

# Participating While Passing Through: A Study of Tourist Engagement in Destination Co-Creations

Master Thesis in Tourism from Aalborg University

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates how tourists relate to the idea of being involved in the development of a destination—and to what extent they are willing to contribute to the co-creation of the places they visit. While co-creation has become an increasingly influential concept in tourism research and practice, much of the existing literature is grounded in provider- or destination-centric perspectives. Tourists are often positioned as latent collaborators, yet little empirical research has explored how they perceive such roles. This thesis seeks to address this gap by combining a theoretically informed framework with qualitative interviews conducted with international tourists in Copenhagen.

The literature review demonstrates that co-creation in tourism has evolved from focusing on experience creation to including strategic processes such as branding, planning, and product development. This shift has prompted a distinction between experiential and strategic co-creation. The former relates to active engagement in on-site experiences, while the latter implies more deliberate contributions to the destination's long-term form and function. Tourists are increasingly recognized as empowered and networked actors, yet their willingness to participate in strategic processes remains understudied.

The thesis employs a theoretical framework combining co-creation theory, motivation theory, and tourist typologies to explore this. This enables a multi-layered analysis of how tourists understand the idea of participation (co-creation), what motivates or hinders their engagement (motivation), what kinds of tourists are likely to participate, and in which ways (typologies). The empirical basis consists of 14 qualitative interviews conducted in Copenhagen. The findings reveal that tourists do not relate to participation as a binary choice but rather as a spectrum shaped by factors such as format, language, perceived relevance, and emotional investment.

Many tourists are willing to contribute—particularly through sharing feedback or ideas—when participation is presented informally and embedded in their travel experience. However, terms such as “development,” “planning,” or “workshop” create distance, as they signal responsibility or strategic intent that tourists often reject. This distinction between *participation* and *involvement* becomes analytically central: while many are willing to participate, few are genuinely involved cognitively or emotionally.

The thesis develops a typology of three ideal-typical role understandings: the *pragmatic improver*, the *experience-oriented participant*, and the *reluctant observer*. These types highlight differences in motivation, preferred formats, and perceived legitimacy. Participation becomes meaningful when it aligns with the tourist's sense of role, autonomy, and travel context. Importantly, co-creation is more

likely to succeed when it does not feel strategic or formalized to the tourist. This creates a paradox: the less strategic co-creation feels, the more effective it may be as a strategic tool.

The thesis contributes to tourism research by offering new insights into how tourists position themselves concerning co-creation and emphasizing the importance of framing, language, and relational meaning in shaping tourist engagement.

**Key words: co-creation in tourism, destination development, critical discussion, case study, typology, Self-determination theory, value-co-creation**

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## Introduction

Co-creation is the new black in tourism development. Or rather – it has been for some time.

Although the concept is no longer brand new, it continues to gain traction as a central approach in both tourism research and practice. Co-creation encourages more inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable development processes, where both tourists and locals are invited to help shape the destination (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). The approach stems from a broader paradigm shift, not only within tourism but also within the fields of innovation and value creation more generally. Here, value is increasingly seen as something that emerges through interaction between multiple actors – rather than as something unilaterally delivered from producer to consumer (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In the context of tourism, co-creation is thus often highlighted as a key to both enhance the experience value for visitors and strengthen the local anchoring and long-term sustainability of the destination (Prebensen, Chen & Uysal, 2014; Boswijk, Peelen & Olthof, 2007).

Considering this, it is not surprising that co-creation has become a popular strategy in destination development, especially in a time when tourism is increasingly viewed as something that should be developed *with* people, not just *for* them. However, because co-creation has gained such widespread acceptance as an ideal, it is worth examining the assumptions that follow. What does it actually mean in practice when tourists are invited to co-create a destination? And perhaps more importantly: do they even *want* to participate?

Tourists are a particular type of stakeholder in tourism development. They are temporary, often lack deep contextual knowledge of the place they visit and typically engage in a mindset where relaxation and experiences are the focus. Still, many development strategies and academic models position them as valuable co-creators with the potential to contribute legitimacy, insights, and creativity (Campos et al., 2018). Some empirical studies also show that tourist involvement in co-creative processes can lead to increased satisfaction, stronger attachment, and more competitive destinations (Chathoth et al., 2014; Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2012). However, this raises an interesting question: is participation and co-creation something tourists themselves desire, or simply something that is assigned *to* them?

There is relatively little research specifically addressing how tourists themselves relate to the idea of being involved in the development of the destinations they visit. The existing literature has primarily

focused on tourists' involvement in on-site experiences. In VisitDenmark's report *International Marketing of Denmark as a Travel Destination*<sup>1</sup> (2016), it is pointed out that tourists increasingly seek holiday experiences where they are invited to participate actively and engage with all their senses. This suggests an interest in more interactive and participatory forms of experience, which may be understood as a kind of co-creation. A typical example might be tourists picking strawberries straight from the field rather than simply buying them at a roadside stand – an experience of *being part of* something rather than just observing it.

This thesis, however, focuses on another form of participation: tourists' role in destination development. Based on current strategies that aim to mature and highlight lesser-known areas in order to distribute tourism more sustainably, the question arises: How do tourists actually feel about participating in this kind of development process?

The aim is not to dismiss co-creation as an approach, but to explore whether, and in what ways, it makes sense to include tourists as actors in destination development. It is rooted in wondering how co-creation with tourists has become an almost natural part of tourism development rhetoric - and especially in the role tourists are considered to play in this context. Before designing new forms of tourist participation, it is necessary to understand what co-creation actually means in a tourism context, and for whom it creates value. This forms the basis for the following research question:

## 1.2 Problem formulation

*Exploring how tourists in Copenhagen relate to the idea of being involved in the development of a destination - and to what extent do they want to contribute to the co-creation of the place they visit?*

### Research Questions:

- How is co-creation defined and used in tourism literature in relation to destination development?

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<sup>1</sup> Translated: International markedsføring af Danmark som rejsemål

- What motivations and barriers do tourists experience in relation to participating in the development of a destination?
- How does the temporary presence of tourists affect their perception of right, responsibility and desire to engage in co-creation?

## **Methodology**

In the following chapter the methodology for planning and execution of the thesis is explained. It begins with an outline of the theoretical framework and the epistemological and ontological assumptions that shape the approach to data and analysis. This is followed by a presentation of the qualitative approach and methodological design, including the rationale for selecting Copenhagen as a case study and the use of semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data generation. The development of the interview guide, the selection of informants, and the process of data collection are also described, along with reflections on the interview format and the social context in which the conversations took place. The chapter then presents the analytical strategy, which is based on a thematic and abductive approach in which theory and empirical data are brought into dialogue. It elaborates on the coding and thematization process and explains how the analytical structure emerged as a combination of data-driven insights and theoretical sensitivity. The chapter concludes with a reflection on methodological limitations and the researcher's positionality, including considerations of bias and linguistic barriers. The aim of this section is to provide the reader with a transparent and nuanced understanding of the processes that have shaped the knowledge base on which the analysis is built.

### **2.1 Research strategy**

This thesis is based on a qualitative and exploratory research strategy, aiming to investigate how tourists in Copenhagen relate to the idea of being involved in the development of a destination. The thesis is grounded in a social constructivist epistemological position, where knowledge is understood as socially and linguistically constructed. The exploratory approach means that the project does not seek to test a hypothesis, but rather to uncover and understand variations in tourists' attitudes, reflections, and conceptual understandings. To achieve this, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted, allowing participants to express their own interpretations and experiences. The data has been analysed through a thematic and abductive approach, bringing theory and empirical material into dialogue to generate a nuanced understanding of tourists' perspectives. The methodology will be elaborated in the following sections.

## 2.2 Ontological and Epistemological Position: Social constructivism

This thesis adopts a social constructivist epistemological perspective. According to social constructivism, all human cognition is shaped through social and linguistic processes. This means that what we perceive as reality is not given in advance but created and maintained in interaction with others. In other words, we are constantly surrounded by constructed truths, which we affirm to ourselves and each other (Collin, 2015). Epistemologically, social constructivism is based on a theory of knowledge in which knowledge is regarded as socially constructed. People produce and reproduce knowledge in concrete contexts, where specific ways of thinking, speaking, and acting appear ‘natural,’ while others appear foreign or socially unacceptable (Schmidt, C. H. 2022).

This insight is particularly relevant for this thesis, in which I, as a researcher, use concepts such as involvement, co-creation, and destination development, which are familiar and meaningful in a professional context but do not necessarily hold the same meaning for the tourists I speak with. These concepts may be either unknown, uninteresting, or understood in entirely different contexts. The project is, therefore, based on the assumption that tourists’ experience of their role in the development of a destination is shaped by their own experiences, cultural contexts, and linguistic understandings.

To examine this, qualitative interviews were conducted with tourists in Copenhagen, where their reflections on precisely these concepts were explored. Within social constructivism, one often works from ontological constructivism, in which social reality, in particular, is considered to be created through human interpretation and meaning-making (Collin, 2003). A distinction is made here between a radical approach, in which all reality is seen as a construction, and a more limited approach, in which the social reality is constructed. In contrast, the physical reality is assumed to exist independently of human cognition. In this thesis, this means that I, as a researcher, do not seek to uncover one objective truth about tourists’ role in destination development. Instead, I focus on how they relate to *the idea* of being involved and how they understand concepts such as participation and co-creation. Therefore, I analyze not what tourists actually do but how they articulate their own roles and how they position themselves about the notion of having influence or the right to express themselves. The responses given by the informants are regarded as valuable knowledge because they contribute to the creation of the reality that is analyzed in this thesis. Therefore, language plays a central role in this process, as my thesis focuses on how the informants understand and respond to particular words and concepts. This applies both to their interpretation of destination development and how they relate to the idea of participating or becoming involved. This means that there is no one true definition of, for example, involvement, but that the concept gains its meaning through the way it is understood and used by different actors – including the researcher, the tourists, and the decision-makers of the

destination. At the same time, it is also about their perception of who has the right to participate and on what terms. Therefore, Knowledge in this thesis arises through the interaction between informants and researcher, and it is shaped by the individuals who participate in the study. From a social constructivist position, I also acknowledge that reality could have been entirely different if I had spoken with 30 other tourists with different backgrounds.

### **2.3 Qualitative Approach**

This thesis is based on a qualitative and exploratory research strategy, aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of how tourists in Copenhagen relate to the idea of being involved in the development of a destination. The qualitative approach is particularly well-suited to shedding light on subjective experiences and meaning-making, which aligns with the thesis' social constructivist foundation.

Whereas quantitative methods seek to produce generalisable knowledge through measurement and statistics, qualitative methods focus on uncovering why people act and understand the world as they do. The aim is not to quantify participation in co-creation, but to explore the meanings and considerations associated with tourists' experience of being—or not being—involved (Metodeguiden, 2024). The empirical data consists of semi-structured interviews with tourists in Copenhagen. This method allows for flexible and in-depth conversations in which informants can express their own understandings and reflections. In doing so, access is gained to nuanced insights into how concepts such as involvement, co-creation, and feedback are perceived and interpreted in a concrete context. The exploratory element of the thesis consists precisely in mapping variations in these understandings rather than testing a predefined hypothesis. However, certain quantitative elements have also been included in this thesis, though they do not constitute the core of the project. These were only applied in places where they felt relevant—for example, in the section on age and life stage, to illustrate patterns in how informants made their choices. Quantitative indicators were also used to highlight which forms of involvement appeared most relevant to the participants.

### **2.4 Copenhagen As a Case study**

This particular focus on involvement makes Copenhagen especially relevant and suitable for investigating how co-creation and participation are perceived and experienced by tourists in practice. Furthermore, Copenhagen has almost eight million hotel stays from international visitors in 2024 (Wonderful Copenhagen, 2025), and, according to VisitDenmark and Statistics Denmark, it is the city in Denmark with both the highest number of tourists and the greatest variation in tourists' nationalities (VisitDenmark, 2024). This made it possible to include a broad range of different travellers in the

study and thereby create a nuanced picture of tourists' perspectives. The aim is not to focus on one specific nationality, such as German tourists, but to explore a wide range of attitudes and understandings across demographic backgrounds. During the planning phase, there were considerations about limiting the case to a smaller geographical area, such as Sydhavnen or Carlsbergbyen. Such a focus could have enabled a more context-specific analysis of how tourists relate to these neighbourhoods, and how co-creation could potentially take place in a concrete local area with clearer social or physical frameworks for participation. However, the final decision was to examine Copenhagen as a whole, as the thesis does not focus on place-specific participation, but on tourists' general understanding of and attitude towards involvement in destination development. It should be noted that all interviews were conducted in the Inner City of Copenhagen. However, the informants were not asked to relate to specific districts, and the thesis is therefore not tied to this area in particular. Moreover, the interviews revealed that many tourists, particularly first-time visitors, do not clearly distinguish between districts in Copenhagen. To them, the city appears as a unified experience destination rather than a composition of distinct neighbourhoods. This is supported by a qualitative analysis conducted by Wonderful Copenhagen and Frederiksberg Municipality, which states that "Tourists see it all as Copenhagen, the metropolis and the capital region. Frederiksberg is more of a neighbourhood than a city in its own right" (Wonderful Copenhagen & Frederiksberg Municipality, 2020). This justifies the decision to treat Copenhagen as one analytical whole rather than focusing on specific local areas. In the analysis, districts are therefore not differentiated, and the individual informants' statements are treated as expressions of their experience of Copenhagen as a unified destination.

A central feature of Copenhagen as a case is that many tourists only stay in the city for a very limited time. This creates an analytical tension between the destination's long-term development strategies and the tourists' temporary presence. It raises relevant questions about to what extent, and on what terms, the temporary visitor can or wishes to engage in the development of a place they only stay in briefly.

Finally, my own connection to Copenhagen plays a role in shaping the thesis. I reside in Copenhagen and work at Wonderful Copenhagen, where I have worked with tourism development and thus have knowledge of the organisation's strategic focus on involving both residents and visitors. This has provided me with in-depth knowledge of the destination's structures and branding strategy. At the same time, this dual position—as a local resident and professional—also carries the risk that certain assumptions about what is relevant or meaningful for tourists may colour my interpretations. I have therefore worked consciously with reflexivity and have strived for an open and attentive approach in

the interviews, in which the informants' own understandings and perspectives have been given analytical weight. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that in the analysis, the concept of co-creation is used as an analytical focal point, but not as a fixed or predefined practice. The thesis is not normative but focuses on how tourists themselves understand and relate to the idea of participating in the development of a destination. The conceptual framework for co-creation and related theoretical perspectives is presented and discussed in more detail in the theory section.

## 2.5 Interview Guide

The interview guide was developed through an iterative process with particular attention to linguistic accessibility and the appropriateness of the question types in context. Initially, the guide included terms such as co-creation, destination development, and shaping the visitor experience, but it quickly became clear that these concepts were too abstract and distant from the everyday language of the informants. In practice, the questions were perceived as too reflective and context-heavy, especially since the informants were in a relaxed holiday setting and had not previously considered such issues. This relates to the nature of tourism as a mental and physical break from everyday life, where many tourists seek to escape demands for reflection and responsibility. As Iso-Ahola (1982) points out, tourist motivation often arises from “the desire to leave the everyday environment behind oneself” (p. 257), which can make it difficult to engage with questions that require critical reflection on destination development. Based on experiences from three pilot interviews, the guide was revised and made more accessible, including the replacement of technical terms with more concrete and experience-oriented formulations. After a further two interviews, the guide was revised again and then tested on an acquaintance without a background in tourism, ensuring that the questions could be understood without specialised knowledge. The final interview guide was then used in the 14 qualitative interviews that form the basis of the analysis. The first five interviews are not included in the final analysis, as they were used for testing the method and approach. In the interviews, the informants were presented with four possible ways of engaging in the development of a destination, ranging from quick feedback options to more involved and social formats:

**Format A:** Filling out a short online survey about one's experiences as a tourist in Copenhagen.

**Format B:** Visiting a feedback booth or pop-up stand in the city to share what worked well and what could be improved.

**Format C:** Testing a new experience, such as a guided tour or digital feature being trialled by the city, and providing quick feedback afterwards.

**Format D:** Visiting a lesser-known part of the city and participating in a group session with other tourists to share impressions.

This was presented to the informants naturally during the interview, as a way to visualise the concept and make it easier for them to relate to. The implications of this are discussed in the limitations section.

## 2.6 Sampling And Data Collection

The informants were selected randomly among tourists in Inner City Copenhagen over three days during the Easter period. The selection was deliberately broad in order to include tourists of different ages, nationalities, genders, travel constellations, and lengths of stay. The aim was not to achieve representativeness in a statistical sense, but to ensure variation in perspectives and experiences. Particular emphasis was placed on including both first-time visitors and tourists with previous experience of Copenhagen, as this could influence their understanding of the place and their willingness to engage in its development.

The interviews were primarily conducted near Rosenborg Castle/The King's Garden and at the Marble Church. These locations were chosen because they naturally invited pauses and rest, creating a more relaxed setting for conversation. Initial attempts to interview tourists while they were moving through the city proved less suitable, as it was more often perceived as an interruption. The choice of quieter spots therefore contributed to the informants being more willing and able to engage in the conversation.

Participation was voluntary and without incentives. The interviews were conducted as semi-structured conversations with open-ended questions, which allowed for an exploration of the informants' own understandings and interpretations. The conversations were held face-to-face and based on the informants' current experiences of the city. The fact that the interviews took place in public space and within a relaxed holiday context had an influence on both the nature of the conversation and the availability of the informants. Several participants expressed that they had never previously considered questions related to involvement and participation in destination development – and this spontaneity was regarded as valuable, as it reflects how tourists actually encounter and understand such themes when not “professionally staged”.

