity (Mikkelsen, 2010. Pedersen, 2010. Ziehe, 1999).

Ziehe is optimistic regarding the cultural liberation, as it provides the individual with freedom and the ability to choose between a variety of opportunities in everyday life; choices that are, according to Prahalad, based on personal beliefs.

However Ziehe emphasises the negative consequences of cultural liberation. Ziehe questions whether it is at all possible to meet the expectations which follows this freedom and furthermore whether it is possible to manage the impressions and the knowledge that the post modern society entails.

Previously, in modern time, choices were few due to the inherited traditions, which were handled over from generation to generation. However in the contemporary society these inherited traditions are no longer handled over and the individual is therefore constantly forced to make choices in everyday life.

The process of managing the choices and impressions from the surrounding world might become a complex and stressful task, which results in overheating of the subjectivity (Knudsen, 2001. Ziehe, 1999. Mikkelsen, 2010).

Such an overheating can result in an emotional identity strain, where the individual is exposed to too much pressure and thus the ability to navigate might disappear. Hence the individual might need help through guidelines and structures to be capable of navigating.

Drawing a conclusion on how to relate to modernity, post modernity and hyper modernity and the connected characteristics, seems almost impossible. It can be argued that a valid decision is not to commit to a single stance, but instead the concepts should be considered as different characteristics, which all more or less are present in the western context, depending on researcher and academic school.

The next section in theory part 1 concerns the concept of meaning in co-creational experiences. The meaningful dimension is important when answering the research question and the theory presented in this section will be used to find meaning in the empirical data, through the analysis.

5.3.2 Meaningful Co-Creation

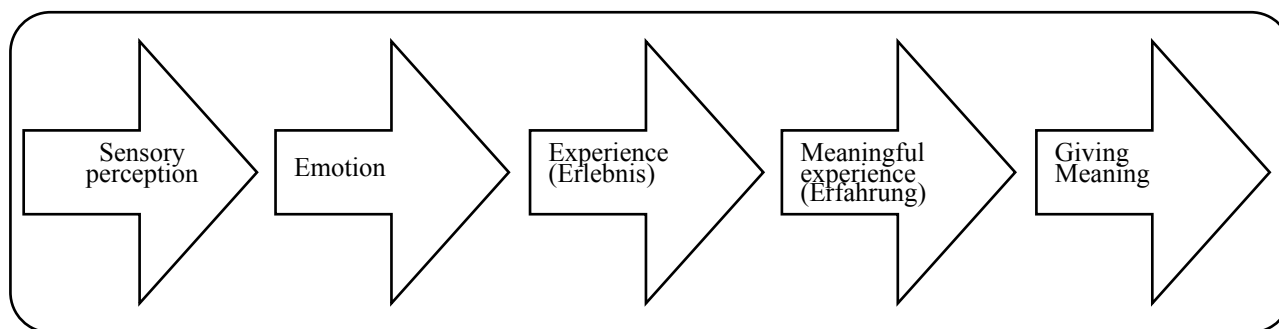
Through experiences the individual's senses, that garner impressions of the things happening in the specific moment, are activated. These impressions lead to emotions, e.g. joy, anger and fear, depending on the situation. These emotions are all important for the individual to deal with the outside world (Boswijk, 2007).

These emotions are the basis for an individual to experience meaningful experiences.

“Meaningful experiences often comprise a complex of emotions that occur simultaneously or successively” (Boswijk, 2007; 20).

Boswijk explains the process of experiencing as in figure 5.

Figure 5



The process of experiencing. Boswijk, 2007; 20

5.3.2.1 Meaningful experiences (Erfahrung)

Meaningful experiences are according to Boswijk more than just experiences. The meaningful dimension occurs when the individual reaches an awareness of the situation in which he finds himself. An awareness which induces reflections about that exact situation and how to react on it. Hereby a strong connection between the chosen experiences and the identity of the individual occurs, as the experiences have to make sense in terms of personal beliefs (Boswijk, 2007).

“A person is the sum of his meaningful experiences” (Boswijk, 2007; 24).

According to Csikszentmihalyi the reason why individuals seek for optimal experiences is primarily because they want to feel satisfied with life and to experience happy moments³⁹.

Happiness does not come easily and is neither a result of good fortune or power. Csikszentmihalyi

³⁹ Referring to the concept of Flow experiences.

argues that happiness is not controlled by nor depending on outside events, but is rather depending on the individual's own interpretation of a given situation.

“For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue ... as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a course greater than oneself”

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; 2).

This greater course can be anything which stretches the individual's mind, as long as it differs from daily routines and comfort zones (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Additionally Emilia Van Hauen, who is a sociologist and trend researcher, argues that the Danish citizens have become more post-materialistic and that the focus has turned from primary selfish behavior to more altruistic behavior (Hauen, 2009. Vestergaard, 2007).

“We have reached a point of where we would like to do something with our lives, which does not only serve ourselves but also others, and somehow enter in to a larger connection” (Van Hauen, 2009; 50).

According to Van Hauen the fact that the material wealth has increased in the society, entails that the individual has partially acknowledged that these material goods do not solely lead to a perfect and happy life. Regarding this Van Hauen argues that there is a trend, which emphasises the inner values and appears when individuals are social responsible.

Claus Buhl⁴⁰ works with analysis of consumer behaviour and marketing and states:

“We live in at post-materialistic paradigm, and the upcoming values are called community and responsibility for others that yourself” (Vestergaard, 2007; 1)

Buhl argues that the prosperity has given the Danes all they need, and therefore the search for material wealth is slowly retreating for the benefit of an involvement in something bigger than oneself.

Associate professor at Copenhagen Business School; Background in communication and consumer research

5.4 Part 2: The Encounter Process

The encounter process between the company and the tourist is where co-creational experiences are taking place. This part of the theory consist of two section.

In the first section the network approach theory has been chosen in order to understand these encounters. The approach emphasises the encounters which occur in the individual's own network and do not only focus on the encounters occurring when the individual enters the tourism sphere.

Additionally this approach acknowledges that the tourist is not only a tourist, but as well an individual with other interests than tourism.

It is believed essential that the partners of Lillebaelt Waters gains information about the network approach, in order to engage with the tourists in their spheres and networks.

The last section in this part of the theory concerns the branding of experiences and the changes which are currently happening within this field due to new demands from the fragmented and active consumer. This forces the companies to rethink how experiences are marketed and additionally it requires an open approach to the virtual world in which the consumers are.

5.4.1 The Tourism Network Approach

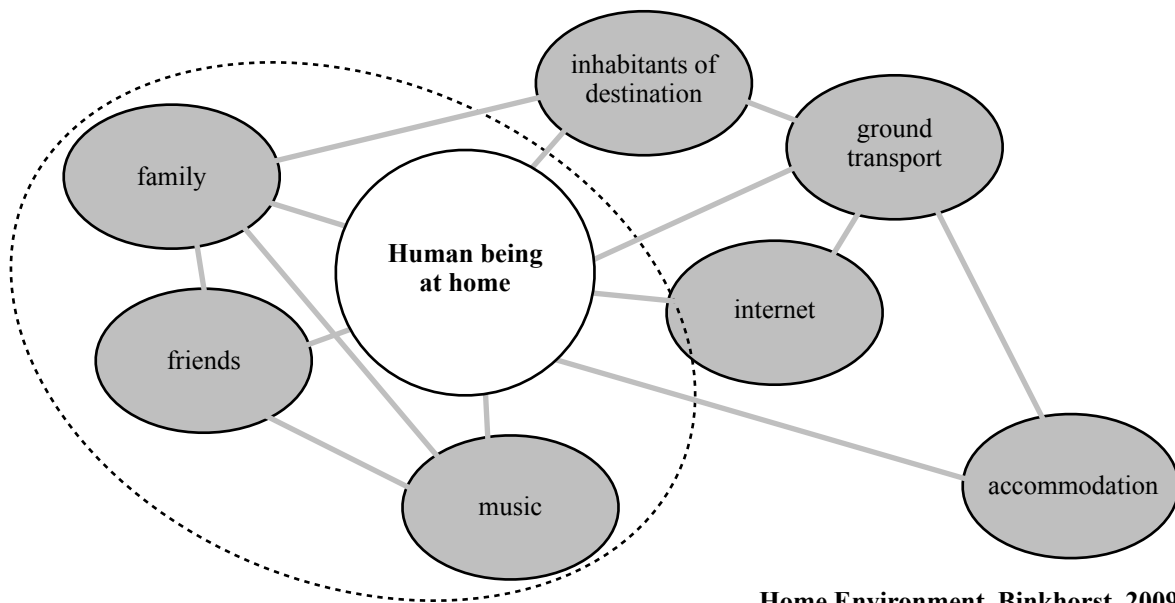
In order to stimulate tourism development the main source for input is hidden in each human being and their values and personal beliefs. The majority of all individuals are only entering the tourist sphere a few weeks each year and the rest of their time is spend in the sphere of everyday life. Therefore it is even more important that the companies learn to understand and interact with the individual in his or her personal context, which also includes the sphere of everyday life (Binkhorst, 2009).

“When not being a tourist, the conditions are shaped to express the self as a tourist” (Binkhorst, 2009; 318).

Binkhorst argues that most experiences are planned and researched before the individual becomes a tourist. In these home, school or work related experience environments, lifestyle expresses latent needs and values of the human being who eventually becomes a tourist at a certain point of time.

Figure A illustrates the individual's home experience environment, which usually is the network where most time is spent.

