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The Production and Consumption of Experiences:

A Study of the Spa Industry in Norway

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Trondheim, June 2015

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management
Department of Geography



NTNU – Trondheim
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Berit Therese Nilsen

Trondheim, October, 2014

Summary

The experience economy has been put on the political agenda particularly in the Scandinavian countries, where the role of the experience industries with regard to regional and rural development has received a fair amount of attention. As a result, existing research on the experience industry to a large extent deals with parts of the industry characterized by part-time employment and seasonal activities in rural locations. In addition, the existing literature presents a variety of practices regarding how researchers categorize both the experience industries as well as several related fields.

How to demarcate the experience industries is not an obvious matter, and the first topic to be addressed here is therefore categorization. The work with exploring research question 1: *What characterizes the experience industries, and what challenges do we face when attempting to define and categorize them?* resulted in Paper 1; 'Defining and categorizing the experience industries' which was co-written with my supervisor, Professor Britt Engan Dale (Nilsen & Dale, 2013). Here the debate surrounding the demarcation and definition of the service industry in the 1980s and 1990s is used to shed light on the ongoing debate regarding the experience industries. General principles of classification are presented, as well as suggestions relating to the existing classification system of economic activity, the NACE code system, and its limitations.

The next main topic is how the spa industry can illustrate the massive consumption trend that the experience industries represent, and what characterizes the spa industry is investigated into by looking at how the industry is marketing itself. To answer research question 2: *What characterizes the Norwegian spa industry, what is its marketing communicating, and how are the spa industry's experience spaces constructed and represented?* - I analysed Norwegian spa's home pages in Paper 2: 'Presenting spa experiences online: constructing places of well-being' (Nilsen, Manuscript submitted). The spa industry uses a number of objects and artefacts, ideas and philosophies actively in the marketing of treatments that either provide the customer with well-being experiences or are aimed at modifying the customer's physical appearance. The analysis suggests that self-disciplined bodies and consumption are increasingly interlinked, luxury is something we all deserve, authenticity is a relative concept, and that the exotic 'others' are still used to identify 'us'.

The third main topic addressed in this thesis is that of the *experience* itself. Attempting to understand the experience industries without having a clear understanding of what an experience is and means to people seems futile. In the attempt to reach such an understanding, psychological elements, as well as social dimensions, ought to be included in addition to the role and impact of surrounding materiality. Crucial elements in this context are the way in which the body to an increasing degree can be a scene of consumption as well as a display of capital. To answer research question 3: *What role does the body play in the individual's production and consumption of spa experiences?* therapists and customers are interviewed about their spa experiences. The results are presented in Paper 3: 'The role of the body and body ideals in the production and consumption of spa experiences' (Nilsen, 2013). In the article, the body's central role in this kind of experience consumption is emphasized, as well as the different roles that various people's bodies take on. While some bodies are in place, others are not, and how consumption, identity, and the body are connected is central to the analysis.

Part 1 of the thesis links the various topics together, provides a background for understanding the growth of the experience industries, and gives a more thorough account of the methods used.

Sammendrag

Opplevelsesnæringene er satt på den politiske agenda særlig i de skandinaviske landene, hvor de har fått stor oppmerksomhet i forhold til regional og rural utvikling. Som et resultat dreier eksisterende forskning på opplevelsesnæringene seg i stor grad om deler av næringen som kan karakteriseres av deltidsarbeid og sesongbetont aktivitet i rurale strøk. I tillegg er både opplevelsesnæringene og beslektede felt kategorisert på svært varierende måter.

Det første temaet som adresseres i denne avhandlingen er derfor kategorisering, siden det ikke er noe åpenbart svar på hvordan opplevelsesnæringene kan og bør avgrenses. Problemstilling 1: *Hva karakteriserer opplevelsesnæringene, og hvilke utfordringer møter vi når vi forsøker å definere og kategorisere dem?* er hovedfokus i Paper 1: «Defining and categorizing the experience industries» som er skrevet sammen med professor Britt Engan Dale (Nilsen & Dale, 2013). Her blir debatten som var knyttet til avgrensning og definering av servicenæringen på 1980 og 1990-tallet brukt til å kaste lys over den pågående debatten om avgrensning og definering av opplevelsesnæringene. Vi presenterer og diskuterer generelle prinsipper for klassifisering, samt det eksisterende klassifikasjonssystemet for økonomisk aktivitet - NACE-systemet, og dets begrensninger.

Videre i denne avhandlingen blir søkelyset rettet mot hvordan spa-næringen kan illustrere den massive konsumtrenden opplevelsesnæringene kan sies å representere, gjennom å studere hva som kjennetegner hvordan spanæringens markedsføring. For å svare på problemstilling 2: *Hva kommuniseres i markedsføringen på hjemmesidene til norske spa, og hvordan er ulike opplevelsesrom konstruert og presentert?*, er hjemmesidene til norske spas analysert og resultatene presentert i Paper 2: «Presenting spa experiences online: constructing places of well-being» (Nilsen, manuskriptet er innsendt). Spanæringen bruker en rekke objekter og artefakter, ideer og filosofier aktivt i markedsføringen av behandlinger som enten skal gi kunden velværeopplevelser eller endre kundens utseende. Analysen viser at selvdisiplinerte kropp og konsum i økende grad er sammenkoplede, at luksus nå er noe vi alle fortjener, at autentisitet er et relativt begrep, og at eksotiske «andre» fortsatt brukes til å identifisere «oss».

Et tredje tema i avhandlingen er selve opplevelsen. Å forsøke å forstå opplevelsesnæringene uten å ha en viss forståelse av hva en opplevelse er og betyr for mennesker fremstår som meningsløst. I forsøket på å oppnå en slik forståelse ser jeg det som nødvendig å inkludere

psykologiske elementer i en viss grad, i tillegg til sosiale, samt å inkludere betydningen av materialiteten i omgivelsene. For å besvare problemstilling 3: *Hvilken rolle spiller kroppen i individuell produksjon og konsum av en kommersiell opplevelse?* ble både behandlere og kunder intervjuet om deres spaopplevelser. Resultatene er presentert i Paper 3: «The role of the body and body ideals in the production and consumption of spa experiences» (Nilsen, 2013) hvor kroppens sentrale posisjon i denne typen opplevelseskonsum er fremhevet, i tillegg til de ulike rollene som forskjellige kropper spiller. Mens noens kropper er «in-place» er andres kropper det ikke, og hvordan konsum, identitet og kropp er koplet sammen er sentralt i analysen.

Del 1 av avhandlingen knytter de ulike temaene sammen, presenterer bakgrunnen for fremveksten av opplevelsesnæringene og gir en mer utfyllende beskrivelse av metodene som er brukt.

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Papers:

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Paper 2: Presenting Experiences Online: Constructing Places of Well-Being

Paper 3: The Role of the Body and Body Ideals in the Production and Consumption of Spa Experiences

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Part 1

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This thesis is the result of work that started in 2008, when the Department of Geography announced a PhD grant for research on the experience economy. There were few restrictions or guidelines, and as the grateful recipient of this grant, but new to the research field, I began the work of finding out what the experience economy was all about.

My initial reflections dealt with what types of goods or services the experience industries cover and what constitutes a commercial experience. A literature search soon revealed that in a Scandinavian context, quite a lot of work had been done by the research community in Denmark in particular. In the previous year, the book *Oplevelsesøkonomi - produktion, forbrug, kultur* (Bærenholdt & Sundbo, 2007) had been published, a publication not only presenting a substantial contribution to the research field, but also answering a lot of my initial questions regarding the experience economy.

O'Dell (2010, p. 17) points out that the experience economy was put on the political agenda particularly in the Scandinavian countries, as opposed to North America and other parts of the world, and 'became something which politicians, tourism, city planners, and municipal leaders actively endeavoured to develop and implement'. When I started writing this thesis, a general optimism had already surrounded the field for some years, where the experience economy was presented as a general solution to a number of challenges regarding employment and revitalization particularly of rural areas.

In Scandinavian politics, experience industries received particular attention with regard to regional and rural development (e.g. Bille, 2012; Bille & Lorenzen, 2008; Freire-Gibb, 2011; Lorentzen, 2009; Lorentzen & Hansen, 2009). As a result, research on the experience industry so far has to a large extent dealt with parts of the industry characterized by part-time employment and seasonal activities in rural locations (e.g. Haugen & Vik, 2008; Nilsen,

2009b; Nordstrand & Johnsen, 2008; Tolstad, 2014). Research on festivals and theme parks (e.g. Jaeger & Mykletun, 2009; Ryan & Wollan, 2013), nature-based experience tourism (e.g. Flø, 2008; Mehmetoglu, 2007), farm tourism and locally produced food (e.g. Brandth & Haugen, 2008; Skavhaug & Brandth, 2012; Vittersø & Jervell, 2011), as well as ‘adrenalin-inducing’ experiences (e.g. Hallin & Mykletun, 2006; Imboden, 2012; Mykletun, 2009) are presented through a range of academic approaches.

My curiosity was triggered regarding the success of various initiatives, and I started my research for this thesis by mapping experience industries in two rural municipalities off coast of Trøndelag as part of a larger project called VRI Trøndelag¹. I aimed to get an overview of the total number of experience providers, as well as to find information about the content of the businesses and what kind of experiences they were selling. Further, the study was designed to find out more about what markets the bidders operated within, as well as whether and how they cooperated. I also assessed what kind of potential the various businesses had and what challenges they were facing. With the help of several very service-minded people in the administration of the two municipalities, I listed potential experience businesses. Businesses that were in accordance with my definition of an experience industry were then contacted and asked to complete a questionnaire.

The findings were interesting in many respects, but did not primarily increase my knowledge of the experience industries. Instead, challenges regarding running a seasonal business in a rural area, with little surplus, lack of necessary marketing skills, and rivalry with neighbouring municipalities were reported. These challenges were about being small, rural, low on capital, as well as lacking the necessary marketing and innovation skills, and not about selling experiences (Nilsen, 2009b). I decided to abandon my original plan and to instead develop another. After that brief encounter with a small part of the experience industry as well as reading some relevant literature, certain aspects about the industry seemed to require a closer look, and three topics stood out. These topics formed the basis of the research for my thesis.

The first topic was categorization, as there seemed to be a lot of different practices regarding how different researchers categorized not only the experience industries but also several other

¹ VRI Trøndelag was the regional initiative of the Research Council of Norway’s programme ‘Virkemidler for regional FoU og innovasjon’ (VRI).

related fields. Was it constructive to label the increased supply and demand for experiences in society ‘experience industries’, or was it perhaps more appropriate to link this phenomenon to the creative industries? Alternatively, perhaps this societal phenomenon just represented an expansion of the cultural industries? Many of the typical experience industries comprise creativity and cultural aspects as well as experiences, and it is not a straightforward task to separate the three. While taking a PhD course on experience industries in Aalborg, I became aware that Professor Anne Lorentzen (2013) at Aalborg University, Denmark, was looking specifically into this matter, and her research was later presented in the chapter titled ‘Post-industrial growth: Experience, culture or creative economies?’ in Sundbo and Sørensen’s *Handbook on the Experience Economy* (2013a). This clarified some aspects regarding the positions of the experience and both creative and cultural industries in relation to one another. However, it was still apparent that there was no general agreement on what should be included and excluded in the experience industries. Should any topics with a slight focus on experiences be included or should only a small selection of industries that are primary experience providers be included, as practised by Statistics Norway? How to demarcate the experience industries was not clear-cut, and one of the main tasks of my research project was therefore to take a closer look into this matter. The work resulted in Paper 1, ‘Defining and categorizing experience industries’ which was co-written with my supervisor Professor Britt Engan Dale and published in 2013 (Nilsen & Dale, 2013).

The work also led to me use the term ‘experience industries’ rather than ‘experience economy’ when discussing, for example, the spa industry in this thesis, as

The experience *economy* should be seen as a broad general process in the economy, where integration of experiences can create increased value to all kinds of goods and services in what could be labelled the secondary experience sector. By contrast, experience *industries* should be delimited to economic activities where experience is the main product. (Nilsen & Dale, 2013, p. 65)

In other words, when experiences are what are primarily capitalized, the correct label should be ‘experience industries’.

The second topic emerged after I decided to abandon my initial plan to study the two above-mentioned rural coastal municipalities. I started searching for an industry that would be

enlightening to study, in the hope of unravelling interesting aspects regarding ‘the experience’. As mentioned earlier, research in the field was concentrated around tourism, festivals, and adrenaline-inducing sports, and in Norway regional and rural politics were often the actual topic of experience studies. As previously experienced from my own research (Nilsen, 2009b), these rural experience providers were typically struggling to make ends meet, were often one-man firms, had to base part of their business on themselves or members of their family working without pay, offered experiences that were often restricted to seasonal activities, and saw it as very challenging to meet demands for marketing and innovation. These businesses were selling experiences, but how were they representatives of what Pine and Gilmore already in 1999 saw as a sweeping social change? After some discussions with my supervisor, Britt Engan Dale, she suggested that I should study the spa industry instead. This industry is fairly new in an academic context (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009), prosperous (Roos, 2009), and is clearly selling experiences in a wrapping that succeeds in many respects, as new spas seem to appear everywhere. The business operates year round, generates profit, has a number of employees, and has an exclusiveness to it that somehow seems appropriate for an experience industry. The next step in the work for this thesis was therefore to find out what characterizes the spa industry, through looking at how the industry is marketing itself. The results of the work are presented in Paper 2: ‘Presenting spa experiences online: constructing places of well-being’ (Nilsen, Manuscript submitted), which is based on an analysis of Norwegian spa’s home pages.

The third topic in the research field that triggered my curiosity was about the *experience* itself. Jantzen and Vetner (2007), in their chapter ‘Oplevelsens psykologiske struktur’, give a thorough presentation of what an experience is from a psychological viewpoint, building on among others Schulze (1992) and Csikszentmihalyi (1990). Understanding the psychological elements of an experience is central when studying this field, as part of the development can only be understood if we know what is valuable about the experience to the individual. After starting to research the spa industry, it became clear that other dimensions were also essential for understanding the various spa experiences. One such dimension is the social dimension. Perhaps especially for this kind of luxury consumption, the element of ‘distinction’ is a motivation factor for consuming the experience. Also the role and impact of surrounding materiality has been recognized lately and included in some more recent research (Svabo, Larsen, Haldrup, & Bærenholdt, 2013). Further, it is crucial to understand how the body to an increasing degree can be a scene of - as well as a display of - consumption.

If we consider the above-described components in combination, it is possible to gain an understanding of how a successful commercial experience ought to be produced or facilitated to meet or perhaps even exceed the expectations of potential consumers. To find out more about how experiences can be produced and consumed therapists and customers were interviewed about spa experiences for Paper 3; ‘The role of the body and body ideals in the production and consumption of spa experiences’ (Nilsen, 2013), which presents the findings from the interviews.

The experience industries, with the spa industry included, has increased tremendously in size in the last 10-20 years, an increase that is obviously also related to phenomena outside itself. To understand the growth of the experience industries, it is important to keep in mind that they have not grown in a societal vacuum. The conditions that made this growth possible are themselves the results of development characteristics and cultural, political, and economic trends, facilitating a stronger focus on individual needs and responsibilities over collective ones. These issues are more thoroughly dealt with in section 2, where figure 3 illustrates how economic issues related to production and consumption, as well as political development and academic discourse are all concurrent in bringing these changed conditions about.

1.2 Main objectives and research questions

The main objectives in this thesis stems from my thoughts as described in the introduction and are the direct results of my wish to investigate further into the content of the experience industries themselves, as well as understand more of the reasons behind the growth of the experience industries. The thesis aims to address three main objectives, operationalised in underlying research questions. It is possible to see each of the objectives and questions as operating at a different level, as the first concerns a general understanding of what characterizes the whole experience industry, the second is about the marketing and communication of one particular experience industry, and the third is about experiences on an individual level.

The first main objective is to understand what characterizes the experience industry, as opposed to other components in the general classification of industries. The purpose of this objective is to see if there are aspects regarding commercial experiences that enable us to separate them from other industries in a sensible manner. In that way it would be possible to have a demarcation regarding the actual industries as well as a demarcation of the research field. As it is a variety of understandings of what the experience industries consist of exist simultaneously. This main objective is operationalised into:

Research question 1: *What characterizes the experience industries, and what challenges do we face when attempting to define and categorize them?*

My second main objective is to understand how successful commercial experiences are communicated, and if that can contribute to understanding why the experience industries have gained such popularity in the last 10-20 years. If the successful marketing of experiences is appealing to aspects that characterise society in more general terms, it might then be possible to see the growth of the experience industries as part of a larger societal development. This objective is operationalised into:

Research question 2: *What characterizes the Norwegian spa industry, what is its marketing communicating, and how are the spa industry's experience spaces constructed and represented?*

The third and last main objective is to contribute further to understanding how a commercial experience is produced, as opposed to other goods and services. One aspect often mentioned in the experience literature which is here looked further into, is how experiences are co-produced, or 'prosumed', as a successful experience is dependent on both the consumers and producers participation. The role of the body is another central aspect, but one which so far in experience research has been addressed to a very limited degree. The links between prosumed experiences and the body in new consumption practices, related to social distinction and increased individual focus and responsibility are here looked into.

How experiences are co-produced and embodied is addressed and operationalized in:

Research question 3: *What role does the body play in the individual's production and consumption of spa experiences?*

Much of the experience research literature to date has focused either on experience consumption as a sweeping force in terms of being the ‘new’ service industry - or on the misinterpreted and blown out of proportion role of commercial experiences. By looking into the spa industry, which clearly focuses on the experience and at the same time must be said to be commercially successful, my intention in this thesis is to contribute to expanding and nuancing our knowledge of experience industries.

1.3 Main contributions

In this section I outline how this thesis is contributing to supplementing our knowledge on several topics. One might ask how this is a relevant, interesting and not at least useful topic to study? During this project I have on several occasions felt the need to justify myself and the topic I have chosen, as conducting fieldwork in a spa can seem somewhat superfluous, and even superficial.

One point is that not all research needs to be about fixing a problem. With regards to the experience industry, from my point of view, quite the opposite is the case - we need to know why it is successful. What is so valuable about these types of experiences that an industry can grow to the extent that the spa industry has done within a couple of decades?

The experience industries’ extensive growth can be seen as an expression of the individualism accompanying the rise of the neoliberal state, where consumption to an ever increasing degree is part of identity narration, expressed through the body. The trend can be seen in how experiential marketing is progressing, aspiring to providing the potential customer with alluring representations (see Paper 2). In a geographical context, the spa industry is illustrative of how various geographies are involved and span across various scales, from the body on the one hand to the global on the other.

Although research question 1 mainly concerns the definition and categorization of the experience industry, it also addresses several topics related to the process of knowledge production in a more general manner. The point that research and knowledge production is

dependent on a conceptual and categorical precision level is relevant far beyond the topics discussed here, and especially so in a fairly new area of research such as with experience ‘prosumption’. If we are not clear about what we are discussing, we might not be discussing the same.

By addressing research question 2, I attempt to uncover how experiences are marketed, and in the process also reveal more general traits concerning experiential marketing, globalization and authenticity. Since experiential marketing view the customers as both rational *and* emotional (section 2.4.1), it communicates a variety of messages meant to appeal to both our rational and emotional sides. The relevance of space or context is underlined by the fact that ‘true’ authenticity might not be what consumers are asking for, and that the content of traditions, artefacts, and philosophies can both be continued as well as change when they travel in time and space. The fact that the body to an increasing degree is becoming a site of consumption can be linked to identity construction, as can the use of exotic ‘others’ in the narration of ‘us’.

Research question 3 addresses how spa experiences are perceived from a producer and consumer viewpoint. By comparing the two viewpoints, discrepancies between what customers expect and what therapists offer is revealed. As it is more common for researchers to look at either producer *or* consumer instead of both, this is a valuable element of my research (see paper 3 and section 2.3.2). Also, how truly individual in one respect and collective in another, the spa experiences informants tell about are, is an interesting point.

In spa consumption the body plays a central part, including inconspicuous demands for a certain appearance and a certain type of body. However, the body plays a central part in a wide range of contemporary consumption practices, and incorporating the body is relevant not just in a spa context but also in relation to a variety of other geographical research topics, as these demands are currently symptomatic for our society (section 2.4.2).

The first section of research question 1, ‘what characterizes the experience industries’ is central to this thesis, and is addressed both empirically and theoretically through part 1 and 2. Empirically it is addressed in paper 2 and 3, through the study of the spa industry as illustrative of two trends; symbolic representations in marketing, and individualism in contemporary consumption, including the body both as an expression of this individualism as well as a site of consumption. Theoretically it is primarily addressed in Paper 1 and in part 1.

In part 1 this is done towards a background characterised by changes in production, consumption, the academy and politics, through illuminating several current debates in geography, involving competing theoretical approaches and viewpoints aimed at explaining parts of these changes in society. The steadily increasing mix of economic and cultural matters, the blurring boundaries between sites of production and consumption, the increase in both the significance and responsibility of the individual are all examples of such approaches and viewpoints.

2. Theoretical perspectives

Reading various scientific publications is always a central part of doing research, so also in this study. To be informed about work done within my own research field, means I can avoid asking questions that have already been answered, as well as substantiate and contextualize my own findings. As journal articles and book chapters have a number of restrictions with regards to both length and scope, some topics are introduced and several topics are investigated further in this part of the thesis. Here I also wish to ‘connect the dots’ and provide a sense of coherence.