The final dataset consists of 14 qualitative interviews with a total of 29 tourists. Informants were travelling either alone, in pairs, or in small groups, and the interview situations were adjusted accordingly. Three of the interviews were conducted with four participants at a time and thus developed

into small focus group interviews. These interviews proved particularly fruitful, as informants spontaneously responded to one another's statements and built on each other's reflections. This created a dynamic in which participants both nuanced and expanded their perspectives. At the same time, this interview format made the conversations longer and more informal – the longest interview lasted approximately 30 minutes – and the interview guide served more as a support than a strict structure. All interviews were transcribed in full and form the basis for the qualitative analysis. The informants represent eight different nationalities and are anonymised in the material. In the analysis, information about age, nationality, travel constellation, and length of stay is included when considered relevant for understanding their perspectives. It is acknowledged that an even broader data foundation – for example, with interviews from additional neighbourhoods – could have added further nuances. This is elaborated in the section on methodological reflections and limitations. The interview guide, transcripts, and an overview of the informants can be found in the appendix.

## **2.7 Data Analysis**

The analysis was carried out through manual, thematic coding of the transcribed interview material. Each interview was read several times with the aim of identifying patterns, contradictions, and key meanings in the informants' statements. The coding was based on a combination of deductive and inductive approaches: the questions from the interview guide served as an initial analytical framework, while new themes were identified and developed continuously through an open reading of the material. The coding process took its starting point in the interview guide, where the individual questions acted as guiding points and were assessed in relation to the thesis' problem formulation and research questions. On this basis, central themes were identified and marked with colours, visually distinguishing the different thematic tracks. Quotes and statements that reflected particular themes were colour-coded, which created an overview and made it possible to compare answers across informants.

As the thesis is grounded in a social constructivist perspective, it is acknowledged that meaning is context-dependent and not fixed once and for all. This also means that the same quotes were, in some cases, included under multiple thematic contexts, as they contained several layers of meaning and conveyed significant insights across analytical tracks. Rather than attempting to lock a statement into one definitive meaning, the analysis sought to open up for the ambiguity that often characterises human experience and reflection.

The analysis is structured around four overarching themes, which together address the thesis's research question:

1. Tourists' motivations and barriers for providing feedback
2. Forms of involvement and participation in destination development
3. The tourist's perceived role and relationship to the destination
4. Participation patterns and tourist typologies and

This structure was developed on the basis of the coding process and was adjusted along the way as new connections and interpretations emerged. In qualitative analyses, three general analytical approaches are often used: inductive, deductive, and abductive. In this thesis, an abductive approach is applied. The starting point for the analysis is the empirical data material from 15 qualitative interviews with tourists, and the themes in the analysis have largely emerged through an inductive, open coding process. At the same time, the selection and interpretation of quotes were shaped by a theoretical sensitivity, as theories of co-creation, participation, and tourist roles contributed to qualifying and enriching the understanding of what was said. The abductive approach has thus enabled a movement between the informants' own formulations and analytical concepts.

Theoretical perspectives on co-creation and motivation have informed the analysis and have been used as interpretative frameworks in dialogue with the empirical material. A more detailed account of the role of theory can be found in the theory section.

## **2.2 Methodological Reflections and Limitations**

All research projects involve methodological choices that both enable and constrain certain forms of knowledge production. This is particularly true in qualitative studies, where data is collected and interpreted through the lens of the individual researcher, and where a range of potential biases may influence the research design, data collection, and analysis.

### **2.2.1 Researcher Position**

Bias is understood here as systematic distortions that may arise at any stage of the research process, either consciously or unconsciously, and which can influence what data is collected, how it is interpreted, and which conclusions are drawn (Malterud, 2001). In qualitative studies, bias may manifest through, for example, the researcher's prior understandings, choice of language and question types, case selection, or interaction with informants. The aim is not to eliminate bias entirely—this is impossible—but rather to remain conscious and reflective about the influence of methodological choices and the researcher's position (Berger, 2015). This section therefore aims to identify and discuss a number of methodological considerations and potential distortions in this thesis.

As a resident of Copenhagen and as an employee at Wonderful Copenhagen, I have extensive knowledge of the city's tourism initiatives, narratives, and development strategies. This insight has been a strength in terms of background knowledge and scoping. At the same time, it entails a risk of preconceived assumptions about what is relevant or important—for example, an implicit premise that tourists can and should be involved in the development of a destination. In the initial stages of the project, I based my approach on the idea of the tourist as a legitimate stakeholder in destination development. This stems, among other things, from my knowledge and experience with stakeholder theory, in which, according to Freeman (1984), it is assumed that “a stakeholder is any person or organisation who can be positively or negatively impacted upon by or cause an impact on the actions of a company. He also views customers and suppliers as important stakeholders.” (as cited in xx p.3). From this perspective, I considered it natural to view tourists as stakeholders in the destination—and, therefore, to include them in development processes. This approach contained a theoretical bias, in that I assumed that because stakeholder theory says tourists ought to be involved, they would also want to contribute actively if invited. In other words, I not only had a theoretical premise that tourists should be involved—I also assumed that they themselves would want to. However, the statements made by informants turned out to be far more nuanced, and several expressed either distance from the idea of involvement or uncertainty about their role in participating. This realisation sharpened my focus on reflexivity throughout the research process.

### **2.2.2 Limitations**

All interviews were conducted in the Inner City of Copenhagen over three days during the Easter holiday. This choice was made partly because Easter attracts many tourists to Copenhagen, and partly because the selected areas around Rosenborg Castle/The King's Garden and the Marble Church are major tourist attractions, thereby drawing a broad variety of tourists in terms of age, nationality, and travel type. However, this geographical delimitation also constitutes a methodological limitation. A broader fieldwork approach—such as including interviews in neighbourhoods like Nørrebro, Vesterbro, or Nordhavn—could have added further nuance to the analysis. This is acknowledged as a potential source of bias in the data foundation. Furthermore, it must be considered that since the interviews took place at some of the city's most popular tourist sites, this may have increased the likelihood of encountering tourists who travel in similar ways, seek out similar experiences, and primarily stay within the most well-known parts of the city. This may have narrowed the range of perspectives and motivational patterns represented in the material, thereby also influencing the findings of the analysis.

Although demographic factors are frequently highlighted in the literature as significant for understanding tourist motivation, this thesis has not systematically focused on variables such as gender, occupation, social class, or educational background—apart from age. This choice was partly driven by an initial ambition to approach the topic from a more “neutral” or generalised perspective, focusing on the tourist *per se*, rather than analysing behaviour through the lens of specific identity markers. The intention was to allow for an exploration of tourists’ attitudes and reflections without pre-imposing demographic distinctions.

As the thesis progressed, it also became evident that no clear or consistent gender-based patterns emerged in the data. Consequently, gender was not included as a meaningful analytical dimension. In contrast, age and life stage were retained in the analysis, as these factors showed more distinct patterns in relation to tourists’ willingness to engage or contribute.

Nationality was likewise excluded as a core analytical category, not because it was deemed irrelevant, but due to the limitations of the dataset. While a wide range of nationalities was represented among the informants, the number of participants within each group was too small to support meaningful generalisations or cultural comparisons.

The linguistic and methodological adjustments made during the development of the interview guide had a direct impact on the analytical focus of the thesis. By simplifying concepts and using more everyday language, the questions became more accessible to the informants. However, this adaptation also introduced a risk that the conversation would shift away from the original research focus. This will be explored further in the discussion section. By replacing “co-creation” with “giving feedback,” a conceptual and methodological challenge arose in relation to what was actually being examined and how the informants’ responses should be interpreted.

Additionally, linguistic barriers emerged in several interviews, where informants had limited English proficiency. In some cases, this meant that only one person in a group responded on behalf of everyone, which reduced the opportunity for nuanced and multi-voiced reflections.

Furthermore, the informants were presented with specific scenarios during the interviews to make the concept of participation more tangible. However, these scenarios were unintentionally primarily grounded in strategic co-creation, and therefore offered limited space for informants to define for themselves what meaningful involvement could entail. What made the interviews more manageable for the tourists thus risked making it more difficult for the researcher to access the full range of perspectives. This methodological tension between accessibility and analytical depth is acknowledged as a significant limitation of the thesis and is further elaborated in the thesis’ discussion chapter.

### **3. Literature review**

For this thesis, five central themes form the framework of the literature review: the historical development of co-creation in tourism, different forms of co-creation, the tourist's role in the literature, tourist motivation and perceived value, as well as critical perspectives and research gaps. Each of these areas contributes to illuminating how tourists relate to the idea of being involved in the development of a destination – and to what extent they wish to actively participate in the co-creation of the place they visit. The historical development of co-creation shows how the concept has been transferred from service management and marketing to the tourism context and has gradually shifted its focus from experience creation to strategic destination development. In this context, different forms of co-creation are addressed, with particular emphasis on the distinction between experience-based and strategic co-creation. Both forms are important in understanding how tourists are involved and what roles they are assigned in the co-creation process. The tourist's role is a third important theme, as literature has developed from viewing the tourist as a passive consumer to seeing them in a more active and relational role as co-creators in destination development. Motivation and perceived value are addressed as a fourth theme and help explain what drives tourists to engage – and what forms of value they associate with such involvement. Finally, critical perspectives are included, questioning the assumption that co-creation is always desirable or effective, and whether all tourists even wish to participate. These points of critique highlight the ongoing presence of significant research gaps, especially regarding the tourist's own perspective. This thesis is based on the need to explore who wants to participate, and how, and aims to contribute new knowledge by linking motivation, value, and participation in one comprehensive analysis.

#### **3.1 The Historical Development of Co-Creation in Tourism**

Over the past two decades, the concept of co-creation has gained significant traction in tourism research and has become central to understanding the tourist as an active co-producer of experiences and destinations. Co-creation originally stems from the fields of marketing and innovation, where it was introduced by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) as a new understanding of value creation based on interaction between companies and consumers. This approach challenged the traditional model, where companies internally designed and delivered products while consumers remained passive recipients until the point of purchase. Instead, co-creation emphasized that value emerges collaboratively – in the encounter between producer and user.

This paradigm shift inspired a range of related concepts such as co-production, co-design, and co-

innovation, all of which share a foundational emphasis on collaboration, participation, and reciprocity (Hoyer et al., 2010; Galvagno & Dalli, 2014). Concepts such as customer participation and customer involvement are often used interchangeably with co-creation, but they differ in that the focus shifts from joint creation to participation in a business-driven process. Nevertheless, they all share the perception of the consumer as an active participant in the development of products, services, and experiences.

In the field of tourism, co-creation was initially introduced in response to the standardized practices that characterized post-war mass tourism. During this period, travellers were primarily regarded as passive recipients of package tours and pre-defined experience offers. However, from the late 1990s onwards, this approach began to be challenged by increasing demand for unique, personalized, and authentic experiences. This shift toward the individualization of tourism led to the development of new understanding of the tourist – not merely as a consumer, but as an active participant in the creation of the experience itself. This development is closely linked to the rise of the experience economy, popularized by Pine and Gilmore (1999), who argued that experiences represent a distinct form of economic value precisely because they are intangible, personally meaningful, and create lasting memories. Binkhorst (2006) extended this line of thought to tourism, emphasizing that tourists should increasingly be seen as “innovation partners in the development of experiences and destinations” (p. 2). According to her, co-creation is particularly relevant in tourism because experiences are largely created in the moment and through interaction between the tourist, the place, and various actors. As she states: “Experiences are intangible and immaterial and although they tend to be expensive, people attach great value to them because they are memorable” (p. 1). At the same time, she points out that although tourism is one of the largest generators of experience, the sector has long lagged others in both practice and research related to co-creation. From the early 2010s, digitalization became a key driver in the development of co-creation in tourism. The proliferation of social media, smartphones, and digital platforms enabled tourists to contribute actively to their travel experiences – before, during, and after the journey. Value creation was thus no longer limited to the physical interaction between tourists and service providers at the destination but expanded to include digital networks, sharing, inspiration, and online communities (Payne et al., 2008; Neuhofer et al., 2014; Reichenberger, 2017). This has led to the development of interactive experiences such as mobile-based walking tours and gamified experience formats.

Theoretical developments in co-creation within tourism have been documented through several systematic literature reviews. Campos et al. (2018), for instance, analyse the research on co-creation of

tourism experiences and conclude that the field has been dominated by studies focusing on the encounter between tourist and service provider during the trip – often with an emphasis on personal and memorable experiences. Mohammadi et al. (2020) add a broader analysis that attempts to map the field as a whole and identify key gaps. They point out that there is still limited knowledge about the role of co-creation in strategic development processes, including tourists' potential contributions to destination development and sustainable transformations. As this development has progressed, the scope of research has gradually expanded. While co-creation was initially seen as an approach to improve individual tourist experiences, recent literature shows increasing interest in co-creation as a strategic tool in broader contexts – including community involvement, sustainability, and shared responsibility for destination development.

### **Different Forms of Co-Creation**

Co-creation in a tourism context encompasses a wide range of practices and understandings. It is not a uniform method, but rather a flexible concept that spans across various levels of involvement and interaction between tourists and destination stakeholders. Technological development has especially enabled new forms of interaction, where tourists participate digitally – before, during, and after the trip – through, for example, smartphones, social media, and digital feedback systems. These interactive formats are just one way in which co-creation is expressed in tourism. In literature, it is often proposed to distinguish between two main types: experience-based co-creation and strategic co-creation, each operating at different levels and with different purposes (Campos et al., 2018; Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). This distinction provides important conceptual clarity in the field, even though the two forms may overlap in practice or take hybrid forms.

Although both forms are acknowledged, this thesis focuses analytically on strategic co-creation, as the aim is to explore how tourists relate to invitations that serve explicit development goals. Accordingly, the discussion of co-creation in the theoretical section is limited to strategic forms of participation. Experience-based co-creation has particularly dominated the research field. Here, co-creation is understood as an activity where the tourist participates emotionally, socially, and physically in the travel experience itself. This can take the form of cooking classes with local hosts, active nature experiences, or gamified city walks where the tourist acts as a co-creator of the content. Prebensen, Vittersø, and Dahl (2013) emphasize that experience-based co-creation creates value by engaging the tourist in the moment and in interaction with the surroundings and actors of the destination. This links to the core idea of the experience economy: that value arises in the sensory encounter with place and activity – rather than in the product itself. Chathoth et al. (2013) describe co-creation as:

“customizing a product or service received with a high level of cooperation and collaboration of customer for the purpose of innovation” (p. 15) – a definition that clearly embraces the tourist’s active role in experience creation.

In contrast, strategic co-creation focuses on tourists’ participation in broader development processes – for example, in connection with destination strategies, product development, and urban planning. Here, co-creation is not primarily about enhancing the individual experience but about using tourists’ knowledge and perspectives as input into long-term decision-making. Richards and Duif (2019) refer to this as co-creation of place, where the destination itself is shaped through interaction between actors and users. This can take place through workshops, feedback interviews, prototype testing, or online platforms where tourists are invited to evaluate and suggest ideas. Despite its strategic potential, this form of co-creation remains under-researched – according to Mohammadi et al. (2020) the field is “dominated by a service-oriented approach,” (p. 111), while co-creation as part of broader destination development remains relatively undocumented.

Between these two extremes are various hybrid forms, where tourist participation creates value both in the experience itself and contributes to the further development of the destination. This can include temporary events, prototype testing of new experiences, or digital feedback systems that are subsequently incorporated into design processes. Neuhofer et al. (2014) argue that technology acts as an “enabler of value co-creation” (p. 356), enabling co-creation across time and place – and thus broadening our understanding of when and how tourists can be involved.

The different forms of co-creation not only involve methodological differences but also affect how the tourist is understood and positioned. In experience-based co-creation, the tourist is typically a participant who creates value through active engagement and emotional involvement. In strategic co-creation, the tourist is instead a potential co-developer whose perspective can contribute to long-term innovation and sustainable development. Across approaches, there is a shared understanding that value is not transferred from producer to consumer but arises in use and interaction – what Vargo and Lusch (2004) have termed value-in-use.

Dimension	Experiential Co-Creation	Strategic Co-Creation
Timing	During the experience	Before and after the experience
Tourist's Role	Participant, co-experiencer	Contributor, knowledge-provider, co-developer
Purpose	Enhance personal experience	Inform long-term development and planning
Format	Cooking classes, guided activities, interaction	Feedback interviews, digital surveys, prototype testing
Motivation Type	Intrinsic (fun, engagement, exploration)	Extrinsic or mixed (perceived value, impact, recognition)
Value Creation	In the moment, through interaction (value-in-use)	Through influence on future offerings
Level of Formality	Informal and intuitive	Structured and often facilitated

*Figure 1 Overview of two forms of co-creation in tourism. The table is based on insights from co-creation literature, particularly Campos et al. (2018). Generated using AI (ChatGPT, 2025)*

### 3.2 The Tourist's Role in the Literature

The role of the tourist has undergone a significant transformation in parallel with the development of the co-creation concept in tourism research. While the tourist was previously portrayed as a passive consumer of standardized experiences, newer literature increasingly positions the tourist as an active participant and co-creator of value. As previously mentioned, traditional tourism practices were characterized by a top-down logic, where experiences were designed and delivered by providers, and tourists were expected to consume them without further involvement. This approach was challenged by the experience-oriented turn in tourism, which focused on sensory, personal, and interactive experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Binkhorst, 2006). Co-creation theory has played a central role in this shift. According to Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009), the tourist should no longer be seen as merely a consumer but as an “innovation partner” in the development of both experiences and destinations (p. 2). This understanding rests on the idea that the experience is not something that can be produced and delivered in advance but is created in the interaction between tourist, place, and actors. The tourist thus assumes a more relational and situated role, where their presence, choices, and actions help shape the experienced product. As previously mentioned, several researchers distinguish between different forms of co-creation, which also reflects how the tourist's role is understood. In experience-based co-creation, the tourist is primarily a participant and user who contributes time, energy, and attention to the experience itself (Prebensen et al., 2013). Here, value arises through engagement, emotional involvement, and social interaction. In strategic co-creation, the tourist appears instead as a resource person whose perspectives and preferences can contribute to development processes, in-

novation, and strategic direction (Richards & Duif, 2019). This role requires that the tourist is recognized not only as a customer but also as a potential stakeholder with legitimate knowledge and experience.