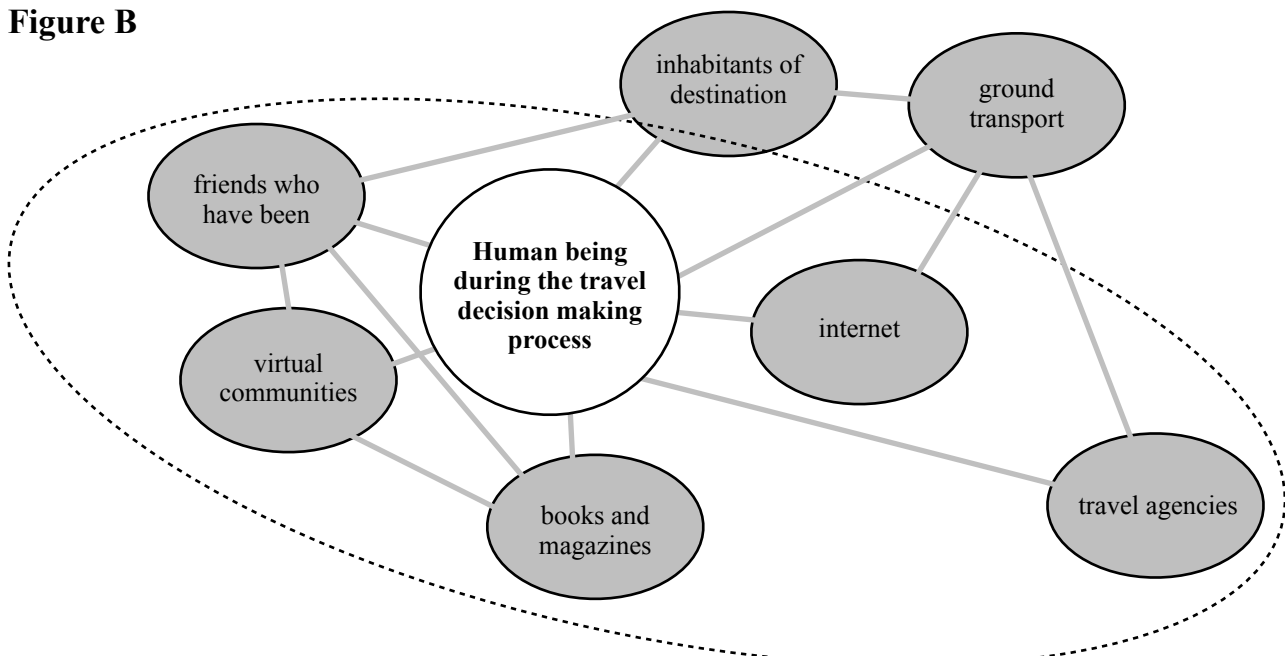
Figure A



Home Environment. Binkhorst, 2009; 320

If the individual becomes active in the search for tourist experiences, the network will change accordingly, which is seen in figure B.

Figure B

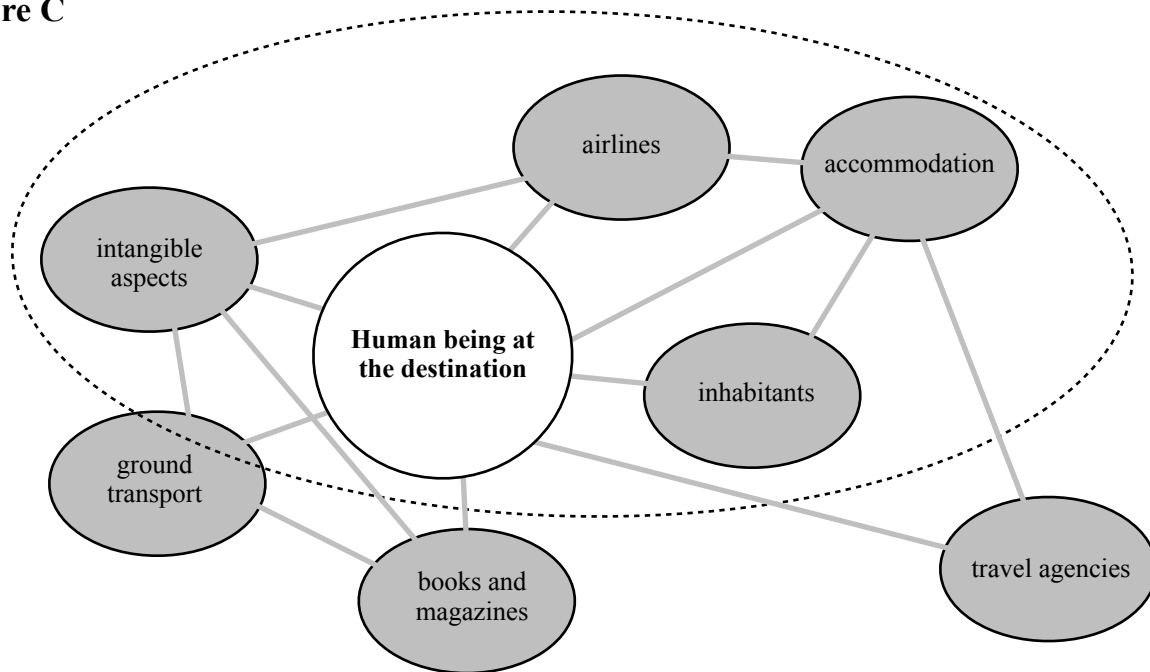


Human being during the travel decision-making process. Binkhorst, 2009, 321

Even without contacting the tourist destination directly, it is possible for the individual to gain a lot of information through friends, virtual communities, magazines etc. Hereby the interacting with the companies is already in process and the consumer starts to select and deselect according to the experience he or she wants.

In Figure C the consumer is a tourist and is experiencing in the network of a certain destination.

Figure C



Human being at the destination. Binkhorst 2009, 321

According to Binkhorst, it is essential that the companies start to consider the tourists as human beings who move around in various experience environments. Consequently it broadens the perspective of who the tourist is and brings insight into important information.

Den Dekker⁴¹ argues that the first steps of interaction between the consumer and the company are of great importance, as this is the beginning of meaningful co-creational experiences on an interpersonal level. It is therefore required that the company is sensitive towards wishes, needs and desires of each individual, not only in the tourist networks sphere as presented in figure c, but in all network environments. This holistic consumer approach implicates an innovative perspective on tourism.

⁴¹ Owner and partner in Co-creation, The Netherlands

“Theoretically this would mean: no separation between supply and demand, company and customer, tourist and host, tourism spaces and “other” spaces, but viewing tourism as a holistic network of stakeholders all connected in experience environments in which everyone operates from different time spatial contexts” (Binkhorst, 2009; 318).

Additionally this approach to tourism as an experience network is furthermore referred to as Experiencescapes by Tom O’Dell. According to O’Dell experiences are planned in one place, developed in another and consumed in a third. This emphasises the necessity for the companies to interact with the consumers at all levels in order to co-create.

Originally these landscapes, in which the consumers could experience highly personal experiences, were solely planned and supplied by companies. According to O’Dell this has changed and he points towards a post-sightseeing society in which the tourists do not want to simply travel around and passively observe, but want to be engaged in designing their experiences.

“...people want to engage the world and do things...to some extent it might be said that we are living in a time in which ‘seeing the sights’ is not enough (Tom O’Dell, 2005; 77).

5.4.2 The Experience is The Brand

Traditionally the brand has been the centrepiece of a company’s communication with the consumer. Companies used to communicate and sell experiences based on their brand position, targeting different consumer segments in the experience space. In other words, advertising was created to persuade certain segments of consumers through controlled and organised communication in order to create an image associated with a specific product or experience (Prahalad, 2004).

The rise of the contemporary active consumers have changed this company-centric model of brand creation.

“Consumers now have access to the information they need to make informed choices, assess value on their own terms, influence the expectations of other consumers, and decide for themselves how they want to transact with the company” (Prahalad, 2004; 133).

Through virtual communities, consumers are discussing and evaluating experiences and making choices based on each others’ feedback. Hereby it is important that the companies ensure that their touch points with the consumers are well considered, not only in the selling process but in all platforms in which the consumers make contact with the companies. If the company wants to co-

create with the consumers they must seek not to target the consumers, but to have dialogue with them (Prahalad, 2004).

Due to the emergence of an involved and active consumer, it is not enough for companies to brand their experiences through advertising and other communication channels solely. The brand now evolve through the experience. According to Joe Pine the company must stage marketing experiences, which is a transition process towards a new opportunity space, since the co-creation experience and the brand become embedded in each other.

“The experience is the marketing” (Pine, video interview).

The fact that the brand is determined by the personal experiences of each consumer challenges the traditional way of approaching brand management. The outcome of an individual's interaction with a given brand experience, is the real subjective experience, which will vary from individual to individual.

The new role of the company is not to brand a certain experience, but rather to visualise the possibilities for the individual to achieve personalised co-created experiences in a specific experience environment (Prahalad, 2004).

According to Boswijk another important factor that the company needs to consider is that the consumer wants the experiences to contribute to his or her's overall way of living their lives. This relates to the holistic approach presented by Prahalad, as everything has to make sense according to personal values and beliefs.

The success of the company might increase if they focus on the context in which the consumers live, for example by offering experiences within themes of significance such as mobility, health, personal development and relaxation.

“It's not going to be about offering cut-and-dry solutions. Rather, it will be about constructing a context- together with the customer- in which the latter, lives, experiences and gives meaning to his life” (Boswijk, 2007; 52)

Hereby it becomes the role of the company to support the individual in meaningful experiences at a charge, and furthermore ensure that the individual is active in this process.

Technology has influenced the communication between the company and the consumer tremendously. Through online booking systems and virtual tourism experience fora, the company

faces a new competition; competition not concerned with prices but with services to enhance the final consumer experience.

Internet blogging, Facebook, tablets and smartphones are only few of the channels available to both consumers and companies. According to Binkhorst this technological development enables dialogue and additionally it provides platforms for innovative experience environments in which co-creational experiences are possible (Boswijk, 2007. Binkhorst, 2009).

5.5 Part 3: The Supplier Process

This theory section is divided into two parts. The first part concerns the opportunities, which are created when companies challenge their traditional way of thinking and initiate cooperation across industry borders. The sharing of knowledge across borders can become a strength for the partners in Lillebaelt Waters.

The second part concerns the element of storytelling and how this can add value to a certain destination. In Lillebaelt Waters this is relevant, as the partners can benefit from a common story which they can promote together or individually.