2.1 A brief backdrop

To understand the development of the experience industries, and hence the rise and reinvention of the spa business (Nilsen, Manuscript submitted), a brief historical backdrop is useful, as the development of the experience industry is part of a larger picture.

One path aimed at explaining this development focus on changes in production and consumption patterns. From around the 1970s and 1980s, radical changes occurred in consumption and production patterns. These changes are briefly summarized in Figure 1.

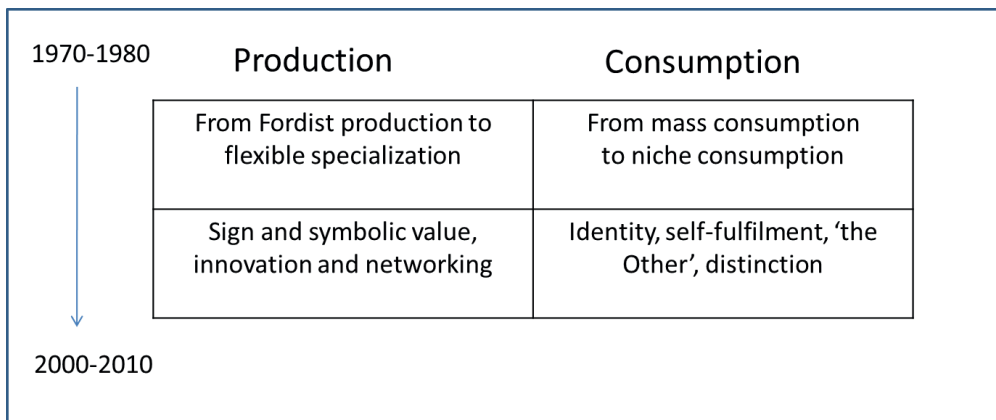


Figure 1: Changing production and consumption patterns

The change in production patterns was detected from ca.1970 (Piore & Sabel, 1984), in which mass production started to give way to a type of production that instead focused on symbolic and aesthetic values. The nature of consumption changed accordingly, and some claim that we can identify key elements of what has been termed ‘after-Fordist consumption’ (Coe, Kelly and Yeung 2007, p. 288). The scope of this change has been debated (Gertler, 1988) regarding whether the post-Fordistic production system has replaced the Fordistic one or whether it is more correct to talk about a co-existence (Dale, 1994). What is clear is that instead of mass-produced goods dominating in all markets, smaller producers aiming at niche markets succeed in an increasing number of areas. These niche markets have new and different sets of priorities and demands, and represent several changes in how both production and consumption should be understood. One of the changes includes an alteration from consumption driven by needs, price, and functionality, to consumption that is far more oriented towards the aesthetic and symbolic value of the products (Coe et al., 2007). This requires more extensive and detailed communication between producers and markets, as producers are expected to respond quickly to changes in demands in the market. They must therefore at all times be informed about consumers’ desires (O’Connor, 2007). The changes in production patterns can be explained as a shift brought about by more knowledgeable groups of consumers with more specific demands (Coe et al., 2007). For a period, the importance of the symbolic value was considered to dominate that of the material (e.g. Baudrillard, 1975), before Actor-Network theory led to a re-focus again on materiality (Hartwick, 2000).

A political change is also detected in academia during the 1980s, where, according to Hartwick (2000, p. 1177) radical geographers seem to have lost their confidence and instead

‘conservatism came to dominance’. This point can be linked to an approach more concerned with explaining the reasons for several societal changes with a stronger focus on political aspects - represented by the fairly recent debate in geography concerning the rise of the neoliberal state, and neoliberalism more in general. While the seeds of the neoliberal turn was planted as far back as the 1930s (Springer, 2010), the success of a relatively strong state in what is usually referred to as ‘Keynesian’ politics up until the 1960-70s prevented its growth earlier (Epstein, 2005). The economic instability emerging in the 1960s erupted with the OPEC crisis, the collapse of Bretton Woods fixed exchange rate system and the build up of massive debt in the Third World in the early 1970s (Epstein, 2005), and paved the way for a steady resurgence of liberal political ideas.

According to Springer (2010, p. 1025), the term neoliberalism refers to a ‘new political, economic, and social arrangement’ which emphasizes not only on market relations and on reducing the role of the state, but also on individual responsibility. So much so, that Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001, p. 5) claim that neoliberal thought has replaced the concern for *collectivism* characteristic of the post-war era with *individualism*. Figure 1 can therefore be added a dimension as displayed in Figure 2:


1970-1980	Politics	Production	Consumption
	From Keynesianism to Neoliberalism	From Fordist production to flexible specialization	From mass consumption to niche consumption
	Individualism, subjectivities, fragmentation	Sign and symbolic value, innovation and networking	Identity, self-fulfilment, ‘the Other’, distinction
2000-2010			

Figure 2, Economic and political changes.

These new political ideals, and the change from mass production to what is often referred to as ‘flexible specialization’ (Gertler, 1988) coincides, not surprisingly, with a number of changes in academic research as well, as shown in Figure 3.

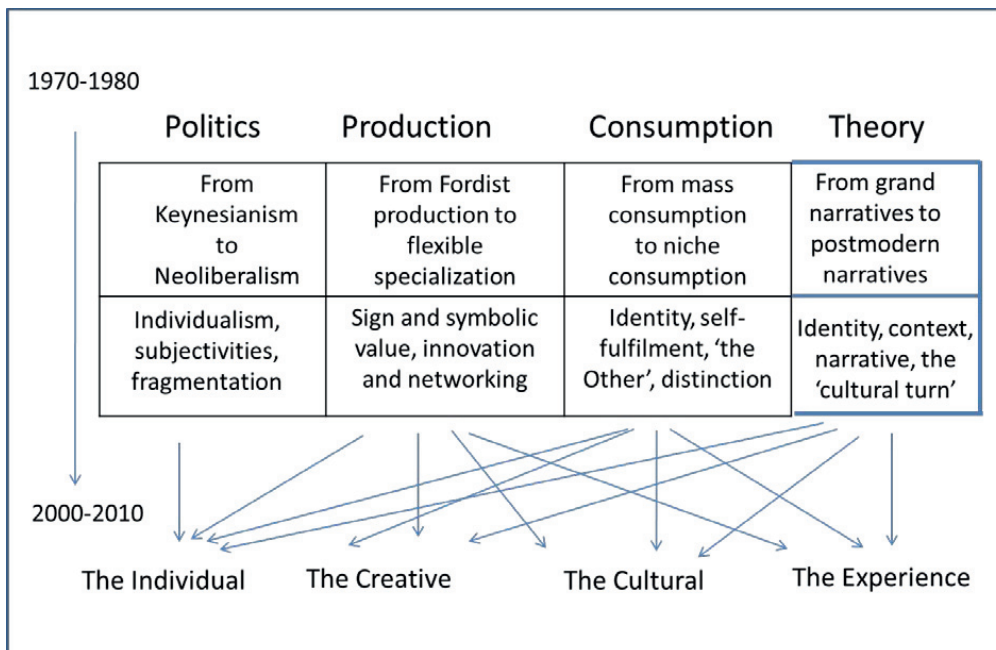


Figure 3, Economic, political and academic changes.

Predominantly, it coincides with what is labelled postmodernism or post-structuralism (Dear, 2001; Giddens, 1990; Grbich, 2004), but also with an increased interest in cultural and creative matters. This does not exclusively concern the economic field, but is characteristic also in the social and human sciences, and is often referred to as the 'cultural turn' (Barnes, 2001; Barnett, 1998; Cloke, 1997; Rodriguez-Pose, 2001) (section 2.3.1). The early 1990s were in general a time when ideology, epistemology, and discourse were scrutinized and debated rigorously. Significant attention was also given to how spaces of consumption are ideological constructions (Mansvelt, 2005). From cultural studies and multidisciplinary approaches analyses emerged of what goods and artefacts mean to people in their everyday life: 'Involving historical, ethnographic, literary, and semiotic analysis, cultural studies enhanced understanding of the experimental, aesthetic, and emotional – rather than the utilitarian – aspects of consumption' (Shove & Warde, 2002, p. 230–31).

While these approaches have several things in common, they are concerned with a variety of topics, and it is so far no single label that covers the whole of this development. Whether Harrison's (2007, pp. 590) talk of a 'relational turn' is corresponding or overlapping with Mansvelt's (2009, pp. 267) 'emotional turn' is not all that clear. What is clear is that the significance of relations and emotions are pointed to from various angles. This focus

addresses power relations that emerge in social contexts, and also how feelings can be externalized onto objects of consumption. In geography, ‘non-representational-theory’ (Thrift, 2007) has been used as a generic term for a theoretical path particularly associated with these issues as well as the re-emergence of materialities. Rather than talking about one theory, it might be more fruitful to talk about non-representative theories in plural, as this body of thoughts is continually emerging and encompassing more. Perhaps due to being methodological challenging as well as theoretically complex, the theories has been met with what Lorimer (2005, pp. 90) calls ‘guarded reception’, and Lorimer instead suggests the term ‘more-than-representational’. This term captures the elements missing in pure representational understandings, at the same time as they do not dismiss the more traditional and representational views. That aside, the theories have pointed to the insufficiency in how we as geographers have included bodily, emotional and affective aspects of our lives, which many will agree leave our research less than complete.

As an analytical model Figure 3 illustrates how larger societal issues and developments are causally linked to the rise of the ideologies of the self, the cultural, the creative and the experience. Figure 3 also presents the foundation of the theoretical perspectives in which this thesis is built upon, which is further elaborated in this section. In explaining the growth of experience consumption, it is essential to see how these changes are interlinked. Before looking closer at the relationship between identity and consumption, I present some thoughts on how to understand experiences and the experience industries.

2.2 Experiences and experience industries

Much has already been said about an increased emphasis on experiences in society (e.g. Bærenholdt & Sundbo, 2007; Carù & Cova, 2007; O’Dell & Billing, 2005), and especially Pine and Gilmore’s various contributions have received a lot of attention (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 1999, 2011, 2013). Apart from a critical approach in Paper 1 to their somewhat simplified view of service, goods, and experience classification, their contributions are not emphasized in this thesis. As Lorentzen (2013, p. 47) points out, ‘the ideas of Pine and

Gilmore from 1998 and 1999 do not represent new academic insight. What they have to say is a reflection, however partial, of established insight’.

At the core of this thesis lies a desire to contribute to further our knowledge and understanding of the experience industries. By choosing to study the spa industry, which is an industry that has rarely been given academic attention, not even within experience research, I aim to generate new insights. I therefore discuss the relevance of this topic for geography, as well as the role of the experience industry as a feature in more overarching global economic developments concerning identity, the emotive body, and consumption. However, I will first discuss approaches to understanding the concept experience.

The term ‘experience industry’ rather than ‘experience economy’ is employed in this thesis because the focus is on the experience ‘prosumption’, not experiences as ‘add-ons’ or as a tool in marketing. This is an important clarification, since at least two options are available when studying commercial experiences: either studying the experience aspect where ever it may show, or locating products where the main part or value is the experience – the ‘secondary’ or ‘primary’ experience industry in Sundbo and Bærenholdt’s (2007) terminology. In this thesis the spa industry is assumed to be and is treated as a primary experience provider, even though some of the research conducted for this thesis indicates that the spa industry can represent both the primary and secondary experience industry, as it consists of a conglomerate of industries (Nilsen, Manuscript submitted).

2.2.1 The experience

‘Experience’ might at first glance seem to be a relatively straightforward concept when discussing the ‘experience industries’. However, a closer look reveals several challenges and a multitude of possible approaches to understanding the concept, both alone and in a specific and academic context such as the one under study. One aspect in need of clarification regarding the concept ‘experience’ is the fact that the Norwegian term ‘*opplevelse*’ is not completely synonymous with the English term ‘experience’.

The fieldwork for this thesis was done in Norway, but as the thesis is written in English translation challenges need to be considered. The English term ‘experience’ can be translated

into two Norwegian terms: *erfaring* and *opplevelse* (as pointed out by Jantzen & Vetner, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 2013; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013b). Whereas *erfaring* refers to something one has done and therefore has some knowledge of, an *opplevelse* refers to something that is not an everyday experience and something that will provide more of an emotional response, usually a positive one. The English term ‘adventure’ covers some of the meaning of *opplevelse*, but not all of it. *Oxford Dictionaries* (2014) defines the word ‘adventure’ as: ‘excitement associated with danger or the taking of risks ... a reckless or potentially hazardous action or enterprise’. Clearly, not all experiences in the experience industry involve a chance of either risk or hazard. For example, a spa experience involving any of these outcomes would almost certainly indicate a negative or failed experience. However, to paraphrase the difference, in Norwegian, the statement ‘*Det var en erfaring*’ (It was an experience) would usually refer to some kind of incident that was instructive, but not necessarily pleasant, whereas the statement ‘*Det var en opplevelse*’ (It was an experience) would indicate some form of positive surprise, something that goes beyond one’s expectations and thus implying some form of emotional response. This difference highlights the importance of contextual definitions and demarcations. When discussing the experience industry, it is the latter of the two understandings that is relevant. A spa experience is supposed to be an *opplevelse* rather than an *erfaring*, and this is mirrored in both the interviewer’s and the informants’ use of the concept. The need of conceptual clarification is pointed out also by other researchers in the field (Holt & Lapenta, 2013), and is examined further in Paper 1.

After discussing these aspects regarding the concept experience, the next step is to look closer at different approaches to understanding what an experience is and what it means to us. Jantzen and Vetner (2007) refer to Gerhard Schulze’s *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft* as the most important sociological contribution to the phenomenon experience, and inspired by him they argue that three levels can be located within the individual when interpreting an experience, as shown in Figure 4.

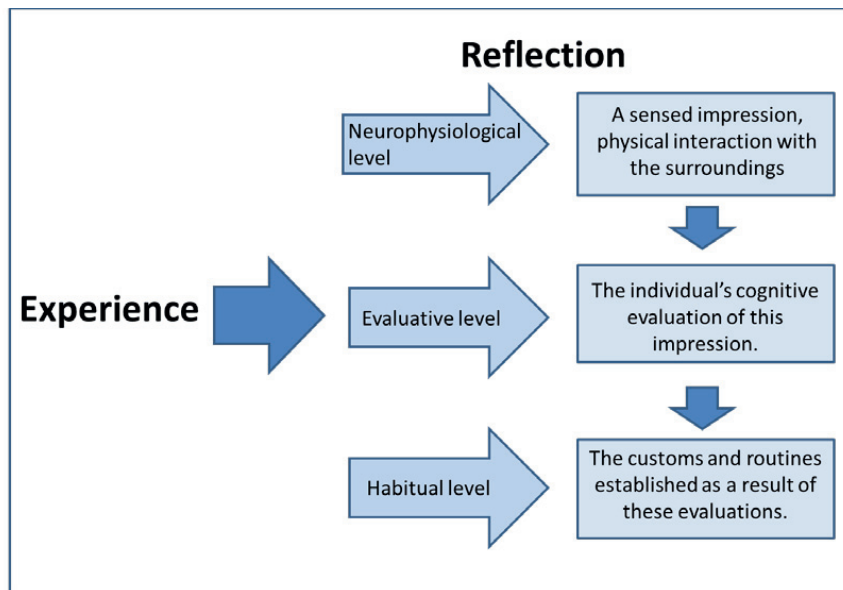


Figure 4: The experience (reproduced from Nilsen, 2009a, p. 7)

Jantzen and Vetner's first level is the neurophysiological level, which is closely tied to the physicality of the organism. The second level is the evaluative one, where bodily experiences are transformed to emotional evaluations. The third level is where habits and practices are formed and where the emotional evaluations are incorporated into cognitive framework. To take a spa treatment as an example, a massage ought to provide physical and mental well-being in order to be positively evaluated, and before being incorporated in the customer's habitual level and then re-consumed. All three levels are therefore important, but the work has to be done at the neurophysiological level. This point was obvious to a spa therapist interviewed in connection with Paper 3, who underlined the importance of touching the customer in order to establish contact and make them relax, thereby starting the experience (Nilsen, 2013).

Paramount to all three levels is reflection, imprinted with idiosyncratic differences due to individual demographic, cultural, and social variations, as well as differences due to biographical circumstances. In addition to these individual differences there are group-specific preferences, which Jantzen and Vetner (2007) account for by again referring to Schulze. Schulze claims that for many people the desire for experiences has become a decisive parameter in everyday life, and he meticulously accounts for specific ways to manage this urge for experiences in group-specific sets of values. Pleasure occurs when there

is an alteration from overstimulation to understimulation or vice versa, and the quicker this alteration occurs, the stronger the sense of pleasure. While some groups of people find the experience they seek by being challenged and having their identity tested, others prefer experiences that in some ways are reassuring and create feelings of security, a dichotomy that is supported by psychological research (e.g. Roberti, 2004). For example reversal theory, suggests that people are either in a telic mode, where the goal is to avoid anxiety, or a paratelic mode, where the goal is to avoid boredom (or actively seek adventure) (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2002).

The brief presentation above is intended to clarify how an experience can be understood on an individual level from a psychological viewpoint. However, there have been some critical responses to what can be seen as a tendency to 'overestimate the influence of sensorial factors on consumers' emotions' (Carù & Cova, 2006, p. 4). Hence, several other aspects regarding our understanding of what an experience is and why it is important to us should be considered. One objection to viewing an experience from a purely psychological standing, is that the social aspects of an experience might then not be given sufficient attention (Holt & Lapenta, 2013). Even though the production of a spa treatment experience is designed for an individual body, the actual experience might be valued just as much for its social aspects (Nilsen, 2013). While some customers are looking for individual experiences, others clearly prefer a shared and social experience.

Another objection to a psychological understanding of an experience as something solely going on within humans is raised for ignoring the impact and importance of surrounding materiality, and currently a complementary view that incorporates the material surroundings in creating experiences is emerging (Svabo et al., 2013). This addition to our understanding of a commercial experience is particularly relevant for Paper 2 in this thesis, as the material (and immaterial) elements used in spa marketing clearly have important functions for the experience. As illustrated by Figure 5, the point that luxurious and spacious surroundings are an important element in the spa experience was also mentioned during interviews with spa customers in Paper 3.



Figure 5, Spa interior (Source: Shutterstock 2014)

In addition to arguing that various viewpoints are necessary for illuminating different aspects of an experience, it is also important to remember that we are not talking about one type of experience – but rather of a group of experiences. Ritchie and Hudson (2009) separate between two types of experiences: the everyday life experiences with little or no preparations, and those that we plan and look forward to. The latter type is considered best when one is taken by surprise, but at the same time is somewhat prepared for an experience. If an experience can surprise us, but at the same time fulfil our expectations, we will be pleased (Abrahams in Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). The latter form is representative for experiences in the experience industry, as they need to be facilitated and prepared for and also benefit from anticipation.

Nuancing the picture even further, Otto and Ritchie (1996), building on the work of many others, identify six fundamental dimensions of the experience construct: ‘a Hedonic Dimension, an Interactive or Social Dimension, a Novelty Seeking or Escape Dimension, a Comfort Dimension, a Safety Dimension, and a Stimulation or Challenge Seeking Dimension’ (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009, p. 113). The experiences offered in a spa fit with the majority of these dimensions, many of which are mentioned by customers and therapists, such as the hedonic, social, escape, and comfort dimensions (Nilsen, 2013). Further, several of the dimensions are used in the marketing of spas, such as offering an escape from everyday life,

arguing for hedonic consumption because ‘you are worth it’, as well as offering positive experiences with others (Nilsen, Manuscript submitted).

One dimension regarding experiences that has been given particular attention is the ‘escape’ or ‘immersion’ dimension, which in many respects is what most clearly sets an experience aside from many of our more everyday kind of routines. Ritchie and Hudson (2009) refer to Csikszentmihalyi as being responsible for launching the concept ‘tourist experience’, as he studied experience in a leisure context already in 1975. Csikszentmihalyi is perhaps more famous for introducing the term ‘flow’ which describes the intensified attention and engagement in an event, to such an extent that one is partly or completely “lost” for the outside world. Achieving such a flow makes us experience intense pleasure and happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1999). At least something resembling flow can be traced in one of the interviews where a consumer describes a spa experience: ‘Oh completely wonderful! Yes. I thought it was wonderful ... I was prepared for being “out of this world”, and it was very much an “out of this world” experience’ (Nilsen, 2013, p. 146). Carù and Cova (2006, p. 5) choose to use the term ‘immersion’ to describe the partaking in and the becoming one with an experience that occurs when there is a ‘total elimination of the distance between consumers and the situation, the former being plunged in a thematised and secure spatial enclave where they can let themselves go’.

However, as reported in Paper 3, interviews with customers revealed that ‘flow’ or total immersion is not necessarily the goal for everyone when treating themselves to a spa visit. Social aspects, the feeling of luxury, and alone time to relax were among other motivational factors behind visiting a spa. Without going further into Ritchie and Hudson’s dimensions, Csikszentmihalyi’s flow, or Carù and Cova’s immersion, it is possible to summarize that pleasure or some form of well-being, intense partaking, or happiness ought to be a part of or the result of any experience for that experience to be desired – people just arrive at those feelings in different ways.

2.2.2 The experience industries

The experience economy is one of several concepts intended to capture a recent societal development in which experiences has come to the fore, both as a product and as a means of selling other products. As mentioned in the Introduction, especially in Scandinavia, political interest and early research on commercial experiences were closely linked to regional and rural development (Bille, 2010, 2012; Bille & Lorenzen, 2008), and some of the early enthusiasm characterizing this field of research has since cooled down (De Paoli, 2006; Freire-Gibb, 2011). However, the focus on experiences has never been more relevant, as experiences are becoming a vital part of a constantly wider range of products. Almost any purchase today might include an experience, and new products are continuously developed within the experience industry.