Different degrees of involvement influence how the tourist is positioned in the literature – from passive recipient to critical user and active co-developer. Campos et al. (2018) argue that co-creation is not just about participation per se, but also about the degree of empowerment and the feeling of being taken seriously. They emphasize that in some contexts, tourists are still treated as “resources” rather than real partners, which can reduce participation to an instrumental goal rather than a meaningful process. Cohen et al. (2014) take a critical look at the tourist as a consumer in a broader societal context. They note that while tourists are given an active role in theory, this does not necessarily mean that all tourists want, can, or should participate in development activities. This raises questions about the expectations placed on tourists within co-creation logic and what types of participation are meaningful and desired.

As previously mentioned, recent literature tends to view the tourist as a more complex and situated actor, whose motivation and involvement are not given but depend on context, relationships, and perceived value. This highlights the need to distinguish between different tourist types, degrees of participation, and roles in co-creation – an aspect that this thesis seeks to explore further.

### **3.3 Motivation and Value in the Literature**

Motivation has for decades been a central area of research across many disciplines and industries – including tourism. As early as the mid-20th century, the concept was linked to human needs through Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which is still used as a classic theoretical reference point in the understanding of consumer behavior. According to Maslow (1943), human motivation is hierarchically structured, moving from basic physical needs (such as food, sleep, and safety) to more complex psychological and self-fulfillment needs (such as belonging, recognition, and personal growth). In a tourism context, this model is used to explain how tourists are driven by both lower and higher-level needs – from the desire for relaxation and security to the search for authenticity, personal development, and meaning. As society has evolved and fundamental needs are more easily met in everyday life, some researchers, such as Gilmore and Pine (2007) and Reisinger (2009), argue that the hierarchy of needs in certain travel contexts may appear “inverted” – meaning that it is the higher-order needs that are activated first. Many modern travelers are thus not primarily motivated by the need to “get away and relax,” but by the desire to grow personally, form connections, contribute to some-

thing greater, or participate in meaningful communities. This shift creates a more dynamic understanding of travel motivation and creates space to see tourist engagement as driven by value-based, self-fulfilling, and social factors.

A large portion of classical tourism motivation research has focused on travel motivation – that is, why tourists choose to travel and why they choose their destinations. This is often addressed through the well-known push and pull model, where push factors refer to internal, psychological needs and motivations (such as the need for escape, relaxation, or adventure), while pull factors refer to the external characteristics of the destination that attract the tourist (e.g., climate, culture, or activities). Across studies, motivation is described as the driving force behind human behavior and a key element in consumer decision-making. As Yoon and Uysal (2005) put it: “Motivation is perhaps best described as ‘psychological/biological needs and wants, including integral forces that arouse, direct and integrate a person’s behaviour and activity’” (Yoon & Uysal, 2005, p. 46, cited in Cohen et al., 2014, p. 881). Nevertheless, motivation is often treated implicitly in the tourism literature – typically as a background factor rather than a distinct level of analysis. Kay (2003) points out that motivation is often used for segmenting and profiling tourists but is rarely analyzed as a context-dependent and multidimensional driver. She calls for a more dynamic understanding of how motivation arises and changes during the travel experience, and how it relates to tourists’ involvement and evaluation of value.

As the concept of motivation has become linked with involvement and engagement, there has ~~also~~ been growing attention to how tourists experience value in their interaction with the destination. Value creation, or value co-creation, is a concept often tied to the interaction between consumer and context and, in a tourism context, is understood as the meaning tourists themselves assign to the experience. Prebensen, Vittersø, and Dahl (2013) use the concept of perceived value and connect it directly to both motivation and involvement. They stress that value is not only about functional benefits or price – but just as much about the emotional and relational dimensions of the experience. Several researchers emphasize that value creation in tourism differs from traditional service contexts because the product, the experience itself, is intangible, ephemeral, and largely created in the moment. This perspective is shared by Vargo and Lusch (2004), who introduced the concept of value-in-use – that is, value is not something transferred from producer to consumer, but something that arises through use and interaction. Chathoth et al. (2013) follow a similar approach and argue that “value is co-created through the integration of resources in the consumption experience” (p. 14). This understanding has gained particular relevance in tourism research, where the tourist is increasingly seen as a co-creator of value – not just a recipient. A growing number of recent studies attempt to link tourist

motivation with perceived value. Prebensen et al. (2013) highlights that both motivation and involvement are key preconditions for the value tourists experience when encountering a destination. Their research shows that tourists who are motivated and actively engage in the experience tend to assign higher value to the destination. In this view, value is not merely a post-rationalized outcome of consumption but something that emerges from participation and interaction with the place and its actors. Here, value and involvement are seen as mutually reinforcing processes in which feelings of meaning and participation play a central role. Particularly relevant in relation to co-creation is the question of what motivates tourists to engage more actively in the destination they visit. While most motivation theory in tourism research focuses on the beginning of the journey, co-creation thinking raises new questions about the tourist's role as a co-developer – not just consumer. Prebensen et al. (2013) emphasize that tourists' motivation for involvement in the destination is closely tied to emotional attachment and personal relevance. When tourists feel that their contributions matter and that their engagement leads to concrete outcomes or social value, the likelihood of participation increases. Cohen et al. (2014) note strong connections between motivation, satisfaction, and loyalty, and that tourists' experience of value is crucial to how they relate to the destination. It is suggested that satisfied tourists who feel connected to a place are not only more likely to return but also potentially willing to engage in its development. Motivation for involvement thus does not necessarily exist in advance but can emerge as the tourist experiences value, belonging, and meaningfulness during the visit. Kay (2003) also highlights that the degree of engagement and participation depends on how the tourist is invited to participate and what opportunities are given for genuine influence. Motivation for involvement is therefore not a fixed trait in the tourist, but a result of the interplay between individual needs, social relations, and the destination's ability to facilitate co-creation.

Although co-creation in tourism research often focuses on processes and forms of involvement, questions of why tourists participate – and what they gain from it – are still only sparsely addressed. Some of the literature mentions motivation as a factor, but often implicitly and without systematic treatment (Campos et al., 2015). There remains a need for a deeper understanding of what drives tourists to engage in co-creation activities – and how they experience value through participation. A number of studies emphasize that tourists' willingness to participate in co-creation is closely linked to the value they themselves experience through the involvement (Prebensen et al., 2013; Rihova et al., 2015). This value is often experience-based and emerges through the interaction with the destination – rather than through the end product. Value arises not only through functional benefits but through the feeling of being heard, contributing something meaningful, and gaining insight into something local or authentic. Prebensen et al. (2013) describe value creation as a result of both the individual's own resources and the context in which they are embedded. Participation in co-creation

can foster a sense of ownership, belonging, and meaningfulness – especially when the activity allows for social interaction or learning. Rihova et al. (2015) point out that value can be both individual and collective, and that tourists often engage when they feel their participation brings joy or insight to others – such as travel companions, locals, or future guests. However, several studies also point out that tourists' motivation and perceived value are situationally dependent and vary with context, timing, and personal preferences (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). This raises the question of to what extent tourists want to be co-creators – and whether involvement is always desirable from their perspective.

### **3.4 Critical Perspectives and Research Gaps**

Although the literature generally highlights the potential of co-creation in tourism, there are also critical perspectives that point to challenges and weaknesses in the concept and its application in practice. A recurring concern in the research is that the co-creation concept is often used broadly and without clear conceptual boundaries. It is not always evident what participation concretely entails, how it is organized, and what effect it has on the tourist's experience or on destination development. Richards and Marques (2012) note that the concept is often used as a strategic ideal rather than a clearly defined practice. A related critique concerns the power dynamics in co-creation processes. Dredge and Gyimóthy (2015) question whether co-creation truly involves equal participation or whether it risks reproducing existing structures and primarily serving the interests of destinations and businesses. They caution that tourists are sometimes involved on the provider's terms – rather than their own – which can dilute the concept's transformative potential. At the same time, several researchers challenge the underlying assumption that all tourists wish to be involved. Dredge and Jenkins (2011) emphasize that participation in development processes requires motivation, understanding, and resources – which are not necessarily present in all tourists. They point out that some tourists prefer to remain consumers and value the curated, uninterrupted experience. The idea of the tourist as a universally engaged and co-creating actor thus risks becoming normative – overlooking the diversity of travel motives, roles, and levels of engagement that exist in practice. If co-creation is to be meaningful, it must not be assumed that participation is inherently desirable for everyone – but rather offered as an option, where the degree and form of involvement are tailored to the individual tourist's preferences and expectations.

In addition, several researchers highlight a range of organizational and structural barriers to the implementation of co-creation in tourism. Jernsand and Kraff (2015) point out that many actors lack the resources, organizational maturity, and experience to facilitate co-creation processes. This can result

in co-creation being limited to small, short-term, and experimental initiatives, rather than being part of a long-term strategic approach to destination development. In this context, several literature reviews identify significant research gaps. Mohammadi et al. (2020) note that co-creation research has primarily focused on the tourist's role in the experience itself (micro level), while co-creation in broader, strategic contexts – including sustainability, long-term planning, and community involvement – remains relatively unexplored. The question of how tourists can best be involved in complex decision-making processes and which formats create value for both tourist and destination is still open. A particularly important research gap concerns the tourist's own perspective. As previously mentioned, much of the literature is characterized by provider-focused approaches or theoretical models, while relatively few studies explore tourists' own experiences with co-creation and their attitudes towards it. Campos et al. (2018) and Prebensen, Kim, and Uysal (2016) stress that there is a lack of empirical knowledge about what motivates tourists to participate, what barriers they face, and how they perceive their role as co-creators in practice. However, the tourist's voice is not entirely absent in literature. Pearce and Schänzel (2013) have studied how tourists relate to destination management, and their study shows that tourists recognize the need for governance while also expressing concerns about overregulation and loss of authenticity. Their focus group-based research indicates that tourists hold nuanced views on how destinations should be developed and managed – but it does not address co-creation as a concrete form of participation, nor does it explore how tourists experience being involved in decision-making processes.

## **4. Theory**

This chapter presents the theoretical foundations underpinning the problem formulation and subsequent analysis. It begins with an introduction to the co-creation framework and a clarification of how this concept is applied analytically throughout the thesis. Following this, the selected theory of motivation is introduced, along with a rationale for its relevance and applicability—despite not being fully embedded within tourism research. The chapter concludes with a visual representation of the analytical framework that guides the interpretation of the empirical material.

### **4.1 Co-creation Theory**

In this thesis, the concept of co-creation is employed as a contextual and conceptual framework to understand how tourists respond to participatory formats that are explicitly designed to serve developmental goals in tourism. While the literature distinguishes between experiential and strategic

forms of co-creation (Campos et al., 2018), this study focuses solely on the strategic dimensions defined as tourist participation that contribute to the planning, development or improvement of tourism offerings. This decision is based on the analytical scope of the thesis: although some interview responses evoke elements of experiential engagement, the empirical focus is on tourists' reactions to invitations that imply a developmental purpose. Therefore, experiential co-creation is not examined analytically but acknowledges as part of the broader conceptual landscape.

Strategic co-creation refers to structured and intentional forms of participation, where tourists are not merely asked to reflect on their personal experiences, but are invited to provide feedback, ideas, or evaluations that can inform future tourism development. These forms may take the shape of surveys, feedback interviews, prototype testing, or digital engagement platforms. In this context, tourists are positioned not just as consumers or participants, but as potential co-developers whose insights and preferences may be used by tourism stakeholders to innovate or improve offerings.

The analytical challenge lies in the fact that strategic co-creation is rarely presented explicitly as such—neither in research nor in practical implementation. It is often described through adjacent concepts such as user involvement, participatory planning, or customer feedback. As a result, this thesis does not define strategic co-creation by terminology alone, but rather by its function: if a participatory practice is intended to inform tourism development or strategic decision-making, it is considered strategic co-creation. By adopting this functional understanding, the framework enables a more precise discussion of how tourists perceive and respond to such invitations. The aim is not to assess whether co-creation "succeeds" but to explore whether tourists experience these formats as legitimate, engaging, or intrusive. In this way, co-creation defines the structural context of participation, while psychological and behavioural theories (such as those on motivation and decision-making) help to explain the individual responses tourists give to these opportunities.

## **4.2 Motivation Theory and Typology**

Understanding what motivates tourists to engage in strategic co-creation can help identify different categories of tourist involvement and provide a more nuanced understanding of their potential impacts (Page, S. J., & Connell, J. 2006). As mentioned in the literature review, motivation theories in tourism have traditionally focused on explaining why people travel, and why they choose particular destinations. However, such these theories can also help illuminate why tourist opt out of certain activities. Thus, understanding participation involves understanding non-participation.

Tourist behaviour is influenced by a wide range of factors, including gender, age, ethnicity, cultural conditioning, social influence, education, and individual perception Mason, P. (2017). Iso-Ahola (1982) points out, psychologist and social psychologist generally agree that “a motive is an internal factor that arouses, directs and integrates a person’s behaviour” (Murray, 1964, as cited in Iso-Ahola, 1982). In the light of this, the act of choosing to participate, or not to participate, in strategic co-creation initiatives must be seen as part of a wider decision-making process. As Hall and Page (2002) argue, “the factors which shape the tourist decision-making process to select and participate in specific forms of tourism is [sic] largely within the field of consumer behaviour and motivation.” (p. 61). Decision-making, at its core, is the act of choosing between alternatives. This logic also applies to the micro-decisions tourists make during their stay. Choosing to participate in an activity simultaneously implies the rejection of other options. Thus, motivation acts as a trigger which stimulates the chain of events in the tourism process Page, S. J., & Connell, J. (2006).

Studying consumer behaviour and thus also motivation goes beyond identifying surface-level reasons for actions. It’s about engaging with deeper psychological drivers (Mason, P. 2017). As Whalmsley (2004, in Page & Connell, 2020) notes, motivation research requires not just an explanation of behaviour but an understanding of it. This positions the inquiry within a more psychological frame, one that seeks to uncover the fundamental underlying tourist behaviour. Iso-Ahola’s contribution to motivations studies is particularly relevant in the context of leisure tourism. He argues that motivation to engage in leisure activities can be traced to two fundamental forces: approach, which comprises seeking positive experiences, and avoidance, which is the essence of escaping from routine. Following this line of thought, tourists perceive leisure activities as potential sources of satisfaction because they offer intrinsic awards, such as feelings of mastery and competences, and simultaneously serve as a break from everyday life.

Although this thesis does not focus on the purchase of tangible tourism products, it does explore whether tourists are willing to “buy into” the idea of contributing to strategic destinations development. In that way the tourists, as a consumer, engages in a process of evaluation and decision-making, one that applies to ideas, activities and level of engagement.

The related fields of psychology and sociology have provided the foundations for many researchers to develop significant theories on motivation. But in these theories motivations tend to be a fairly static concept, and having only the concepts of one theory may oversimplify a complex, layered process, that is understanding the motivations of tourists. Theories, like Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs, pull and push factors, Cohen and Plog’s typologies have long shaped our understanding of tourists’ motivation, and while these theories have been critiqued for their descriptive nature, rather than explanatory (Harrill & Potts, 2002), they remain useful for building basic distinctions. However, in order to

deepen the analytical insight, I also draw upon the motivation theory Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (2002). SDT was originally formulated within the field of psychology but has been used in a broad range of fields concerned with human motivation such as healthcare, leadership and the experience economy. SDT shares a lot of the same thoughts as motivation theories more used in the field of tourism. Like Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Kilde), SDT is built around the assumption that all humans possess fundamental psychological needs. In the context of SDT these fundamental psychological needs are three: competence, that is to say to feel confident and effective in relation to whatever it is you are doing. The second need is to feel relatedness. That is so to say to feel cared for by others, to care for others, and/or to feel like you belong in various groups that are important to you. And the third need is to autonomy. Autonomy is actually a deeply rooted human need, that refers to self-determination, independence, and self-governance. It means being able to make one's own decisions without external influence and to act in accordance with one's own values and goals (Deci & Ryan, 2002). The word originates from the Greek *autos* (self) and *nomos* (law) (Kilde). In psychology autonomy refers to the feeling of having control over one's own actions and decisions, and that these actions are aligned with one's own needs and desires (Kilde). To put it simple; "I, the self or individual, want to choose for my self what I do. I want to feel free and not pressured." A human need is something that people must get satisfied for optimal wellness and for optimal performance (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Thus, autonomy in particular plays a crucial role in determining whether or not a tourist will engage in strategic co-creation with a destination. In a tourism context this means that a tourist might say "this seems fun" or "I'd do this anyway" which is an indication of high autonomy, where the individual feels that the activity aligns with their own needs, whereas another might respond "not on my holiday" if they feel pushed into participating which then again indicates a low autonomy. Deci & Ryan (2002) argues that when these three needs are not fulfilled, the result is often disengagement or resistance. In this way SDT confirms Maslow's hierarchy of needs but provides greater nuance in how needs are structured and experienced.