5.5.1 Experiences Across Industry Borders

The transformation of industries is partly driven by the development of new channels through which the consumers can be reached. These new channels emerged with the digitisation, globalisation and connectivity, which represent the contemporary society. This development will impact many business industries by challenging traditional ways of thinking and furthermore it will create opportunities for companies to innovate and co-create value across industry borders (Payne, 2008. Prahalad, 2004. Prahalad, 2008).

In the publishing *“The New Age of Innovation - Driving Co-Created Value Through Global Networks”* Prahalad explains his main point regarding this business transition.

“No firm is big enough in scope and size to satisfy the experiences of one consumer at a time. All firms will access resources from a wide variety of other big and small firms-a global ecosystem. The focus is on access to resources, not ownership of resources” (Prahalad, 2008; 11)

The S-D logic, which is presented in theory part 1, replaces the understanding of a supply chain with a network concept, which is referred to as the service ecosystem. This system is a network of value, which proposes that social and economic partners interact through technology in order to:

1. *co-produce service offerings*
2. *exchange of service offerings*
3. *co-create value*

(Lusch, 2011; 15).

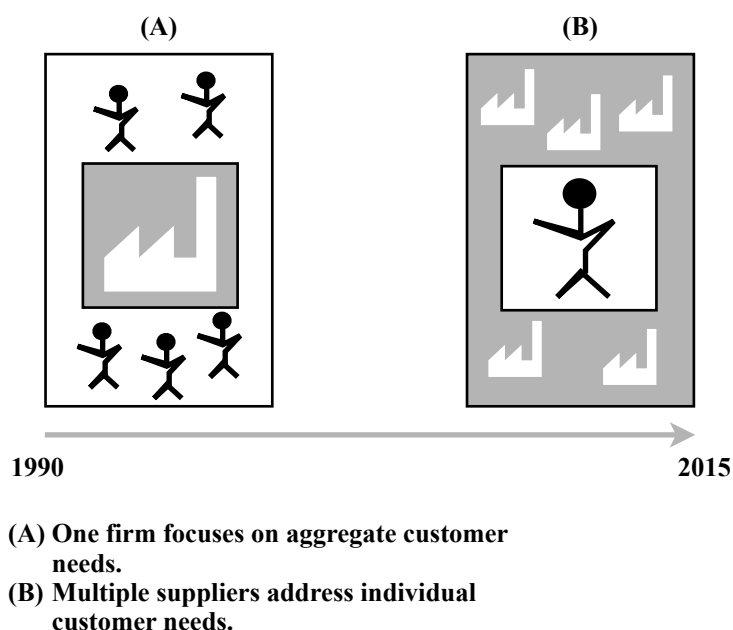
The concept of a service ecosystem can also be approached as a value network, which may better capture the supply chains in larger and more encompassing value networks (Lusch, 2011).

The main premise is that the concept of ecosystem acknowledges actors as making value propositions to each other instead of delivering or adding value. It also emphasises the co-production and co-creation that occurs between actors in the service ecosystem and hence has a strong focus on collaborative processes (Lusch, 2011).

The focus on creating unique personalised experiences across industry borders, as the basis for value creation, is opposing the traditional way of managing experiences, where the companies controlled and held on to the resources they possessed. Hence they were constrained by the knowledge and resources they owned.

In figure 6 the change in how the companies address the consumers is illustrated.

Figure 6



Rather than competing by forecasting consumers' aggregate needs and attempt to meet them as individual companies, the companies from different industries should instead cooperate and share knowledge in order to deliver optimal consumer experiences (Bradley & Nolan, 1998). The blurring borders between different types of industries entail new opportunities through the combination of competencies, capabilities and knowledge (Prahalad, 2008).

Hereby companies who are selling experiences within a specific industry might become capable of expanding the experience platform by crossing industry borders and provide the consumers with even greater opportunities for optimal experiences.

Additionally cooperation between partners in the tourism industry has it's strengths in terms of destination branding. Instead of focusing solely on own business and benefits, successful destination branding depends on different stakeholders' commitment to a shared vision. This is a difficult process since stakeholders operate in their own local context, holding different values and perspectives and have limited resources to interact with other stakeholders to develop a common ground (Prahalad, 2008).

5.5.2 Storytelling

Storytelling is not a new concept, but has recently gained more popularity in the field of marketing (Christensen, 2003). The narrative concepts of storytelling belong to a traditional communication model, as they take point of departure in the idea of a message being conveyed from a sender to the receiver. The focus is on the content of the message and the way it is narrated (Herman 2009, Brown 1998).

Storytelling is the art of telling stories that in relation to a specific topic may enhance the reputation of the company in relation to both their external and internal stakeholders (Fog, 2009).

The main goal for companies and corporations that conduct storytelling, is to communicate a consistent story about the company or it's products/experiences and at the same time create a strong image that the consumers can relate to (Christensen, 2003).

Within storytelling an element which is often referred to is the element of retro branding. The stories told in retro branding are often emotional and nostalgic in their expression, and often they convey strong values connected to the past; values like family-bonds, stability and security. They are furthermore frequently related to the companies' own history.

The stories told within retro branding relate to a variety of consumers, and as a consequence of this the central story has to have elements that each individual can recognise from their own set of values.

The creation of a world of stories, filled with values and symbols that are easy to interpret and relate to for the receiver of the message, is a key element to improve the image of the company.

The tendency of using the companies' own history when working with storytelling sometimes results in controversial communication, because of a creation of false or untrue stories about the companies' history. Sometimes the company attempts to create a more flattering history (Naughton, 1998). The consumers may not realise that the stories told to them are untrue, or they may not even care, simply because the false history still brings a nice story. However it can be seen as a risk to the image and reputation of the company, if they are caught while lying to the consumers through an untrue story. If the consumers are misled and the company's story do not hold, the unveiling of the truth may become problematic for the company because of lack of integrity.

The next part of the project will consist of the analysis.

6. Analysis

6.1 Reading guide

The analysis of the project consists of three parts. Each part will answer one of the sub-questions. When answering the sub-questions, the research question will be answered simultaneously in order to relate the findings of each sub-section directly to the research question. Additionally the end conclusion will conclude on the findings in the analysis.

The general focus of the analysis is the practical suggestions, which are emphasised throughout the analysis regarding the co-creation of meaningful value for both the partners and tourists.

Additionally this practical approach is in focus, as it helps the partners of Lillebaelt Waters to utilise the findings as inspiration for new initiatives and as a guideline for what the tourists want.

The first part of the analysis will analyse the characteristics of the contemporary tourist. This part of the analysis contains three sections which analyse some of these characteristics. The areas are: *valuable elements in the travel experience, package solution vs. self-design and self-realisation vs. true pleasure.*

The second part concerns the communication between the partners and the tourists when designing meaningful co-creational experiences. This part is based on a new approach to the communication with the tourists, which emphasises an understanding of the different networks that the tourists are a part of in their everyday life.

Additionally this part examines a few of the benefits and challenges, which appear through the communication between the partners and tourists. traditional communication channels face new demands from the tourists in case of how communication should be approached.

The third part concerns the partnership between the different stakeholders in Lillebaelt Waters and how they can benefit by cooperating across industry borders. Additionally this section examines how storytelling and retro branding, with point of departure in Lillebaelt Waters, can be used as a marketing strategy in order to co-create meaningful value.

6.2 Sub-question 1: What Are The Characteristics of The Contemporary Tourist?

6.2.1 Valuable Elements in The Travel Experiences

6.2.1.1 The Bicycle Experience

According to Ulrich one of his memorable experiences was when he once biked around Funen, Denmark, together with a couple of friends. He explains that he has always wanted to see Denmark from another perspective than what he normally did when travelling to the larger cities.

This experience was specifically interesting to Ulrich, as he was close to the nature and at the same time in great company (Appendix 4).

Another person interviewed in the survey “The Great Bicycle Experience” describes the bicycle experience as getting ‘backstage’ of a destination, which induces different feelings in the individual than experiencing the same place through a car window (Appendix 11).

The bicycle experience allows the individual to get closer to an unspoiled nature experience, as he or she can travel places not possible for cars to drive.

Referring to the concept of Erfahrung, a meaningful experience is more than just the experience in itself. The meaningful dimension occurs when the individual reaches a point of awareness about the situation in which he or she finds themselves. The awareness leads to reflections about what that exact experience means to the specific individual. One of the individuals interviewed in the bicycle survey (Appendix 11) describes a meaningful experience, which took place when she was biking backstage in the Danish nature.

“It has been a kind of relaxation just to think about relaxing and figuring out what life is really about. So actually you can call it a kind of pilgrims biking. To try to – what do you call it – valuing .. a kind of simple living. To figure it out .. well, to clear the head.”⁴²

(Appendix 11. Translated by author)

It can be argued that such ‘behind-the-scenes-biking’ experience in a relaxing nature environment gives meaning to life, as the tourist is emotionally attached to the experience. Emotional consumerism, which according to Lipovetsky is an expression for introvert hyper consumption, concerns the creation of meaning through personal and emotional satisfaction rather than seeking meaning through prestige and staging of images.

⁴² Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 1).

In the survey conducted by Kirsten Poulsen from Firstmove a similar travel trend seems to occur and she connects it to the value of ‘freedom’ (Appendix 5).

This trend refers to the idea that the moderation has increased and the tourist deselects everything unnecessary in order to protect nature and environment. This travelling phenomenon is called “travel light”, which emphasises the importance of freedom when experiencing.

The bicycle experience is connected to freedom because it contains elements of improvisation, as the individual decides when and where to go. Furthermore it can be argued that the bicycle experience has a dimension of co-creation. The bicycle experience consists of cycle paths in the nature environment, planned and build by the government or other stakeholders. The cyclist then has the opportunity to use the paths, but can also stray away from the designed routes in order to experience new environments or try something different.

It can be suggested that the partners of Lillebaelt Waters co-create experiences with the tourists by designing and offering bicycle experiences in Middelfart. This could be an individual partner project or a joint project between the partners. It will provide an opportunity for co-creating, as the tourists will be invited to experience the nature environment and other attractions in Middelfart and still be able to decide when and where to go themselves.