According to some (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Rasmussen, 2007), there is virtually no limit to the experience economy, as a simple purchase of anything can provide an experience. This view of the experience economy as a mega-trend implies viewing the offering of experiences as a global trend across a range of industries (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011). This approach can be challenging, as the category ‘experience economy’ or ‘experience industry’, is considered to include a range of industries using experiences to sell other products, rather than to sell an experience. To meet that challenge, Sundbo and Bærenholdt (2007) suggest subdividing the experience economy/industry, so that we talk about primary experience products on the one side, and secondary experience products on the other. When discussing marketing and marketing strategies, as Pine and Gilmore do, the difference might not be that interesting. If, on the other hand, the production and consumption of an experience is the main focus, then the separation is very relevant, as a secondary experience product is really about selling something else. In a geographical context, the division between experience products that are produced and distributed– the ‘foot-loose’ products (Lorentzen, 2009), and the experience products that demand the presence of both the supplier and consumer is particularly interesting, as the second type involves place in the production and consumption in a very different way.

Clearly, how to define and demarcate the experience industry is not a straightforward task. According to statistical data, the experience industry in Norway is located in a tiny subgroup

under the heading ‘Opplevelses-, arrangements- og aktivitetsarrangørvirksomhet’ [Experience and activity arrangements] NACE code 79.903. This thesis presents an understanding of what ought to be categorized as experience industries that extend far beyond the range of this category. The spa industry is for instance not included under NACE code 79.903, but rather under NACE code 96.040: ‘Virksomhet knyttet til kroppsspleie og fysisk velvære’ [Enterprises related to body care and physical well-being]. However, the latter category excludes ‘Medisinsk massasje og terapi’ [Medical massage and therapy] which is placed under code 86.909 ‘Andre helsetjenester’ [Other health services] and ‘Sunnhets-, fitness- og bodybuilderklubber’ [Health, fitness, and bodybuilding clubs] which is located under code 93.13 ‘Treningssentre’ [Training centre] (SSB, 2014). Another category that probably covers the spa content to some extent, especially some of the day spas, is NACE code 96.020: ‘Frisering og annen skjønnhetspleie’ [Hair-dressing and other beauty treatments] which includes facial massages, manicure, pedicure, and make-up (SSB, 2014). This illustrates some of the complexity regarding the coding of various overlapping industries, challenges that are further addressed in Paper 1 (Nilsen and Dale, 2013).

2.2.3 Researching experience consumption

The experience industries involve products that are far removed from standardization and mass production. To provide the consumer with a sought-after experience, the product should stimulate their senses in a desired fashion via material and immaterial facilitation, which is then interpreted and evaluated as positive before it is attached to the consumer’s mental schemes as a positive experience that could be repeated in the future as well as recommended to others. The experience should provide pleasure from either overstimulation or understimulation, possibly even a feeling of flow, and in addition fit with the consumer’s narrative in the sense that his or her desired lifestyle and social reputation will benefit from it (see section 2.4.1).

In this thesis several angles to studying commercial experiences are presented, as I view the subject to be a complex matter in need of several contextual and customized approaches To

understand what an experience means to us as individuals, members of social groups, and consumers, it is necessary to generate further knowledge about the experience industry, whether we focus on the cultural or economic aspects, or a combination of the two. In Paper 3, 'The role of the body and body ideals in the production and consumption of spa experiences' (Nilsen, 2013), the experience is discussed from both producers' and consumers' perspectives, where I show how the production and consumption of the 'perfect' experience also requires a combination of many elements. A similar point is made in Paper 2, 'Presenting experiences online - Constructing spaces for well-being' (Nilsen, Manuscript submitted), as a variety of material elements, representations and 'more-than' representations are used in creating spaces for spa experiences.

The before mentioned book by Bærenholdt and Sundbo (2007) *Oplevelsesøkonomi - produktion, forbrug, kultur*, has in many respects provided a common ground for many discussions regarding research on the experience economy, which to some degree is pursued further in the *Handbook on the Experience Economy* (Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013a). Since this is a fairly new and interdisciplinary field of research, much work is yet to be done. Locating one's own study within geography as a discipline, experience studies as a field of research, as well as in relation to terminology, is important in order to form a geographical base for understanding the above-described phenomena in full.

2.2.4 Spas as experience consumption

Experience-based consumption can only be understood if we identify why commercial experiences are so highly valued, and why people to an increasing extent are consuming experiences. One of my criteria for choosing to study the spa industry was that it is an experience provider offering experiences that require the presence of both consumer and producer, which heavily involves place in the 'prosumption' of experiences. Although spas might at first not appear to represent a typical experience industry, as it is closely tied to, and may even constitute, several industries that are not experience industries, such as beauty parlours, hotels, cosmetic surgery, and alternative medicine, this thesis is not the first to place spas under the experience umbrella (see for instance O'Dell 2010). The spa industry comprises several typical characteristics of an experience offering, as their prime product has

an intentional focus on the experience, aiming at creating internal (and external) pleasure. The experiences are facilitated, profit-making, non-material, and demand participation from the customer. Spa experiences can be both individual and collective (Nilsen, 2013), and the main ‘products’ can be classified as pure experience products, not so much because the sale of additional products, such as cleansers, body-shape products, face, hand, nail, and foot creams, cosmeceuticals, and vitamins, is irrelevant, but because that aspect is under-communicated compared to the well-being, therapies, and relaxing experiences sold by the industry.

In Norway, spas represent a fairly recent trend and coincide with the general development in the experience industry since the early 1990s. Even so, elements from traditional spas worldwide are used to create an eclectic display of exotic elements, well-being, good looks, health, and hygiene. These elements are visible in the interior, treatments, philosophies, texts, and images that the spas use in a variety of ways. The industry ranges from skincare, via Botox, to holistic spa treatment well within the ‘alternative’ industry. That modern spas represent something different than traditional ones is recognized (O’Dell, 2010) and new ways in which modern spa services are framed, is the main focus of Paper 2 through analysing Norwegian spas homepages. Although these experiences are not consumed until customers physically visit the spas, the aim is to make the spas’ home pages present the spas’ experiences virtually in such a way that purchases hopefully will take place. The digital representations as well as ‘more-than’ representations, of various spas that the home pages present create a myriad of spaces of experience, providing information at the same time as tempting potential customers into buying one or several treatments on offer.

2.3 A geographical approach to consumption²

Already in 1995 Miller (1995, p. 1) claimed that the then recent interest in consumption is ‘a remarkably delayed acknowledgement of social and economic transformations at a global level’ and one that has ‘suffered from extraordinary academic neglect’. Along with the much referred to ‘cultural turn’, an increased interest in consumption has been detected also within

² Some of the content of this subsection has already been published (Nilsen, 2009a)

geography (Leslie & Reimer, 1999), through increased research on how socio-spatial conditions and consumption are linked (Goss, 2004).

Spatialities, socialities and subjectivities of consumption are not mutually exclusive. Together they constitute geographies of consumption – geographies which are about the complex relationships between social and spatial relations, the ways in which people, material and symbolic practices, entities and things are connected, performed and expressed as they are created and move across space. (Mansvelt, 2005, p. 23)

Much of the research presented in this thesis is summarized in Juliana Mansvelt's quote. When attempting to understand a social phenomenon in its various contexts, it becomes very clear that the spatial and the social are not only interwoven but impossible to separate fully. It is also clear that the meaning of objects and practices will change when they appear in new locations or are interpreted by new people.

Hartwick (2000, p. 1178) identifies three types of geographies of consumption: 'postmodern geographies, emphasizing liberation in consumption, retail geographies, emphasizing the finding of identity in consumption, and actor-network theory geographies, emphasizing networks of actants (human and nonhuman)'. Rather than faithfully following one of them, I have chosen to contextualize various geographies rather than purifying them, and in the process apply theoretical perspectives from different camps. Consequently, I would like to stress the importance of the liberating aspects of consumption (being free to narrate who you are), as well as the general increased significance of consumption in identity formation, and lastly, point to the fact that both material and non-material, human and non-human actors are influencing on all aspects of experience consumption.

Instead of continuing to support dichotomies such as economy versus culture, producer versus consumer, and space versus time, I instead attempt to blur their borders. In support of Slater's (1997, p. 2) claim that consumer culture can be characterized as 'a spaghetti junction of intersecting disciplines, methodologies, politics', this is done in part by targeting the artificial separation between cultural and economic approaches (section 2.3.1), by criticizing the view that producers are active and consumers are passive (section 2.3.2), and by looking closer at the assumption that time and space are two distinguishable factors (section 2.3.3).

2.3.1 Cultural and economic approaches

Locating one's own research topic at the intersection of several sub-disciplines or theoretical traditions might be both rewarding as well as challenging. This is no longer a novel approach, as especially the economic and cultural fields are increasingly mixed, as pointed out by Castree (2004) among others. It is not uncommon for economic geographers to reach outside the established borders of their sub-discipline, just as cultural geographers inquire into economic dimensions of culture. Bathelt and Glückler (2003, p. 118) consider that this ongoing debate on culture versus economy is based on what they call 'false dualisms', and further argue that 'this discussion is unclear because it mixes normative accounts of the discipline's policy implications with epistemological and methodological arguments.' According to them, attempts to separate economic and social aspects are futile and meaningless, as the two aspects are inseparable (Bathelt & Glückler, 2003). Jansson (2002, p. 6) links the term 'reflexive accumulation', which represents the consumption side of the 'flexible specialization' referred to in Figure 1, to the process of economic and cultural elements becoming increasingly intertwined: '[while the] economy gets culturalized, cultural life gets commercialized'.

Yeung (2005, p. 37) refers to 'the softening of sub-disciplinary boundaries within human geography' as a trend that is accompanied by a general call for a more 'relational thinking' in human geography. This 'relational economic geography' is, according to Yeung, combining knowledge of the socio-spatial relations between actors and economic processes and structures. Bathelt and Glückler (2003) argue that this shift towards a more relational understanding has already occurred in economic geography. Many of the perspectives in this thesis are inspired by the same ideas, as I study actors and their interaction in the spa industry within an overarching economic framework.

In the research done in the two rural municipalities off the coast of Trøndelag (Nilsen, 2009b), I observed that when economic aspects such as surplus, enough employees, professional marketing, and a milieu for innovation are not in place, they demand the proprietor's full attention. By contrast, when these aspects are more or less in place, focus can also be directed towards other elements concerning the business. Economic and what is here labelled 'cultural'

aspects are clearly interlinked, and especially the ‘cultural’ side is depending on economic conditions to be prioritized. In an experience industry however, profit will not come easy to a business that doesn’t prioritize or comprehend the non-economic side of experience product development. To comprehend and portray an industry such as the spa industry, economic as well as cultural (in a broad sense) elements must therefore be considered.

However, ‘economy’ and ‘culture’ cannot necessarily be combined without causing friction. To paraphrase Crewe (2003, p. 352), I want to be ‘purposefully side-stepping the now locked-in and tired refrain of “let’s join economy and culture”’, as it is a much debated topic already, but one that, according to Jansson (2002, p. 6), despite not being a very original argument ‘is an increasingly valid one’. I will instead look into one specific element in the complicated relationship between culture and economy. As pointed out by O’Connor (2007, p. 7), whereas capitalism is steered by ‘the principle of unlimited accumulation at the expense of all other values’, culture has always blatantly protested against this principle. Productivity in general has become highly efficient in the last century, as has the production of some cultural commodities. The paradox that O’Conner points to is that culture is increasingly becoming a commodity subject to the same laws of capital as any other commodity.

A major difference with in situ consumption of experiences compared to consumption of material products is that the principle ‘cultural commodities are expensive to produce but cheap to reproduce – the more copies sold the greater the return on the original investment’ (O’Connor, 2007, p. 20) does not apply if the commodities one is selling are attached to a specific place and must be consumed in real time. In that case, one faces a different set of challenges concerning both production and quantity, compared to more traditional physical products that can be distributed. Still, for both types of cultural products to be deemed ‘genuine’ and ‘authentic’ the profit-making side of production ought not to be visible or prominent, because we expect the objectives in culture and capitalism to differ greatly. In some cases, producers are apparently content with long working hours as long as they can make a living, but some consumers expect suppliers to ‘live to work’, as well as to have a genuine interest in the product they supply, that far outweighs their profits (Brandth & Haugen, 2008). These expectations do not apply to regular businesses, where it is somehow not considered immoral to have economic objectives.

Gibson (2003, p. 202) compares the situation with the problematizing of unpaid work in feminist approaches, and states that while ‘such perspectives have triggered wide debate

within economic geography they have rarely been brought to bear on the cultural industries'. The 'performance' of therapists in the spa industry might not be what we typically think of as belonging in the cultural segment, but in the interviews with spa customers there were some expectations that customers in a regular business would not normally express. For example, I found that 'several of the customer informants had no objections to the dismissal of the receptionist with acne' (Nilsen, 2013, p. 149). This point underlines the fact that spa customers find the appearance of spa employees not merely relevant, but central to their job performance. The same evaluations or judgments did not apply to the customers' bodies. Also, 'if their therapist appeared "invisible" and they did not recognize him or her after the treatment, it was quite accepted and perhaps even desirable' (Nilsen, 2013, p. 145), which can be interpreted as an expectation from the customers for the therapists to act subservient rather than as an equal. These attitudes are probably relevant only in some industries, but imply that customized approaches to understanding the dynamics between producer, experience, and consumer are necessary.

The idea that cultural and social perspectives are suited to understanding the dynamics of consumption whereas economic perspectives are appropriate for understanding the dynamics of production has already been challenged in the ongoing debate on culture versus economy (Amin & Thrift, 2000; Gertler, 2003; Gregson, Simonsen, & Vaiou, 2001). Some regard this as cultural perspectives offering to compliment the 'often one-sided picture of consumption presented by economics' (Gronow, 1997, p. 5), but this debate can also be linked to parts of the 'cultural turn' in geography (Cook, 2000), as in the social sciences in general (Barnett, 1998; Cloke, 1997; Gibson, 2003). Some claim that the cultural turn has changed or influenced economic geography to the extent that we should now talk about 'new economic geography' (Coe et al., 2007, p. 311). This new economic geography is characterized by its ability to contextualize the economic in relation to the social, political, and cultural. In addition to expanding the number of factors seen as relevant for economic processes, what are considered to be economic issues are also expanded. Processes that cannot necessarily be given a monetary value and that were formerly ignored by mainstream economic analyses can now be seen as included and considered to be of economic relevance (Coe et al., 2007).

The 'cultural turn' has led not only to a critique and in some cases the rejection of the rigid separation of the economic and the cultural, but also to a critical re-examination of much of

the accompanying dualism thinking. Concepts are instead brought to the fore which have an emphasis on the ‘mutual constitution and fundamental inseparability of these two spheres’ (James, 2006, p. 289). Rather than discussing whether it is possible or interesting to merge the two fields when studying the experience industry, it is more appropriate to ask whether it is possible to understand fully or explain the industry without such a merger. While economic geography traditionally has tended to focus on ‘worthy’ or ‘serious’ industries, such as ‘food, automobiles, infrastructure, manufacturing, and so on’ (Gibson, 2003, p. 202), the recent turn or interest in cultural aspects ought to be reflected also in the types of industries studied from an economic perspective. Consumption is mentioned as one of the central topics in this ‘reconstructed economic geography’ (Crewe, 2000, p. 275), and Mansvelt (2005) particularly mentions that much work still remains to be done in the study of consumption of dematerialized and ‘ephemeral’ commodities, which definitely fit the description of the spa industry. As with the service industry decades ago, the experience industry might now be representing the *zeitgeist*, and deserve contextual approaches from a variety of geographical sub disciplines.

Paper 1, ‘Defining and categorizing experience industries’, (Nilsen & Dale, 2013) discusses possible approaches to categorizing the experience industries and represents one example of research that has relied on contributions from both cultural geography and economic geography. On the one side, in order to grasp what the experience industries are about, a number of approaches from cultural and social geography must be considered, while on the other side, to be able to have a sensible discussion about NACE codes and categorization, economic geographic knowledge of how the various sectors and industries of a country’s economy have developed must be understood and applied.

2.3.2 Production and consumption

Traditionally, and according to, for example Coe et al. (2007, p. 286), consumption processes have been understood to possess ‘inherently different economic geography to production operations’. For example, production is often thought of as going on in one particular place, whereas consumption can happen everywhere. Another difference between production and consumption is that production received much more attention from economic geographers

until the cultural turn. In short, production and consumption have been treated as completely separate entities, represented by very different and unattached geographies. This was criticized, and now, according to Pratt (2004, p. 117), ‘the analytical pendulum has swung too far in prioritizing consumption in analyses of the cultural economy.’ He claims that this has put the production aspects to the side, and has created a situation in cultural economic geography where the two have simply swapped places. Instead of replacing production with consumption, Pratt argues that a more informative perspective would include both sides, through an analysis of their *interpenetration*. This represents a more holistic approach that is able to capture the ‘interlinked processes of production and consumption’ and that will help eliminate what he finds is an artificial separation of the two (Pratt, 2004, p. 117–18).

The academic approach to consumption and production was in the 1990s characterized by an awareness that grew, that some priorities and assumptions ought to be questioned. This also led to a change in how consumers and producers were viewed. According to Mansvelt, this includes a critique of the view of consumers as passive agents that is ‘reproducing discourses and structures of consumption framed by producers’ (Mansvelt, 2005, p. 14).

The discussion about the need to implement consumers’ views from producers’ perspectives is not new to or characteristic only of the experience industry (e.g. Gibbs, 1992), but is never the less relevant. There has been substantial academic interest in the discussion about the relationship between the consumer and the producer (Ritzer, Dean, & Jurgenson, 2012), and some have gone as far as calling it a paradigm shift in how we relate to the economy: we have moved away from an understanding of consumption and production as separate entities, and instead now focus on the ‘prosumer’ (Ritzer, 2010). The term was presented by Alvin Toffler already in 1980 (Toffler, 1980) in his presentation of the post-industrial age in which the passive consumer was left behind. The separation of the two spheres as well as the view of the consumer as a passive spectator is challenged and rejected also in the experience literature, where Boswijk, Thijssen, Peelen, and Johnston (2007) use the concept ‘co-creation’ when they discuss the simultaneous production and consumption of experiences.

From my point of view the experience industries are particularly central in the discussion about the combination of approaches, since the consumer in many cases is responsible for both consuming and producing the experience. This has also been a recurring topic within tourism research: for example, Mossberg (2007) points to the relevance of co-creation in a

number of tourism products. According to Andersson (2007, p. 48), ‘the tourist takes over the responsibility for the final “production” which will determine the final value of the whole production chain’. Ek, Larsen, Hornskov and Mansfeldt (2008) call for the development of a model that includes all aspects of how consumers produce places through performance – through their active, corporal, technical, and social participation. They argue that if we instead view consumers as *performers*, their roles will change to include also production aspects. In a similar manner, Crewe (2003) calls for approaches that recognize consumers as active agents, as well as the significance of context and consumers’ interpretations of and relation to context: ‘Actions are intertwined with people’s everyday practices and the structure of cultural communities in complex ways. Passivity, predictability and rationality are increasingly less appropriate descriptors of contemporary consumption practices’ (Crewe, 2003, p. 354).

The active consumer is very much present in a spa context. In a spa, the customer clearly partakes in the production of various experiences, with regards to know-how, body comfort, the spa as a social arena, and a place for pampering oneself. To what degree they feel comfortable in such performances varies, as does what types of experiences feel right for each individual (Nilsen, 2013). To capture this active consumer and the meaning of contexts implies the use of approaches that understand and reflect the meaning of relationality (Crewe, 2003). With regards to spa consumption of various treatments (not just using facilities), the meeting or relation between customer and therapist is the deciding moment for the success of the experience ‘prosumption’.

It is thus important for both therapists and customers to facilitate their meeting according to expectations and preferences. An example mentioned by McNeil and Ragins (2005, p. 33) concerns how several spas in the US are now targeting men, even though ‘many men do not initially like the idea of going into a room, taking off their clothes and being massaged’, and do not want to be touched by another man. The spas therefore need to facilitate spa experiences in a different way for male customers as a group, for example by giving them the choice of wearing some clothes or being given the option to choose the gender of the therapist. The importance of correct staging and facilitation of the meeting between therapists and customer is mentioned also in the interviews reported in Paper 3, particularly in interviews with some of the therapists. They mentioned the importance of being calm, and of touching the customers to make them relax, but at the same time keeping some distance. By contrast, the customers seemed less aware of their own role in the production of a successful

experience, but reported, for example, that it was made easier to relax when ‘everything’, including their mobile, was left behind in the locker. Also the fact that the spa and the therapists’ uniforms were ‘clinical’, as Figure 6 illustrates, was mentioned as a positive aspect, perhaps because of associations to the medical profession.



Figure 6, Spa therapist's outfit (Source: Shutterstock 2014)

To be able to link new ideas, approaches, empirical findings, and theories to existing knowledge of the experience industry in a fruitful and productive manner, it is necessary to consider cultural and economic approaches to production and consumption, covering the experiences of consumers and producers, and thus supply and demand. Treating consumption and production as inseparable requires rethinking theoretical assumptions, and possibly also what can be considered to be adequate methods.