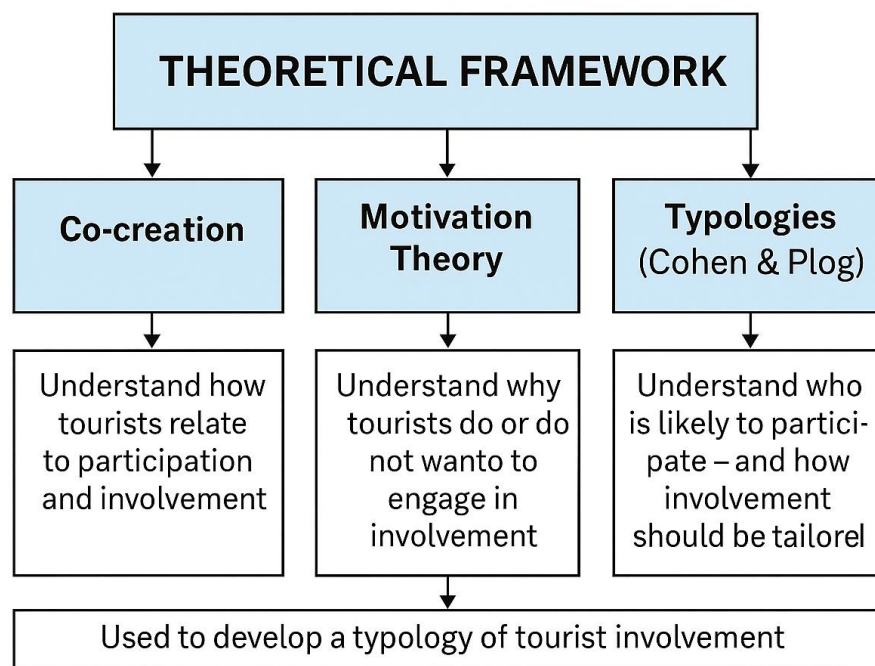
While SDT is rarely applied in tourism research, perhaps because it complicates the assumption that motivation is a unitary concept, SDT offers valuable tools and a lens for this. Rather than employing SDT as a rigid theoretical framework, I use it as an analytical lens or inspiration by adapting its key concepts to help interpret my empirical findings. In this sense, SDT functions as a guide to understanding the deeper psychological mechanisms that inform tourists' behaviour. For example, when a tourist is asked to provide feedback on an experience, several motivational factors come into play. If she says yes, it may be because she feels autonomous in her choice, to say that she is not coerced or pressured. She may feel competent if the questions are easy to understand, giving her a

sence of control and efficacy. And she may feel relatedness if she perceives her feedback as helping others or contributing to a greater cause. In this way, SDT provides a vocabulary for understanding why some tourists choose to engage, while others do not. The need for competence is also something that Iso-Ahola, S. E. (1982) emphasizes in his theory of tourism motivation alongside with the concept of intrinsic rewards. Deci & Ryan (2002) distinguishes in SDT between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is enjoyable or interesting in itself. Extrinsic motivation on the other hand, refers to doing something for an external reward or outcome. This distinction becomes especially relevant in tourism, where motivations often blend personal interest with situational influences. The SDT is not used in isolation in this thesis. It's complemented by the pull-push framework and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. These models help situate the motivational drivers within the context of tourism specifically, while SDT enriches understanding by connecting these drives to psychological needs. In connection with the concept of relatedness, place attachment theory also becomes relevant. Place attachment refers to the emotional, cognitive, and functional bonds that individuals form with specific places, often as a result of meaningful experiences (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). In tourism contexts, such attachments can influence how visitors perceive their role and legitimacy in contributing to a destination's development (Ramkissoon et al., 2012). While place attachment is only briefly addressed in this thesis, it provides a useful conceptual supplement to relatedness, in understanding why some tourists may feel entitled, or reluctant to engage in co-creative processes with the places they visit.

The practical value of these insights lies in their applicability to segmentation. As Laws (1991, cited in Page & Connell 2006) argues, categorizing tourists has practical utility, even if not all individuals fit neatly into predefined typologies. Segmenting tourists according to behavioural patterns, interests, or attitudes can help destinations understand which groups are most likely to engage in strategic co-creation, and in what ways. Segmentations not only facilitate more targeted engagement strategies, but also helps us understand which formats, message, and participation channels are more likely to resonate with different tourist types (Page, S. J., & Connell, J. (2006). In this thesis, Cohen's typologies are used as reference points for categorising informants. While not definitive, the typologies, when combined with psychological theories such as SDT, provide a rich basis for analysing the motivations and hesitations tourists express. Ultimately, this dual perspective enhances our ability to understand who is likely to engage in strategic co-creation, why they might do so, and how such engagement can be designed to meet both individual and organisational goals.

Crucially, this combined approach is used to explain the diverse ways in which tourists relate to the idea of involvement. While some express enthusiasm and a desire to contribute actively, others show

clear reluctance or even resistance. These differences are not random—they reflect underlying psychological needs (e.g., autonomy, competence, relatedness), varying travel styles, and distinct interpretations of what it means to "participate." By drawing on these patterns, I propose an original typology of tourists based on their perceived role and willingness to engage in strategic co-creation. This typology is not meant to impose rigid categories but to function as an analytical tool that captures the spectrum of tourist engagement from those who actively seek out opportunities to co-create, to those who prefer to remain observers or consumers.



**Figure 2:** This theoretical framework integrates co-creation theory, motivation theory, and typological approaches to explain how, why, and who engages in strategic participation. These perspectives are not treated in isolation, but are used in combination to interpret tourists' attitudes, behaviours, and self-perceptions regarding involvement in destination development. Generated using AI (ChatGPT, 2025)

## 5. Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative analysis conducted on the basis of 14 interviews with tourists visiting Copenhagen. The overall purpose of the analysis is to investigate how tourists relate to the idea of being involved in the development of a destination, and to what extent they are willing to contribute to the co-creation of the places they temporarily inhabit. The analysis is organised into four thematic sections, each addressing a central dimension of the research question: 1) tourists' motivations and perceived barriers for participation, 2) their preferences regarding different

formats of involvement, 3) their perceived roles and relationships to the destination, and 4) emerging participation patterns and typologies.

The analysis is grounded in an abductive approach, which enables a dynamic interplay between empirical material and theoretical concepts, particularly those related to co-creation, motivation, and tourist typologies. Instead of testing predetermined hypotheses, the aim is to uncover the diverse and sometimes contradictory ways in which tourists understand and engage with the notion of participation. Special attention is given to how tourists perceive invitations to engage, how they evaluate the relevance and feasibility of different involvement formats, and how they position themselves in relation to the development of the destination. Finally, the chapter concludes with the construction of a typology consisting of three ideal types, which combine key variations in tourists' attitudes and orientations towards participation.

## **5.1 General Motivations and Barriers**

This section explores the general motivations and barriers that shape tourists' willingness—or reluctance—to engage in the development of the destinations they visit. Rather than assuming a uniform approach to participation, the analysis investigates the diverse considerations, emotions, and underlying values that inform tourists' attitudes toward involvement. While some informants express a desire to contribute constructively others highlight concerns related to effort, irrelevance, or a lack of perceived legitimacy. By examining these patterns, the section sheds light on the complex set of factors that influence whether and how tourists are open to participating in co-creative processes during their travels.

### **5.1.1 Knowledge-sharing**

In the analysis of what motivates or inhibits tourists' willingness to participate, a general sense of positivity emerged regarding the idea of sharing experiences and providing feedback during their trip. This willingness is often driven by a desire to help other travelers by passing on one's own experiences and insights. When asked what would motivate them to give feedback to a destination, one informant responded:

“Certainly to pass on knowledge of things we enjoyed particularly and how we got to each spot (...)  
Definitely to support future visits for other people.”

*(Informant 7, British woman, 48 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 4 days)*

For this informant, the motivation to participate is the opportunity to use her personal resources, specifically knowledge or know-how, to improve something. This can be seen as a form of internalised motivation, where sharing is associated with contributing to other tourists' experiences. It aligns with the drive and desire of tourists to engage in behaviours that benefit others, such as local communities, the environment, or fellow travellers (Deng, Pengfei & Zhou, Xingye & Xie, Dan & Zheng, Peng 2024; Ferre D 2024). Here, motivation stems from a wish to help without expecting direct personal gain. Viewed through the lens of SDT, this would be classified as intrinsic motivation, where the action is undertaken because it is inherently meaningful and satisfying (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Interestingly, the informant's perceived autonomy is not tied to making independent decisions but rather to acting according to personal values, namely doing something because it feels right and purposeful. In this case, sharing experiences becomes a way to contribute to something relevant and valuable by potentially making a difference for other travellers. At the same time, her statement highlights a particular form of value embedded in the social space of tourism. When she expresses the desire to "pass on knowledge of things we enjoyed," it reveals a need to reciprocate a practice from which she has benefitted. This suggests a form of indirect co-creation among tourists, precisely what Rihova et al. (2015) describe as value co-creation as a social practice, where value arises through direct interaction and asynchronous exchange. This form of "invisible co-creation" is fascinating, as it illustrates how tourists' experience of contributing to others can be a source of meaning, rather than merely a response to the destination as an institution. It signals a relational connection to a broader tourist community. It corresponds to what Deci and Ryan (2000) identify as the need for relatedness, manifesting as a sense of social connectedness (Zhu, P. et al., 2022; Chi, C. G., Han, H., & Kim, H. 2022). Other informants extended this motivation by linking their engagement to a broader desire to enhance the tourist experience for future visitors as a whole:

"To maybe share more experiences with other tourists, like give ideas and also how to improve maybe tourist experience because I mean tourism is important for cities."

*(Informant 3, Swiss woman, 19 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 3 days)*

This response suggests a more reflective stance on sharing experiences. The informant sees herself not only as a participant in a shared tourist community, but also as a potential actor in a broader context. This is a form of twofold motivation to help other tourists and to improve the destination experience, based on the recognition that tourism plays a role in the city's growth and economy. In SDT

terms, this reflects a shift from purely intrinsic motivation to identified regulation, where the individual engages in an activity because it aligns with personal values and beliefs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Her comment introduces concepts from tourism theory concerning destination stewardship and the active role of the tourist in urban development. Recent literature has shifted from viewing tourists as passive consumers to seeing them as co-responsible co-creators, especially in the context of sustainable and inclusive tourism strategies (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009; Dredge & Jenkins, 2011). By stating that “tourism is important for cities,” the informant articulates an understanding that her experience is part of a larger system—and that her perspective may have significance.

Her motivation may also be understood as a form of *empowerment* because she feels her knowledge and experience can make a difference. This overlaps with Rihova et al.’s (2015) concept of “co-creation of meaning”, where tourist participation is not only physical but also cognitive and emotional, a way of positioning oneself in relation to the destination’s narrative and development.

From this perspective, her statement expresses both pro-social intention (Chi, C. G., Han, H., & Kim, H., 2022) and engaged participation within the tourism ecosystem. It is not necessarily about exerting direct influence but about contributing to an ongoing flow of experiences and improvements that extend beyond her visit. This dynamic space between individual experience and collective value is precisely what the concept of co-creation in tourism seeks to capture.

### 5.1.2 Social Motivation

Another dimension of motivation that emerged during the coding of interviews relates to social interaction and the desire for human connection. For some informants, the willingness to get involved is not driven by a wish to improve the destination or help others but rather by the opportunity to engage with people, both locals and fellow tourists:

“I think it is good, yeah, because you can talk to people who live here in the city.”

*(Informant 5, German, 22 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 5 days)*

This statement reflects a desire to move beyond the role of passive observer and instead enter into dialogue with the people who inhabit the destination. Here, involvement becomes more than an exchange of information. It also serves as a means to build relationships and experience the city through human encounters. Again, this can be seen as intrinsic motivation, closely tied to the SDT

concept of relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). It also touches on the relationship between host and guest, suggesting a more inclusive and welcoming dynamic that moves beyond a binary of “us” and “them” toward a more collective “we.” The social dimension and sense of community are further emphasised by Informant 20, who highlights the importance of interactions with other tourists:

“Maybe the conversations with other tourists so you can share some tips and information.”

*(Informant 20, German, 27 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 4 days)*

While more informal, this quote contains an important insight: For some tourists, the social aspects of travel motivate them to engage because it fosters a sense of mutual exchange and shared exploration. The focus is not necessarily on the destination itself but on the relational practices that emerge in connection with visiting it. This perspective aligns with experiential co-creation, where value is derived from participation and social interaction, not just the outcomes that may result (Campos et al., 2018; Prebensen). This suggests that human contact and dialogue can be influential motivational factors for involvement. This line of thought is supported by Informant 18, who expressed:

“I need to actually interact with people and share my opinions this way.”

*(Informant 18, Danish, frequent visitor to Copenhagen, stay duration: 1 day)*

This states that human contact and dialogue make participation and feedback feel real, engaging, and taken seriously. It implicitly suggests that when feedback is collected via impersonal systems, it may be perceived as superficial or meaningless. The statement can be interpreted as a critique of what Ritzer (2015) describes as the McDonaldization of experiences, where standardized systems reduce human interactions to efficiency and control, potentially eroding the perceived value of the individual voice. Informant 16 elaborates on this point by reflecting on how personal chemistry and authenticity influence her willingness to participate:

“(...) it depends I think on the person who asked. I know that’s not good to say, but (...) If it is a person I think is sympathetic, I think I will answer the questions more likely.”

*(Informant 16, German, 26 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 3 days)*

This quote illustrates how relationships and the human dimension of context play a significant role in shaping engagement. It is not only about *what* is being asked but also *who* is asking and *how* they ask. In a co-creation context, Neuhofer et al. (2014) underline this, emphasising that the feeling of

being acknowledged and taken seriously is critical for tourists' experience of creation and thus also for their willingness to participate. In other words, trust and relational safety must be present for genuine dialogue to unfold.

### 5.1.3 Emotional Intensity

Several participants emphasised that they only provide feedback when an experience has been extreme—either highly positive or deeply negative:

“I only give feedback if I’ve experienced something I thought was really bad, and I’ve been furious. In a way, it’s my way of regaining a bit of control. On the other hand, I guess I also give ‘feedback’ when I experience something great, but that’s more in the form of telling everyone about this amazing experience.”<sup>2</sup>

*(Informant 26, Danish, 30 years old, frequent visitor to Copenhagen, stay duration: 3 days)*

These statements confirm a well-documented tendency in service design and consumer theory: responses are most often triggered by experiences at the emotional extremes (Sweeney et al., 1999). In this context, feedback becomes a form of justice-seeking behaviour. Not merely an assessment of quality, but a psychological tool for processing and reacting to emotionally charged events. It functions as a form of emotional compensation: a way to restore balance if the experience failed to meet the implicit value contract or conversely, a way of expressing gratitude. As one participant put it:

“You want to be compensated. Not necessarily with money, but by having your voice heard. Because you paid – with your time, your money, your energy.”

*(Informant 13, USA, 53 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 7 days)*

This statement reflects both a consumer logic and a deep emotional investment. What is being evaluated is not “just” a service—it is the tourist’s holiday, their memories, their energy. This resonates with Pine & Gilmore’s (1999) theory of the experience economy, which holds that experiences are not merely services, but deeply personal events involving individual engagement and emotional investment. When such experiences fall short, the resulting disappointment is not perceived as a simple

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<sup>2</sup> Translated from Danish to English. Original quote in appendix 14.

“service error,” but rather as a rupture in the destination’s perceived authenticity and integrity. Expressing one’s opinion thus becomes not only a rational act, but also an emotional reaction, and a way for the tourist to process an experience that either enriched or conflicted with the anticipated narrative of their holiday.

These situational forms of motivation also relate to SDT’s notion of needs satisfaction. When an experience has either supported or threatened the tourist’s sense of autonomy, competence, or relatedness, it may activate the need to respond—either through praise or critique. Feedback thereby becomes an expression of how the tourist perceives the balance between personal investment and experiential return.

#### **5.1.4 Framing, Accessibility, and Mental Availability**

Several informants linked their motivation to the specific conditions surrounding participation. In other words, it is not solely about willingness or the desire to help others, as illustrated in previous quotes, but also about when, how, and how much effort it requires. Participation was frequently evaluated in terms of whether it felt appropriate and easy to integrate into the holiday experience:

“If it was easy and not time-consuming, then yes. But otherwise, I’m here to enjoy my time.”  
(*Informant 22, Portuguese, 27 years old, first-time visitor to Copenhagen, stay duration: 5 days*)

This statement clearly illustrates that complexity and time investment play a crucial role in whether tourists are motivated to engage. Motivation here is not just a matter of interest, but also of practical capacity and perceived ability to contribute. In service design literature, this aligns with the importance of convenience and low-effort solutions (Witell et al., 2011). Within the SDT framework, it can be linked to the concept of perceived competence meaning the tourist’s self-assessed ability to complete a task without excessive cognitive or practical strain. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), motivation is only sustainable when the individual feels both competent and autonomous in their actions. If participation is experienced as distracting or mentally taxing, motivation may drop. Not because interest is lacking, but because it exceeds the person’s mental or emotional capacity at that moment. This suggests that mental availability plays a significant role.

The statement “*I’m here to enjoy my time*” indicates that holidays are perceived primarily as a time for recreation, not reflection. For many, holidays represent an alternative mode of being—a temporary reality in which rest, sensory enjoyment, and distraction are prioritised. Tourists are not in the

same “gear” as in everyday or professional life, where more complex tasks and feedback may feel natural. While on vacation, they are in a different mood—and thus in a different psychological and social position (Iso-Ahola, S. E., 1982).

This connection between setting and state of mind is made especially clear in the following quote from Informant 18:

“It has to be in a good point when I’m on a rush to get somewhere or I’m exhausted of the day because I walked so much around I think it’s not the best time [...] but especially I’m sitting here it’s okay because I do a break [...] and it’s a good time to ask.”

*(Informant 18, German, 26 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 3 days)*

This illustrates how participation is highly dependent situation. The issue is not necessarily the format itself, but whether tourists are approached at a moment when they are mentally and emotionally ready. Informant 18 is open to participating, but only if it fits into a “pause” in the day, when she feels relaxed and available. This highlights that giving feedback or engaging while travelling is not merely a rational decision; it also depends on feeling present and having enough capacity. As Neuhofer et al. (2014) note in their work on digital co-creation, engagement often hinges on a form of situational readiness—whether the tourist feels mentally and physically prepared in the moment. Their findings show that low complexity and high usability increase tourists’ willingness to engage in co-creation processes. It is not only about what people are willing to do—but whether they have the bandwidth to do it. This calls for more situation-sensitive approaches to tourist participation that insist on designing involvement opportunities based on tourist logic and holiday practices, rather than the destination’s need for input. This point is further reinforced by Informant 7:

"As long as it’s not taking anything away from our plans. If it’s on the way to do something else."

*(Informant 13, American, 53 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 7 days)*

These three quotes demonstrate that motivation to participate is not exclusively about willingness, but also about appropriate conditions, perceived competence, and timing. It emphasises the need for flexible and context-aware participation formats that align with the tourist’s state of mind and leisure rhythm.

Finally, it is worth noting that some tourists refrain from participating for more basic reasons. When asked what might discourage engagement, one informant simply stated:

“Laziness.”