Additionally the partners have an opportunity to use the label of Lillebaelt Waters with benefits. By designing and planning nature experiences, which will be experiences exclusive to Middelfart due to the surroundings, it might strengthen their competitive position in relation to other cities.

Hotel Sixtus in Middelfart is located in a beautiful nature environment and Vibeke Stentoft⁴³ believes that they have to focus even more on the possibilities of the surrounding nature:

”We are already a lot based on nature, we have rowing boats and have just invested in bikes. We will also invest in kayaks and we have a lot in our garden”⁴⁴

(Appendix 9. Translated by author).

It can be argued that there is great potential in the nature for creating value for both the tourists and the hotels. The bicycle experience is believed to be an example of a meaningful co-created experience, but it can be argued that the nature around Middelfart contains much more potential than the bicycle experience alone. However this requires that especially the hotels start to think differently and expand their horizon in terms of what kind of experiences they are selling. It can be

⁴³ Managing Director of Sixtus Middelfart

⁴⁴ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 2).

argued that offering accommodation with appertaining dinner is not to co-create experiences with the tourist, as the degree of tourist engagement is low. A meaningful co-creational experience consists of a lot more. In order for the hotels to succeed in co-creating value with the tourist, they might need to change their industry logic from only concerning the accommodation business and acknowledge that they are in the experience industry. The blurring boarders between different industries provide the hotels with new opportunities for both creating experiences and co-create value with the tourists.

Additionally 31% of the foreign tourists appreciate the possibility of biking when they visit Denmark during vacation time (Appendix 15)⁴⁵. Thus it can be argued that the Danish nature environments are attractive to both Danish tourists and foreign tourists, which create opportunities for the partners of Lillebaelt Waters.

This argument is supported by another survey conducted by VisitDenmark in 2011. The survey concludes that the most important motivation for European tourists to visit Denmark is the possibility to discover nature environments, such as forests and the beaches. This is also the most important motivation when the Danes are vacationing in Denmark (Appendix 17)⁴⁶.

Compared to the Southern European countries Denmark differs in the values associated with the country. Southern European countries are associated with *values as fun, party and a high degree of activity level*, whereas the values related to Denmark as a travel destination are *nature and peace, authenticity and time together* (Appendix 17).

Not only in a Danish context, but as well in an international context, Denmark is known for the possibilities, which are created in the nature environment. The tourists want authentic and relaxing experiences in the nature, which can be consumed for own pleasure as a break from the busy and stressful everyday life.

These surveys are consistent with the findings from the personal bicycle experiences mentioned above. It can be argued that in order for the partners of Lillebaelt Waters to co-create meaningful experiences with tourists, they have to acknowledge the possibilities found within the nature environment and furthermore recognise the importance of crossing industry boarders.

Additionally this leads to one of the most important factors mentioned in the data material regarding optimal and meaningful experiences. This will be presented in the next section.

⁴⁵ Referring to the methodology section of the project for additional information about the survey

⁴⁶ Referring to the methodology section of the project for additional information about the survey

6.2.1.2 Nearness As an Attraction

One of the most important elements, which was noticed through the interviews in terms of tourist related experiences, was the need for being in good company.

Ulrich mentions:

"I am definitely valuing the community... Good memories and that you have shared experiences together are what I find rewarding" ⁴⁷

(Appendix 4; 2. Translated by author).

The interviewee Theresa also believes that a core element of experiencing meaningful experiences is experiencing it with someone. When she is asked what element makes a travel experience worth having, she answers:

"Among other things to be together with someone you care about" ⁴⁸

(Appendix 3, 2. Translated by author).

According to a survey conducted by Lighthouse Cph.⁴⁹, the busy everyday life of families creates a need for vacations focusing on solidarity. Additionally intimacy and contact are central elements in a travel experience. The destination in itself is of secondary importance.

It can be argued that experiences, which are superficial and focuses on prestige and status are less attractive among contemporary consumers. This might be the emerging of a paradigm, which focuses less on self realisation and more on personal sensation based on core values.

Simultaneously with the characteristics emphasising the relational dimension in meaningful travel experiences, Kirsten Poulsen from Firstmove argues that a new trend is arising. This trend is connected to the value of "nearness" (Appendix, 5).

"We have gone from the international to the global, to the local and in the end to the regional." ⁵⁰

(Appendix 3, 2. Translated by author).

⁴⁷ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 3).

⁴⁸ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 4).

⁴⁹ Referring to the methodology section of the project for additional information about the survey

⁵⁰ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 5).

According to the trend study survey conducted by Firstmove⁵¹ this intensification of the local indicates that the tourists will value the peculiarity of local destinations and attractions in the future. Furthermore this induces that more tourists choose to enjoy their vacations in their own houses or local environments, as the most important factor is to be together with loved ones through a pursuit of intimacy (Appendix, 5).

Theresa and her family are used to travel both nationally and internationally and enjoy experiencing new cultures and get new impressions, but this year they have chosen a different kind of vacation. They have decided to borrow her brother's house on the Island of Funen, Denmark, for one week, while her brother is travelling with his own family.

*"Interviewer: So it will be a kind of local vacation? Interviewee: Yes yes, and then we are going to the zoo, and yes that is also vacation to us. And there the children are feeling good and we are allowed to relax and enjoy ourselves. So vacation can be many things"*⁵²

(Appendix 3, 3. Translated by author).

Joe Gilmore argues that the contemporary consumer is more focused on finding the things which are really valuable, such as being together with loved ones, instead of focusing on buying superficial products and experiences (confer the field of issues).

Additionally this phenomenon of emphasising the importance of family, friends and nearness through local environments, might be another expression for the appearance of hyper consumption. It can be argued that previous consumption, which might be referred to as modern or post modern consumption, depending on ontological orientation, contained a high degree of self expression and need to create identity through things consumed. This is also referred to as extrovert consumption. On the contrary hyper consumption emphasises introvert consumption, where products, experiences and goods are purchased to meet personal sensation and satisfaction and not to express social distinction.

It can be argued that these findings are relevant for the partners of Lillebaelt Waters. Even though the hotels can not sublease local houses, they still have the opportunity to bring the local touch to the tourists by using the environment and the surroundings of Middelfart to create a local story in which they can co-create value.

⁵¹ Referring to the methodology section of the project for additional information about the survey

⁵² Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 6).

In the interview with the chief of marketing at Hindsgavl Slot, she stresses that they already acknowledge this idea.

"But more concretely what we can do is to emphasise our history and not only be a hotel with a pillow and chandelier. We need the authentic and should encourage it. In other words we need to use the food from our own vegetable garden." ⁵³

(Appendix 8, 2. Translated by author).

It can be argued that the tourists want the local touch to the experiences in order to experience authentic environments. Additionally this is believed to be a great opportunity for the partners to co-create value with the tourists, as they become the hosts that provide the tourists with local experiences. Hereby it might be possible for the partners to create a unique profile through the label of Lillebaelt Waters, in which the tourists can co-create experiences with a local touch.

To succeed with this idea it is believed that the partners have to get practically involved and start innovative and creative initiatives, as the local touch (story) will not be self-evident to the tourists, but has to be presented through a local host. At the same time it is acknowledged that these practical initiatives have to be well planned and contain a certain degree of integrity, so it will not appear fake to the tourists.

It can therefore be argued that the value of nearness implies two important elements; the importance of being together with loved ones in order to obtain meaning in a co-created experience and the importance of engaging with the local environment and feel the local touch.

6.2.2 Package Solution vs. Self Design

According to the S-D logic, the consumer is always a co-creator of value and wants to participate in creating the experiences. Kirsten Poulsen from Firstmove argues that the consumers want to arrange and design the vacation on own initiative.

"The pre-packed and custom-made travel is not asked for" ⁵⁴

(Appendix 5. Translated by author).

It is the open frames and undreamt-of possibilities that create wanderlust and great experiences.

However a few of the interviewees disagreed with this theoretical stance.

It is clear that Steffen actually prefers package solutions when he and his family travel.

⁵³ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 7).

⁵⁴ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 8).

"It is because it is easy and because you, more or less, know what you get and that somebody is ensuring that it meets certain standards" ⁵⁵

(Appendix 2, 6. Translated by author).

Additionally Ulrich mentions that he has reached a point in his life where he considers buying package solutions.

"I think I am in a place where I want to relax more and let other people do the work. Make other people fix the vacation..." ⁵⁶

(Appendix, 4, 3. Translated by author).

These statements seem to conflict with the theory of co-creating experiences and do not express the need for self-design and involvement. In this case it can be argued that value is also created through consumption of fixed experiences.

It is considered interesting that for example Steffen prefers package solutions. According to his answer it can be argued that he prefers the security, which follows when the vacation is planned by the travel agency. Hereby he has to rely on the reputation of the certain agency and trust that the experience is going to have a specific standard, which might not be reached if he was to plan it himself.

Also Ulrich has reached a point in his life, where he would prefer that someone plans his travel experience.

One of the reasons for buying package solutions might be a result of a change in societal conditions, which induces new demands and expectations of the tourist. According to Ziehe the individual of the contemporary society is assigned to cultural liberation. This is positive as it entails many opportunities, which become available to the tourists, but it also requires an ability to navigate through the many choices that the individual is faced with in everyday life.

Both Steffen and Ulrich might have reached a point where the choices have become too many in everyday life, which means when it is finally vacation they do not want to make additional choices. Vacation is associated with time of relaxation and freedom, and thus also less decision-making in their cases. It can be argued that the wish for package solutions is a reaction to the many stressful choices in everyday life, which they can no longer cope with. This overheating of subjectivity might

⁵⁵ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 9).

⁵⁶ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 10).

force them to unconsciously buy and prefer travels or other experiences where everything is more or less planned.

Hereby they are able to focus on more important things, such as time with family and doing things, which feel right according to personal values and beliefs.

On the other hand Steffen mentions that he enjoys travelling to big European cities for a weekend. This kind of travelling is not difficult to plan and there are plenty of cultural and entertainment opportunities placed in one location.

”The fact that there is a variety of offers. It sounds a little spoiled, but the fact that you can pick and choose whatever you want”⁵⁷

(Appendix 2, 3. Translated by author).