2.3.3 Time and space

Time and space is a dichotomy that penetrates our thinking in almost every way, and the conception that time and space are two distinguishable factors that can be included or excluded according to disciplinary boundaries is problematic. Time and space are also central elements in the much discussed subject of *globalization* which usually refers to the massively increased financial contact, integrating ever new places in worldwide economic processes, and reorganizing the meaning of geographical levels along the way. Globalization can thus be understood in a number of ways, depending on whether the focus is on technological, political, economic, or cultural aspects (Croucher, 2004). According to Gandolfo (2014, p. 338) globalization from an economic viewpoint can be defined as ‘the closer integration of world markets for commodities, services, and factors, partly due to the decrease in transport and communication costs (so called “annihilation of distance”)’.

Nonetheless, there is little dispute concerning the claim that all areas are affected by the ‘speeding up’, ‘spreading out’, and ‘linking up’ characterizing the multiple changes that we label globalization (Hubbard, Kitchin, Bartley, & Fuller, 2002). The predictions concerning the eradication of space that were voiced at the onset of the globalization discourse were met with counterarguments (Massey, 2005), and have not come true. Rather, a renewed interest in spatial aspects has occurred, and what can be called a ‘restructuring’ of space and time has been detected (Amin, 2002).

From a geographical viewpoint, the spatial dimensions can hardly be overrated, but it might prove to be particularly relevant in the types of experience consumption that are place-specific and must be consumed in situ. According to Ek et al. (2008), the time aspect is also very relevant in the representation and understanding of places and spaces that are experienced. The *before*, *during*, and *after*, all affect and shape how we perceive and experience physical, cultural, and social spaces. This corresponds with Jantzen and Vetner’s (2007) temporal focus in understanding an experience. The point is to underline that both time and space affect the production and consumption of experiences, and that it makes no sense to attempt to exclude or isolate either one or the other.

The objects, artefacts, and therapies that create what we recognize as ‘spa-like’ have travelled both in time and space, and can therefore prove to be a relevant example of this point. While

traveling, these objects, artefacts, and therapies have simultaneously remained the same in some respects and changed in others. This has to do with how symbolic content relies on context, which is a central element in understanding the experience industries, where symbolic consumption practices affect distant as well as local cultures (Nilsen, Manuscript submitted). ‘Spatialities are thus concerned with sites of consumption, but also with how people, things and processes ... travel – transforming, reproducing, contesting, creating and disassembling particular constellations of social-spatial relations in place as they move’ (Mansvelt, 2005, p. 14). The crucial geographic contribution in this regard is to understand how patterns and processes operate in space, and how all places are different and particular even in a globalized world.

Businesses that try to manipulate and stimulate consumption through layout and design, where the business’ physical place become part of a design strategy, is one example of geography’s relevance and importance. Coe et al. draw particular attention to theme parks, as they offer a specifically interesting consumption experience, as visitors are

paying to experience the whole built environment, which places particular emphasis on the architecture and its symbolism. Accordingly, theme parks are extremely carefully configured, and the use of space within them is heavily regulated and choreographed. In many cases they are explicitly designed to offer a contrast to the more messy spaces of everyday life, providing a safe, care-free environment in which entertainment is interactive rather than passive. (Coe et al., 2007, p. 307)

This focus on the physical surroundings can easily be transferred to a number of other experience industries, not at least to the spa industry. In common with Coe et al.’s description of what characterizes theme-park consumption, a spa offers multisensory experiences, with people performing according to certain norms and expectations. Spas will often offer modern, technological devices, very often luxurious devices, in a highly managed space. Such spaces are carefully filled with objects and artefacts from times and places located far away and charged with symbolic content, specifically designed for particular kinds of consumption experiences (Nilsen, Manuscript submitted).

2.4 Identity and consumption

The changes referred to in section 2.1, and summarized in Figure 3, coincided with a strong focus within the social sciences on the relationship between identity and consumption (Baudrillard, 1996; Bourdieu, 1986; Giddens, 1991; Sarup, 1996). In this section this relation will be addressed. This is a continuation of, and a more in depth presentation of the development presented in Figure 3. Since experience consumption is part of a bigger picture, I adopt a more general understanding of modern consumption to be able to contextualize the research presented in this thesis. Already in 1995, Jackson and Thrift pointed especially to the relationship between consumption and modernity as one that needs to be accounted for. This relationship has not become any less complex since then, and Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011) see the individual's need to create their own identity and to shape their personality as one of the driving forces behind this development.

As an effect of changing production and consumption patterns, academic approaches to understanding these changes have no other choice but to adapt. As part of the deconstructive forces of postmodernism, instead of viewing identity as congenital, stable, and fixed, identity is now perceived as temporary, fluid, and narrated, and therefore open to alterations. These changes in how we understand identity may, according to some be the result of the secularization of the Western world, whereby meaning is embedded in symbolic objects rather than religion. It can also be more generally linked to the liberating aspects associated with the post-traditional society, whereby individuals can freely choose where to live, whom to live with, what to buy, and what to do (Grbich, 2004; Jameson, 2001; Valentine, 2001). However, such 'freedom' implies that a person's consumption choices to a much larger extent say something about how they would like to be seen by those around them, as their occupation, family, and home place no longer necessarily supply this information. This process of selection can be referred to as a construction of *narrative* (Giddens, 1991). The importance of consumption for identity narration is revealed, and also how the places of consumption are important in these processes.

The understanding of identity as narrated, and consumption as an important element in identity construction is in harmony with Bourdieu's (1986) claim of distinction as an engine in consumption practises. The many roles consumption can play in relation to social

differentiation and how social positions and lifestyle are connected have become topics of substantial academic interest (Shove & Warde, 2002). The increased popularity and purchase of experiences can be seen as a part of this development, and the first to recognize the importance of studying the experience rather than the product in the field of leisure and tourism was Arnould and Price (1993). While presenting their study on river rafting, which is an extraordinary adventure tourism experience, they also question conventional approaches in tourism research and focus on both hedonic and symbolic aspects of experiences (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009).

2.4.1 Identity, narrative, and distinction

As the close bonds of communities wither away, people survive the new order of weak communities by a continuous re-expression of self to transient audiences. They dress up, now as skiers who never ski, now as pilots who cannot fly, now as soldiers who never see army life, in a search for the expression of individualism bound up in a fantasy status. They discover community through the community of shared brands: brands link consumers via promotion to similar others. (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2002, p. 531)

Modern society to some extent and postmodern society to an even larger extent are characterized by the weakening of social bonds and class boundaries (Gronow, 1997, p. 5). This accounts for changes in a number of areas, but in particular it has been debated in relation to identity (Butler, 2001; Pile & Thrift, 1995; Sarup, 1996). Where identity information previously was both given and partly dictated by local communities, in rich and 'advanced' communities such as Norway, the individual is now more or less free to choose and narrate themselves. This active construction of identity has been emphasized by what may be called a culturalist perspective, which has drawn attention to a number of interesting aspects regarding identity, such as how consumers use commodities or purchases as part of actively constructing their own identity (Coe et al., 2007). As with other purchases, experiences 'function as a personal source of information for the stories people tell about their

lives' and therefore play an important part in how people view themselves (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011, p. 239), as well as how others perceive them.

The meaning of an experience is rooted in an individual's self-image and social identity (Jantzen & Vetner, 2007), and to construct or narrate oneself through experience consumption implies an association to some people and types of experiences and dissociation from others. The task of identifying one's own experiences in an experience market that is supposed to appeal to many other people's taste can be challenging, but what to buy in order to communicate a particular identity is the consumer's active choice to make (Coe et al., 2007). On the one hand, commodities or experiences are purchased to be part of who you are, but on the other hand distinction from 'others' is perhaps just as important in the narration process (Harvey, 1993; Mach, 1993; O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2002). The purchases are meant to mark belonging to or distance from somewhere, towards the centre or margins (Coe et al., 2007), in order to conform or oppose.

Some goods are what Hirsch (1977, p. 27) labels 'positional' goods. Positional goods are characterized by being either '(1) scarce ... or (2) subject to congestion or crowding through more extensive use'. In addition to identifying the consumer, positional goods are also used to demonstrate group membership (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2002). The symbolic value is important particularly in the case of certain types of purchases, as it can signify a certain position in society. The scarcer and more socially exclusive a positional good is, the higher the level of satisfaction to the consumer. The most desired goods or services are those that can 'provide a rich and broad vocabulary with which to speak – without saying a word' (Granot & Brashear, 2006, p. 992), and these fashionable and cool products can at the same time express personal taste, differentiate oneself from others, and demonstrate sophistication. They therefore enable one to align oneself with people thought to have similar values or interests (Granot & Brashear, 2006).

Following mainstream marketing theory, certain types of products (including positional goods) evolve from a state of exclusiveness consumed by innovators or elites and thereafter become more and more available and popular among the masses because copies are made or mass production sets in. In other words, refinement and exclusiveness are often very short-lived qualities. In this respect, one of the interesting aspects of the immaterial and in situ experience products is their 'remoteness' when it comes to everyday consumption. Because of the time, money, creativity, and sometimes skills it takes to consume them, it is harder to see

how many of them can ever become mainstream possessions, and thereby drop in status and value. In the case of the spa industry in Norway, the tendency is that ever more people are consuming spa services (Roos, 2009). Due to the type of products that the spa industry offers however, which cannot be mass produced or efficiency in production be increased without ruining the product, there is no price drop. The industry is at the same time continuously innovating, developing, and importing new products, therapies, and equipment from all over the world, which also makes devaluation less probable.

The speeding up of information flows, production, and communication means that the process of demonstrating distinction is also speeding up. This implies that exclusiveness is harder to achieve, since most consumables can easily be accessed, regardless of wherever one is in the world (as long as one has the resources to obtain them). Urry (2002, p. 79) claims that symbolic goods are subject to a 'distinct economy, a "cultural economy", characterised by competition, monopolization, inflation, and different forms of capital, including especially cultural capital'.

These types of products also require a different marketing approach, and according to Schmitt (1999), experiential marketers recognise consumers to be both rational and emotional.

Experiential marketing also assumes that consumption can be motivated by social belonging and recognition, which can fuel a 'desire for self-improvement' (Schmitt 1999).

O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002) point out that marketing also should focus on the anticipation and fantasies about the products, and the inclusion of and appeal to our senses is argued by Crewe (2003). Experiential marketing is further addressed in Paper 2, as these aspects are found in the marketing of spas.

Since the content and meaning of consumption and identity is affected by the places where they occur, they can both be said to be place-specific to some extent. As Coe et al. (2007, p. 311) specify, this even accounts for the spaces of consumption that are thought of as being homogenized by the effects of globalization (e.g. the company McDonalds), as 'how those spaces are used will vary from place to place'. The symbolic content of a commodity is not written in stone, and the importance of context must therefore constantly be considered as there 'is no essential, one-to-one, correspondence between particular commodities and particular identities: the same commodity can have radically different meanings for different individuals and for the same individual over time' (Jackson & Thrift, 1995, p. 224). Paper 2,

‘Presenting spa experiences online: constructing places of well-being’ (Nilsen, Manuscript submitted), looks at the use of objects and symbols, treatments, and ‘truths’ from various places and times, and how specific associations and meanings are created.

2.4.2 The significance of the body

John Urry (2002, p. 152) states in *The Tourist Gaze* that:

I have at times in this chapter referred to travel as *corporal* travel. This is to emphasize something so obvious that it has often been forgotten ... It is that tourists moving from place to place comprise lumpy, fragile, aged, gendered, racialized bodies. Such bodies encounter other bodies, objects and the physical world multi-sensuously.

What Urry underlines is just as relevant for experience research as for tourist studies, yet the body has still not become an obvious part of experience research.

Since the 1990s, identity has received substantial attention in all social sciences, geography included, with a whole new understanding of identity as a result. One of the more central outcomes of this interest in and reinterpretation of identity is the critique of dualisms or dichotomies (Assiter, 1996; Bondi, 1992; Johnston, 2005; McDowell, 1992; Sarup, 1996), resulting in efforts to break down the Cartesian body and mind dualism. The connections between the body and the identity of a person can no longer be ignored, as the body is now regarded as the locus of a person’s identity (Hubbard et al., 2002), and people are viewed as ‘body subjects’. As soon as the body started to receive attention in the 1990s, its significance specifically in relation to how place and identity can be interpreted in geography was underlined (Blunt, 2009) as ‘a truly human geography needs to recognize the role of the body in shaping socio-spatial relations’ (Hubbard, 2002, p.339).

Until the interest in the body emerged, most social sciences ignored the embodied nature of social life, and left the body to be studied from biological or medical science views. These views tended to focus on the body merely as a biological entity, either able or unable to perform certain tasks. A strictly biological approach to the body can lead to understandings and presentations that reinforce stereotypes of a person’s abilities and positions based on

biology and genetics rather than challenging them. With such understandings, biological differences can be used not only to explain, but also to justify differences between men and women, and between able-bodied and disabled people (Hubbard et al., 2002). The constructivist perspective that gradually developed in the social sciences challenged and rejected 'biological essentialism', and offered instead understandings that saw the meaning attached to various bodies and identities as 'socially constructed rather than biologically determined' (Hubbard et al., 2002, p. 98). Inspired by Foucault, discourse and power became central concepts in understanding identities as well as the role of the body in various places (Bordo, 1993a; Foucault, 1982; Hall, 2001; Valentine, 1999). Subject identities and social categories are not given, but *created* through representations, practices, and performances. Discourses are seen as constitutive also of bodies, and through discourse society is establishing opinions about what is regarded acceptable and normal, what bodies should look like and how they ought to be used (Hubbard et al., 2002).

Ideas about the development of identity through embodiment underlie studies such as Malbon's (1999, p. 98–99) study of clubbing, in which 'in a similar way to dress and other forms of bodily adornment, dancing provides a way for the individual to present his or her self-image to others'. His study also demonstrates how people create their own sense of place through their bodies and dance, and he develops ideas about the way the body participates in collective experiences. Findings in Paper 3 support the more general claims regarding bodily discourses in society as well as Malbon's study, since different bodies were found to be either in place or out of place in a spa and how, for some, the social or collective elements of spa experiences were very important (Nilsen, 2013).

To an increasing degree, neoliberal ideals holding the individual responsible for its own appearance is gaining momentum. In combination with exposing the constructed nature of identity and body as well as the dismissal of the separation of body and mind - a very different understanding of what our bodies mean to us and how we interpret different bodies is emerging. On the one side, people can no longer detach themselves from their bodies, as they and their body are now considered one and the same entity. At the same time, a person will be judged according to the appearance of his or her body, since the constructed elements of both bodies and identities have been laid bare. A well looked after, exercised body and conversely a neglected body therefore communicates a lot more than just that. This point has

been commercialized to a steadily increasing level, to the extent that Powell (2010) sees this connection between the physical body and consumer society as being so interlinked that the boundaries between them are translucent. The growing interest among academics in the links between body, consumption and lifestyle very much reflects a general interest in these topics in society (Hubbard et al., 2002), as pointed out also by Shilling (2012, p. 216):

In recent decades, there has been an increasingly global preoccupation with the size, shape, performance and look of bodies. This has been encouraged by the centrality of appearance within consumer culture; a culture that idolizes as a sacred young, sculpted and sexualized flesh, only to suggest that it is actually available to us all.

Hubbard et al. (2002, p. 97) suggest that people's own body image influences their choices of what types of activities they participate in and in which places, and claim that it 'has been suggested that those with certain (privileged and valued) types of body may seek to exclude "other" bodies from their surroundings'. This point can be linked to the role of signs in postmodern society, where 'everything' is a sign or symbolic in one way or another. Instead of buying expensive art, the body can be used to accumulate and display wealth. This has opened up for a view of the body as similar to other commodities that we use to narrate a specific identity.

Both Cresswell (2002) and Hubbard et al. (2002) highlight the importance of Bourdieu's contributions to understanding how the body is related to other parts of society in contemporary human geography. Cultural capital is expressed through clothing as well as peoples' bodies, and like any other commodity the body can be used to communicate class identity, status, and distinction. The evaluation of bodies is done like any other commodity, according to socially constructed and constantly changing ideals linked to what is considered scarce and exclusive in the relevant context. As an example, in the midst of an obesity epidemic in the Western world, the body ideal has never been slimmer (Bordo, 1993b). For most people in Western society, having an underweight body would require a lot of work and self-discipline, and as Bordo (1993b, p. 165) underlines: 'The body is not only a text of culture. It is also, as anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu and philosopher Michel Foucault (among others) have argued, a practical, direct locus of social control'. Individuals, especially women, are supposed to exercise self-discipline and sculpt their bodies according to several ideals to make sure they are attractive. A slender body expresses, for example, a well-managed and disciplined self (Bordo, 1993a, 1993b) and there is also an 'important link between a slender

body and the healthy body, in that the slender body is depicted as available to anyone if they are vigilant of their food intake and pursue a healthy lifestyle' (Hubbard et al., 2002, p. 114).

Thus, our cultural environment is of crucial importance when determining how identities and bodies are maintained and disciplined (Davidson, 2003), but according to Foucault this discipline is not just credited in social contexts, since the State also works towards 'programs of education, welfare and social policy designed to encourage people to recognize the desirability of having normal, clean, healthy and productive bodies' (Hubbard et al., 2002, p. 107). While discourses of cleanliness and health are interesting, so too are the 'cultural and institutional discourses of religion, philosophy, and medicine' (Covino, 2004, p. 40) regarding the creation of 'good and bad bodies' (Hubbard et al., 2002, p. 108), and the roles various places play in creating them is especially interesting for geographers.

Johansson (2006) agrees with the argument of disciplining, but claims that while it used to be health authorities that encouraged people to live healthy lives, the task has partly been taken over by the commercial market. In the efforts to manage a body according to cultural ideals, we are required to buy products and services to maintain our appearance. Consumption is thus closely linked to how we construct and communicate bodies, as it is not only possible, but very actively encouraged, to change the meaning of one's body through consumption. Several commercial professions specializing in managing the body have developed, so that those who can afford their services purchase assistance to be able to eat healthily, exercise rigorously, or relax in spas (Johansson, 2006). Groups of businesses have emerged offering to clothe, slim, exercise, and modulate virtually every type of body (Hubbard et al., 2002) – industries with blatant offers of *hedonic* consumption, but with mixed messages regarding well-being and discipline. In the marketing of spas, especially age and weight are targeted with regards to body alterations, but just as Johansson (2006) observed in fitness magazines, even though all ages and looks are targeted, the images are of young and perfect-looking bodies.

Geography is however not only increasingly preoccupied with bodies – but so also with minds, emotions (Davidson & Miligan, 2004; Lorimer, 2005), as well as comfort (Bissell, 2008). To capture the subtleties and 'background noise' of everyday emotions and affects (Anderson, 2006), interactions between human and 'more-than' human entities (Lorimer, 2010), the experiential implications of landscapes (Conradson, 2005; Wylie, 2009) and atmospheres (Anderson, 2009), various versions of 'non-representative theories' are launched

(Anderson and Harrison, 2010). I interpret this theoretical angle to be a development and continuation of parts of the epistemological debates in post-structural theory and agree with some of its critics (Thien, 2005). It can also be hard to see exactly *how* to do research according to some of these ideas (see section 3.1) (Lorimer, 2008). Paper 2 is however applying some elements from this strand of thoughts, in analysing how materiality, atmosphere and mobility are some aspects in the creation of experience spaces. I originally expected emotions to be prominent in Paper 3, as I assumed undressing and being touched by therapists would be seen as problematic by some. However, ‘none of them reported of any discomfort undressing in front of a male therapist, as long as he was doing his job properly or routinely, and not displaying any hesitation or uncertainty’ (Nilsen, 2013 p. 145). As I did not feel my empiric findings supported further investigation, the topic was not prioritized. To get any kind of sensitive data, a different approach from the one I chose might have been more productive.

2.4.3 Luxury and hedonic consumption

According to O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy (2002, p. 539), hedonism is ‘one of those simple-sounding concepts that tends to remain unanalysed in debates’. They refer to hedonism as the view that pleasure, which includes the avoidance of pain, is the only good in life. Pleasure is considered to be the only possible object of desire, and all motivation is based on the prospect of pleasure. From an ethical viewpoint it can be claimed that pleasure has a moral edge in ‘arguing that every man ought to act in whatever manner brings about the most pleasure to the greatest number in the long run’ (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2002, p. 526–7). If puritanism can be associated with antipathy towards pleasures of the flesh, hedonism can be seen as its opposite. Some see hedonism as the more natural of the two, as people have a strong desire for instant gratification: ‘If explanations are sought, it is puritanism that requires explanation, not hedonism (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2002, p. 525).

As pointed out in section 2.1, and illustrated by Figure 3, what can be seen as a general trend in society is that collective responsibility is replaced by a neo-liberal ‘freedom’ or rise of the individual. This trend is elaborated by amongst others, Featherstone (2003), who claims to detect a development within the Western culture that facilitates hedonic consumption, and that

today's consumer culture leads to the development of a new type of personality. The individual's motivation has gone from being internal to external, in the sense that it has to do with their own appearance. He detects a shift from puritan ideals to hedonistic ones, also pointed out by Johansson (2006), where this new type of individual is described as highly self-centred, chronically obsessed with health, and scared of growing old and dying. This new self, which Featherstone (2003, p. 163) calls 'the performing self' emphasizes appearance and self-presentation. This performing self can further be linked to a restructuring of social space that facilitates bodily exposure. According to Featherstone we all desire good health, youth, and beauty, and one of the strengths of the consumer culture is its ability to utilize and transfer these bodily needs and desires to purchasable products. This opening up to products aimed at improving the individual's looks, health and overall appearance can quite easily be seen as correlating to the before mentioned increased individual 'freedom' or actually *responsibility*. As a consequence the pendulum in Western societies has swung from self-centring being regarded as immoral to the opposite. Still, it is considered to be more moral to advocate health rather than beauty (Johansson, 2006), and this is reflected in the spa industry's marketing attempts to link health with beauty. However, there is also a commercial 'campaign' working towards acquitting hedonic consumption, as highlighted by O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002, p. 526): 'the genius of advertising ... is to provide an alibi for self-indulgence.' This alibi has been presented by a number of producers, and has been very successfully mediated in recent decades. L'Oreal's slogan 'Because you're worth it' is well known worldwide. An argumentative logic is permeating the language of hedonic consumption: If one doesn't look after oneself, who will? Moreover, how can a person perform in other arenas if they are not beautiful and rested? Not looking after 'number one', to paraphrase former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, is now clearly associated with lack of self-respect and also very often resources, to an extent where 'buying luxuries is no longer a guilty self-indulgence; it is exercising a right and almost an obligation to make sure consumers are feeling their best' (Granot & Brashear, 2006, p. 993).