*(Informant 17, German, 23 years old, Spain, first-time visitor, 1 day)*

While seemingly banal, this response highlights a fundamental point we must not overlook when discussing motivation: that participation also depends on basic human factors such as energy, priorities, and mood. In this case, it is not about cultural distance, perceived legitimacy, or lack of competence, but simply a pragmatic choice not to engage in something that does not feel urgent. Viewed through the lens of classical tourism motivation theories, such as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943), this reflects the prioritisation of more fundamental needs over involvement in social or self-actualising activities, particularly while on holiday.

### **5.1.5 Sense of Safety and the Role of Travel Companions**

The sense of safety and the motivation to participate in co-creative activities such as feedback sessions or workshops appear closely tied to whom the tourist is travelling with. The interviews revealed that informants travelling in larger groups (typically four people or more) were more likely to choose the socially oriented and dialogue-based examples of involvement presented during the interviews. In contrast, solo travellers and couples tended to prefer examples that allowed them to provide feedback without significant social interaction. This suggests that the structure of the travel group influences both the perceived sense of security and openness to social participation, and that relational motivation is shaped by how one is present in the destination and with whom.

The reason for this may be twofold: 1) such activities can strengthen group cohesion and 2) contribute to a shared memory both during and after the trip:

“If you’re in a bigger group, and someone’s like, ‘Hey, should we just go to this thing? It could be fun.’ [...] Then it becomes a good memory to bring home, so you can say, ‘Remember when we did that feedback thing? That was hilarious, or great, or however we experienced it.’”<sup>3</sup>

*(Informant 26, Danish, 30 years old, travelling with friends, stay duration: 3 days)*

Here, participation is framed as experiential and relational rather than rational. The primary reason for engaging is the shared experience, not necessarily a strong identification with the purpose. In

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<sup>3</sup> Translated from Danish to English. Original quote is showed in appendix 14

light of co-creation theory, this aligns with the concept of shared engagement (Campos et al., 2018), where value emerges in the collective moment rather than through individual contribution. Conversely, informants travelling as a couple or alone often expressed a lower inclination to engage in such activities. These respondents described a stronger sense of privacy or a desire to protect the intimacy of the travel experience:

“That's our personal opinion, we're not for groups. We're two of us, and we've got our own system of experience in a city or countries.”

*(Informant 11, Croatian, 50 years old, travelling with partner, stay duration: 2 days)*

“If it were just me and my partner travelling, I probably wouldn't be that inclined to do any of these things, unless I really had to.”<sup>4</sup>

*(Informant 26, Danish, 30 years old, travelling with friends, stay duration: 3 days)*

These statements illustrate how the travel context shapes mindset and willingness to participate. When the trip is centred around intimacy, relaxation, or a private experience, tourists are less inclined to take part in social or open formats. This points to the significance of relational motivation, that is, how one's travel companionship affects one's openness, which can be a key factor in tourists' willingness to engage.

#### **5.1.6 Age and life-stage**

Previous research on tourist motivation has highlighted age and life stage as central variables in shaping destination and experience choices (Page & Connell, 2020). In marketing contexts, age is also frequently used as a segmentation parameter, as it is assumed to reflect needs, preferences, and lifestyle characteristics (Page & Connell, 2020). When one informant was presented with the idea of participating in a social workshop with other tourists, she responded:

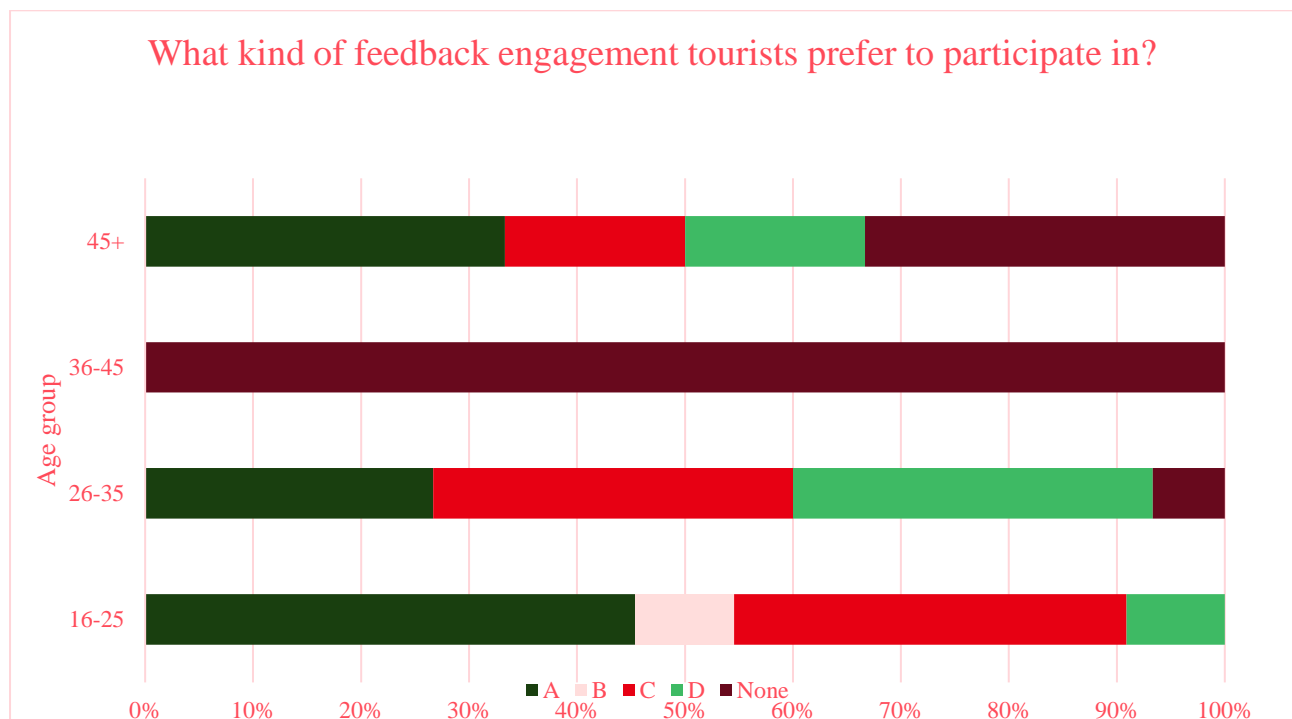
“I would not, but maybe younger people would. Students maybe? They are more free, more live in the day. They do not have such a planned day like older people, I think.”

*(Informant 19, German, 36 years old, stay duration: 4 days)*

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<sup>4</sup> Translated from Danish to English. Original quote is showed in appendix 14

This quote reflects an assumption that younger people are more flexible and spontaneous, and therefore potentially more inclined to engage in novel social or unconventional formats. Based on this, age is included as an analytical lens in this section, exploring whether patterns emerge in the empirical material linking age to preferred modes of participation. Age can be seen as a factor influencing how tourists perceive their autonomy and competence in relation to participation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Younger tourists, for instance, may more easily perceive themselves as free agents, willing to engage spontaneously in social settings, whereas older tourists may place greater value on structure, predictability, and self-management. If the form of involvement does not align with a tourist's sense of freedom or perceived ability to contribute meaningfully, motivation is likely to decrease. At the same time, the need for relatedness may manifest differently depending on age and life situation. While some tourists seek social interaction and community; Others prefer experiences that are private or intimate. This means that the same participatory format can be experienced either as enriching or intrusive depending on where the tourist is in life. To support the analysis, a graph was created to illustrate informants' preferred feedback formats:



As shown in Figure 1, there are clear age-related differences in preferences for involvement. The youngest participants (aged 16–25) demonstrated the greatest diversity in their responses. Although Format A—the least socially demanding option—was popular in this group, the data also show that

this age group was most inclined to choose more experimental and socially oriented formats such as B, C, and D. This suggests that even within a single age category, there is considerable variation. As established in previous sections, some individuals are motivated by efficiency, while others are motivated by social connection.

A similar, albeit more defined, tendency was observed among participants aged 26–35, who showed a stronger preference for experiential and dialogue-based forms of involvement. One likely explanation is that these age groups are in life stages characterised by identity exploration and social orientation, where different degrees of engagement and interaction are experienced as meaningful. This can be interpreted as reflecting an active need for relatedness and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These same age groups were also the ones most explicitly expressing a desire to share, engage in conversation, and meet new people as seen in earlier quotes.

By contrast, none of the informants in the 36–45 age group chose any of the proposed formats. This may indicate a low sense of perceived autonomy or a lack of perceived relevance. A more straightforward explanation may be that these participants simply adopt a different approach to holidaymaking, one in which engagement in destination development is not prioritised. Similarly, many informants in the oldest age group (45+) also preferred not to participate at all, or showed a clear preference for the least demanding format, Format A. This could reflect a desire to contribute without engaging in social or time-consuming activities. It is likely that participation formats requiring active involvement are experienced as less accessible or desirable, thus reducing perceived competence and motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

These tendencies suggest that age groups differ not only in practical preferences but also in how they psychologically engage with tourism. Younger tourists appear to associate feedback more closely with participation, connection, and meaning making, whereas older tourists tend to value self-management and clearer boundaries between leisure and responsibility (Page & Connell, 2020). This underscores the importance of tailoring participatory formats to tourists' life situations and psychological needs if the goal is to foster engagement across age groups.

### **5.1.7 Extrinsic Motivation**

As we have seen, motivation is not a singular or uniform phenomenon. People are rarely motivated by just one factor; instead, motivation often emerges from a complex interplay of influences. As

mentioned in the theory chapter, according to SDT, it is possible to distinguish, though roughly, between two overarching types: on the one hand, *intrinsic motivation*, where actions are driven by internal forces such as meaning, curiosity, or a sense of belonging, as discussed in the previous sections; and on the other hand, *extrinsic motivation*, where behaviour is shaped by external rewards or recognition (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This distinction can also be related to classical push–pull theories in tourism research, where *push factors* refer to internal needs that drive individuals to travel (e.g. the desire for relaxation, change, or adventure), while *pull factors* refer to external elements that attract individuals to a specific destination (e.g. climate, culture, or particular experiences). Translated into the context of this thesis, one could argue that some tourists are motivated by an internal “push” such as a desire to help, connect, or express themselves, whereas others require a “pull” in the form of tangible incentives. Some informants explicitly expressed that external conditions played a central role in their willingness to provide feedback or engage in participatory activities:

“Maybe to get something for free? A coffee, an entrée ticket or a typical Danish thing?”

*(Informant 6, German, 21 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 5 days)*

This statement clearly reflects an extrinsically oriented motivation. Participation is framed here as a kind of transaction, where time and attention are exchanged for a tangible reward. Time emerges as a particularly valuable currency, and the act of “spending one’s holiday on something” requires compensation. The informant elaborated:

“You have to get like a little something for taking some of your time to do it.”

*(Informant 6, German, 21 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 5 days)*

As previously discussed, tourists pay not only financially for their trip, but also with time, energy, and presence. When an engagement, such as participating in a feedback session, is perceived as taking away from the holiday experience, there may be a need for symbolic reciprocity. This supports Deci and Ryan’s claim that when an action is not experienced as self-chosen or inherently meaningful, external stimuli are often required to sustain motivation. It becomes evident that intrinsic motivation is not always sufficient, especially when the activity is perceived as a “task” or a “disruption” during one’s vacation time. In such cases, even small rewards, like a cup of coffee or a local souvenir, can serve as meaning-making mechanisms that legitimise participation. In other words, the social value that might otherwise motivate engagement must be supplemented by something more tangible. This indicates that value in a tourism context is not created exclusively through social interaction but

can also emerge through the individual sense of recognition and reward the tourist experiences in connection with their participation. Co-creation theory emphasises relational value creation, but it also acknowledges that perceived value can be both social and individual, depending on how the tourist interprets the outcome of their own contribution (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Rihova et al., 2015).

## **5.2 Perceived Legitimacy and the Right to Participate**

This section explores how the informants relate to the idea of having the right to participate, and how this perception shapes their motivation and perceived capacity to act.

### **5.2.1 Doubts About the Right and Basis to Express an Opinion**

As discussed in the theory chapter one of the fundamental psychological needs, according to SDT, is the experience of competence—the sense of being capable or knowledgeable enough to act meaningfully (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For several informants, this need emerged as a central issue. Despite being open and willing to participate or provide feedback, they expressed doubt about whether they, as temporary users, had the right or sufficient insight to contribute to the development of a destination:

“I’m only here for a couple of days, so I don’t know if my opinion is really valid.”

*(Informant 22, Portugal, 27 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 5 days)*

This statement illustrates how the sense of legitimate participation is not necessarily grounded in formal rights, but rather in the individual's own assessment of whether they have something qualified to offer. When the duration of one's stay becomes the mental benchmark for whether one feels entitled to voice an opinion, it reflects an unfulfilled need for competence. The informant does not feel “equipped” to provide feedback, and this self-doubt reduces the motivation to engage.

Her response also raises the question: how long must one stay before it is perceived as “enough” to qualify as a legitimate voice? Five days is more than double the average length of stay for city tourists in Copenhagen, which in 2023 was 2.45 days (VisitDenmark, 2023). The empirical material collected shows an average of 3.7 days. Still, five days is constructed as insufficient. This supports the notion that perceived legitimacy is not governed by objective measures such as time, but rather by perceived attachment and cultural embeddedness. This experience of low perceived competence is closely linked to the concept of perceived legitimacy (Wang et al., 2020), which highlights that participation in development processes largely depends on the individual's own sense of being a relevant and valid contributor. It becomes not just a matter of what one is formally allowed to do, but of

what one perceives oneself as capable of doing. At the same time, the feeling of connection plays a decisive role. According to place attachment theory, it is not necessarily one's physical presence, but the emotional bond to a place that forms the foundation for engagement (Ramkissoon et al., 2012). The same applies to SDT's concept of relatedness. If the tourist does not feel any connection to the destination, the incentive to engage diminishes accordingly. Legitimacy thus becomes not just a matter of access, but one of recognised belonging and perceived relevance. This understanding is further nuanced by informants who, despite shorter stays, still considered their experience valid in certain contexts. As one participant put it:

“I mean, you can't be as good as someone who spent weeks or months here, but like you can still give your experience and your opinion about just normal stuff that all tourists will go to.”

*(Informant 3, Swiss, 19 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 3 days)*

Here, a differentiated view of competence emerges, where the informant distinguishes between different levels of legitimacy. While she acknowledges her limited insight, she still perceives her perspective as valuable, particularly in relation to experiences commonly shared by tourists. In SDT terms, this reflects a situated sense of competence, in which she does not feel qualified to speak about the destination as a whole, but she does feel competent enough to provide feedback on specific, publicly accessible elements. This suggests that in some cases, motivation does not require a full sense of mastery, thus only a belief in one's ability to contribute meaningfully within a limited domain. At the same time, this example demonstrates how attachment can develop incrementally, through everyday experiences and interactions with specific places (Ramkissoon et al., 2012).

### **5.2.2 Ethical Considerations and Respect for Locals**

While some informants expressed internal uncertainty about their right to participate, others actively chose to step back out of respect for those who live in the destination. In these cases, participation is framed not as a matter of knowledge or access, but as an ethical issue. Many informants emphasised that it is important not to disrupt the everyday lives of locals or impose on the city's development:

“Yeah I think it sounds like a great idea too (involving tourists), as long as they don't disturb the people who actually live here. I think it's important to be careful about their needs.”

*(Informant 17, Spanish, 23 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 1 day)*

This statement suggests that non-participation does not always stem from a lack of interest but may instead reflect a desire to protect the authenticity of the destination and the daily lives of its residents. It expresses a form of normative restraint, where the tourist believes that others have a greater right to be heard and chooses to demonstrate respect by staying in the background. The informant seeks to maintain a balance between curiosity and humility, which can be interpreted as a form of situational perceived legitimacy (Wang et al., 2020). Here, SDT's concept of relatedness is again relevant, as it points to a need for connection, not just to the place, but also to the people who inhabit it.

Respect for locals and their everyday lives often involves implicit recognition that the uniqueness and authenticity of a destination should not be compromised - even in the name of co-creation. This raises the question of consequence: what happens to the local when everyone is invited to contribute? One informant expressed her concern this way:

“I mean feedback is good, but I wouldn't want to take away from the uniqueness of the city that makes it their own.”

*(Informant 13, American, 53 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 7 days)*

This clearly reveals an awareness that tourism itself can contribute to a form of cultural dilation. What makes the city unique is perceived as belonging to the locals and should be protected. This concern is echoed and elaborated by a younger informant:

“As long as it doesn't take away from the local aspect of it and it's not too global then. Because that's why we're here, is to see the local.”

*(Informant 9, British, 18 years old, stay duration: 4 days)*

Here, it becomes evident that the local and the authentic are key motivations for travel. The tourist is not seeking a familiar or standardised experience, but something that distinguishes this destination from others. If co-creation and tourist involvement result in a destination being shaped according to visitor expectations, there is a risk of erasing precisely the uniqueness that initially attracted them. These reflections highlight an inherent tension in the co-creation paradigm. While co-creation is often praised in theory as an inclusive and meaningful practice (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Campos et al., 2018), several scholars have pointed out that co-creation can also become a strategic tool serving the destination's interests rather than a genuinely open process (Dredge & Jenkins, 2011; Richards & Duif, 2018). When tourists feel that their involvement might threaten local authenticity,

they may adopt a form of moral restraint, not out of indifference, but out of a recognition that their voices should not dominate. This is an ethical stance where non-participation becomes an act of respect and responsibility, rather than resistance to involvement itself. Considering recent critical perspectives within co-creation theory, such responses suggest that co-creation should not be understood as a universal solution, but rather as a context-dependent practice that must account for the social and cultural materiality of the destination. Several informants expressed that it is precisely the specificity, locality, and non-replicable aspects of a place that constitute its value, and that they do not wish to alter. This ethical awareness also comes through in reflections on who should actually have the right to shape a city. Several informants drew a line between being a guest and belonging to a place, like an acknowledgment that cultural ownership rests with those who live there:

“It's up to you and your culture, wherever it is, to decide on those things. I have a choice to be here or not be here.”