It can be argued that Steffen in this case is experiencing the positive benefits of cultural liberation, which are the many opportunities that the individual ascribes to in the contemporary society. Simultaneously the choices have to be within a manageable range and not too complicated, which might be the reason why travelling to big cities is his choice.

This conflict, that Steffen sometimes prefers that someone plans for him, and other time prefers city breaks with the possibility of choosing between a variety of experiences, is further discussed in the end discussion, as it contains an important aspect of co-creating value.

This information is useful to the hotels in Middelfart, as it proves that tourists are very different and not all are first movers, which are interested in designing everything themselves. This emphasises the importance of dialogue with the tourists to understand the individual needs.

Additionally Steffen’s example can be used to demonstrate the flexibility in the concept of co-creating value. Even though he preferred package solutions, he also emphasised the importance of being able to choose between different attractions and experiences within the city frame.

It is suggested that the hotels in Middelfart create experiencescapes, in which choices of individual character can be made, but still are structured and guided by the hotels. Through individual dialogue such experiences seem to be realistic, as there are plenty of opportunities within the frame of Middelfart.

⁵⁷ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 11).

Furthermore Steffen can be an example of a fragmented tourist and his behaviour is a result hereof. The tourism network approach emphasises that the main source for creating experiences, which create value for both the company as well as the tourist, is hidden in each human being. This calls for individual dialogue with the tourists in order to meet their needs, which furthermore might change from day to day. Hereby it is suggested that the partners of Lillebaelt Waters focus on individual marketing in order to engage the individual tourist in meaningful co-creational experiences, instead of segmenting the tourists into groups based on independent variables. However this is acknowledged as a challenge to especially the hotels, since they are not used to this kind of individual communication with the tourists (Appendix 8. Appendix 9).

6.2.3 Post Materialistic Values - A Social Responsible Tourist

Another relevant characteristic, which is found within the data material, is the emerging of the social responsible tourist, who mixes pleasure with altruism.

This following discussion takes it's point of departure in a statement by Apollo Travel Agency in the context of a new survey examining the Danish travel motives⁵⁸.

*"Danes prefer travel agencies that take social responsibility"*⁵⁹ (Andreassen, 2012; 1).

21% of the tourists asked in the survey emphasise the importance of the travel agency being social responsible. This is a high percentage compared with previous surveys (Andreassen, 2012)⁶⁰.

Additionally this trend is supported by trend researchers, such as Emilia Van Hauen and Claus Buhl, who both commit to the idea that Danish citizens have reached a point of material satiety due to the increased material wealth. This phenomenon might be explained as a new paradigm, in which post materialistic values are of higher priority.

"We live in at post-materialistic paradigm, and the upcoming values are called community and responsibility for others than yourself" (Vestergaard, 2007; 1)

According to Andreas, one of the interviewees, the element of helping others and being social responsible in his travel experiences has been of great importance, as it gives more meaning than

⁵⁸ The results of the survey are found in Appendix 21

⁵⁹ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 12).

⁶⁰ The results of the survey are found in Appendix 21

just relaxing on a beach. The summer 2012 he is travelling to the Philippines in order to make a difference in poor peoples lives. To him this gives meaning and is relaxing at the same time.

It can be argued that due to the increased material wealth and the acknowledgement that this wealth in itself does not entail a happy and meaningful life, the tourists are looking for something deeper, which is consistent with personal values and beliefs.

“For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue ... as the unintended side effect of one’s personal dedication to a course greater than oneself”

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; 2).

This greater cause can be the idea of being social responsible, whether is it buying travels through a CSR (corporate social responsibility) focused travel agency or helping personally through practical work.

Ulrich, one of the interviewees, mentions that he has spent a part of his holiday helping in a drop-in-centre for homeless people and drug addicts. This was meaningful to him and he did it out of pure pleasure, because it gave him extra energy in his everyday life (Appendix 4).

It is clear that the hotels in Lillebaelt Waters are neither travel agencies nor drop-in-places for homeless people. However it is believed that they can benefit from other CSR initiatives, and hereby interact with the social responsible tourist, who finds this important.

Of the seven hotels who participates in Lillebaelt Waters, only one hotel has a direct link on their website, which links them to a CSR project. It is unclear whether the other six hotels supports CSR projects; if they do, it does not appear on their websites or in their advertising material.

It is suggested that the hotels consider using a CSR strategy, as social responsibility appeals to the contemporary tourist and might become an essential factor for the tourist to interact with a specific hotel.

According to Prahalad the company has to understand the tourist from a holistic perspective, as the tourists want everything in life to make sense according to a coherent whole. If more and more tourists are emphasising the importance of post materialistic values in their everyday lives, it is likely that they also prioritise such values when vacationing.

The survey conducted by Kirsten from Firstmove also emphasises the importance of a holistic approach to the tourist. Additionally she argues that tourists want to maintain their values and lifestyle in all aspects of life.

*"It doesn't help that we have access to a fast meal if it is filled with E numbers and other things. Value convenience covers that everything is in order, so we don't have to consider it. But if we are going to sit and think about the pollution or that we are eating too much poor food, it will ruin the experience"*⁶¹

(Appendix 5, 3. Translated by author).

Even though the context of the example is different, it still concerns the same issue regarding the responsible tourist. It can be argued that this type of tourist does not compromise with personal values. If the tourist values sustainability and social responsibility this will be emphasised not only in everyday life, but also during leisure time and travel experiences. Additionally he or she might base his or her choice of hotel on whether that hotel is sustainable and social responsible.

It is suggested that all stakeholders, not only the hotels in Lillebaelt Waters, seriously consider this topic, if this is a decisive feature of the future tourist.

Furthermore the label of Lillebaelt Waters might be helpful in this context as well. Instead of the partners individually supporting different projects, they have the possibility of working together under the brand of Lillebaelt Waters. It can be argued that the Lillebaelt Waters brand would become attractive to the tourists by emphasising sustainability and social responsibility directly through the experiences. Hereby the partners can help each other in creating such a profile.

Concerning this it is important to notice that the project has to be real, authentic and not enforced. Otherwise the consumer might discover that the initiative is superficial and lacks integrity, which might result in disappointed tourists.

⁶¹ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 13).

6.3 Subquestion 2: What Are The Communicational Challenges in Order to Engage the Contemporary Tourist?

6.3.1 The Network Approach - Emphasising Individual Communication

According to The Network Theory presented by Binkhorst it is necessary to consider tourism as a network of people working to co-create value individually and together.

It starts with the recognition of the tourist is not solely a tourist, but a human being. The tourist is surrounded by different stakeholders depending on the network he or she is in at the specific moment. When he or she moves around in the different networks, the stakeholders change accordingly.

For the partners in Lillebaelt Waters to become stakeholders in one of these networks, and hereby obtain dialogue with the tourist, they have to visualise themselves and appear attractive to the tourist. This requires that the hotels are actively working on their communication channels and touch points, for them to be aware of what they are exactly signalling to the tourist.

Several of the interviewed hotels in Lillebaelt Waters find this interaction with the tourists difficult, as they are not used to approach, and interact with, them through so many different channels. According to the interviews, the methods used for communication are primarily traditional advertising tools.

*"Well, in this segment, the leisure market, it is mainly via advertisements and newsletters."*⁶²

(Appendix 9, 2. Translated by author).

Even at Comwell the chief receptionist, who is their representative in Lillebaelt Waters, explains that they do not focus much on advertising, besides from booking sites, as they do not find it necessary.

*"Again, we are a five star gourmet hotel and we don't need to call the customers or do sales promotion."*⁶³

(Appendix 6, 3. Translated by author).

⁶² Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 14).

⁶³ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 15).

It can be argued that these statements, in different ways, refer to a company-centric approach. In the case of hotel Sixtus the advertising is created to persuade specific segments of tourists through controlled and organised communication, which creates an image associated with a specific experience.

At Comwell the approach appears more passive, as Elisabeth⁶⁴ explains that they do not need to market their hotel, as it is already well known and clients are visiting. It might be the case that Comwell is well known and successful, but it can be questioned whether this passive approach will become a disadvantage one day.

According to Joe Pine the experience is the marketing and therefore a positive luxury experience at Comwell might be enough marketing in itself. In this case the quality of the experience is going to sell the experience. However it is still considered essential that the staff and stakeholders at Comwell, who are actors in the tourist's experience network, continuously are deeply involved in making this specific experience valuable to the tourists.

Experience concepts are strongly linked to the atmosphere and people of a place. Therefore it is important that the staff at Comwell do not become too accustomed to the idea that advertising is unnecessary, as they have to constantly interact with the tourists for the experiences to remain unique and meaningful.

As already mentioned, according to Binkhorst, *it is when not being a tourist that the conditions are shaped to express the self as a tourist* (Binkhorst, 2009; 5). This emphasises the importance of interacting with the tourists in the stages of everyday life, though it is obviously more difficult to attain access to the tourist's everyday life spheres. It can be suggested that Comwell do not only focus on communicating with the individual when he or she enters the tourist sphere, as it is the case in the above-mentioned example. They should initiate the dialogue with tourists in other network spheres as well.

It can be argued that if the hotels in Lillebaelt Waters, as well as the other partners, focus on the human being and pay attention to each individual, it might provide them with a competitive advantage compared to other destinations due to this proactive approach.

Additionally it can be argued that the virtual platform is a place where most tourists interact in everyday life and is a place for networking. Therefore it is important that the partners not only rely on traditional communication channels. In order to engage the tourists in co-creational experiences, they have to interact with them where they are and choose to be.

⁶⁴ Chief receptionist at Comwell

The next section will focus on technological communication channels and the opportunities they provide to partners in Lillebaelt Waters.

6.3.1.1 The Importance of Technology

In order for the partners of Lillebaelt Waters to succeed networking with the tourists and to create opportunities for co-creation, the technological element cannot be ignored.

Technology has a tremendous influence on different stakeholders' communication across networks, which additionally changes all the time. Online booking facilities and virtual experience platforms, such as Facebook, blogging sites and other fora of interest, oblige the companies to compete not only on price, but also on offered services to enhance the final tourism experience.