3. Methodology

3.1 A comment on epistemology

Before presenting my choices regarding methodological approaches, I will provide some information about my background that I consider was relevant for the choices. As pointed out by Aitken and Craine (2005, p. 261) ‘it is important to understand the theoretical position that you bring to your analysis and that the method you choose carry with them political baggage that is also part of your analysis’.

My first extensive research experience was my master’s thesis, *Identitet og kategorier: En postmoderne, teoretisk diskusjon* (English title: Identity and categories: A postmodern, theoretical discussion (my translation)) (Nilsen, 2005). As the title indicates, the master’s thesis presents a theoretical discussion based on research done by others and with no use of standard methods. This meant that I did not acquire any extensive experience in gathering and analysing primary data, only with processing information already gathered and analysed by other researchers. My experience with primary data was therefore somewhat limited, and at the outset of my research for this doctoral thesis, gathering data appeared slightly daunting and analysing it mysterious.

Further, the work done in connection with my master’s thesis seriously affected my perception of epistemology. In short, my main findings were that social categories are inherently discriminating, and supportive of the general knowledge production in academia that is reinforcing the dominant position of the male, Western, able-bodied, and heterosexual hegemony at the cost of ‘others’. The knowledge we are presented with is therefore only representative of a contextual and temporal ‘truth’. I was by no means the only one preoccupied with these topics (e.g. Dear, 2001; Giddens, 1990; Grbich, 2004; Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 2001; Lash & Urry, 1994; Schaanning, 1993), and at that time a reconsideration of many assumptions regarding knowledge production was due.

However, as the debate continued, several challenges occurred. Even though the philosophical arguments characteristic of postmodernism are hard to defy, how can knowledge be

contextual without being relative? Also, Derrida's famous language deconstruction does not offer any alternatives. How are we supposed to express ourselves with a highly insufficient language (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994)? Self-reflexivity became an important part of the deconstruction of the role of the researcher (e.g. England, 1994; Kitchin & Hubbard, 1999), which led to almost impossible demands of accounting for all possible influences, resulting sometimes in research being more about who the researcher was than of the topic being researched.

I found it impossible or pointless to attempt to combine the demands for reliability, which have obvious roots in positivist perspectives (Golafshani, 2003), with a postmodern philosophy. To exaggerate somewhat, research is about a gendered, embodied, educated, aged, sexually oriented, and ethnically belonging researcher who attempts, through the use of insufficient and repressive methods, to find a contextual and temporal truth. This truth has to be presented through the use of language that represents all types of things apart from what the actual words are thought to represent, on behalf of people who instead should speak for themselves, and thereby supports the existing and oppressive epistemological hegemony.

To add further to this 'catch 22'-situation, 'non-representational theory' that has developed over the last ten years or so, as the name implies - is pointing to several other breaches in research representations. Most problematically so to representation in itself, which does not make it any easier to do research. It would be inaccurate to claim that the main point of non-representational theory is to dismiss representations per se, it is rather pointing out that much research is missing out on several arenas, like emotional aspects, 'affect' – or the pre-conscious, human to non-human relations, the everyday 'background hum' to mention some.

A common feature in post-modern deconstruction and non-representational theory is a sceptical attitude towards the capabilities of the language to represent diverse realities. Lorimer (2008, pp. 555) however points to the worryingly bleak 'prospects of finding a vocabulary that copes better, or even satisfies'. He refers to Harrison that proposes a perhaps even more depressive thought: 'A crystalline realization is all that can be offered: what we do will forever 'fall short'' (Lorimer, 2008, pp. 555). Despite their common grounds, non-representational theory is also criticizing social constructivism for its 'preoccupation with representation; specifically, by a focus on the structure of symbolic meaning (or cultural representation)' (Anderson & Harrison 2010, pp. 4).

With all this in mind, attempting to develop a research design implies some obstacles. For one, I am increasingly annoyed that demands for the researcher to be reflective of any possible variable affecting the process of knowledge production do not really resonate with the postmodern view of knowledge as contextual. Rather, they support positivistic ideals about objectivity, since accounting for and hence possibly removing all personal traits that might affect knowledge, somehow indicates that one is left with ‘the Truth’. I have no such aspirations; my aim is not to find ‘the Truth’ or to reflect upon matters in life that might have influenced my data gathering or my interpretation of the data beyond what is here presented. Secondly, the harsh criticism of certain parts of social constructivism, including particularly representations, and their inadequacy in capturing various realities does not improve the situation.

3.2 Research design

A qualitative approach can be chosen for several reasons, but perhaps the most important one in my case was to get new insight into a relatively unexplored field of research and specifically in a Norwegian academic context to gain insight into a relatively unexplored phenomenon, the spa industry.

Another reason for choosing a qualitative approach is, as Thagaard (2009) points out, that qualitative methods are flexible, which makes it possible to work on various parts of the study at the same time, or to go back and forth in the research and potentially make changes during the study. This approach enabled me to adjust the number of informants, interviews, and the interview guide as well as my own conduct in the interviews.

Further, there is an appealing ‘closeness’ in qualitative approaches that can be both challenging and rewarding (Postholm, 2010). From my experiences, it is not always possible to achieve this closeness. As explained in subsection 3.5, one of the informants gave me a hug, which made me evaluate my own behaviour. Was I perhaps being too informal? Did I not keep enough professional distance? Alternatively, is distance a good thing in an interview situation? In my view, closeness is preferable to the distance I felt during one of the other interviews, when I sensed that the informant was tense, as though she considered herself to be

a spokesperson for the company rather than an interviewee giving her personal view on some topics. As referred to several times in this thesis already, the ‘non-representational turn’ in geography questions several epistemological assumptions commonly held, some of which – if taken seriously – would demand a radically different methodological approach than a standard qualitative interview (see for instance Lorimer, 2010). One much more tuned in on emotions, affect and pre-cognitive aspects to mention some. While I don’t so much object to incorporating these aspects, I chose to follow a road *more* travelled for several reasons. One was a lack of experience in the interview-situation; another was a lack of skill with regards to psychological know-how. As explained in subsection 1.1, there were several reasons behind my decision to study the spa industry, and one of the more central ones was that the spa industry has an intentional and commercially successful focus on the experience. Although not clear at first, what turned out to be my main research questions were tripartite as well as operating at three different levels. The three questions developed from aspects I found generally interesting and that seemed to be unclear in the existing literature. The questions are intended to supplement one another but at the same time work as a unity.

Research question 1: *What characterizes the experience industries, and what challenges do we face when attempting to define and categorize them?* primarily concerns how the experience industries can be defined and categorized. This enquiry relates to the whole experience industry and operates at a paramount level compared to questions 1.2 and 1.3. The question is also intended to be principle more than empirical. Although very central in research, principles and practices of classification and categorization are too rarely discussed or questioned. Research question 1 was developed after I had read several publications on the experience economy and industry in which the question was either not addressed or addressed insufficiently. Rather than listing industries and claiming that they were representative of the experience industries, I chose a more thorough approach of relating the discussion to principles and assumptions regarding classification and categorization. For this critical view on existing practices and options, and through an overarching, theoretical, principle discussion, I chose to use secondary data.

Research question 2 regards what can be said to characterize the new spaces for well-being in the spa industry in Norway: *What characterizes the Norwegian spa industry, what is its marketing communicating, and how are the spa industry’s experience spaces constructed and*

represented? This research aim was decided upon early in the research process, and although data were gathered throughout the research, they were the last to be analysed and interpreted. As already mentioned, I decided early on that I wanted to investigate the experience industry by learning more about one industry, and I had already chosen the spa industry.

I wanted to use different kinds of methods in order to generate different kinds of data for the three papers, and as I wanted to gather information about the industry in the whole of Norway for Paper 2, interviews seemed out of the question. To get an impression of the spa industry in Norway, I started searching the Internet, and soon discovered that spas are active users of net-based solutions and in general offer a lot of information via their home pages. The spas' home pages offer an abundance of texts and images that create a multitude of spaces for a wide range of treatments aimed a variety of consumer groups. Hence, although web page analysis might not be the most common method in geography, it is still a recognized method and in my case proved surprisingly adequate. The method captures a central element in our contemporary culture, as vocalized by Aitken (2005, p. 234): 'Methods of study often reflect changes in the way academics view the world. It may be argued that textual analysis gained importance with the recognition that representations and images dominate our culture.'

Research question 3 addresses how an experience is produced and consumed at the individual level: *What role does the body play in the individual's production and consumption of spa experiences?* This question was the first to be addressed methodologically, and represents perhaps also the question for which I reflected least on the choice of method. The interviews with spa managers and therapists were conducted early in the research process because I felt the need to talk to someone who knew the business. As I elaborate in section 3.5, I felt that these interviews went very well, and they helped me understand many aspects of the business that I knew nothing about beforehand. I wanted to study the spa experience from both the producers' and consumer's perspective, and interviewing appeared to be the logical choice to secure comparable information from customers and managers or therapists.

Crang & Cook (2007, p. 132) state: 'Analysis is a creative, active, making process that can be done more or less carefully and thoroughly, and with more or less accountability and transparency.' In subsections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 I strive to show both accountability and transparency, and aim to show that the data were always treated in a thorough and accountable manner, also during the analysis. As Crang and Cook (2007, p. 133) point out, 'throughout the research process, writing and analysis are inseparable', and this is true also in

my case. Parts of the analysis are the result of reflections I have done throughout the whole process, often reflections that are not written down or accounted for, but still influential for the end result.

3.3 Secondary and additional sources

A lot of interesting and relevant, accessible or already gathered data commonly referred to as 'secondary data' are available. Secondary data can be defined as data collected by others, or information that is publicly available and therefore not specifically gathered for the research question it will be used to answer (Clark, 2005; Cowton, 1998; Flowerdew & Martin, 2005). In general, social scientists tend to think that doing 'proper' research requires collecting new data, but according to Clark (2005, p. 58) 'secondary data are likely to be an important element in nearly all human geography dissertations', and is in addition essential in providing a context for primary data.

As mentioned, the data presented in Paper 1 are secondary, as no primary data were collected during the research for that publication. Statistics Norway was used as a source of data to a limited degree, but the main sources were other academic publications that were re-contextualized and discussed. Existing academic literature can be regarded as secondary data and an important part of any type of research, and according to Aitken (2005, p. 234), 'the ability to interweave these theoretical perspectives around dissertation questions, and essentially use theory as method, is extremely important.'

The choice of whether to define the spas' home pages as secondary or primary sources of data seemed less straightforward. Even though to some extent I gathered or at least systematized the data, the information provided on the spas' home pages were not presented as a response to my inquiry and I therefore chose to treat those data as secondary data.

To get an impression of the Norwegian spa industry in general and a sense of vocabulary, trends, and norms in the industry, I searched the web portal altomspa.no as well as two volumes (2011 and 2012) of the magazine *SpaBeauty*, which describes itself as a professional

magazine directed towards the spa and beauty industry. I also made four visits to different kinds of spas. These additional sources did not provide any of the data that were directly analysed, but provided general background information and insight into the industry.

3.4 Web page, text, and image analysis

Semiology is intent upon uncovering the meaning of texts by dealing with what signs are and how they function. Language is a system of signs and, like language, social and cultural products are not simply objects or events because they have meaning: they are also signs. (Aitken, 2005, p. 243)

For Paper 2, a combination of text analysis and visual analysis of the home pages of spas in Norway was conducted. The aim of this research was to get a general understanding of the business, as presented through the spas' home pages. A strong point of this method is that it can identify actors and the main 'message' of their business, at least in a tentative way. According to Aitken (2005), the notion of text has long since been expanded to include many other communication systems than the traditional text, such as fashion and advertisements. Although the actual content of the home pages might not have many layers of meaning, their texts represent and refer to something more and other than themselves:

By treating texts as social products that are dynamic, and culturally mediated by discursive practices, post-structuralists reject the quest for meta-narratives found in early semiological and Marxist writing, as well as empiricist efforts to make 'facts speak for themselves' which presupposes some form of meta-narrative. Accordingly, everyday life is not immediately 'present' but is re-presented simultaneously through the contradictory texts that constitute our world. (Aitken, 2005, p. 248)

Initially, I did not think of the images on the spas' home pages as central, and instead I concentrated on the analysis of the text. Gradually, I realized that the images not only contained a lot of information, but also that my impression of the individual spas, as well as the industry in general, was highly influenced by these images. The images used on the home pages represented a wide variety of information, and could easily have provided enough data

for a separate publication. Powell (2010, p. 122) states: 'the visual image is increasingly dominant in Western culture', and according to Aitken and Craine (2005, p. 254), out of the four types of 'representational images that have been studied by geographers: art ..., photography, film, and advertising' the latter is a 'unique yet extremely important genre of visual and cultural representation'. They go on to state that advertising does not consist of passive images, but can rather be seen as symbolic representations (Aitken & Craine, 2005), a point that is highly relevant for my analysis. In sum, visual methodologies help us to understand how particular spaces are produced (Aitken & Craine, 2005).

By examining the various messages presented on the spas' home pages and juxtaposing some of them, the texts (including the images) can definitely be seen as social products that represent very contradictory contents. Without talking about meta-narratives, it is also possible to reveal through text analysis how the texts represent bigger trends in society.

Aitken (2005, p. 241) states: 'Places are actively produced and struggled over, and it is the politics of this struggle that ought to engage those who adopt textual analysis'. Spas may not be typical of 'struggling' sites, but as Papers 2 and 3 show, spas' home pages, therapists, and customers definitely attempt to define spa spaces in particular ways, and they all execute the power to define some people as 'in place' in a spa, and others as 'out of place'. What is appropriate to include on the home pages either in texts or images also varies, and whereas some messages are brought forward, others are clearly under-communicated.

There are many advantages of using the Internet as a source of data, such as the fact that someone else has done much of the work already (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005). Another major advantage is that finding information online is a major time saver (Clark, 2005), and I would not have been able to gather the same amount of information via telephone calls, interviews, brochures, or questionnaires. However, as mentioned in subsection 3.3, there are several challenges regarding the use of this kind of data. One general shortcoming is that the information does not necessarily answer the research questions. The data are generated for different purposes, and therefore their usefulness can vary greatly. In my case, one limitation of web page analysis was that the data I found were what the individual spa had chosen to share on their commercial website. I can therefore only assume that if there were any 'problematic' areas they would all have been excluded.

This also means that since spas might not share the same type of information, comparing data is not possible. Also, from analysing the home pages, I know nothing about the resemblance between the presentation of the spa on the website and the physical or actual spa. Consequently, findings from the web page analysis might not apply to the physical spas.

As often pointed out when discussing online sources, there is a need to be critical, as in most cases anyone can post whatever they like online: ‘The ... danger derives from the essence of the web – that it is largely unregulated. Anyone (for example, lobbying groups), can put any information they like on the web without it being checked’ (Clark, 2005, p. 68).

The home page altomspa.no (which translates as ‘everythingaboutspa.no’) appeared to be a central source of information on the spa industry in Norway. This site can be characterized as a portal or gateway, which can be defined as a site bringing together similar types of ‘information formerly scattered across different physical and/or electronic locations’ (Clark, 2005, p. 65). As I was curious as to who the owners of the site represented, I e-mailed them. Their reply did not directly answer my question, but did inform that altomspa.no is run solely on income from advertisements, and that those running the site do so without pay. Their aim is to give potential customers an updated overview of all actors in the spa industry, but also to be a channel of use to the industry. They specifically stated that they did not receive any financial support from the spa industry. I therefore do not know whose interests they are serving. When I still chose to use their information, I did so because the spas’ home pages provided the data up for analysis, not altomspa.no. The list they provided of Norwegian spas was a very helpful starting point, but not more than that.

3.4.1 Analysing the home pages

Earlier research and general information about the spa industries provided a backdrop for the study reported in Paper 2. As the analysed data from the home pages comprised both text and images, the analysis was a combination of qualitative content analysis and ‘plain’ text analysis. Considering that the analysed material is commercial and aimed at being easily understood and appealing, I have attempted not to overanalyse the *intended* meaning in the

material and have instead tried to interpret the data from an academic viewpoint, commenting on consumption trends in society.

Categorization is one of the main topics discussed in Paper 1, and its principles are quite extensively described there. However, a few points ought to be mentioned about the categorization in Paper 2, which is applied to gain an understanding of what constitutes the spa industry in Norway. First, I produced a list of as many Norwegian spas as possible. The list of spas provided by altomspa.no was extended and heavily modified as a result of a further Internet search, where I searched for the Norwegian terms for 'spa', 'spa treatment', 'spa hotel', 'spa therapy', and 'spa holiday'. Although I did not use any other media sources systematically, whenever I came across media coverage of spas or related topics, I checked my list to make sure it was updated.

All spas included in the list were checked for an active home page. As the home pages provided the data, all spas without an active home page were excluded from the list, as were beauty parlours and other businesses not offering what I characterized as spa products (i.e. body treatments with the aim of providing a sense of well-being and relaxation). Several spas shared a home page, and therefore an initial list of 218 spas and beauty parlours was reduced to a total of 147 spas, which were then categorized and analysed. However, the list was rectified several times during my research, as some businesses disappeared and new ones appeared.

The analysis was further based on three main elements in the contents of the home pages: what seemed to be the 'selling point' of the various spas, what types of treatments or products were on offer and what kind of images were used to illustrate the selling point or the treatments and/or products. First, I aimed to find a focus in the text with regards to what kinds of elements and treatments that were promoted, what could be said to be the main message. Two main types of selling points were characteristic of all spas: the focus was either on well-being and nice or social experiences or it was primarily on bodily improvement of some kind.

Second, the treatments on offer in all of the spas were listed and then grouped according to which part of the body was treated or which type of treatment was given, in an attempt to generate an overview of the spas' own organization of the treatments. In addition to the initial division between well-being and bodily modification, the classification ended up with the

following groups of treatments: general face, general body, hands/nails, eyelashes/eyebrows, feet, ears, nose; and hair removal, make-up, make-up tattooing, treatments aiming at psychological 'well-being' (e.g. coaching, hypnosis, and hypnotherapy); and various treatments aimed at 'medical' benefits (e.g. cosmeceuticals, healing, acupuncture, diets, and nutrition).

Third, knowing that 'carefully constructed images sell products' (Aitken & Craine, 2005, p. 250), the way that the various images emphasized and displayed certain aspects of the spa industry, while perhaps concealing others, became an important element in the analysis. A particularly interesting aspect regarding the relationship between text and image was that the images sometimes underlined the information given in the text, but at other times had a completely different content. For example, the text would (indirectly) be addressing people of a certain age (e.g. to remove wrinkles) or with a few extra kilos (e.g. to lose weight or drop a dress size), to encourage them to subject themselves to uncomfortable treatments, while the accompanying images were of young, slim, relaxed women.

Thereafter, to get an overview of the whole industry, and because this amount of data needed to be divided into manageable quantities, I looked for common features in the various spas. I had already listed the spas on an Excel sheet, and as my aim was to divide the industry into identifiable subgroups that shared some central features, the spas' characteristics were then entered into the next columns on the same sheet. The different categories were established based on shared characteristics in type of location, product range, image contents, and equipment displayed or promoted. This categorization resulted in four categories that were not mutually exclusive: spa hotels, day spas, alternative spas, and medical spas.

The next stage of the analysis was directed towards detecting elements used in the promotion of spas as something 'more than' and different from hotels, beauty parlours, alternative medicine clinics, and places performing plastic surgery. These were the elements used in both text and images that potential customers recognize and think of as 'spa-like'. Some of these elements connected the Norwegian spa industry to places and times far away, thereby providing various kinds of 'authenticity' depending on what type of treatment were offered. In short, I found that all types of medical treatment were linked to Western medicine and sterile environments, advanced machinery, and professionally trained and educated staff performing the procedures. By contrast, any type of 'spiritual' experience was linked to the

East, to ancient times, and to philosophies from faraway places. Also, nature and non-scientific 'knowledge' and traditional and alternative medicine were portrayed as preferable.

3.5 Interviews

As mentioned, the data for Paper 3 (The role of the body and body ideals in the production and consumption of spa experiences) were collected from interviews. There were several reasons for choosing interviews as one of the methods for collecting data on the spa industry. One reason is that as an outsider to the spa industry, talking directly to informants provided me with information as well as opportunities to correct any wrong assumptions. Especially the interviews with the managers and therapists working in spas gave information that enabled me to understand the industry better. The second reason is that direct contact provides different information compared to, for example, a questionnaire, which I had used in an earlier study (Nilsen 2009b). Since bodies, which constitute a personal and private topic, would be discussed, it was important to enable the informants to feel relaxed and talk freely. My third reason for choosing interviews as a method was simply personal preference. As Kitchin and Tate (2000) point out, interviewing is not only the most common way to get qualitative data, but is also a somewhat less formal way of producing rich and varied data. Interviewing gives the researcher access to their informants' opinions, experiences, and beliefs.