*(Informant 15, American, 56 years old, have visited once before, stay duration: 7 days)*

This reflection expresses respect for cultural autonomy. It suggests that it is not the tourist's role to intervene in local matters precisely because their presence is temporary and voluntary. It is a position that frames the tourist as an observer rather than an actor, placing boundaries on participation based on an awareness that the symbolic and practical right to shape a place belongs to those who reside there. From this perspective, co-creation becomes not merely a matter of opportunity or incentives, but of ethical judgment and cultural humility. At the same time, the informant's remark about choice *"I have a choice to be here or not be here"* indicates a strong sense of autonomy in terms of personal mobility, but a low sense of autonomy regarding influence or action. Viewed through the SDT lens, this can be interpreted as a situation where the psychological needs for autonomy and competence are not experienced as activated in relation to participation. The informant does not perceive himself as a “valid” voice in development processes, which suppresses motivation.

### **5.2.3 Principled Resistance to Involvement**

While the vast majority of informants expressed openness to participating and providing feedback, under the right circumstances, the coding of the material also revealed that motivation is not universally present. Some informants rejected involvement not due to lack of time, energy, or perceived

competence, but based on a more fundamental value position: a resistance to the idea that tourists should play any role in shaping the development of a destination. One informant stated:

“The city itself shouldn't go towards tourism. Just keep it like it is. Nothing more.”

*(Informant 11, Croatian, 50 years old, repeat visitor, stay duration: 2 days)*

This principled distance became even clearer in a follow-up comment from the same informant, when asked about participating in feedback activities:

“In general no, but okay, maybe... If you're forced to it maybe.”

*(Informant 11)*

What is most striking about this response is that, for this informant, participation would only occur under pressure, not as the result of personal conviction or a sense of relevance. This absence of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation stands in sharp contrast to the rest of the sample, where participants often mentioned the joy of helping, the desire to be involved, or the wish to make a difference. It represents an extreme end of the motivational spectrum, one that cannot be addressed through better timing or incentives, as it stems from a fundamental, value-based opposition to tourism's societal role. Theoretically, this can be understood as a form of authenticity defense, in which tourists wish to protect the destination from the impact that their own presence could generate (MacCannell, D., 1976; Reisinger, Y., & Steiner, C., 2006). In the tourism and co-creation literature, similar concerns have been raised, with scholars such as Richards & Duif (2018) and Dredge (2016) arguing that co-creation is not always perceived as a right or a privilege. In some cases, it may be viewed as an unwanted responsibility, one that risks undermining the spontaneity and authenticity of the travel experience.

### **5.3 Forms of Involvement and Participation**

While the first analytical section explored informants' motivations and barriers related to participating in feedback processes, the focus of this section shifts to the specific forms of involvement that tourists perceive as relevant, realistic, or attractive. The analysis is grounded in the distinction between experiential and strategic co-creation. Both forms are relevant here, as described by Neuhofer et al. (2014), who define co-creation in tourism as encompassing both “co-constructing the tourist

experience in the moment” and “contributing strategically to tourism innovation and destination development” (p. 353). The concept of co-creation is used analytically to understand what types of involvement tourists prefer, and how they respond to different degrees of participation. It should be emphasised, however, that the informants were primarily introduced to forms of strategic co-creation that is, participation in the development of destination offerings through feedback, suggestions, or evaluations, rather than experiential co-creation, where the tourist takes part in shaping their own experience in the moment. At the same time, concepts from SDT are used to examine how perceptions of autonomy, engagement, and control influence how tourists assess the different formats.

In the interviews, informants were presented with four possible ways of engaging in the development of a destination—ranging from quick feedback options to more involved and social formats. These formats are described in the methodology section but are summarised again here for clarity:

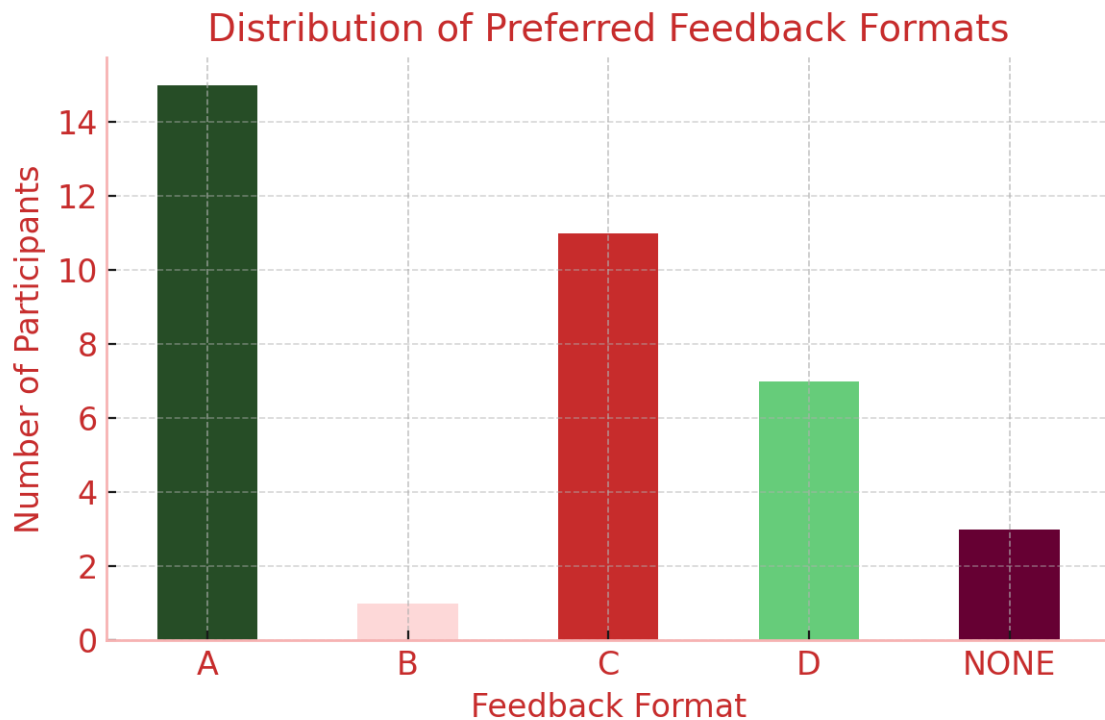
**Format A:** Filling out a short online survey about one’s experiences as a tourist in Copenhagen.

**Format B:** Visiting a feedback booth or pop-up stand in the city to share what worked well and what could be improved.

**Format C:** Testing a new experience, such as a guided tour or digital feature being trialled by the city, and providing quick feedback afterwards.

**Format D:** Visiting a lesser-known part of the city and participating in a group session with other tourists to share impressions.

Informants were asked to select the format they could most imagine themselves participating in. The following analysis examines their choices and reasoning.



### 5.3.1 Preferred Forms of Participation

On average, the informants indicated a willingness to spend approximately 12 minutes on a digital survey, 10 minutes on a conversation, and up to 43 minutes if the feedback activity was embedded in an experience, such as a guided tour or event. This suggests that the amount of time tourists are willing to invest is closely tied to whether the act of participation is perceived as an integrated part of the overall tourist experience. What is particularly fascinating here is that one informant noted having waited in line for four hours to see the Colosseum during a trip to Rome:

“We were at the Colosseum when we were in Rome. I think we stood in line for four hours or something. You just have to see it.”<sup>5</sup>

*(Informant 25, Danish, 28 years old, travelling with friends)*

This remark highlights a revealing contrast: tourists are often willing to spend hours passively waiting for something that holds personal meaning, yet on average are unwilling to spend even a single

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<sup>5</sup> Translated from Danish to English. Original quote is in appendix 14

hour contributing to feedback that may benefit others. The point here is not to equate feedback with iconic experiences, but to underline how the perceived *setting* and *value* shape tourists' sense of time well spent. Just as people may spend hours preparing an elaborate meal but seek to minimise time spent cleaning up afterwards, hence the invention of the dishwasher, so too do tourists distinguish sharply between activities that *enrich* the holiday experience and those that feel like obligations. Waiting in line for hours might objectively seem like doing nothing—standing still like an “amoeba,” as one might say—but if the outcome is personally meaningful, the time investment is easily justified. This reinforces the idea that even strategic co-creation is often evaluated not by its functional goal, but by the quality and character of the experience itself. This preference for meaningful and sensory settings draws on the logic of experiential co-creation, even though the context in this case reflects strategic co-creation in practice. It confirms that, in a tourism context, co-creation is often evaluated based on the character of the experience rather than the purpose of participation alone.

Among the formats presented to informants, Format A and Format C were assessed as the most appealing and feasible. With 15 and 11 preferences respectively, it was clear that tourists favoured options that required minimal practical effort and were integrated into their experience of the destination. These preferences do not necessarily indicate a desire for experiential co-creation in the classical sense, where tourists actively co-produce the experience itself. Rather, they reflect a preference for strategic co-creation that feels experience oriented. When strategic participation is framed as part of the tourist journey, through sensory or social formats, acceptance and engagement increase. That Format D was selected by only seven informants, and Format B by just one, supports this interpretation: participation is preferred when it creates value for the tourist and does not feel like an interruption or obligation. The participants' choices indicate a tendency to engage where participation naturally blends into the experience. In light of co-creation literature, this suggests that tourists do not necessarily seek experiential co-creation as self-directed activity (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009), but rather prefer strategic co-creation formats that activate the experiential dimension without communicating planning, responsibility, or formal development processes (Richards & Duif, 2018). Several informants highlighted that trying something new was appealing:

“I think example C is a good idea because you get to do stuff that maybe you hadn't thought that you could do here in the city, if you are new here.”

*(Informant 3, Swiss, 19 years old)*

Digital participation (Format A) was primarily selected because it was quick, non-committal, and anonymous:

“It’s easy, and you don’t have to talk to anybody else.”

*(Informant 2, German, 26 years old, first time visitor, stay duration: 5 days)*

However, several participants also expressed skepticism toward digital tools, especially when perceived as superficial or symbolic acts with no real effect:

“Those online surveys – for me, it’s doing something just to do it. [...] I’m getting a bit tired of online stuff.”

*(Informant 28, Danish, 30 years old, repeated visitor)*

“When you get it all the time, you stop noticing it [...] like in IKEA, where you press a smiley button, but no one looks at it.”

*(Informant 25, Danish, 28 years old, repeated visitor)*

These responses suggest that participation in destination development must not be perceived as an empty gesture. For tourists to engage, their contribution must be experienced as valuable, desired, and meaningful. Ease alone is not enough—it must make sense in context and appear to have consequences:

“It’s about explaining the importance of involving people and that you’re helping to develop the destination.”

*(Informant 27, Danish, 30 years old, repeated visitor)*

As previously discussed in the section on motivations and barriers, the feeling of being taken seriously and having something to contribute is a key factor in willingness to participate. This point can be illuminated using SDT, where the experience of competence—i.e., the sense that one’s input has value and is used—is a fundamental condition for intrinsic motivation. If participation feels meaningful, and tourists have the freedom to choose how and when, autonomy and engagement are strengthened.

Several informants even expressed interest in Format D because it aligned with what they already sought out on their trip:

“I like to go to less known parts of the city normally.”

*(Informant 17, Spanish, 23 years old, first time visitor, stay duration: 1 day)*

However, many withdrew their interest when they learned it involved a group session afterwards. The length of the experience was not the problem in itself; It was the social and formal structure of the conclusion. This shows that willingness to participate does not necessarily depend on how much time a tourist is willing to invest, but rather on how that time is used and in what format:

“If the whole premise is that you sit down for a half-hour group session, then I’d probably say:

‘Thanks for the tip about the super hip area!’ and just buy that glass of wine myself.”

*(Informant 28, Danish, 30 years old, repeated visitor)*

“D is a very modern version to experience something, but I don’t like group sessions with other people.”

*(Informant 6, German, 21 years old, first-time visitor, stay duration: 5 days)*

This resistance toward Format D illustrates that even participation linked to new and exciting experiences can be rejected if accompanied by social obligations. For many, group discussions felt unnatural or burdensome associated with work, education, or forced social contexts. In such cases, co-creation becomes a barrier rather than a benefit (Iso-Ahola, S. E. 1982).

At the same time, participants’ responses suggest that participation can be social and engaging—but only if it gives something back and is framed as an experience:

“If you can see that there’s an experience to be had, then I’d definitely be up for it.”

*(Informant 28, Danish, 28 years old, repeated visitor)*

Therefore, the reluctance toward Format D does not necessarily stem from a general resistance to social interaction, but rather from a desire that the social dimension emerge organically and meaningfully. This can be understood through the concept of *communitas* (Turner, 1969), which describes the temporary yet intense sense of solidarity and equality that arises in transitional situations such as travel or shared experiences. In the context of tourism, *communitas* often occurs when participants feel connected in a shared, non-hierarchical space. Not because they are expected to, but because they experience something together. This distinction is crucial: informants are not necessarily asking

for less community, but for more genuine community. Participation can be collective but not forced. When co-creation succeeds in creating space for spontaneous togetherness—where participation feels voluntary, meaningful, and experientially rich—it becomes something tourists are eager to be part of.

Several informants suggested that a group-based feedback session could be appealing if wrapped in something exclusive and sensorial such as access to a local space, a free meal, or the feeling of being among the first to discover something new:

“If you sell it the right way [...] and say, this is a new area under development [...] and you get a dinner or a glass of wine—then I think that could be a really cool way to do it.”

*(Informant 27, Danish, 30 years old)*

“That’s a total buzzword for me, that whole hidden gem thing.”

*(Informant 26, Danish, 30 years old)*

Thus, participation is directly tied to extrinsic motivation and what many informants seek in tourism: the authentic, the local, and the lesser-known:

“Because that’s kind of the authentic thing we’re all looking for—where not so many people go.”

*(Informant 27, Danish, 30 years old)*

This form of participation holds significant potential. Although tourists often do not perceive it as such, Format D aligns closely with the notion of co-creation as articulated by Campos et al. (2018). In their definition, co-creation is a process where tourists collaborate with the destination in developing new products by using their own resources, such as time, knowledge, and creativity (Prebensen, N. K., Vittersø, J., & Dahl, T. I. (2013). When tourists choose to visit a lesser-known area and provide feedback afterward, they actively contribute with input that can inform the future development and marketing of the destination. In this way, they participate in the early stages of product development, even if they do not perceive it as such. According to Campos et al. (2018), this form of collaboration is not merely part of destination development, but also a key component in achieving competitiveness in tourism. For the tourist, the act of participating can simultaneously enhance the overall experience: it can add meaning to the stay and reinforce a sense of connection to the place. This form of attachment, in line with SDT’s concept of relatedness, may foster a stronger emotional bond to the destination. Ultimately, it can increase the likelihood of return visits. This supports what several

scholars have argued regarding co-creation: that it should not only be viewed as a means for product innovation, but also as a strategy for fostering long-term relationships between tourist and place (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Prebensen & Foss, 2011; Dredge & Jenkins, 2011; Richards & Duif, 2018; Campos et al., 2018).

Several informants' statements also suggest that strategic co-creation is not necessarily rejected in itself, but that it must be "disguised" as an experience in order to be accepted. What may theoretically be understood as a contribution to planning becomes significantly more legitimate and attractive to tourists when it is embedded in a concrete experience and associated with something authentic, social, or sensorial. When participation is shaped to resemble experiential co-creation—that is, as a meaningful and embodied activity, it can serve as a gateway to strategic input, without being perceived as burdensome or intrusive. This aligns with the findings from Theme 1, where several informants expressed hesitation toward influencing a destination directly, as it might threaten the city's authenticity or feel like an overstep for a temporary guest. However, many expressed a desire to contribute to improving the experience for other tourists; A form of value creation that reflects what Prebensen et al. (2013) refer to as *value co-creation* when participation generates value for both the visitor and the destination through engagement, sharing, and social interaction. Thus, the rejection of Format D should not be interpreted as a sign of unwillingness to participate, but rather as an expectation that participation should offer something in return. What is off-putting is not the act of participation itself, but the formality of the format, its framing, and the social demands it entails. This highlights that co-creation in tourism must be experienced as an invitation, not an obligation, and that the value of social formats only arises when they support engagement and *communitas*, rather than duty and performance.

Across the different options, Format B was the least popular. This may be due to the fact that this form requires the tourist to take the initiative and actively approach someone, which several informants perceived as a barrier:

"I don't want to talk to someone standing at a pop-up stand."

*(Informant 25, Danish, 28, travelling with friends)*

For some, this creates uncertainty about what they are getting involved in and what the social interaction might entail. This uncertainty may be linked to doubts about their right to speak up, and to the level of social engagement required issues also addressed in the earlier theme on motivation and bar-

riers. In Format B, the contact is more direct and less structured, which can feel intrusive or uncomfortable, especially when the interaction is not embedded in an experience but rather framed as an open-ended encounter with a stranger. Conversely, a few informants considered Format B precisely because it appeared informal and easy to participate in:

“At first I actually thought of B – like stopping by a booth or something – that I’d be most likely to do that, because it requires the least effort.”

*(Informant 26, Danish, 30 years old, repeated visitor)*

This shows that Format B is also evaluated differently depending on individual boundaries, social preferences, and perceptions of the nature of the interaction. For some, it appears as a low-effort opportunity; for others, it represents an unwanted social confrontation. This confirms a core finding of the analysis: that the way a participation format is framed plays a crucial role in whether tourists choose to engage.