It is believed to be essential that the partners focus on the Internet as a primary communication channel for co-creating value. Additionally it offers the opportunity to develop a closer relationship with the tourists.

According to Steffen the Internet has a significant role when he and his family are searching for travel experiences.

*"It means almost everything. It is where it happens."*⁶⁵

(Appendix 2, 7. Translated by author).

Additionally when Theresa is asked about the importance of the Internet when searching for travels, she answers:

*"A lot, we only find our travels online"*⁶⁶

(Appendix 3, 3. Translated by author).

It can therefore be argued that in order for the hotels and other attractions in Middelfart to be the final choice of the tourist, they have to interact online through different channels. A website might not be enough, as the tourists not necessarily are aware of its existence; this additionally appear to be the main problem in Middelfart.

According to Hans Christensen from the business centre of Middelfart one of the challenges is to make Middelfart, and the opportunities it contains, visible to the tourists. He is personally surprised by the many possibilities Middelfart and it's surroundings offer.

⁶⁵ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 16).

⁶⁶ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 17).

The head of marketing at Hindsgavl Slot acknowledges this problem as well.

*"...the challenge is just as much that we need to be better in visualising all the opportunities we have in Middelfart"*⁶⁷

(Appendix, 8, 2. Translated by author).

Additionally none of the interviewees were aware that Middelfart is a great place for consuming interesting experiences. The only thing mentioned by a few of them was the Lillebaelt Bridge, which you have to cross when travelling from Jutland to Funen.

Steffen emphasises that it is not the fact that it is Middelfart, but rather a question of ignorance about the possibilities there. He has been vacationing in Fredericia with his family once, which is the city located near the Lillebaelt Bridge on the Jutland side. They had never been in Fredericia before, but by chance he found an online offer for a short hotel stay, which was placed near an indoor aqua park. Suddenly he saw an opportunity to travel to Fredericia and have a great experience with his family.

Steffen clearly states that they would not have chosen Fredericia as travel destination, if this offer had not appeared when he was searching online. Furthermore they were encouraged by some friends to go there because of great attractions in the surroundings of the city. Additionally he mentions that he would also have considered such an offer, if it came from one of the partners in Middelfart.

Another relevant dimension of the Internet is the world of social media. It can be argued that Facebook might be a beneficial platform for the partners in Middelfart to make their experience environments visible to the tourists. Additionally Facebook is considered to be an interactive platform for communication, in which both the partners and the tourists are able to create dialogue and hence value for both parts. However not all methods are considered as equally good.

Ulrich is an example of an individual who does not prefer to be contacted through Facebook, unless it is on his own initiative.

*"If it is an advertisement on Facebook, I will probably not take the offer. I don't want that."*⁶⁸

(Appendix, 4, 5. Translated by author).

⁶⁷ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 18).

⁶⁸ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 19).

To Ulrich it is important that it is on his own initiative, when he is to consider an offer from a company. Ulrich finds it intrusive when a company crosses this line. It can be argued that in order for a company to co-create value with the tourist, it is important that the tourist is the initiator and furthermore decides when and where.

However a company might succeed in delivering a message to the tourist in the virtual world, even though he or she has not chosen it. This is done through indirect and innovative communication and is suggested to the partners of Lillebaelt Waters, as it allows them to enter the personal sphere without the individual noticing it.

Theresa is an example of such indirect communication through Facebook, which is an example of how this platform can become a first touch point in a positive way. When she is asked about how social media influences her, she answers:

“It has a great impact. I have a girlfriend that have just been to Sicily and then posted pictures [on Facebook]. Then I’m thinking “wonder what they paid for that” because if the price is okay, we will go there the next time. It has a great commercial effect. Pictures talk so much more than words”⁶⁹

(Appendix, 3, 3. Translated by author).

In this case Theresa is starting her co-creation with the Sicilians through the touch point of images presented by a close friend. Value is created already at this stage. It is not a company that approaches Theresa directly through advertising in order to sell an experience, but it can be argued that the experience has become the marketing in itself, as referred to by Gilmore. Even though Theresa has not yet been to Sicily, she has already had her first impressions of the place. In other words her friend is recommending the place, which also has an impact on her final decision.

Several of the interviewees mention the importance of a place or an experience being recommended to them by friends. This makes a great impact in the decision-making process, as friends and family are a part of the home network environment and therefore have greater impact than other stakeholders.

It can be argued that this knowledge is useful to the hotels in Middelfart, as they also have the possibility of picturing their environments and experiences. The staff can help the tourists with taking good quality pictures. Furthermore they have the opportunity to make a Facebook site representing their hotel in the best way possible.

⁶⁹ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 20).

At hotel Sixtus they have not yet had any positive experiences with Facebook as a channel for interactive communication. According to the Director Vibeke Stentoft it does not work and currently they do not have the time and energy to prioritise it. They have a Facebook profile, but there are no pictures on it.

It can be argued that having a Facebook profile without using it properly might leave an even worse impression, than if they did not have one at all. The same goes for Severin Middelfart, another partner of Lillebaelt Waters.

Additionally it can be argued that the partners have to work actively in the virtual world, especially through social media. This is a platform which cannot be ignored in the contemporary society, as this is a primary communication tool for many tourists. The partners of Lillebaelt Waters are believed to have great opportunities for co-creating with the tourists in this platform. Especially because of the common label of Lillebaelt Waters, which already consists of hundreds of experiences, which might be interesting to the tourists. However a visibility is needed.

6.3.1.2 The Importance of The Staff

As mentioned in a previous chapter, it is, among other things, the atmosphere and people of the place, which create unique value for both the tourists and the destination.

According to the network theory both the host environment and the potential customer play a key role during the creative process of developing tourist experience environments.

Whether the touch point with the tourist is through virtual media, brochures, phone calls or other channels, it is essential that the staff (hosts of a certain destination) acknowledge the importance of this first communication in order to give the tourist a good impression of that specific destination. Therefore a huge responsibility is placed on the staff, as they are the face of the company.

According to the Director of Hotel Sixtus the biggest challenge is for the staff to be capable of this kind of interaction, which is new to them.

“Well yes, the challenge is to prepare the staff for the task. It is easier for the staff to sell a package with everything included. With this new type of tourist, it is important to remember to tell everything we are offering, and that will be the challenge I think.”⁷⁰

(Appendix 9, 2. Translated by author)

⁷⁰ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 21).

It can be argued that this will be a challenge for the hotels in Lillebaelt Waters, as they are not used to the intense dialogue, which is required in order to co-create experiences.

It is therefore suggested that the staff of the different hotels pay attention to the detail when interacting with the tourist to obtain as much personal information from them as possible. This should be information about the human being behind the tourist, so that they have a better opportunity to create experiences, which match the needs of the specific tourist.

At Hotel Sixtus the Director acknowledges that this is a problem:

*"What we know about the customers is very limited. We have name and email and that is it."*⁷¹

(Appendix, 9, 2. Translated by author).

When the head of marketing at Hindsgavl is asked whether they collect information about the customers she answers:

*"No, we actually don't. One could wish it was that way, but we don't."*⁷²

(Appendix 8, 3. Translated by author).

It is not a common thing for the hotels interviewed to engage much with the tourists, and they might have to change that to be capable of co-creating experiences in the future. According to the survey conducted by Kirsten from Firstmove, the first movers want to be approached as a friend and not just a guest. Furthermore they want to leave the destination with something of real value (Appendix 5).

Again this emphasises the importance of co-creating value between the partners and the tourists. In order for the tourists to become friends with a specific hotel in Lillebaelt Waters, they have to share personal information. Additionally the hotel staff needs to approach the tourist with openness and hospitality. Hereby meaningful value is created.

⁷¹ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 22).

⁷² Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 23).

6.4 Subquestion 3: What Are the Benefits of the Cooperation Between the Partners in Lillebaelt Waters in Order to Engage the Consumers?

6.4.1 Cooperation Across Industry Borders

The interviews with the partners of Lillebaelt Waters clearly indicated that changes are needed in order to succeed in co-creating value together with the contemporary tourist, especially regarding the hotels businesses. Several of the hotels mention the issue of the traditional approach to the hotel business restricting the development and innovation that are needed in order to co-create value with this new type of tourist, who wants to be engaged and design personal and meaningful experiences. The head of marketing from Hindsgavl Slot mentions that:

*"It is a tough one to change"*⁷³

(Appendix, 8, 3. Translated by author).

It might be an idea for the partners and other stakeholders of Lillebaelt Waters to use their individual knowledge and competencies to change the experience industry logic, as well as the hotel industry logic.

The contemporary tourist wants to choose between a variety of unique and meaningful experiences, which goes beyond what a single company is able to offer. In other words, it can be argued that it is difficult for one partner to create such experiences, as it often requires a combination of attraction, facilities and stakeholders.

According to Prahalad no companies are big enough to satisfy the consumers at all times.

"All firms will access resources from a wide variety of other big and small firms-a global ecosystem"

(Prahalad, 2008; 11).

Traditionally the hotels have been used to provide the tourists with accommodation. However it is suggested that the partners of Lillebaelt Waters change this understanding of the industry, so that they not only accommodate tourists, but also provide experiences designed in cooperation with other stakeholders in Middelfart. At Hindsgavl Slot they already have this in mind.

⁷³ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 24).

*"Definitely. It is very much about us being a service agency outside our own cadastre"*⁷⁴

(Appendix, 8, 3. Translated by author).

The blurring borders between different types of industries entail new opportunities through the combining of competencies, capabilities and knowledge.

An example of an experience arranged by several companies could be a theme weekend stay with nature accommodation at Sixtus, climbing and nature walk with another company and sailing with a third part. Such experience would require cooperation between partners and sharing of knowledge and competencies.

Additionally this would create value, not only for the tourists, but as well for all the partners involved. The concept of the service ecosystem network emphasises the co-creation of value between stakeholders. Instead of competing, they cooperate, which creates greater opportunities when designing experiences. Furthermore it might create a better economy for the partners individually, as they direct tourists to each other depending on their needs.