The recruiting of informants from the spa industry was very straightforward, as almost everyone I asked responded positively. One manager was recruited using the snowballing method. In addition, one therapist was interviewed while he was treating me. His answers were grouped with the managers' answers. I chose therapists from spas that differed in location, size, and type, and attempted to cover a range of types of spas. As a result, the managers and therapists in my sample worked in rural spa hotels, urban spa hotels, and large and small urban day spas. The total number of managers and therapists was five: four women and one man, all of whom were Norwegian.

All interviews with spa managers and therapists were conducted on a one-to-one basis. Three of the interviews were conducted at the managers' workplace during work hours, one was

conducted at a restaurant during lunch, and one was conducted while I was on a massage bench receiving a massage. The five interviews were held between the 15th of July 2009 and the 27th of August 2010. The interviews lasted between 25 minutes and 1 hour and 35 minutes.

The interviews were conversational-like, but guided by me. Particularly in one interview, I sometimes sensed that the manager felt she was representing her workplace's views rather than her own. I also got the impression that she censored herself while discussing some of the topics. I cannot be sure of this, but it was the only logical reason I could think of why she should respond so briefly to some of my questions. Other informants were very trusting and seemed to confide in me, and their interviews appeared more successful at the time. Although the 'objective' and detached scientist is a ghost of the past in many ways, I remember asking myself whether I had been too friendly with my informants, as one of them spontaneously gave me a hug at the end of the interview. In sum, however, the interviews resulted in rich and varied data, shedding light on a number of aspects regarding the production of an experience.

When the time came for the second round of interviews, this time with spa customers, recruiting informants was more challenging. The main reason was that I was more uncomfortable about asking customers. While the managers were doing their job, informing about and in a way promoting their own workplace, as well as getting paid while doing so, the customers had already paid for their experiences and had nothing to benefit from volunteering to being interviewed.

All spas that I contacted gave me permission to try and recruit customers as informants, but as I felt this was a very uncomfortable setting, I instead petitioned for informants online. I first tried one of the spas' Facebook wall, but did not receive any replies. I then tried posting it on my own Facebook wall, and after some time succeeded in recruiting most of the informants I needed. The remaining informants were recruited by the snowballing method. As a result, several of my customer informants were friends of friends that I had never met before, and some were my acquaintances.

My initial plan for the second round of interviews was to have group interviews. Because of the composition of the informants I had been able to recruit, the result was rather a mix of groups, pairs, and single interviews. In total, 15 spa customers were interviewed about their experiences: seven people in two groups, six in pairs, and two in single interviews. For the

purpose of discussing the spa phenomenon as well as their own experiences, I found that holding interviews in pairs and groups was the best method. Topics and elements were both introduced and discussed by the informants, whereas the single interviews were characterized to a much larger degree by a 'question and answer' dialogue. Of a total of 15 customer informants that were interviewed, 13 were women and 2 men; all were Norwegian and ranged in age from late twenties to early forties. The interviews were conducted between January and June 2011, and lasted between 35 minutes and 1 hour and 30 minutes.

In the literature a point is made of the fact that an interview can vary from being *very structured, semi-structured, or relatively unstructured* (Crang & Cook, 2007; Postholm, 2010; Thagaard, 2009). For the interviews conducted for my study, two types of interview guides were made: one for managers and therapists, and one for customers (see Appendixes 1 and 2). The interview guides for the managers and therapists were altered somewhat between the first interview, which was very general in approach, and the later interviews, as the direction of the research changed as a result of information gained from the interviews. For the remaining interviews I used two types of guides that were quite similar content-wise (see Appendix 1). Due to the lack of flow experienced in particularly one interview in which the questions had been formulated as whole questions, I tried just listing keywords for some of the other interviews. However, I did not notice any effect of this change. The only interview in which, for practical reasons, I did not use an interview guide was the one with the therapist who gave me a massage. In the interview guides for the customer interviews, some questions were slightly altered, removed, or added, some pronouns were changed, and some questions were rephrased to fit the number of people interviewed.

Although the questions were formulated very specifically in the interview guides, in the interviews, rather than reading out the questions from the guides, I asked for the informants' thoughts on the topics in the questions. How specific I had to be and how much I got out of the interviews varied according to the number of people interviewed as well as how talkative they were. In the various interviews, a number of topics and questions were fixed in the sense that I was eager to get the informant's views on them, but not all topics interested or excited the informants enough for them to give a comprehensive answer in all cases. This was probably also a result of me encouraging the informants to talk about the topics they raised but that were not necessarily included the guide, as well as the fact that both their experiences

and opinions differed. As Kitchin and Tate (2000) point out, a less-structured interview can make the informants more relaxed and more 'free'. Semi-structured interviews are also suited if the aim is to get a glimpse of the informants' own definitions and experiences of a phenomenon (Kvale, 1997; Silverman, 2006). My choice of a more unstructured or semi-structured approach was also about me being more comfortable in the interview setting if it resembled a conversation rather than an interview.

It is important to conduct enough interviews to get a sufficient basis for an analysis (Dalen, 2004). With my two sets of interviews, which lasted between 30 minutes and 90 minutes per interview, I deemed the data generated as more than sufficient for an analysis.

All interviews were recorded on tape, included the interview I conducted while being massaged, as none of the informants had any objections. I transcribed all interviews myself, and one reason for that was to be able to go through the interviews thoroughly, as well as to add my thoughts and comments along the way. In this way I was also preparing for the analyses of the material. During the transcription of the interviews I made sure that the informants' anonymity was maintained. In addition, the names of businesses and places were changed, as suggested by Thagaard (2003), among others. None of the informants were referred to by name. For the interviews with the managers and therapists, I also presented them with a written statement that explained the purpose of my research as well as their rights as informants (see Appendix 3). For the interviews with customers, I explained my intentions and their rights verbally.

3.5.1 Analysing the interviews

After each interview had been conducted, the records were transcribed, but the analysis was done at a later point in time for all interviews at the same time, after they were all conducted. The analysis of these data started with me reading through the transcriptions of the interviews and marking statements I thought to be interesting. I used a technique where quotes or statements that 'stood out', surprised, or intrigued me were marked, and a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements was produced, as suggested by Smith, Larkin, and Flowers (2009). The next phase in the analysis was to give the statements a heading or a

‘code’. The code represented an analytical category or a central theme in the material. I then grouped the codes into larger units of information, which according to Creswell (2007) can be called ‘meaning units’, before assembling relevant statements under these units. I then copied all quotes related to these topics into a separate document in Excel, and used the software to prepare a matrix.

After going through all the interviews, I found that certain meaning units clearly had a connection that was strong enough for them to be merged; after starting off with 16 categories or units, I ended up with 5: (1) Context, alone or social, (2) Price and product ‘pushing’, (3) Beauty, body and nakedness, (4) Facilitation, treatment, therapists, and (5) Development, globalization. Not all of these units were included in the final version of Paper 3, but they nonetheless formed the initial foundation for the presentation of the empirical findings in Paper 2. The aggregated units were then scrutinized, when I looked for connections, explanations, and answers to my research questions. I wanted to know whether the units could reveal any insights about what factors are central for the ‘prosumption’ of a wellness experience, and in addition explain the significance of the body.

In Paper 3, I quote from the interviews and try to give examples of the various findings identified from the material. Quoting in combination with context descriptions will hopefully provide a sufficiently ‘thick’ presentation for the reader to evaluate the relevance and level of transmission. According to Ponterotto (2006, p. 541), ‘thick description involves much more than amassing great detail: It speaks to context and meaning as well as interpreting participant intention’. I therefore consider that translating the Norwegian quotes into English and focusing more on content than form was the right choice to make.

4. Concluding remarks

As we have seen in chapter 2, the development of the experience industry is part of a larger picture that includes some radical changes in both consumption and production. Some of these changes are linked to an increased preoccupation with symbolic and aesthetic values, an ongoing development that requires a much more extensive and detailed communication

between producers and markets. These changes are also reflected in academia, as an increased interest in cultural and creative matters can be detected in most disciplines. What is typically referred to as the ‘cultural turn’ represents among other things a focus within the social sciences on the relationship between identity and consumption.

In this thesis I have tried to combine theories and insights from human geography and related fields to explain at least parts of a consumption trend. This trend is characterized by an increased supply and demand for experiences, and can be linked to a range of topics within marketing, consumption, globalization, identity narration, and the meaning of the body in contemporary society. As an example of such a trend, the spa industry is illustrative of how various geographies are involved in experience production and consumption, stretching across scales, ranging from the body to the global.

4.1 Summarizing Part 2: Papers 1, 2, and 3

Part 2 of this thesis consists of a book chapter (Paper 1) and two articles (Papers 2 and 3). The book chapter and one of the articles have been published, and the second article has been submitted for publication.

Paper 1 was co-written with Professor Britt Engan Dale, and addresses the links between the debate about the concept of service that arose with the massive growth of the service industries in 1970s, and the existing debate concerning the definition and categorization of the experience industries. The nature of the experience industries is illustrated through this comparison, as well as what is characteristic of services, and finally their shared traits. The characteristics are summarized in *Figure 4.1 Service and experience* in Paper 1 (Nilsen and Dale 2013 p.75). Paper 1 also discusses the principles of categorization more generally, and particularly the shortcomings of the existing classification system of economic activities: the NACE code system. Further, Pine and Gilmore’s argument that it is easy to distinguish between goods, services, and experiences is challenged, and we rather claim that all three have very much in common and typically overlap.

Paper 2 serves as a link between the overarching, principal discussions in Paper 1, and the individual experiences discussed in Paper 3. The spa industry is the level of inquiry, and the main focus is on how the marketing of experiences is done. Rather than considering the long traditions of the spa industry that clearly exist, Paper 2 studies the spa as a representative of the contemporary experience industry. To understand how spaces for specific spa experiences are constructed, various spatial, cultural, and historical elements must be considered. This includes references to lifestyle and luxury consumption, as well as globalization and authenticity, which are all related to the topics discussed. Four main types of Norwegian spas are detected: day spas, hotel spas, medical spas, and alternative medicine spas. Although different in typical 'appearance', through the use of texts and images the four types also have much in common in their use of elements that we recognize as 'spa-like' from geographically and historically distant times and places. Some spas also use their physical surroundings in addition to elements from both alternative medicine and modern Western medicine in their marketing. Spa consumption is on the one hand marketed as a relaxing 'breathing space' in everyday life, but on the other hand is also promoting and offering uncomfortable treatments for a certain appearance.

Paper 3 emphasizes the significance of the body in the spa, which again is treated as representative of the experience industry. The theoretical frame includes the concepts of experiences, well-being, and consumption, with some well-known and fundamental contributions regarding identity and modernity (Giddens), the body (Merleau-Ponty), and distinction (Bourdieu). The study aims to close some of the knowledge gaps that exist with regards to the meaning and role of the body in relation to experience consumption. More particularly, the different meanings of therapists' bodies and consumers' bodies are analysed and deemed as either 'in place' or 'out of place' in a spa setting. In addition, the mixed messages regarding the inside and outside of the body in the spa industry is addressed.

4.2 Summarizing Part 1

Part 1 consists of four chapters presenting the theoretical and methodological foundation of the whole thesis, in addition to binding the three publications together in an overarching framework.

I initially present some of the challenges that appeared early in the process and that turned out to have a major influence on the direction of my research. My initial aim to study the experience industries in two rural municipalities did not proceed quite according to plan, but did result in some interesting findings. It revealed that the rural experience industries I studied were characterized by being small, often one-man companies, with limited earnings and innovation capacity (Nilsen, 2009b). To grasp the considerable consumption trend that experiences represent today, I therefore deemed it necessary to look elsewhere.

The Introduction to Part 1 presents some of my motives for writing this thesis, and some of the central questions are asked: What is an experience industry? How can an experience be produced and consumed in a successful manner? These questions and especially what concerns the ‘prosumption’ of experiences is a reoccurring topic. An overall aim is to contribute to understanding the growth of the experience industry in a wider societal context: Why has the experience industry increased in the last few decades? Why is an experience considered to be so valuable?

I outline three main challenges:

The first challenge concerns the fact that the research field is characterized by a lack of a shared vocabulary and categorizations, and it is therefore difficult to detect a clear view of what the experience industry really is. One example of such imprecision is that the two concepts ‘experience economy’ and ‘experience industries’ seems to be used rather interchangeably. Instead, I have argued that the ‘experience industry’ ought to refer to specific industries that capitalize on experiences, whereas the ‘experience economy’ refers to a general societal development. The first aim of my research therefore became to attempt to define and categorize the experience phenomenon, and resulting in the publication of Paper 1, ‘Defining and categorizing experience industries’, co-written with my supervisor Professor Britt Engan Dale.

The second challenge relates to the difficulties encountered at the beginning of the work for this thesis, and my motivation for studying the spa industry can be linked to these challenges. I was not able to consider the small, rural, and striving industries typically studied in a Norwegian context as representative of the sweeping social changes described and facilitated by enthusiastic politicians and planners, and in several academic discourses. However, the spa industry appeared to be more relevant as it is a 'new' and rapidly growing industry, with the experience as the main marketed product. This work resulted in Paper 2, 'Presenting spa experiences online: constructing places of well-being', which has a marketing focus and is based on image and text analysis of spas' home pages.

The third main challenge addressed in this thesis concerns the concept and phenomenon 'experience'. The initial source of inspiration for my understanding came from a psychological perspective (e.g. Jantzen & Vetner, 2007; Roberti, 2004), and later the escapist element was included (e.g. Carù & Cova, 2006; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This was further complimented by additional understandings and approaches to the concept and the phenomenon (e.g. O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2002; Same & Larimo, 2012; Svabo et al., 2013). A central point throughout this thesis has been that to understand the social sides and implications of experience consumption, we must first understand why an experience is deemed valuable. This is the key to understanding why a commercial product can become a success or meet the expectations of potential customers. This challenge led to the publication of Paper 3, 'The role of the body and body ideals in the production and consumption of spa experiences', which ties the body to identity, consumption, and geographical research, and is based on qualitative interviews with spa managers, therapists, and customers.

4.2.1 Questions and answers

In this section I will outline more specifically how parts 1 and 2 of this thesis address the main research questions.

Research question 1: *What characterizes the experience industries, and what challenges do we face when attempting to define and categorize them?* The most direct contributions to

answering the first research question are presented in Paper 1, which primarily concern the definition and categorization of the experience industries. There are several challenges regarding the definition and categorization of experience industries, one of which has to do with the blurred distinction between services and experiences. Both services and experiences are basically non-material 'products' that in many cases have been materialized into goods. We argue that a consistent and operational definition of experiences ought to be based on the unique and fundamental characteristics of primary or pure experience industries instead of trying to cover the whole of the 'experience economy'. 'Experience industries' ought therefore to cover industries in which experiences are the main product, a product that offers the customer a unique, personal, out-of-the-ordinary, memorable event.

We further claim that in Norway the statistical category labelled 'experience activities' in the official statistics is far too narrow. However, other research has demonstrated that it is possible to estimate a more correct image of the size and development of experience industries based on existing statistics, even if the data is imperfect (Smidt-Jensen, Skytt, & Winther, 2009).

Working further towards a definition of the experience industries is necessary in order to assess the scope, growth, economic importance, and regional distribution of this group of industries, as well as the possibilities and challenges they face. Due to the modest size of 'pure' experience industries and their many similarities with services, we conclude that ideally they should be seen as a subclass of services, albeit one allocated to a separate and distinct subcategory. This would ensure that they have a more clearly identified position than they have today. As is the case for a number of other industries, the dynamic nature of experience industries indicates that categorizations and definitions are challenging.

Although research question 1 concerns the definition and categorization of the experience industry, it also raises a further set of questions about some of these topics in a more general manner. Changes in consumption and production ought to be reflected in academic research on these topics, but it is also important that these changes are mirrored in public statistics showing trends in various industries. As thoroughly addressed in Paper 1, concepts and categorizations are by no means 'neutral' or objective mirrors, but are actively creating what they are seen to be representing. The point that research and knowledge production is dependent on a conceptual and categorical precision level is relevant far beyond the topics discussed here.

Research question 2: *What characterizes the Norwegian spa industry, what is its marketing communicating, and how are the spa industry's experience spaces constructed and represented?* Research question 2 is addressed primarily in Paper 2, which looks at the online marketing of one particular experience industry, the spa industry. In this thesis in general, including Paper 2, the spa industry is treated as a modern industry, as presented in subsection 2.2.4. The analysis shows that just like the experience industries in general, categorising and demarcating the spa industry is also challenging. Accepting that the boundaries are blurred and the contents overlapping, the analysis of the spa's home pages shows that this modern, Norwegian version of the spa industry can be characterized by four main tendencies or categories of spas: day spas, spa hotels, medical spas, and alternative medicine spas. The various types or categories of spas vary from day spas primarily offering a breathing space in a busy day to hotel spas focusing on attractive locations, additional facilities, and various social aspects of spa. Medical spas' primary focus is on beauty treatments that physically modify skin or muscles, whereas treatments and products inspired by traditions and philosophies from remote places and cultures, often 'the East', are the main message on the home pages of the fourth category, the alternative medicine spa.

While the home pages present a myriad of different experience spaces, several typical tendencies are found in the analysis, which demonstrates the qualities of a geographical approach which proves able to embrace the whole context of the production of these virtual experiences. Central in the analysis is *how* the images and messages on the homepages are communicating its contents, which is by making use of both representations and 'more-than' representations, where the virtual spa-spaces can be seen as expressed through atmosphere, mobility, immobility, artefacts and objects. Remote places and times in a globalized world of consumption are used through their appeal to motions/emotions, sensations, and memories. Thus, whereas the spa narrative comprises a myriad of elements that can seem contradictory, certain 'typical' components make us recognize what is 'spa-like'. As they travel in time and space, some of the symbolic content of traditions, objects, artefacts, and philosophies are preserved, but some of their content changes. This underlines the relevance and impact of space or 'context'. As stated by Mansvelt (2005, p. 5), 'commodification and the symbolic and material practices and spaces of consumption are seen as part of a globalization, remaking landscapes and transforming local cultures'. Three main components are essential in the marketing of spa products and treatments, appealing to well-being, bodily modifications and

the use of materiality in staging the experiences. In the process of finding out how experiences are marketed in the Norwegian spa industry, more general traits concerning globalization and authenticity, hedonic consumption and its relation to bodies and identity narration have been revealed and discussed. In the argumentation authenticity is a relative concept, bodies are sites of consumption, luxury is no longer for the few and 'others' are still used to identify 'us'.

Research question 3: *What role does the body play in the individual's production and consumption of spa experiences?* The successful 'prosumption' of spa experiences is dependent on a number of factors, some of which are identified in Paper 3. One factor is the relationship between producer and consumer, in this case the therapist and customer. The data suggest that while therapists describe the importance of closeness for a successful treatment, some customers instead associate spa consumption with a Bourdieuan distinction, and they therefore expect a somewhat subservient attitude from the therapists. Both therapists and customers mentioned the importance of customers' feeling of 'in placeness' to achieve the sought-after spa experience, and both groups of informants agreed that all customers' bodies are in place in a spa, whereas therapists' bodies ought to live up to certain ideals. The motivation for visiting a spa varied amongst the customer informants, and while some came close to immersion or escapist-like experiences, others kept a distance from the whole experience. For some, visiting a spa was something they did alone, while most of the customers mentioned the importance of the right company.

Further, this third topic concerns how a spa experience is perceived on an individual level from the both producers' and consumers' viewpoint. Having both sides' views represented, it was possible to compare the two as well as look for discrepancies between what the customers expected and what the therapists offered.

The importance of the body in Western society is already massive and steadily growing. The different meanings bodies can have, and how some bodies are in place while others are out of place is given substantial attention in this thesis. Through focusing deliberately on the body, my intention has been not just to 'add' the body to the analysis, but to demonstrate its profound relevance. Since the body plays a central part in a wide range of consumption practices, incorporating the body to a larger extent is relevant not just in a spa context, but also in a variety of other geographical research topics.

4.2.2 Theoretical perspectives

The theoretical perspectives used to address the three research questions belong to a number of sub-disciplines on the intersection between economic, social, and cultural geography, as well as other disciplines. This is both a result of the interdisciplinary topic that the experience industry represents, but also of my own postmodern academic upbringing, where eclecticism is the norm rather than the pursuit of grand narratives. How to define and demarcate the experience industries is a central contribution in this thesis (section 2.2 and Paper 1).

However, other central contributions in this thesis relate to the transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism, or from mass production to flexible specialization (section 2.1 and Figure 1), accompanied by the rise of the neo-liberal state and its promotion of individualism (sections 2.1, 2.4.3 and Figure 2) and how this corresponds to social change in general (section 2.1 and Figure 3), and particularly to the rejection of the separation of economy and culture, through the ‘cultural turn’ (section 2.3.1). Experience consumption and production are seen as emphasizing symbolic values and are linked to other processes in society (section 2.1, and Paper 2), particularly the role of the body in identity narration (section 2.4.2 and Paper 3).