### **Sub-conclusion for 5.3**

The analysis shows that tourists prefer participation formats that are easily accessible, experience-based, and integrated into their journey—rather than formats perceived as separate, pre-planned, or socially demanding. In particular, Format A (online survey) and Format C (testing and feedback) were seen as realistic and meaningful ways to engage in destination development. In contrast, Format D was frequently rejected—not due to the time required, but because group sessions were perceived as unnatural and socially demanding. Informants' responses indicate that willingness to engage is not primarily dependent on the *duration* of participation, but on *how* it is experienced: as relevant, acknowledged, and embedded in something that is perceived as inherently valuable. Here, concepts such as autonomy and competence, as well as value co-creation, are central: participation is preferred when it feels meaningful and creates value for both the tourist and the destination. At the same time, the analysis shows that strategic co-creation is perceived as far more legitimate and accessible when presented in formats that resemble an experience rather than as a distinct, formal task. While several informants distanced themselves from strategic involvement when it was presented explicitly or in abstract terms, their responses to the proposed formats suggest that they are, in practice, willing to take part in development processes, if participation is easy, meaningful, and feels like a natural part of their journey. As Campos et al. (2018) point out, this type of low-threshold involvement can contribute to the competitiveness of the destination—while also creating a sense of meaning and connectedness for the tourist. In this context, the SDT concept of relatedness becomes relevant, as the

feeling of connection to the place, even though something as simple as being heard, can enhance attachment and increase the likelihood of repeat visits. This insight leads to the next theme, which explores how tourists understand their own role and relationship to the destination, and how this affects their willingness to engage.

## **5.4 The Tourist's Perceived Role and Relationship to the Destination**

In this chapter the focus shifts from underlying motivation to tourist' role perceptions: how do the informants see themselves in relation to the destination? Do they perceive themselves as temporary guests, engaged participants, critical consumers, or passive observers? Through a thematic analysis of the informants' own reflections, the chapter explores how tourists perceived position in relation to the place influences both the degree and nature of their involvement. The chapter concludes with a presentation of three ideal-typical role understandings, which illustrate the range of ways in which tourists perceive and navigate their relationship to the places they visit.

### **5.4.1 Tourists' Own Words and Reflections**

Across the interviews, a picture emerges of informants who, to varying degrees, reflect on their position as temporary visitors, and who actively, or at times passively, set boundaries for their engagement based on that self-perception. This role understanding is closely tied to questions of responsibility, legitimacy, and cultural belonging, and thus becomes directly relevant to whether and how tourists choose to engage in destination development.

A consistent pattern in the data is that tourists perceive themselves as temporary and without deeper attachment to the place. Following the logic of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), this often leads to a form of restraint, especially when the psychological needs for competence and relatedness are not met. Several informants explicitly question their right to have an opinion about the city, precisely because their stay is short or distanced from local everyday life. As one Swiss woman puts it:

“You can't be as good as someone who spent weeks or months here, but like you can still give your experience and your opinion about just normal stuff that all tourists will go to.”

*(Informant 3, 19 years old, first-time visitor, stay: 3 days)*

This kind of differentiated legitimacy, where the tourist feels entitled to give input, but only within certain limits, is echoed by several informants. It points to a fundamental uncertainty about both responsibility and the right to speak, particularly in relation to deeper questions of destination identity and long-term development. A German tourist expresses this boundary clearly:

“I would want to watch it, but I don’t think I want to get involved.”

*(Informant 24, German, 48 years old)*

This is not an expression of indifference, but rather of ethical or cultural awareness. The desire to “help” is balanced against a strong sense of what is appropriate or inappropriate to do as a tourist. This reflective distancing can, with inspiration from Erik Cohen’s typology (1972), be seen as a form of self-positioning within the roles of organized- or individual mass tourists, who primarily seek leisure and experience, but not necessarily engagement with the local community. Their self-understanding as “guests” or “consumers” leads to a form of normative restriction, where the desire to contribute is tempered by a sense of what tourists ought or ought not to do. At the same time, several informants expressed a willingness to contribute, but only under the right conditions. As one Spanish tourist put it:

“I think we can all use improvement. (...) But I will not go pretentiously just to say: yeah you should change that, when I’m only here for a day.”

*(Informant 17, Spanish, 23 years old, first-time visitor)*

This balance between willingness and humility occurs throughout the interviews. Tourists are often open to giving feedback, but they do not wish to assume the role of change agents. Instead, they position themselves as those who can offer an outsider’s perspective:

“It’s also good when somebody comes from another country or city (...) So to get another view, another set of eyes.”

*(Informant 1, German, 27 years old, travelling with partner)*

However, this contribution is not automatically seen as legitimate. There is an underlying sense that feedback is only meaningful as part of a co-creative process when it is both welcomed and perceived as appropriate. This aligns with recent research on co-creation, which highlights that meaningful

tourist participation in development requires perceived relevance, recognition, and a good “fit” between the individual’s role and the format offered (Campos et al., 2018). When that balance is missing, willingness to participate may diminish. This form of reflexivity clearly demonstrates how tourists’ self-understanding shapes their boundaries of participation. Many consciously place themselves in the role of guest, observer, or supporter—and this act of self-placement becomes central to their views on co-creation and involvement.

#### **5.4.2 Role Perceptions as Fluid and Shaped by Context**

Tourists’ perceived role in the destination is not necessarily fixed or consistent. Building on the previous section on perceived legitimacy and willingness to participate (see section 1.2), this part of the analysis shows how role perceptions are shaped and adjusted in response to context, format, and the tourists’ own background. The interviews reveal that the same informant may position themselves differently depending on the situation. This challenges the idea of a role as a static identity and instead suggests that tourists’ self-understanding is best viewed as fluid and spectral.

The analysis demonstrates that role perceptions vary considerably—not only across informants, but also within individual accounts. Several informants primarily position themselves as guests, showing respect for local life and a belief that residents should retain control over what happens in their city. As one informant puts it:

“It’s up to you and your culture, wherever it is, to decide on those things. I have choice to be here or not be here.”

*(Informant 15, American, 56 years old, visited Copenhagen once before, travelling with family)*

Here, the informant presents himself as a temporary presence with no claim to influence. This reflects an internalized guest ethic, where the role of the tourist is to remain discreet and respectful (MacCannell, 1976; Lugosi, 2008). However, what is particularly interesting is that this self-positioning is not absolute. Despite stating that he has no say in local matters, the same informant later expresses a preference for the most participatory format (Format D) when presented with different options—simply, as he explains, “because I’m an artist” (Informant 15).

This does not necessarily contradict his previous stance but indicates that even when tourists acknowledge having no right to influence, they may still be curious and willing to contribute, especially when the format aligns with their personal identity or skills. This dual positioning suggests that

tourist roles are not fixed but shaped by the situation. Role perception, in this sense, appears as a spectrum rather than a binary, encompassing a wide range of expressions and intensities. Across the empirical material, several informants show both hesitation and curiosity, often within the same conversation. This underscores the need to see the tourist not as a static type, but as a reflective actor navigating between cultural and psychological positions. In contrast, other informants more clearly identify as participants. Not in the sense of active co-developers, but as individuals who view their own experience as relevant and want to share it for the benefit of others:

“To maybe share more experiences with other tourists, like give ideas and also how to improve maybe tourist experience. (...) I would like to help other people out.”

*(Informant 3, Swiss, first-time visitor, stay: 3 days)*

Like others who are motivated by the desire to help, this quote also points to a kind of peer-to-peer logic, where the informant sees herself as part of a temporary community of travelers with shared needs and experiences. Here, it is not attachment to the place itself that shapes the role, but rather a sense of connection to others in a similar situation. The tourist is not involved in destination development in a formal sense but acts as a *peer* among fellow visitors. This reframes the role from guest/host to that of a travelling ally among others. This enables a sense of situational competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and with it, a feeling that one has something to contribute even without claiming a broader role in the city's development.

The role perception in this case is somewhere between consumer and participant: the tourist does not see themselves as a co-creator of long-term transformation, but neither as a passive recipient. Rather, we see a form of micro-participation, where feedback is perceived as a helpful service to others.

In summary, this section shows that tourists' role perceptions are rarely fixed or stable. On the contrary, they appear to be fluid, context-sensitive, and shaped by both ambivalence and reflexivity. Several informants move between distance and engagement, between respectful hesitation and a desire to contribute, and often within the same conversation.

On this basis, five analytical role types are presented in the next section. These should not be understood as fixed or exhaustive categories, but rather as conceptual markers that help structure and interpret the complexity revealed in the analysis.

## 5.4.2 Role Perceptions Identified In The Empirical Material

### The Temporary Guest

This position is characterised by a self-perception of being temporary and without any right to influence. Informants who adopt this role often express a clear awareness of being mere "visitors" and emphasise the importance of not overstepping the boundaries of what is considered appropriate for a tourist. One informant put it succinctly: *"We are only tourists... We have nothing to say"* (Informant 5), while another noted: *"It's up to you and your culture, wherever it is, to decide on those things. I have a choice to be here or not be here"* (Informant 15).

These statements clearly reflect the normative guest ethic also discussed in sections 1.2 and 3.3, where the desire not to "interfere" with local life often outweighs any wish to participate actively. This role understanding is closely linked to a low sense of place attachment and a strong respect for cultural autonomy.

### The Respectful Feedback-Giver

This type of tourist does not seek to change the identity of the place but considers it constructive to offer feedback on what already exists—particularly with the aim of improving the experience for other visitors. Statements such as *"I think we can all use improvement"* (Informant 17), and *"You can still give your opinion about just normal stuff that all tourists will go to"* (Informant 3) illustrate this approach.

Here, participation is not directed at strategic development but rather at specific experiential elements. The role draws on a peer-to-peer logic and connects to theme 2.2 on preferred forms of involvement, where feedback is understood as a form of service rather than influence.

### The Reflective Observer

This role is marked by a clear ethical awareness. Here, it is not merely the length of stay or a lack of attachment that limits the willingness to participate, but rather a reflective stance on one's own position. Several informants express concern that their involvement could harm the local character or disrupt existing power dynamics. *"No, because it takes away from the characteristic of the city"* (Informant 13), and *"It's a responsibility I don't want to have"* (Informant 27) are central quotes that illustrate this perspective.

This role is closely connected to theme 1.2.2 on ethical respect and represents a moral position in which non-participation is seen not as apathy, but as a deliberate and responsible choice.

### **The Experience-Seeking Participant**

This role differs from the more distanced types in that the tourist is open to engagement—not out of a sense of obligation, but because it is experienced as meaningful, authentic, or interesting. Participation is primarily driven by curiosity and a desire for experiential value. As two informants express it: *“I like to travel like I’m living in the city”* (Informant 18), and *“I like to have as much free time as possible (...) and then just be hit by something and grab it”*<sup>6</sup> (Informant 27).

This role connects to theme 2.4 on the character of engagement and draws on logics from experience-based co-creation, in which involvement is perceived as a natural and informal part of the journey—rather than as active co-development or structured planning. Although the formats in question fall under strategic co-creation, the analysis shows that tourists are more likely to accept and enjoy such involvement when it does not feel separate from the experience itself, but rather merges with it.

### **The Selective Co-Creator**

The selective co-creator is characterised by a clear awareness of when and how participation makes sense. This tourist is willing to engage—but only under conditions that align with their own values, interests, and expectations. It is a role marked by both criticality and reflexivity. Statements such as *“If only it’s sold the right way”*<sup>7</sup> (Informant 28) and *“It has to kind of disguise itself as something you would want to do anyway”*<sup>8</sup> (Informant 26) demonstrate how engagement depends on a perceived fit between the individual and the format of participation.

This role connects to theme 2.3 on perceived autonomy and control, and to theme 2.4 on selective engagement. Among the roles identified, it represents the most co-creative ideal—but always on the tourist’s own terms

The five role understandings identified in the interview material illustrate the diversity in how tourists perceive their position in relation to the destination. From the discreet presence of the temporary guest to the targeted engagement of the selective co-creator, tourists appear as reflective and situated actors who navigate varying degrees of distance, interest, and involvement. While the five roles identified in the data contain overlapping elements and nuanced differences, they are joined into three ideal-typical categories. These ideal types are not intended as rigid classifications, but as analytical tools to gain insight into how tourists position themselves in relation to participation. More than that,

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<sup>6</sup> Translated from Danish to English. Original quote in appendix 14

<sup>7</sup> Translated from Danish to English. Original quote in appendix 14

<sup>8</sup> Translated from Danish to English. Original quote in appendix 14

they serve as a framework for identifying the type of tourist one is engaging with, and how that tourist might most meaningfully be involved in destination development. The typology draws inspiration from Erik Cohen's (1972) classic model of tourist types, which differentiates levels of authenticity-seeking and engagement.

### ***5.4.3 A Typology of Tourist Role Perceptions***

#### **The Pragmatic Improver**

*"If it's quick and easy, then sure – I don't mind helping."*

The pragmatic improver is the type of tourist who is generally positive towards providing input, but only if it can be done quickly, effortlessly, and without social obligation. Participation must be perceived as meaningful but should not be demanding. Informants in this category are not motivated by the idea of influencing the destination or contributing to long-term development, but rather by the wish to improve specific aspects of the visitor experience. It is not about co-determination, but about practical utility. As discussed in themes 1.1.1 and 1.1.3, this type is often motivated by a desire to "pass something on" or "help others"—but only to the extent that it feels easy and manageable. Participation should not require deep reflection or be experienced as a task. It should be possible to engage "on the go"—ideally during a break, on the way home, or with a quick tap on a screen. In theme 1.1.7, it became clear that this type is more responsive to external incentives such as a free coffee or a discount. These are not primary motivators, but they lower the threshold for saying yes. This type typically prefers to avoid social interaction when participating. As noted in themes 2.2 and 2.3, several informants emphasise that it is important not to have to talk to anyone, and that participation should feel "like something you just do." Conversation-based or group-driven formats are often avoided—not out of resistance, but for reasons of convenience. Informants in this category often travel alone or as couples and focus on their own experience. Participation is seen as a service, not as a shared process.

Viewed through the lens of SDT, this type exhibits a moderate sense of competence—they feel capable of providing relevant feedback on concrete experiences, but do not wish to comment on the city's broader development. However, autonomy is essential: participation must be voluntary, easy, and free from pressure. Relatedness plays only a minor role, as the connection to the destination is limited and not emotionally anchored. This type aligns well with Cohen's institutionalised tourist: a

traveller who follows established structures and willingly engages in well-defined activities, but without seeking deeper cultural contact or personal transformation. This is a “guest” who accepts their position—and acts within its boundaries. For destinations seeking to involve this type of tourist, understanding the concept of *perceived fit* is crucial. In order for participation to be meaningful, it must align with the tourist’s self-perception—as helpful, but not deeply involved. If the invitation matches this self-image, participation is likely. If not, it is often dismissed as irrelevant or “too much.” Compared to other types, the pragmatic improver is characterised by high acceptance of participation, but a low level of engagement. This is a tourist who wants to do something good—but without expending effort. The more specific, quick, and easy-to-understand the task, the more likely they are to participate.

### **Suitable Formats and Conditions for Participation**

This type should be approached with efficient and simple feedback formats that can be completed within a few minutes. Short multiple-choice surveys placed in hotels, public transport, or central locations around the city work well—especially when combined with small incentives such as a free coffee, a discount, or a thank-you message. There should be no expectation of long-term involvement, and it should be clear how their input will be used.

The pragmatic improver does not participate in order to gain influence, but because it is easy—and because they want to be “helpful,” as long as it doesn’t require too much effort.

### **The Experience-Oriented Participant**

*“If it’s part of an experience then I’m happy to take part.”*

The experience-oriented participant is characterised by an open and engaged approach to involvement. This type prefers experience-based formats—not because participation should feel like a “special experience” in itself, but because it adds meaning and value to their journey. When participation is perceived as a natural part of something they would have sought out anyway—or as an opportunity to discover something they would not have found on their own—they are more likely to say yes.

What motivates this type is not necessarily the activity itself, but the chance to encounter something new and different.

Several informants who align with this role highlight that they are happy to participate if it gives them access to something unique—such as a new experience, a local activity, or something hidden that makes the trip more interesting. It is not the participation itself, but the chance to be introduced to the unexpected that creates value.

For this type, feedback must feel natural and not like a task. Phrases such as “feedback workshop” or “group session” create distance, as they signal something formal and heavy. As one informant said: *“It has to mask itself as something I’d be doing anyway.”* (Informant 26)

This type is also often motivated by the opportunity to talk to a real person. It is important for them to feel that their input is actually being heard and used. As one informant put it: *“I need to actually interact with people and share my opinions this way.”* (Informant 16) Therefore, the format should not be too anonymous or mechanical—it must be clear that there is someone on the other side who is listening.

In addition, this type is often motivated by external incentives—though they may not state this explicitly. No one asks directly for a reward, but many show that they think in terms of value exchange. Their preference for experience-based formats means that the experience itself often functions as the reward. If they are given the chance to try something for free or be introduced to something new, an implicit exchange takes place, where participation is perceived as worth the effort.

This type often travels in groups and sees participation as something that enhances the collective travel experience. As shown in themes 1.1.5 and 2.2, the social dimension can play an important role—though to varying degrees. For some, participation is a way to strengthen temporary bonds with fellow tourists by sharing experiences and helping each other. As one informant explained: *“To maybe share more experiences with other tourists, like give ideas and also how to improve maybe tourist experience. (...) I would like to help other people out.”* (Informant 3)

Others highlight the opportunity to speak with locals as something valuable: *“You can talk to people who live here in the city.”* (Informant 5)

For others, the social element is less important, and the motivation is primarily experience-driven. They participate if it fits naturally into the trip they are already on—without a need to network. This highlights the diversity within the type and shows that willingness to participate and social orientation can vary within the same category. It is not about placing the tourist in a fixed box, but about understanding participation as a spectrum of possibilities triggered under specific circumstances.

From a SDT perspective, this type typically experiences high levels of competence and autonomy, but they also have high expectations regarding the perceived fit between the form of participation and their identity as travellers. The role corresponds to Cohen’s *Explorer*—not necessarily in the alternative or “drifter” sense, but through their curiosity, exploratory behaviour, and desire to try something new when it feels authentic and relevant. Compared to the other types, the experience-oriented participant is characterised by a high acceptance of participation, but selective and situational engagement. It is a type that is happy to participate—and may engage deeply—but only if the format aligns with their way of being a tourist.

### **Suitable Formats and Conditions for Participation**

The experience-oriented participant should be invited into formats where participation is integrated into the experience itself: taste tests, cultural prototypes, or guided tours with conversational elements. The format should be sensory and meaningful, preferably offline and in contact with a real person. Feedback should appear organically for example, as part of a dinner conversation, rather than as a scheduled task. When tourists feel that they are being listened to in a natural and sincere way, and that their experience truly matters, engagement grows. But it must happen on their own terms and in a language that feels playful rather than task-oriented.