The label of Lillebaelt Waters appears to be a great opportunity for such cooperation. Through this label they have a common story to tell the tourists about Middelfart and its surroundings. This is a unique cooperation possibility, which has rarely been seen in the hotel industry.

When the director of Hotel Sixtus is asked about the cooperation between the partners she answers:

*"I think it has been fantastic... for once we have really had something to work together for... We are not sitting and talking prices, but we are talking destination and we are talking 'let us sell this city for Gods sake'"*⁷⁵

(Appendix, 9, 3. Translated by author).

Comwell also appreciates the cooperation in Lillebaelt Waters:

*"If you consider it, competition-wise it is very atypical. But it has been fantastic to get together with the other hotels and try to help each other by getting the tourists to Middelfart"*⁷⁶

(Appendix 6, 4. Translated by author).

⁷⁴ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 25).

⁷⁵ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 26).

⁷⁶ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 27).

Even though they are competitors, they are still trying to benefit from each other through a community of stakeholders, which all wants to deliver the best experience possible to the tourists.

These considerations regarding a common story continues in the next section, which analyses how storytelling and retro branding is relevant in the co-creation of value between the tourists and the partners of Lillebaelt Waters.

6.4.2 Lillebaelt Waters: A Common Authentic Story

6.4.2.1 The Safety in the Story

Another aspect of the cooperation between the partners is the uniqueness of Lillebaelt Waters as a label. Middelfart appears to have many stories to tell the tourists and it can be argued that through the label of Lillebaelt Waters, these stories can be collected and presented to the tourists.

Drama, humour and a mixture of facts and fiction, together with personal telling are all elements in a good story. This means, that although the stories are founded on historical facts and authentic reality, fictive elements, such as anecdotes and legends, might as well be used to gain advantage when delivering a good story. Additionally it might make the story more interesting and make cultural history become more alive. In the case of Middelfart the stories might not only come from historical facts, but as well from personal tales told by citizens. This can make a story even more exciting.

Therefore this label has the potential to become a unique story in itself, which might attract tourists who want to engage with the storytellers and hear the good story.

An example that can be mentioned is the guided tour around Hindsgavl Slot, where it is possible to meet 'the white lady'. This is a story about a ghost walking around the castle and it is one of the stories told within Lillebaelt Waters.

One of the benefits of a common label, which contains a variety of stories and experiences, is that it might help sustaining a certain standard of quality in the experiences presented to the tourists under that specific label. Hereby the tourists know what to expect when travelling to Middelfart for Lillebaelt Waters experiences. It can be argued that it is important that the different partners meet the responsibilities, which are required of them, in order to satisfy the consumers.

According to the head of marketing at Hindsgavl Slot, it is about creating authentic stories of high quality, so that the consumers will remember the experiences. Furthermore she emphasises the importance of the hotels meeting a certain standard.

“... Well, we need to bring in those authentic narratives. We need the food from our own vegetable garden and it doesn't help if they go to Severin and get fabric-produced food, because then that is what they will remember Middelfart by... They need local food and not pizza as you get it in Italy.”⁷⁷

(Appendix 8, 2. Translated by author).

It can be argued that it is beneficial to the different partners in Lillebaelt Waters to compile a variety of stories under the same label, especially because they already have the facilities and stories in place. Furthermore it might become a platform in which value is created for the tourists and hotels, as well as other stakeholders.

Another relevant element, which is found within storytelling, is retro branding. As stated in the theory section, retro branding is often emotional and nostalgic in its expression, and furthermore convey strong values connected to the past; values like family-bonds, stability and security.

For the stories told in Lillebaelt Waters, retro branding might be an advantage. An example of such story could be the family vacation on a castle, which is presented as an idyllic picture of being together as a family surrounded by history in nature environments. Such experience might induce feelings and memories of good times in the past with loved ones, times together with family and friends without worries and issues. Children might also connect such retro branding experience with good times from their own childhood, even though the two occasions have nothing in common. The connection between the two occasions is happening at an emotional level.

In a societal context, which is characterised as complex, fragmented and ever changing with only a few stable variables, it can furthermore be argued that retro branding is a relevant strategy when selling experiences. As already mentioned the many choices and opportunities, which individuals assign to in the contemporary society, might result in an overheating of subjectivity, due to a lack of ability to handle the many impressions.

⁷⁷ Original quotation is found in Appendix 20 (quotation 28).

In such case it can be argued that retro branding reminds the tourist of the good old days, before the worries and all the decision-making processes. Hereby this marketing strategy might attract the tourists in an unconscious way through stories and experiences with retro branding elements.

It is suggested that the partners of Lillebaelt Waters use storytelling and retro branding as strategies, as it provides opportunities for interacting with the tourists on a more emotional level, which additionally might lead to meaningful experiences. In this case important value is created for both parts and the tourist leaves Lillebaelt Waters happy and with great memories. Moreover the environment in Middelfart is considered an obvious choice for implementing such methods, as the city has a lot of history, which has potential for good stories to be told.

6.4.2.2 Different Narratives

The concept of storytelling belongs to the traditional communication model, as it takes point of departure in the idea of the message being conveyed from the sender to the receiver. Companies often build their brand around a story in order to attract a certain group of tourists. This might also be a possibility for Lillebaelt Waters. However it can be argued that the post modern conditions change the way in which stories are told, and furthermore change the structure of who sends and who receives.

The fragmented tourists, who are a result of the contemporary society, *are neither committed to nor captivated by a single narrative, state of being, or self* (Firat, 1997, 195).

As they do not commit to a single narrative or self, it might be difficult for the partners to utilise only one story. It can be argued that certain flexibility is needed, as the fragmented tourist requires the possibility of mirroring him- or herself in the story. If they cannot identify themselves with the specific story, they might go somewhere else. Therefore it is suggested that the partners create an experiencescape in Middelfart, which tells multiple stories in order to interact with a variety of different tourists.

Additionally the traditional sender to receiver communication model might as well be reconsidered, as the contemporary tourist wants to engage and be a part of creating the story. Hereby the tourist is not only the receiver of the story that is told, but also becomes the sender, as he or she wants to interact and create own stories within the story. In such case it is the responsibility of the partners of Lillebaelt Waters to make it possible to interact with a specific story, in order to co-create personal stories.

There are plenty of stories to narrate in Middelfart, which is also visualised in the business profile of Middelfart. Thus there are a variety of possibilities for the tourists to interact and create own stories based on the Lillebaelt Waters' experiencescape

7. Discussion

This discussion concerns the concept of co-creation. Through the analysis of this project the understanding of the concept has changed, and the discussion is a result hereof.

Additionally through the discussion a new hypothesis is presented regarding the understanding of co-creation. However this hypothesis does not have any further influence on this project and is solely a part of the findings in the discussion.

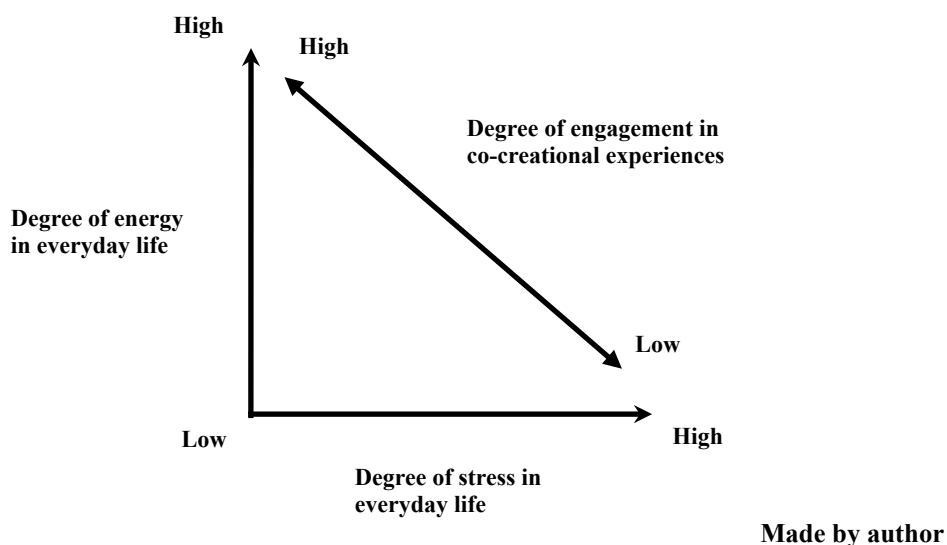
7.1 Hypothesis: All Experiences Are Co-Created

According to the theory presented in this project the second generation of experience economy emphasises the engagement of the consumer when designing meaningful experiences, and the research question more or less assumes that it is a fact.

However the data material, more specifically the interviews with both Steffen and Ulrich, indicated something else, as they both preferred package solutions, which is assumed to have a low level of involvement in co-creation. The reason for Steffen to prefer package solution was the element of safety when leaving the responsibility of planning the experiences to professionals, and additionally it was important to him that he did not have to make a lot of decisions when he was vacationing.

In these examples it can be argued that cultural liberation has a greater influence on tourists' decision-making processes than the need for co-creating experiences. As already mentioned, the disadvantage of cultural liberation is the overheating of subjectivity due to the many and stressful choices that the individual assigns to in everyday life. It can therefore be argued that the request of how much to be involved when designing a specific experience, depends on how much energy the individual has in his or her everyday life. Additionally this energy in everyday life is argued to depend on how many choices the individual are facing. Individuals making fewer choices often have more energy than those making more choices. Those making more choices, on the other hand, are often more stressed. This hypothesis is illustrated in figure 7.

Figure 7



However in the interview Steffen also mentions another example of a preferred holiday situation, which contradicts the wish for package solutions. He states that he likes city breaks with his family, as this type of holiday provides a lot of opportunities within a small geographical area and in such environment that he is able to pick and choose between experiences. This appeals to him and his family.

In this case Steffen prefers the many opportunities, which are presented to him, and does not seem to stress about having to make the choice. This can be referred to as the benefit of cultural liberation. This might additionally indicate a high level of energy in everyday life, which as well increases the engagement in co-creational experiences.