In this thesis, the consumption of experiences is about active, sensing, and contributing ‘prosumers’ and ‘co-creators’ (Paper 2 and 3). Place-bound experience production presupposes simultaneous production and consumption in places staged for experience consumption, and comments on the relation between production, consumption, body, and identity formation (sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and Paper 2 and 3). The value of geographic approaches in encompassing context, or both time and place is underlined (section 2.3.3 and Paper 1, 2 and 3). The central geographical contribution is an understanding of how these processes happen and form spatial patterns, what is exceptional and what is choreographed, and what is designed or not designed.

The methodology section starts with an account to explain what I saw as major obstacles when I began my research (section 3.1). The demands on the one hand for reliability, rooted in a positivistic perspective, and on the other hand, the contextual focus and relativity

tendency in postmodern philosophy that eradicate any opening for ‘objectivity’ or accountability proved particularly challenging. My solution has been to comment on these obstacles and others and not to discuss them further. The remainder of the methodology chapter has given an account of how web page, text, and image analysis were conducted to analyse the content of Norwegian spas’ home pages for Paper 2, and then how interviews were conducted and analysed for Paper 3 (sections 3.4 and 3.5).

4.3 Future agendas

After completing the main work behind this thesis, which represents a relatively brief, yet thorough encounter of one part of the experience industry, I pondered about some of the tendencies that I see in this field of research. One such tendency is that the research field seems to have shifted from its initial phase when marketing and political initiatives were dominant topics. Current experience research seems instead to be about building a theoretical foundation (see for example, Part I in Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013a) or about each of the subfields developing further (e.g. experience and tourism, experience and innovation, and experience and marketing), as well as new topics emerging.

Thus, while some topics have already emerged and matured, I anticipate that others are about to emerge. To date, experience research has to a large extent focused on luxury consumption, on the affluent, with enough resources to consume goods and services that are not about fulfilling what are considered as basic needs. However, the desire for feelings of well-being and positive experiences is not reserved for the rich, and to develop our understanding of what positive, albeit not strictly necessary, experiences mean to us, I think a wider range of experiences will be studied in the near future. White (2010, p. 160) discusses how more subjective understandings of well-being can bring about ‘new areas of activity and enquiry, with the fields of “subjective wellbeing”, “quality of life”, and “life satisfaction” in psychology and social-indicators research and the “economics of happiness”’. This point was illustrated by a former colleague at the Department of Geography, NTNU, who was doing research in Addis Ababa on a completely different topic, when she came across the sauna shown in Figure 7. It had been built by a local entrepreneur and rented out primarily to young men who wanted to surprise their girlfriends with a nice experience. As the image clearly

shows, nice experiences are not reserved for the rich and affluent, and are expressed differently when resources are scarce.



Figure 7, Sauna in Addis Ababa (photo: Camilla Bjerkli 2010).

Another relevant and potentially emerging topic that can be seen as somewhat related is that of the implications of social categories in experience production and consumption. In my own research I found a lot of data related to gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, and class, both in the interview material and on the home pages. This concerned how the interviewees referred to themselves and to others, and also how texts and images on the home pages referred to and portrayed people. The white, young, affluent, heterosexual woman is present in all areas of the spa industry. This woman is expected to look after herself in a very specific manner, including pampering on the one hand, and hair removal, manicure, pedicure, make-up tattooing, and Botox injections on the other. Men, older people, people of other ethnicities than white and Western, and homosexuals are marginally referred to yet. However, as physical appearance to an increasing degree is determining who we *all* are, the range of products aimed at modifying and ‘improving’ all of us will increase. This accounts for all groups in society, and there is already a steady growth in products and experiences especially targeting other groups than young women.

The topic of ‘therapeutic landscapes’ is an established field of research (e.g. Foley, 2010; Gesler, 1992; Lea, 2008; Williams, 1999), but is still developing and might gain increasing relevance in the near future. I see especially two aspects as interesting in the further development of this topic: one aspect relates to destination spas, and the other to our ever evolving understanding of the concept health. Although destination spas currently do not appear to be very typical of the Norwegian spa industry, due to the fact that Norwegian nature is seen as one of the country’s foremost competitive advantages, in combination with the constant demand for ‘uniqueness’ in the experience industry, destination spas can be seen as an answer to both challenges. Already, it is possible to see how some spas actively use their surroundings in their framing of experiences (e.g. Bjelland, 2008), and regardless of their treatments, therapies, and products being similar to what other spas can offer, this point makes them ‘unique’.

The health aspect is at the core of traditional spa industry (Smith & Puczkó, 2009), and even if its impact has been somewhat reduced, a new understanding of health is emerging in relation to some types of experience industries, such as the spa industry. We no longer see the absence of illness implying good health; rather, we pursue health as something that requires certain behaviour (exercising and diet), as well as certain products (spas, vitamin supplements, and cosmetics to mention some). The data for this thesis comprised several health-related topics, but since my focus was on the experience side of the spa industry, it felt looking very deeply into the health aspect would have been to take a detour. However, I did follow that path a few times, and encountered a lot of fascinating material at the intersections between health and experiences, health and consumption, and health and body. Research on the topics of health, lifestyle, and consumption remains far from complete.

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Part 2

4. Defining and categorizing experience industries

Berit T. Nilsen and Britt E. Dale

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses various challenges concerning the definition and categorization of experience industries. To shed light on the various challenges regarding different aspects of this classification, the discussion is seen in the light of a long-standing debate regarding how to define and categorize service industries. We also ask whether experiences should be seen as a subclass of the services or whether they have sufficiently strong characteristics to justifying treatment of them as a separate economic sector.

Although a new and not yet clearly demarcated interdisciplinary field of research, the concept of ‘experience industries’ has drawn much attention in the last 10–15 years. Although theories relating to experience industries have not been fully developed, for many Scandinavian politicians such industries are at the centre of attention with regard to regional and rural development (Bille and Lorenzen, 2008; Lorentzen, 2009; Lorentzen and Hansen, 2009; Smidt-Jensen et al., 2009; Freire-Gibb, 2011; Bille, 2012) and clearly related to contemporary consumer trends (Lorentzen and Hansen, 2009). Lund et al. (2005, pp. 25–7) identify as many as eight prominent perspectives on the experience economy in the Danish context. Especially in Denmark the concept of the experience economy has become highly influential in local economic development policy and among academics, although recently more critical voices have been heard (Freire-Gibb, 2011; Bille, 2012). In order to gain a better understanding of the characteristics, possibilities and challenges of experience industries, it is necessary to develop a better definition and categorization of them than exists at present.

In our view a necessary starting point is to separate the ‘experience economy’ and ‘experience industries’ – two concepts that are often conflated in the literature. The experience economy should be seen as a broad general process in the economy, where integration of experiences can create increased value to all kinds of goods and services in what could be labelled the secondary experience sector. By contrast, experience industries should be delimited to economic activities where experience is the main product, that is, the ‘primary experience sector’ (Sundbo and Sørensen, Chapter 1, this volume). This is also in accordance with Nielsen’s (2004, p. 8) claim: ‘the term “experience economy” refers to society in general, while “experience industry” covers a limited number of industries’. In this chapter, we use the word ‘experiences’ to refer to experiences as economic activities or industries. This is parallel to the concept of ‘services’ used as shorthand for service industries. We consider the term ‘experience sector’ to be a common denominator for experience industries, even though it is open to debate whether it is possible to delimit such a sector.

Currently, experience industries are barely represented as a separate category in the Nomenclature statistique des Activités économiques dans la Communauté Européenne (NACE) system (discussed further in Section 4.4), which is a classification system used

by both the European Union (EU) and member countries of the Schengen Area. This makes it difficult to comment on the scope and development of the industries. Also, within academia there is lack of agreement on the definition and categorization of experience industries. Commonly, references are made to how experience industries are not clearly demarcated, but at the same time without anyone really attempting to go thoroughly enough into the matter. To define and categorize experience industries requires knowledge of not only the industries themselves but also classification and hence an understanding of the principles of typology and taxonomy, or what can be termed 'definition' and 'categorization', respectively. As stressed by Salamon and Anheier (1997, p. 81), classification is not always prioritized in research:

Classification efforts . . . often get short shrift in the development of new bodies of knowledge. It is, after all, somewhat dry work, lacking the drama of new empirical discoveries. Yet the importance of such work to our understanding cannot be overemphasized. Classification is the crucial prerequisite for scientific progress in any field of study.

The discussion of how to classify experience industries has strong parallels with the discussion of the definition of art and culture, an issue that has been long debated (Bille, 2012). Also, it has clear parallels to the discussion of how to define and categorize service industries, which reached a peak in the 1980s and 1990s and is drawn on in this chapter. One outcome of that discussion has been that the distinction between goods and services is becoming increasingly blurred. We demonstrate that this is also the case for the distinction between services and experiences. Thus, we strongly disagree with Pine and Gilmore's (1998, p. 97) statement: 'Economists have typically lumped experiences in with services, but experiences are a distinctive economic offering, as different from services as services are from goods.' Instead, we believe that, in common with services and goods, experiences and services have commonalities and therefore defining and categorizing experience industries is not a straightforward task.

The chapter is organized as follows. After a section discussing the principles of classification, we discuss the various definitions of service industries and experience industries and then compare the two types of industries. Thereafter, we discuss various options with regards to experience industries, namely avoiding the use of the concept, making do with existing statistics or attempting to classify the industries. We conclude the chapter with a summary of our discussions.

4.2 CLASSIFICATION: TYPOLOGY (DEFINITION) AND TAXONOMY (CATEGORIZATION)

Societies are constantly changing, and at all times scholars have tried to denote and describe society, as well as label its most readily apparent and dominant traits. However, it is not an easy task to tidy up the usually 'messy' reality with which we surround ourselves. In politics and research, classification is used extensively to group elements with common traits, as well as to distinguish between elements considered to differ in one or more central aspects (Bowker and Star, 1999). However, classification can be a matter of dispute, as expressed by Bowker and Star (1999, p. 6):

Assigning things, people, or their actions to categories is a ubiquitous part of work in the modern, bureaucratic state. Categories in this sense arise from work and from other kinds of organized activity, including the conflicts over meaning that occur when multiple groups fight over the nature of a classification system and its categories.

Although it may be extreme to talk of groups ‘fighting’ to categorize and define experience industries, there is nonetheless a lack of consensus regarding the issue. Economic activities that are to be presented in the form of statistics require systematic classification (Salamon and Anheier, 1997; Statistics Norway, 2008) and at some point consensus ought to be reached in this regard. Although classification is a foundation of all research, including the social sciences, the principles of classification are seldom discussed, perhaps because of their embeddedness in research practices (Bailey, 1994). Classification is essential but at the same time difficult, as no system of classification will fit all purposes (Salamon and Anheier, 1997). Classifying experience industries undoubtedly faces many of the same challenges or problems as the classification of other industries, albeit with different ones as well.

Bailey (1994, pp. 12–16) lists both the advantages and disadvantages of classification, some of which are highly relevant with regard to experience industries. One advantage is the mere descriptive qualities that classification can provide. Currently, there is no general agreement on the scope of experience industries. A second advantage is the reduction in complexity, as one of the central aspects of classification is that of presenting a disordered reality in an orderly manner. Third, identifying both similarities and differences in relation to other sectors and industries can be a useful aspect of classification. Bailey’s critique of classification points out that classification is either descriptive, pre-explanatory or non-explanatory, where the latter two can be potentially problematic in a research context. In addition, Bailey mentions reification as a potential challenge if theoretical constructs that do not exist empirically are treated as real empirical entities. Further, the fact that classification is static rather than dynamic can be an objection to classification efforts.

Industrial classification concerns identifying systematic differences among the various businesses in a demarcated sector and grouping them in a sensible manner (Salamon and Anheier, 1997). In general, classification can be divided into two types of approaches: typology and taxonomy (Bailey, 1994). Typology deals with conceptual matters, or what we have termed ‘definition’, and taxonomy deals with empirical matters, or what we have termed ‘categorization’. In the case of defining and categorizing experience industries, it is clear that both need to be considered as there is a need for both an operational definition and operational units categorized in a sensible manner.

4.2.1 Principles of Definition

It hardly feels like a choice *if* we ought to argue for a common definition of the experience industries or not. Agreeing on the content of central concepts is essential in science. Salamon and Anheier (1992, p. 127) very clearly articulate the central position of analytical concepts: ‘The existence of analytical concepts is thus not a matter of choice: it is the *sine qua non* of all understanding.’ Hence, by discussing how to define experience industries we are engaging in an ongoing debate in the research field. According to

Smidt-Jensen et al. (2009) most academic literature on the subject of experience industries revolves around conceptualizations of the term. Some of the debates are referred to in this chapter, but first we discuss concepts more generally.

Bal (2002) sees a concept as different from a word in that a concept can be seen as a miniature theory able to serve as a tool in an analysis. According to her, concepts are not objective representations and their intersubjective understandings ought always to be thoroughly defined. However, the process of defining is not a simple task because concepts are not fixed and stable entities but flexible and usually related to many disciplinary traditions, as in the case of experience industries. Bailey (1994) reminds us of the point of locating the fundamental or defining characteristics of a phenomenon in order to be able to conceptualize it. A further elaboration of the importance of definition is presented by Markusen (2003), who discusses what she calls 'fuzzy concepts'. She defines a fuzzy concept as: 'one which posits an entity, phenomenon or process which possesses two or more alternative meanings and thus cannot be reliably identified or applied by different readers or scholars' (Markusen, 2003, p. 702). She demonstrates that in literature framed by fuzzy concepts researchers may believe they are addressing the same phenomena but may actually be targeting quite different ones.

Although Bal (2002) points out that concepts are debatable and that these debates also can be very fruitful, she seems to agree with Markusen's (2003) claim that to have a constructive discussion; there must be agreement on the meaning of central concepts to some extent, both with regards to how the concepts are used and what they contain. Bal (2002) further claims that if a concept is to be used as a methodological tool, it is vital that the concept and the object being examined are confronted with each other and re-examined, as both are likely to change. First, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by a concept, before examining its relationship to what it is supposed to explain or represent, before the concept then is re-examined. Bal also points out that, in addition to merely developing, concepts also travel. They travel in time and space, between and within disciplines, and in the case of a given concept various contexts and authors will add or subtract value and content (Bal, 2002).

4.2.2 Principles of Categorization

According to Bailey (1994, p. 6), taxonomies are often both hierarchical and evolutionary, and like 'classification', 'the term taxonomy can refer to both the process and the end result'. There are standards for categorizing economic activities on several levels worldwide. NACE is a standard for classifying economic activity. It is common to all European countries and renders statistics comparable between European countries on all levels (Statistics Norway, 2008). The USA, Canada and Mexico use a six-digit classification code called North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) (Walker and Murphy, 2001), where the two top levels are comparable between the different systems used worldwide. However, high-level categories are heterogeneous and to locate more homogeneous categories one must look to the lower hierarchical levels (Illeris, 2007).

Perhaps the most important reason to classify the world is to simplify it. Very often, we operate with mutually exclusive categories, which imply that no element can belong to more than one category at a time. Also, a general principle is that of 'exhaustive categories', which means that each entity in an entire population under study will fall into

at least one category (Bailey, 1994; Statistics Norway, 2008). Furthermore, the use of categories encourages us to concentrate on the similarities within a category – as well as the differences between the categories: ‘By maximizing both within-group homogeneity and between-group heterogeneity, we make groups that are as distinct (non-overlapping) as possible, with all members within a group being as alike as possible’ (Bailey, 1994, p. 1). Despite this, the fact that such tidy categories are supposed to represent chaotic realities is perhaps not sufficiently reflected upon.

Research on social categories has shown that shortly after a category becomes generally accepted and applied it will appear to be ‘natural’ and at some point we will stop questioning its construction (for example, Butler, 2001). But at the moment of creation, a new category’s man-made origin will be blatant and trigger an urge to question its objectivity and ‘naturalness’.

4.3 DEFINING AND COMPARING SERVICE AND EXPERIENCE INDUSTRIES

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Pine and Gilmore (1998) make a sharp distinction between goods, services and experiences, seeing them as separate categories of economic offering based on separate and clear-cut definitions. In the following, we first give a brief review of how services have been defined and discuss the distinction between goods and services. We emphasize consumer services, that is, services directed towards individuals and households, not producer services (directed towards firms and other organizations), because only the former is relevant regarding experience industries. Second, we present a review of experiences, followed by a discussion of experiences compared to services. We show that it is not easy to find a general and satisfactory definition of either services or experience industries that does not include overlapping characteristics.

4.3.1 What Characterizes Services?

The conventional definition of services has evolved through practice and custom over the course of several hundred years (Marshall and Wood, 1995) and is based on a view of farming, mining and manufacturing as the basic economic activities. Originally, services were seen as ‘residual’, as the kind of economic activities that do not produce or modify material goods. This definition is still applied in public statistics, for example, NACE. As the service sector covers 70–80 per cent of all economic activity today, such a negative definition – focusing on what the services are not – is unsatisfactory.

Most suggestions of positive service definitions emphasize that a typical service consists of a relation between service producers and consumers and demands the simultaneous presence of producer and consumer, as services are often produced and consumed simultaneously. Services often require active participation by the consumer if they are to have an effect, as in the case of education. Furthermore, a service is non-material and cannot be stored. Traditionally it has therefore been assumed that a typical service has only use value, not exchange value (Illeris, 1989) and hence the service sector was perceived as unproductive and ‘parasitic’. This is no longer the predominant view.

Most traditional definitions of services separate them from goods and in this sense

they are in accordance with Pine and Gilmore's (1998) statement of a fundamental distinction between goods and services. However, it has become increasingly clear that the traditional characteristics of services have many exceptions, making them less and less separable from goods. Much of the service provision that formerly demanded face-to-face contact has become space-time independent due to new technology (for example, e-banking, Internet trade, distance education and various kinds of Internet-based information and entertainment services). In all cases, service has become materialized as a good (for example, PCs, tablet computers and DVDs), in other words, the good has become a service carrier (Selstad and Hagen, 1991). Thus, service has become both less intangible and ephemeral; it can be repeated and seen or heard as often as we want to. This blurring of the categories goods and services has been observed in the service literature since the late 1970s, and even Pine and Gilmore (1999, p. 8) mention that 'the line between goods and services can be blurry'. However, in contrast to most contemporary service researchers, they see the blurred cases as only minor exceptions.

Further, the difference between goods and services has become less distinct due to the increased tendency for products to consist of a good as well as a service; they are 'joint products' (Walker, 1985). Although some service input has always been needed to produce goods and vice versa, in recent decades the amount of service input in the production of goods has increased (for example, research and development (R&D), information and communications technology (ICT) solutions and marketing) and today it typically represents 70–80 per cent of total costs (Illeris, 2007). Conversely, material products are very often an integrated part of service products. Services support goods production and vice versa – they are complementary. Hence, the current economy should be seen as a complex and interdependent system of the production of goods and services (and experiences), a perspective that stands in sharp contrast to the view expressed by Pine and Gilmore (1998) quoted above.

Due to the scope, heterogeneity and blurriness of the service sector, it is challenging to find a satisfactory and generally accepted definition of services (Dale, 1994; Marshall and Wood, 1995; Illeris, 1996, 2007) and there is a huge body of research stating that service is typically a chaotic conception (Sayer, 1992) or fuzzy concept (Markusen, 2003) with diverse and multifaceted content. There have been innumerable attempts to provide a more up-to-date definition of services, but even the best-recognized attempts have produced either very complicated or too wide definitions that are difficult to apply (Illeris, 2007). An example of a wide definition has been made by Miles (1993, p. 656), who states that services are 'those industries which effect transformations in the state of material goods, people themselves, or symbolic (information)'. As we show in the next section, this definition can be seen as also covering experiences.

4.3.2 What Characterize Experiences?

When discussing experience industries – a term introduced by Toffler (1970) – we emphasize that it differs from the concept of the experience economy, which is Pine and Gilmore's (1998, p. 97) main concern. As mentioned above, experience industries can be understood as including only primary experience providers (Sundbo and Sørensen, Chapter 1, this volume) and therefore it ought to be possible to demarcate and categorize such industries. By contrast, the experience economy is rather referring to a meg-

atrend that is indicative of a general societal development (Nielsen, 2004; Sundbo and Bærenholdt, 2007). The distinction between the two concepts is therefore crucial.

Most definitions of experience industries include a statement to the effect that they are industries where the actual experience is the main product. However, such definitions are not very productive because they do not contextualize or specify the nature of either an experience or an industry. In order to find a productive and functioning definition of experience industries, it is necessary on some level either to agree on what Bailey (1994) refers to as 'the fundamental characteristics' or to choose a path that Thomsen (2012) suggests of 'thinking in difference' rather than looking for the underlying essence. Thomsen's thoughts are rooted in post-structuralist thinking, where no such essence is thought to exist. We choose to gain inspiration from the idea, without pursuing the post-structuralist thinking any further.

Finding a general definition of a commercial experience is challenging, as it is not readily apparent why one product is an experience product and another is not. Where should we draw the line concerning what to label an experience product and what can be regarded as not having some sort of experience value for the consumer? Can a good in itself represent an experience, or only immaterial and ephemeral products? With regard to the latter, we face exactly the same problem as mentioned in our discussion on services versus goods, demonstrating that the boundary between experiences and goods can also be unclear. In the same way as with services, experiences can be materialized into a good, such as video game consoles and smart phones. The 'footloose' experience products (Lorentzen, 2009), that is, the kind of experience products that are sent to the market over long distances, are heavily dependent on such material 'experience carriers'. However, place-bound experience products such as festivals, wilderness tourism and theme parks are also facilitated by a range of material goods.