### **The Reluctant Observer**

*“I would want to watch it, but I don’t think I want to get involved.”*

The reluctant observer is characterised by a fundamental distancing from the idea of participating in the development of a destination—either because it feels irrelevant, inappropriate, or ethically problematic. This type of tourist may be curious, attentive, and reflective, but still chooses to remain at a distance. Some do so because they feel they do not belong or lack the right to get involved, while others simply do not want to spend time on it.

Several informants in this category express doubts about whether it is even appropriate for them to comment on the city. It is not necessarily a matter of disinterest, but rather a conscious decision not to engage. As one informant stated: *“It’s up to you and your culture, wherever it is, to decide on those things. I have a choice to be here or not be here.”* (Informant 15). This reflects a form of internalised guest ethic, where responsibility for the place is seen as belonging to the local population. Others express a clear fatigue with the idea of participating in something organised or “meaningful”: *“It sounds like a good idea, but I wouldn’t want to take part in something like that”*—often without further explanation. This suggests that non-participation may sometimes stem from low motivation, low energy, or a lack of perceived benefit. It is not resistance, but an absence of engagement. For some, participation simply does not feel like something they *should* be a part of, and it does not seem relevant to their trip.

As shown in theme 1.2 of the analysis, ethical considerations play a key role in many tourists’ decision to opt out. Informants do not want to interfere with local life, and many feel that their short stay does not entitle them to shape anything. *“Feedback is good, but I wouldn’t want to take away from the uniqueness of the city that makes it their own.”* (Informant 13). In this case, the absence of participation becomes a way to show respect—not a sign of indifference.

At the same time, the data show that some informants simply do not feel connected. There is a lack of attachment, and therefore a lack of motivation. As one informant put it: *“I don’t know if my opinion is really valid.”* (Informant 21). When short stays, limited local knowledge, or cultural distance result in low perceived competence and low relatedness, engagement is inhibited.

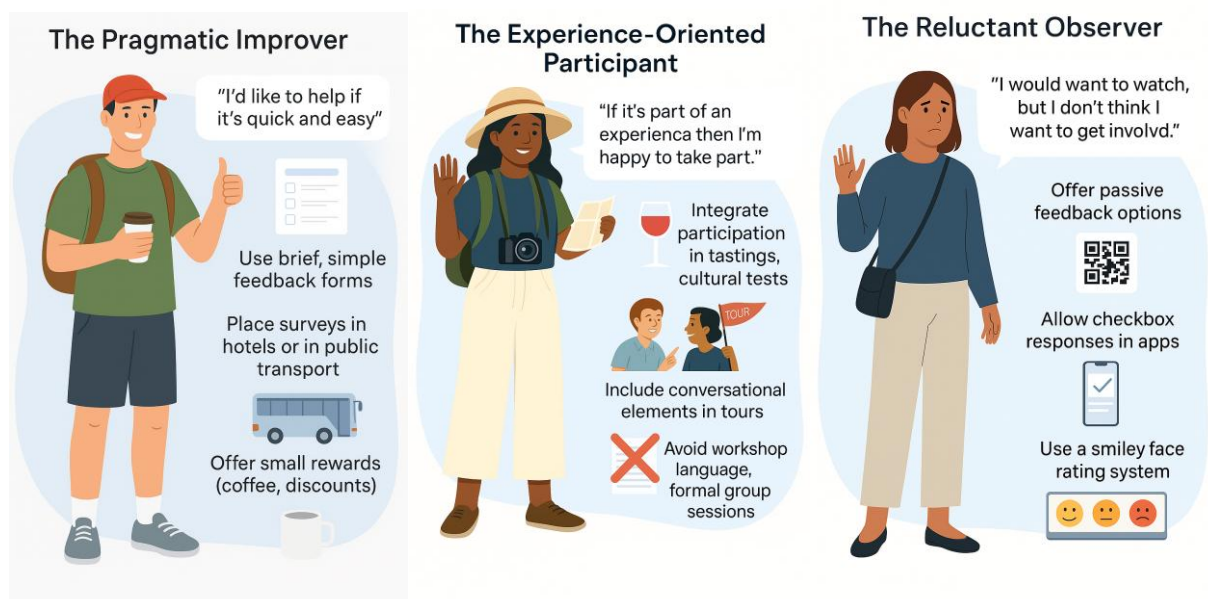
From an SDT perspective, this type is characterised by low or fluctuating experiences of competence and relatedness—and sometimes also autonomy, especially if participation feels forced or unnatural. Unlike more engaged types, they do not feel they can contribute meaningfully—or they simply do not wish to. This type most closely resembles Cohen’s institutionalised mass tourist—not because they are unreflective, but because they consciously adopt a clearly defined role as guest and observer. They engage with the destination on its terms, but not with its development.

Compared to other types, the reluctant observer is characterised by low acceptance of participation and low engagement. This is a tourist who fundamentally does not wish to be involved—and who will only participate under extremely simple, non-social, and easily accessible conditions.

### **Suitable Formats and Conditions for Participation**

This type should not be met with expectations of engagement or co-creation. If destinations wish to involve them, it must be strictly on their terms: practical, quick, and entirely voluntary. For example, through passive feedback options such as tick-boxes in an app, QR codes on the wall, or smiley terminals at exits. There should be no expectation of speaking to anyone or taking active part.

Any attempt to "activate" this type risks triggering resistance or fatigue. They will only participate if it requires virtually no effort—and preferably goes unnoticed.



Visual illustration of the types generated by ChatGPT (2025)

### Sub conclusion for 5.4.3

The three ideal-typical role understandings - the pragmatic improver, the experience-oriented participant, and the reluctant observer - are not intended as fixed categories, but as analytical reference points that can help us understand how tourists relate to the possibility of being involved in destination development. Each type illustrates different levels of willingness, motivation, and preferences regarding participation, and highlights that participation is not a binary choice, but a spectrum. The analysis shows that many tourists are not necessarily opposed to participating in strategic development as long as it is not framed as such. Terms like “*feedback*,” “*session*,” “*group session*,” or “*workshop*” are off-putting to several informants, as they evoke associations with work, responsibility, or excessive seriousness. However, if participation is embedded as a natural and meaningful part of the experience, for instance, as an informal conversation during a meal or after an activity, many are positive and willing to contribute. Several informants expressed that tourists can offer valuable outsider perspectives, and that their position as visitors enables them to see new angles or offer relevant suggestions for example, about how experiences could be made more accessible or tourist friendly. At the same time, it is essential that this engagement is not perceived as interfering with local life. Informants do not wish to influence urban planning or change anything for local residents—the very aspects that make the place feel authentic and unique should be preserved. Participation must therefore occur on the destination’s terms, but without the tourist being made to feel like a “hostage” in a strategic development process. When participation feels light, informal, and experience-driven, many actually find meaning in taking part. Thus, the three types hold not only analytical

value but may also serve as a practical tool for destinations aiming to design differentiated and target-group-sensitive forms of co-creation. Offering participation that aligns with tourists' self-perception, level of engagement, and cultural expectations is crucial if involvement is to be experienced as meaningful.

## 6. Discussion

This thesis set out to explore how tourists relate to the idea of being involved in the development of a destination, and to what extent they wish to contribute to the co-creation of the place they visit. Implicitly, it challenges the assumption that tourists either want to engage in destination development or they do not. The findings point to a far more complex and context-dependent understanding of tourist engagement than initially assumed. Two key concepts within co-creation emerged as requiring deeper discussion: participation and involvement.

Throughout the analysis, the two terms have been used almost interchangeably without being problematised. However, in light of the findings, it becomes clear that this conflation is analytically significant. Can one participate in something without becoming truly involved? And conversely, can one be involved without actively participating? This distinction is not only linguistic but also conceptually relevant. While *participation* may refer to the act of taking part in an activity or process, *involvement* implies emotional, cognitive, or strategic investment in what one is participating in.

This conceptual distinction proved analytically fruitful: many tourists in the study were indeed willing to participate—by sharing ideas or answering questions—but simultaneously drew clear boundaries regarding how much influence or responsibility they were willing to assume. They did not wish to be part of decision-making but were happy to share their perspectives. In this way, they participated without truly being involved. Conversely, some informants displayed signs of reflection and engagement without expressing any desire for an active participatory role.

This distinction became central to understanding how tourists position themselves in relation to co-creation. Co-creation is not merely about doing something together, it is also about how, and how deeply, one engages in it.

As the analysis shows, many informants initially distanced themselves from the idea of contributing to “developing” something. Several expressed that they did not want to “interfere” in matters they felt they had no right to influence. This could be interpreted as resistance to strategic co-creation, but a closer reading reveals that the issue lies more in language, context, and format. When engagement is introduced through informal and meaningful formats, many are open and curious. What they reject

is not participation itself, but participation presented as formal, responsible, or alien to their role as tourists.

This ambivalence—a desire to help, combined with a reluctance to take responsibility raises a crucial question: Is it really co-creation that the tourists are saying yes to? Traditionally, co-creation entails both participation and involvement: the user actively contributes to the development and production of experiences and engages with their ideas, resources, and perspectives. It is precisely the combination of being part of something and being invested in it, physically, cognitively, or emotionally, that distinguishes co-creation from mere feedback.

Yet in this thesis, what tourists contributed were inputs, ideas, and reflections. They did not see themselves as co-creators, but as experience-bearers with something to offer under specific conditions. This realisation became a focal point of the analysis: the study did not investigate whether tourists want to co-create in the classical sense, but rather what forms of strategic co-creation they are willing to engage in, and under what conditions such engagement is perceived as meaningful. This conceptual clarification is particularly important when considering how co-creation is applied in practice. Here, the thesis' main insight emerges: the tourists say yes to contributing but not to deciding. They do not wish to be involved in large-scale development processes but are willing to share ideas and experiences when it happens through formats that feel relevant and non-obligating.

As previously noted, several informants expressed discomfort with words like “*workshop*” or “*planning*”, but responded positively to formats that felt experiential. It is not the act of participating that creates resistance, it is the language and framing that surrounds it. This tension reveals a paradox in co-creation as a strategic tool: the less strategic it appears, the more effective it may be as a strategy. In this light, the concept of *relatedness* becomes particularly relevant. When participation is experienced as a way to connect, not just with the destination but with those who listen, it generates meaning and a sense of attachment. What motivates engagement is not instrumental contribution but relational significance. In this way, co-creation is not only a tool for destination development but also a way to create reciprocity and experiential value for the tourist.

This insight also calls for reflection on the language used by researchers and practitioners when discussing participation. As mentioned, many informants distanced themselves from terms like “*workshop*,” “*planning*,” and “*development*” - not necessarily because they opposed participation, but because the terminology itself created a barrier. Strategic or academic concepts like “*co-creation*” or “*strategic involvement*” often hold little meaning for tourists.

As I became aware of this barrier during the interviews, I deliberately shifted to more everyday expressions like “*feedback*” or “*ideas for improvement*” and this led to more open conversations. Participation became more accessible and meaningful. However, this also means that, in trying to make

the concept more relatable, I may have contributed to confusion about what tourists were actually agreeing to. Realistically, few tourists consciously say yes to *co-creation* in an abstract or general sense. Partly because it is not a practice they are typically expected to evaluate, and partly because most are unfamiliar with the term.

By simplifying the language to make it more accessible, I may also have created distance from the academic point of departure raising the question: Did they actually co-create, or did they simply provide input? The simple answer may be: No, they did not say yes to co-creating with the destination in the classical sense. But they did say yes to helping improve something.

This highlights the importance of language, context, and presentation in shaping the legitimacy of participation. And it raises another ethical and analytical question: if participation is only accepted when packaged in everyday terms, do we risk tourists participating without being aware of it, and without the opportunity to critically reflect on their role? This realisation places demands on both researchers and practitioners. One must consider not only the formats used, but also the language in which they are framed. In this thesis, my own vocabulary, shaped by my academic context, may at times have contributed to the very distance experienced by several informants. This underlines that co-creation is not only about intent and design, but also about linguistic accessibility, transparency, and the opportunity for reflective participation.

The analytical findings point to a need to rethink how tourist participation in destination development is understood and facilitated. Rather than treating participation as a binary, something one either does or does not do, the analysis shows that engagement exists on a spectrum, shaped by factors such as context, format, and language. The tourists show a willingness to contribute, but they do so selectively, and in ways that feel relevant, non-binding, and meaningful.

This perspective has several implications. First, it emphasises the need to understand participation as a situated and dynamic practice, where the level of involvement does not necessarily reflect willingness or interest, but rather how participation is framed. When co-creation is presented as something experiential or relational, rather than as a strategic responsibility, motivation tends to increase. Here, concepts such as autonomy and relatedness become useful. Not as ends in themselves, but as indicators of when participation is likely to be perceived as meaningful.

Although this thesis has shown that tourists are willing to contribute, when it happens on their own terms the question remains: How can destinations work with co-creation as a strategic tool without it feeling contrived or instrumental to the guest? This is a challenge that extends beyond the scope of this thesis, but one that this research hopes to meaningfully contribute to.

## 7. Conclusion

**So how do tourists actually relate to the idea of being involved in the development of a destination—and to what extent do they wish to contribute to the co-creation of the place they visit?**

This explorative question was examined through a combination of theoretical mapping and qualitative analysis. The literature review showed that co-creation in tourism has evolved from focusing on the joint creation of experiences to also encompassing strategic processes such as branding, product development, and destination planning. This shift has led to a distinction between experiential and strategic co-creation, where the latter requires tourists to contribute ideas, perspectives, or knowledge, rather than active part in consuming and producing values (Dabholkar, 1990 as cited in Prebensen, N. K., & Foss, L. (2011). It reflects a broader shift in paradigm from seeing tourists as passive consumers of ready-made products to viewing them as “informed, networked, empowered, and active” partners (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

The findings of the thesis indicate that many tourists are indeed willing to contribute to the place they visit, but on their own terms. Participation is experienced as motivating when it occurs in informal, experience-based formats, and when the tourist feels acknowledged and listened to. Conversely, terms such as “workshop,” “planning,” or “development” tend to create a sense of distance, signalling responsibility or obligations that feel out of place in a leisure context (Iso-Ahola, S. E. 1982). Motivation is therefore highly context-sensitive and closely tied to how participation is framed. Many informants were willing to contribute ideas or share experiences, yet reluctant to engage in more formalised processes or take part in decision-making. This emphasizes a conceptual distinction between participation and involvement: one may participate without being emotionally invested, and vice versa. To explore these dynamics, the thesis applied a theoretical framework combining co-creation theory, motivation theory, and tourist typologies. This allowed for a threefold analysis: examining how tourists relate to participation (co-creation), what motivates or inhibits their engagement (motivation), and which types of tourists are likely to engage, and in what ways (typologies). This theoretical combination laid the groundwork for a nuanced understanding of tourist involvement that goes beyond simply distinguishing between participants and non-participants. It highlights significant variations in preferences, levels of engagement, and underlying motivations.

The analysis revealed that tourists participate selectively, primarily when the form of participation is simple, relevant, and embedded within the experience. They are generally willing to contribute but reluctant to assume responsibility. Many prefer to “help” rather than to “develop.” Here, language and framing play a decisive role. When strategic terminology is replaced with everyday language,

participation becomes easier to accept. However, this also creates a paradox: the less co-creation is framed as a strategy, the more strategically effective it may become.

The typology developed in this thesis features the pragmatic improver, the experience-oriented participant, and the reluctant observer, and illustrates that involvement is not a singular phenomenon but one that takes many forms. These types show that motivation, willingness to participate, and social preferences vary considerably. As such, destinations seeking to engage tourists in co-creation must tailor their approaches and communication strategies accordingly. It is important to emphasize that these three ideal-typical role understandings are not fixed categories but rather analytical reference points that help us interpret how tourists position themselves in relation to destination development. Each type represents a different level of willingness, motivation, and preferred format of participation, and underscores that engagement exists on a spectrum rather than as a binary.

In conclusion, this thesis offers three overarching insights:

First, tourist engagement in destination development should be understood as a spectrum rather than a binary opposition. Second, participation becomes meaningful when it is voluntary, experience-oriented, and clearly separated from responsibility and formal planning. Third, in order for co-creation to be perceived as legitimate and useful, researchers and practitioners must design both formats and language based on the tourist's perspective, not merely the needs of the destination.

While this thesis does not claim to provide definitive answers on how co-creation should be implemented across all contexts, it offers valuable insights into how tourist perspectives can be more thoughtfully and respectfully integrated into the development of future destinations.

### **Reflection on the Use of AI in the Thesis Process**

Artificial intelligence has played a suggestive role in the development of this thesis, both as a practical tool and as a form of personal support. AI was used at various stages of the process: for linguistic feedback, idea development, structuring sections, and assisting with the visual illustrations. It also served as a kind of dialogue partner throughout a process that at times felt both overwhelming and isolating. As a student managing learning difficulties and personal challenges such as exam anxiety, and ADHD, I found that AI provided structure, clarity, and a sense of guidance. In moments where academic work can feel unmanageable without a clear framework, the ability to ask the AI for explanations, formulations, or structural help. Even in moments of acute anxiety, being able to engage with an AI system helped me regain focus and continue working. It is important to emphasize that all written content in this thesis has been conceived and written by me as the researcher, with support from AI primarily in the form of rephrasing or rewriting poorly or unclear sentences. In instances

where I was unsure about theoretical concepts, the AI helped unpack and clarify them – always followed by my own revision and critical engagement. I also used DeepL and Grammarly to support the English translation and refinement of the text.

At the same time, using AI has required a strong sense of critical awareness. ChatGPT, in particular, tends to provide affirming and cooperative responses, which means the user must remain cautious and reflective. On several occasions, the suggestions provided were either misleading or factually incorrect, making it clear that AI should serve as a supplement, for academic judgement and expertise and not a replacement. Overall, AI has been a good support throughout the writing process, especially for someone with learning challenges. However, its use has also demanded ongoing reflection, critical thinking, and a clear understanding of the limits of what technology can offer in academic research.

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