However it is acknowledged that a variety of other factors might influence how much, or whether at all, the consumer wants to engage in co-creational experiences. The above-mentioned argumentation is simplified and includes only a few variables, but it can still be argued that there is a connection between these variables.

Another theory, which might explain the case of Steffen, is the theory concerning the fragmented consumer, who changes behaviour from situation to situation. The fragmented consumer builds his life around small narratives, which are ever changing, and he or she cannot be limited to one way of behaving.

The need for co-creating experiences might change from situation to situation and in some cases the tourist wants more involvement than in others. It can be argued that individual marketing and

personal dialogue are essential for the partners of Lillebaelt Waters to gain knowledge about the extend to which the specific tourist wants to be involved in co-creating experiences.

On the basis of the above-mentioned discussion, it can be argued that the question regarding meaningful co-creational experiences does not concern whether or not the tourist wants to co-create, but rather to what extent the tourist wants to co-create with a specific company. Hereby all experiences are to some degree co-created by all the involved actors.

However this does not mean that the research question of this project loses its relevance. The partners of Lillebaelt Waters can still improve in engaging the tourists in the creation of experiences and hereby dissociate themselves with the company centric approach, which has especially characterised the hotel industry.

8. Reflections of Chosen Methods

This section will discuss a methodological aspects which could have been approached differently in this project. The lack of criteria in the selection process of the interviewees has had significant consequences for the validity of the research. The only criteria were to choose individuals who differed in terms of relational status as well as whether they had children or not.

This meant that the interviewees more or less had only little or nothing in common except from being tourists.

The selection process of the interviewees could have applied more specific criteria in order to strengthen the external validity of the research (Bryman, 2008).

By choosing four individuals who have nearly nothing in common, the analysis is limited to focus on the interviewees as individual phenomena, which makes it difficult to transfer the findings into other contexts and situations.

However validity is not traditionally acknowledged among qualitative researchers, as they reject the basic realist assumption that there is a reality external to the perception of it. Hereby it doesn't make sense to be concerned with the truth or falsity of an observation with respect to an external reality. One argument though for using validity in qualitative research is that validity has to do with the association between data and conclusion.

“qualitative researchers try to achieve validity not through manipulation of variables but rather through their orientation towards, and the study of, the empirical world” (Bulmer, 1979; 49).

Additionally Lamnek argues that qualitative studies might achieve an even higher validity, as the data is closer to the research field than compared to quantitative studies.

“In qualitative research opinions and views of the research subjects are considered; and a successive expansion of data is possible” (Lamnek, 1998; 154)

If ten individuals were chosen based on more specific criteria, for example five with children and a five without children in the same age group or with same educational background, it would have been possible to conduct a comparative qualitative study. This might have improved the degree of external validity, as it includes more interviewees and gives an opportunity to compare answers across social settings.

However, in order to except this example, the judging has to be different in terms of how external validity is understood. Since phenomenological research is studying the concept of meaning, it is through criteria related to meaningfulness that external validity should be judged. Thus external validity in qualitative or phenomenological research is not a matter of replication of results but of meaningful coherence between results, data, and the techniques (Churchill, et. al. 1998).

As this project concerns the studying of meaningful co-creational experiences from a social constructivist perspective, this judging of validity is acknowledged.

Though the limited criteria in the interviewee selection process were an intended choice, as it was considered more important to understand each interviewee in depth and with point of departure in the uniqueness of each individual. Additionally the differences between each chosen interviewee are believed to provide more perspectives in the discussion of how co-creational experiences can be defined practically.

9. Conclusion

Nature and peace, authenticity and time together characterise Denmark as a travel destination. Both Danish and foreign tourists are attracted by the Danish nature environments. This can become a great benefit for the partners of Lillebaelt Waters, as Middelfart has beautiful nature surroundings. The partners should take advantage of the possibilities in these surroundings.

One of the characteristics of the contemporary tourist is that he or she emphasise the freedom that such nature environments bring. Furthermore due to hyper consumption tourists value the relaxation that is related to nature. Therefore it can be concluded that for the partners to engage the contemporary tourist in meaningful co-creational experiences, should emphasise the possibilities for relaxing experiences in the nature environments and the opportunity to choose. A relevant example is the bicycle experience, which allows the tourists to do so.

The contemporary tourist is also characterised as fragmented, which raises the requirements of providers of experiences. Thus the partners should be willing to cross industry borders in order to co-create experiences with more opportunities presented.

Danish citizens, and thus also a majority of the tourists, have reached a point of material satiety due to the increased material wealth, which has induced a new paradigm, in which post materialistic values are of higher priority. These values are, among other things, time together, nearness and social responsibility. These values give the tourist meaning in life and it is therefore essential that the partners are aware of that element when creating experiences. Due to the focus on personal sensation instead of self-realisation, these values are also significant when travelling, especially because the tourist has to be understood from a holistic perspective, as he or she wants everything in life to make sense according to a coherent whole. The destination in itself is of secondary importance.

It is therefore important that the partners of Lillebaelt Waters stress the opportunity to be together with loved ones when co-creating meaningful experiences. Additionally nearness and authenticity is concluded to be important to the contemporary tourist, and the partners therefore have to create experiences with a local touch in authentic environments. Hereby they moreover create a unique profile through the label of Lillebaelt Waters, which will help them to differentiate themselves and thus strengthen their competitive position.

Finally due to the value of social responsibility the partners have to be able to mix pleasure with altruism when co-creating experiences with the contemporary tourist. It is however important that

the CSR initiatives that are suggested to take, have to be real and not enforced, as the tourists want authenticity and integrity.

According to the personal interviews, it can be concluded that the contemporary tourist both prefers package solutions and self-design, when searching for travels. As already mentioned, the contemporary tourist has a fragmented behaviour, and it is therefore unclear when the tourist wants package solutions or self-designed vacations. The partners of Lillebaelt Waters therefore have to emphasise individual dialogue in order to understand the individual needs. It might additionally be relevant to implement individual marketing, due to the fragmented tourist behaviour, instead of grouping the tourists into different segments.

Finally it can be concluded that it is not a question of whether or not the tourist wants to co-creating experiences, but rather a matter of the degree of engagement. All experiences are believed to be co-created. Additionally the willingness of the tourist to engage in co-creational experiences depends on the energy in his or her everyday life. Meaning is not only created through self-design experiences, but also appears in package solutions, as it is concluded that it is the tourist who ascribes meaning to the certain experience.

It can be concluded that the tourist is not solely a tourist, but is a human being who interacts in various networks, which have different stakeholders. The partners of Lillebaelt Waters have to become stakeholders and visualise themselves in one or more of these networks in order to obtain dialogue with the individual behind the tourist.

This will be one of the main challenges for the partners of Lillebaelt Waters. Due to their company centric approach, they primarily communicate through traditional advertising, if they advertise at all.

Additionally it can be concluded that the partners have to interact with the tourist in their everyday life by using more relevant communication channels, which also function as new touch points. It became evident in the interviews that tourists prioritise to search for their travel experiences on the Internet. In order for the hotels and other attractions in Middelfart to be the final choice of the tourist, they have to interact online through different channels, which is currently not the case. This stresses the lack of visibility of the opportunities in Middelfart.

Facebook is an important platform for interactive communication. It is however not all tourists that prefer being contacted directly through this media, as it is a private sphere. Therefore innovation and creative ideas are necessary.

It is essential that the staff (hosts of a certain destination) acknowledge the importance of this first communication (touch point) in order to give the tourist a good impression of that specific hotel. In the communication with the tourists, it can be concluded that a huge responsibility is placed on the staff, as they are the face of that specific experience.

It can be concluded that in order to co-create meaningful experiences, it is necessary to gain detailed information about the specific tourists regarding needs and interests. Additionally the tourist wants to be a friend and not just a guest. This will be a challenge for the hotels in Lillebaelt Waters, as they are not used to obtain detailed information from the tourists.

The partners in Lillebaelt Waters have to educate their staff to have dialogue with this new type of tourist, so they will be capable of creating meaningful experiences with them. Additionally for the tourist to become friends with the partners, it requires openness from both sides.

The contemporary tourist wants to choose between a variety of unique and meaningful experiences, which goes beyond what a single company is able to offer. The traditional approach to the hotel business is restricting the development and innovation that are necessary to co-create value with the tourists, who wants to be engaged and design personal and meaningful experiences.

It can be concluded that the partners can benefit from the combination of competencies, capabilities and knowledge that are present when cooperating across industry borders. Additionally this creates value in different ways. Instead of competing, they cooperate, which creates more opportunities when designing experiences together with the tourists. Furthermore the partners benefit economically, as they create value when directing the tourists to each other.

Moreover through cooperation the partners have the opportunity to create a certain standard for the experiences under the name of Lillebaelt Waters. This provides a security for the tourists who know that the Lillebaelt Waters experiences have a certain quality.

Additionally the uniqueness of the Lillebaelt Waters label has a competitive advantage, as these experiences are only found in Middelfart. This provides the partners with the opportunity of co-creating experiences, which are unique to that destination. Moreover it can be concluded that these

unique experiences have to focus on authenticity and the local touch, which have already been concluded to be of importance to the contemporary tourist. This requires a focused cooperation between the partners, as they have to visualise the facilities and stories, which are found in the local environments of Middelfart.

For the stories told in Lillebaelt Waters, retro branding has been concluded to be an advantage for the partners when co-creating experiences with the tourists. The history and nature in Middelfart create opportunities for narrating good stories, which induce feelings and memories of good times in the past with loved ones. Retro branding and storytelling are therefore relevant strategies due to the complex, fragmented and ever changing societal context of the contemporary tourist, who wants to be reminded of the good old days before the worries and all the decision-making processes.

The fragmented tourist is not committed to a single narrative or self and requires the possibility of mirroring him- or herself in the story told. It can be concluded that for the partners to co-create experiences with the fragmented tourists, they have to create an experiencescape in Middelfart, which tells multiple stories in order to interact with a variety of different identities. Additionally the tourist wants to create own stories within the story, which requires flexibility in the label of Lillebaelt Waters.

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