A possible starting point for localizing the essence of experience industries could be to accept that an anticipated experience is the reason for a purchase. Although the facilitation of a 'product' usually involves material components, in this context it is important to emphasize that the experience *is* the product, however non-material and ephemeral. As already mentioned, the focus of this chapter is on experiences as an economic activity or industry, and here we are talking about out-of-the-ordinary, paid for commercialized experiences. Consuming an experience is about creating a state of internal pleasure or well-being, either through an increase or decrease in stimuli or, as Lund et al. (2005) formulate it, through the production of emotions. The production can take many different forms, corresponding to a great variety of demands. While some groups find the experience they seek through being challenged (for example, Weber, 2001; Costa and Chalip, 2005; Page et al., 2006) others prefer experiences that in some ways are reassuring and create feelings of comfort and safety (Jantzen and Vetner, 2007) and well-being (for example, Sointu, 2005; Klepp, 2009; Voigt et al., 2010; Huijbens, 2011). Alternatively, the customer may seek meaning when purchasing experiences (Boswijk et al., 2007). The products corresponding to very varied experiences can range from, for example, rafting and parachuting to receiving a massage or being 'healed'. It is beyond our competence to examine further the psychological theories of needs and motives in relation to experiences, but Schulze (1992), Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Jantzen and Vetner (2007) and Jantzen (Chapter 8, this volume) all provide in-depth explanations of central aspects regarding the experience itself in experience industries.

For something to be defined as experience consumption, it requires (as with services) some form of participation or attendance by the consumer. Also, it is usually characterized by a relation between producer and consumer, where the consumer can also be a co-producer, or a 'prosumer' in Toffler's words (1981). In addition, the experience must be facilitated where this facilitation demands some sort of material or non-material staging of the product. A further characteristic of the purchase of a commercial experience is that it is not about fulfilling any basic needs, but rather about leisure or luxury consumption. Experience consumption is typically individual, although many individuals may have comparable experiences (Lorentzen, 2009). Experience products are closely linked to innovation (Sundbo, 2009), as an element of surprise is often demanded by the customer. However, this does not mean that an experience needs to be unique, as some experiences often are repeated (Lorentzen, 2009). In short, an experience can be defined as 'a sense or feeling; the act of encountering or undergoing something' (Boswijk et al., 2007, p. 11). This definition can easily be interpreted as included in the 'people themselves' part of the above-mentioned definition that Miles (1993) formulated for services (see Subsection 4.3.1). However, compared with most services, experiences can be said to cover something more, as successful experiences involve feelings and/or emotions. Furthermore, experiences are to some extent mind-altering and represent something out of the ordinary.

In the next subsection we take a closer look at what separates experience and service products to see whether this can help to enlighten our understanding of the two concepts. The best way to move forward may be to look at both similarities within a category as well as differences between categories, as done in classification theory. At this point, it is important to be mindful of the fact that a number of characteristics regarding services and experiences will only be apparent in contextual applications of the concept through empirical work. The task of defining therefore ought not to turn completely into a theoretical exercise.

4.3.3 Comparing Services and Experiences

As we have shown, there are both similarities and differences between how services and experiences as commercial products can be defined. We consider it clearly apparent that services and experiences have very much in common. As shown in the sections above, they are typically non-material, although usually in demand of some form of material facilitation. Further, they both often require simultaneous presence from both producer and consumer, where the 'product' is simultaneously produced and consumed.

A couple of characteristics are more debated. One such characteristic is 'supply domination', which is mentioned by Sundbo (2009) as more characteristic of the experience production process than the service production process. This might be true in many cases, as supply domination is a basic characteristic of art and entertainment, where the creators define the content and the customer quite passively may either accept or reject it (for example, attend an event or stay at home, or watch or turn off their screen). By contrast, Lyck (2008) mentions supply domination as one of the common traits of both experience and service industries. For example, the customer has little influence over the organizing of bank or insurance services or public transportation, but there are also many examples of the opposite case both within the experience sector and the service sector.

Technology is mentioned as an aspect that is more characteristic of experience production than service production (Sundbo, 2009), as exemplified by TV, computer games, experiences on websites and mobile phones as well as the fact that experiences can be stored on DVDs and shared via ICT networks. Even though the service industries are older than the experience industries, we should not fall into the trap of thinking that the service industries are not developing. Today even 'old' services such as banking and insurance services are heavily based on ICT systems. This applies also to retailing and education. Not only can experiences be stored on media such as DVDs and ICT networks, but also, for example, practical manuals, user instructions, dictionaries and educational programmes. Hence, technology is not an exclusive characteristic of experiences.

All of the above-mentioned characteristics have exceptions, but nonetheless they can be seen as general and shared characteristics of both service and experience industries. Despite this, it is also feasible to detect some dissimilarity in what can be considered the 'essence' of services and experiences, respectively. For the purpose of discussing the potential for categorizing experience industries, it may be worth taking a closer look at the differences between service and experience industries. We discuss whether these differences stand up to scrutiny, and whether the extensive similarities rather blur the distinction between the two types of industry.

The consumer's participation will always influence the quality of a 'product' in experience industries. As Sundbo (2009, p. 433) points out, 'users must be more engaged than in services because the experience takes place in their minds'. Whereas services usually require some form of participation, experiences always do, as they occur within the consumer. Without the user's participation or engagement, there would not be an experience product. This does not apply to all services; for example, it is possible to have your car repaired and even a haircut while asleep. In many respects, experience industries favour whatever is unique and reject standardization (Lyck, 2008), and the individual aspect is more outspoken in experience industries than in services. The staging or facilitation may be individually customized, or the same staging of an experience may be perceived differently by various people, and hence become different products. Although this may be more characteristic of experience industries than of a typical service, it is not hard to find exceptions. For example, the performance of a teacher, a shop assistant or a hairdresser may be experienced differently by different individuals, and the 'products' of such service workers (a lecture, a purchase and a haircut) may differ each time they are provided. Further, experience industries are more closely linked to and more dependent upon innovation processes, as many of their products require more or less constant reinvention: 'New experiences must continuously be presented to maintain the growth rate' (Sundbo, 2009, p. 436). By contrast, service industries more often benefit from standardization.

While traditionally services have had to be located relatively close to their customers in order to be the preferred service provider, several of the experience industries require their customers to travel some distance to reach the experience provider. For example, in the case of certain forms of tourism, customers have to travel to be able to experience place-specific attractions. It is less common to find services which are that unique that someone will be willing to travel far in order to purchase them. Even though willingness to travel does not apply to all experience production (for example, on TV, DVD and computer games), it can still be said to characterize the experience industries rather

than the service industries. This point can be linked to another aspect separating the two industries, namely that it is typical of service industries to ‘solve the customers’ problems’ (Sundbo, 2009, p.432), or fulfil a need of some kind, very often a practical one, whereas an experience cannot be deemed a necessary purchase in the same way and is rather linked to leisure or luxury consumption aimed at providing a mental journey for the customer. Thus, the demand for experiences is flighty and capricious, as it is rooted in desires for luxury rather than basic needs. In other words, experiences can mainly be linked to the sphere of recreation and leisure, whereas services are required in connection with the more mundane necessities of everyday life (for example, shopping, travelling to work and paying bills). This finding correlates with Pine and Gilmore’s (1999, p.2) claim:

[W]hen a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages – as in a theatrical play – to engage him in a personal way.

Sundbo (2009, pp.435–6) also mentions another aspect that could be defined as a unique characteristic of experience industries as distinct from service industries. He argues that the increasing demand for experiences is determined by factors such as seeking social status and more meaning and less boredom in life, along with psychological self-realization, all of which are issues that can be linked to ‘identity narration’. Even though experiences can be very short-lived, they have another and perhaps even more valuable function as they can be used to signal our emotions, attitudes and values relating to our surroundings (Lund et al., 2005). Although identity narration is an expanding topic within consumption in general, it is arguably particularly relevant in the case of purchasing experiences (for example, De Bres and Davis, 2001; Hannam and Halewood, 2006; Boswijk et al., 2007).

Sundbo (2009, pp.433–4) concludes his discussion of the differences between services and experiences by stating that ‘even though experience production is in many respects similar to service production, there are differences’. One reason why arguing for a statistical categorization of experience industries is challenging is that both experience industries and services are extremely heterogeneous but also partly overlapping, as Sundbo (2009, p.433) also argues: ‘experiences, like goods and services, is a very diverse category’. These points are listed in Figure 4.1, and summarize the characteristics of service industries and experience industries as well as their substantial overlap.

Thus far, we have looked at both similarities and what we consider to be essential differences between services and experiences. In addition, we have pointed out why the boundaries between the two industries are blurred and overlapping. The fact that experiences are used to increase the value of services or goods (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Lorentzen, 2009) is one example of a typical ‘blur’ between goods, services and experiences.

We disagree with Pine and Gilmore’s claim of the distinction being obvious, and think their view complicates and obscures our understanding of service and experience industries. As we see it, services and experiences as commercial products have some clear links and similarities, but at the same time they are sufficiently different to justify being categorized separately.

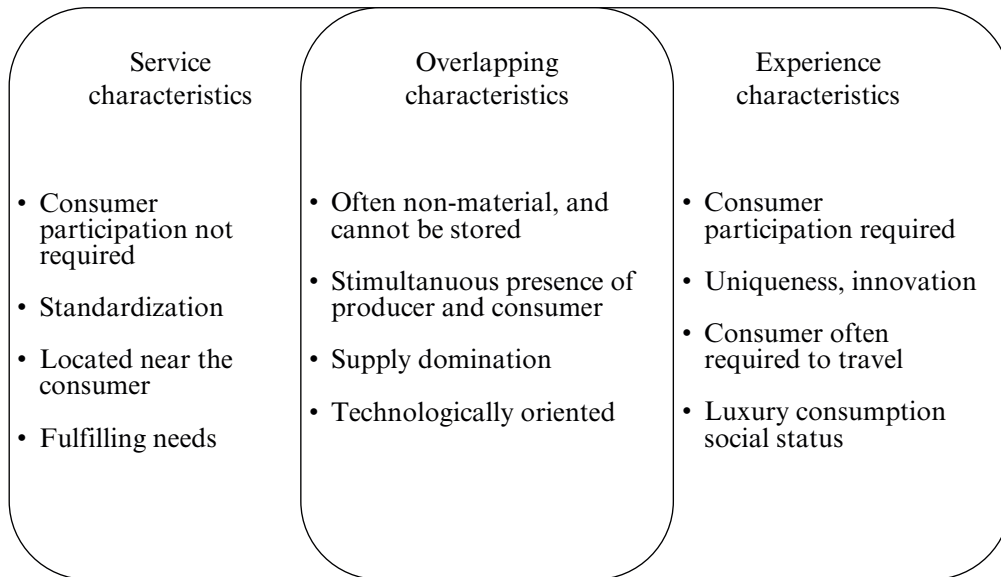


Figure 4.1 Service and experience

4.4 CATEGORIZING EXPERIENCE INDUSTRIES

In Norway, the current status of the direct representation of experience industries in the official Norwegian statistics is described in subcategory 93.291: ‘Experience activities. This category contains: the organizing and sale of own products, for example rafting, mountain climbing, sleigh riding, and beaver safaris (including the hiring out of equipment for these activities)’ (Statistics Norway, 2008, p. 175, our translation). The subcategory is grouped under the main category ‘R’, which covers cultural activity, entertainment and leisure activities, and subcategory ‘93’, which covers sports and leisure activities and managing amusement establishments, under the heading ‘93.29 Other leisure activities’ (Statistics Norway, 2008, p. 175, our translation). Category 93.291 clearly covers parts of experience industries, but represents a rather narrow understanding of them. The choice of a wide or narrow understanding of the industries of course has a huge impact on what will be considered to be the size of experience industries, a topic already discussed at length in the research community. Some of the views from this discussion are presented below.

4.4.1 A Wide or Narrow Understanding?

Depending on what is being discussed, a wide or narrow understanding of experience industries can both be constructive. As in the case of Pine and Gilmore’s (1999) discussion of a general trend in marketing, and a ‘general and qualitatively new characteristic of advanced capitalism’ (Smidt-Jensen et al., 2009, p. 849), there is no point in having a narrow definition. The reason is that virtually anything can be sold as an experience, and

as Bille (2012, p. 101) aptly points out: ‘we do not capture the whole experience economy by focusing on the industries that produce (and sell) pure experiences’.

A Danish governmental report categorizes experience industries as consisting of ‘advertising, architecture, broadcasting, media, content production, cultural institutions, design, edutainment, events, fashion, film/video, music, performing arts, play tools and theme parks, publishing, sport, tourism and visual arts’ (Regjeringen, 2003 cited in Bille, 2012, p. 94). The ‘political’ definition of the experience economy can therefore be based on a sector perspective with a very broad scope. However, a more recent Danish report (Erhvervs- og Byggestyrelsen and Center for Kultur- og Oplevelsesøkonomi, 2011) presents a view that is more in line with current research findings, namely that there are different ‘categories’ within the overarching label ‘experience industries’.

In our case (discussing a possible entry for statistically measuring experience industries), a very broad angle such as the one Pine and Gilmore promote would be meaningless, and our focus would rather be on agreeing on certain primary and perhaps mainly place-bound industries that capture the essence of the industries (although including more than the current statistical category). Lorentzen (2009) also argues for a narrower definition, as she sees experience industries as based on a relationship between producer and customer: ‘The focus . . . is on the consumer, on his/her expectations and involvement with the product, and sometimes even as co-producer’ (Lorentzen, 2009, p. 833). Theme restaurants, theme parks, spectacular museums of arts, performances and events are mentioned as examples of place-bound and pure experience products, whereas she defines, for example, tourism, fashion, visual arts, film and video, advertising, television, computer games and cultural institutions as creative branches, and emphasizes that ‘the creativity, innovativeness and culture “content” of the products does not make them experience products’ (Lorentzen, 2009, p. 833). Lorentzen further divides place-bound experience products into three different categories: events (for example, festivals and sporting events); activities (for example, shopping, hiking, handicraft and art production); and ‘services’ (for example, theme restaurants, wellness services, exhibitions and galleries, theatres and cinemas). Even this narrow understanding and demarcation has a substantially broader angle than the current statistical category.

Bal’s (2002) ‘miniature theory’ understanding of a concept makes a valid point here. If, for instance, the concept ‘experience industries’ is discussed without making it clear whether it is the primary or secondary part, or place-bound or footloose experiences that are being discussed, we can see how the same concept can imply different theories. This uncertainty can lead to a somewhat frustrated atmosphere, where some go as far as to suggest that ‘it does not really make sense to try to measure the size of the experience economy . . . Depending on how many or few activities and industries are included, the experience economy becomes larger or smaller: you can add to it or subtract from it as you will’ (Bille, 2012, p. 101), and conclude that ‘TEE [the experience economy] is a concept that can hardly be measured or evaluated’ (Freire-Gibb, 2011, p. 1851). Rather than agreeing with the two last quotes, and giving up on the attempt to measure or demarcate the experience industries we instead discuss what options exist and how different understandings of the concept ‘experience industries’ can be fruitful in relation to categorizing the industries. In the next subsection, we start with an example of what the outcome of simply avoiding the concept of the experience industry would be, before moving on to discuss two other options that are more con-

structive, namely using existing statistics or categorizing experience industries more accurately.

4.4.2 Avoiding the Concept ‘Experience Industries’

One publication that ought to expand our knowledge of experience industries in Norway is the report *Kartlegging av kulturnæringene i Norge (Mapping Cultural Industries in Norway)* (Haraldsen et al., 2004, our translation). Its authors investigate on behalf of the Ministry of Commerce the role that experience industries, culturally based and creative industries play in the Norwegian economy. The report has a central position in the Norwegian debate surrounding the experience industries, even though the concept ‘experience industries’ is quickly rejected on the grounds that ‘without further specification of the product than it being “an experience” it is, however, difficult to operationalize this definition’ (Haraldsen et al., 2004, p. 17, our translation). This report is the closest we come to mapping the role of experience industries in Norway. It mentions the concept experience industries, but primarily debates whether to use the term cultural or creative, and decides in favour of the former. The three concepts culture, creative and experience are discussed as though they are interchangeable, thereby implying that they cover the same area or, to apply Bal’s (2002) terminology, they represent the same mini-theory.

The argument used in Haraldsen et al.’s report is that the concept ‘cultural industry’ is more fruitful than the concept ‘creative industries’ because ‘creativity exists more or less in all industries’ (Haraldsen et al., 2004, p. 17, our translation). From our point of view, this problem regarding the concept of creative industries is no more significant than the challenges associated with applying the term ‘cultural industries’. Despite Haraldsen et al.’s definition, culture can by no means be regarded as an unambiguous or unproblematic concept; rather, it is a concept specifically regarded as problematic (Bal, 2002). We would be the first to admit that none of the concepts (culture, creative and experience) are unproblematic. Still, clarifying the distinction between them would benefit all three concepts. This raises the question of what the ‘mini-theories’ ought to contain or explain. In our opinion, using the three concepts as though they are interchangeable is an approach that does not reveal any of their content (see Lorentzen, Chapter 3, this volume for more on this subject). However, even though the term ‘culture-based business’ is preferred to the term ‘experience economy/industry’, in Haraldsen et al.’s policy report it includes almost the same industries as in the Danish political definition (Bille, 2012, p. 95).

In 2007, Haraldsen and Hagen (2007, p. 243) state: ‘during the last decade, we have seen an increased interest in the cultural industries. Mapping the industries both in Norway and internationally shows that they are important contributors to employment and value creation’ (our translation). However, the report published by Haraldsen et al. three years earlier concludes with the following remark: ‘These industries’ part in both employment and GNP has been relatively stable since 1996 (c. 3.5%)’ (Haraldsen et al. 2004, p. 61, our translation). Why, then, are we even discussing what to call this ‘change’ or ‘development’ if nothing has changed? Could the problem rather be a lack of sufficient debate around definition and categorization of the various industries? Is the result that change and development is hidden rather than illuminated and explained?

In the following subsection we present what we find to be a more constructive

approach of how to perform a study of the scope and development of experience industries, based on existing statistics.

4.4.3 Categorization Based on Existing Statistics

The above-mentioned standards (NACE and NAICS), regarding classification followed by all countries that we would naturally compare Norway with, do not allow for a detailed statistical overview of the experience sector as a whole. Regardless, Smidt-Jensen et al. (2009) attempt to give an account of the situation in Denmark using the existing NACE categories. They ask what sectors and industries can be characterized as the experience economy and end up with a broad definition of experience products and services, including, for example, entertainment, amusement parks, hotels and restaurants: 'to make a comprehensive analysis on the basis of the data that are available to us, it has been necessary to use the relatively high level of industry aggregation to make an analysis on the level of municipalities' (Smidt-Jensen et al., 2009, p. 851).

Smidt-Jensen et al. (2009) are among the few researchers that have attempted to provide an operational definition of the experience economy. Like us, they start by making a distinction between the definition proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999) and a definition that refers to specific industries. The latter definition is based on the industries where the experience content is especially strong. This means that the experience industries overlap with what often is alternatively defined as 'the cultural industries', 'the creative industries', 'the entertainment industries' and 'tourism' (Smidt-Jensen et al., 2009). Furthermore, Smidt-Jensen et al. (2009), like Sundbo and Sørensen (Chapter 1, this volume), make a division between the 'primary' experience sector, consisting of firms and institutions where the production of experiences is the main objective, and the 'secondary' experience sector, where experiences are add-ons to goods or services. The primary experience sector can also be said to deal with pure experience products (Lorentzen, 2009, p. 833), which are products with high experience values. Similar to Lorentzen's use of 'footloose' versus 'place-bound', Smidt-Jensen et al. (2009) further divide the primary experience sector into producers of detachable experience products and services (DEPS) and attendance-based products and services (AEPS). While DEPS can be sent to receivers all over the world as artefacts or electronic and digital impulses (for example, music CDs, books and television programmes), AEPS requires in situ attendance by the consumers (for example, festivals, restaurants and cinemas).

Smidt-Jensen et al. (2009) end up with a broad demarcation of experience industries, consisting of 'NACE 55 Hotels and Restaurants' and 'NACE 92 Entertainment, Culture and Sport', and estimate that approximately 80–85 per cent of the industries within these two categories are AEPS. Despite imperfect data, they still find enough to suggest that the growth of AEPS has been strong since the 1990s, especially in the large municipalities, while in the small municipalities, the growth has been more modest. Smidt-Jensen et al. also find that growth is unevenly distributed among various branches, and conclude that growth is more likely in traditional tourist places with natural, cultural or entertainment amenities. They conclude: 'However, for a majority of cities and municipalities, AEPS as a way to future prosperity may turn out to be a very fragile growth strategy, at least in terms of jobs and job creation' (Smidt-Jensen et al., 2009, p. 858).

In relation to national and international classification, as in the NACE system, there

can be no competing ‘truths’. Therefore, before experience industries could be more thoroughly represented in that classification system, it would be preferable to conduct a consensus among the users of the concept ‘experience industries’. Even so, it is doubtful whether we will ever see the experience industries assembled in a higher-order NACE category of their own. However, it is possible to make use of the existing lower and ‘scattered’ categories, as Smidt-Jensen et al. (2009) demonstrate. To have comparable data between countries, such as the Scandinavian countries, would probably require formal cooperation and specifically ordered reports from the various countries’ statistical bureaus.

4.5 CATEGORIZING EXPERIENCES VERSUS SERVICES

In this section we move the discussion up a level and instead of discussing characteristics within the service and experience industries, we look at the relationship between the two sectors. Should experience industries be seen as a part of the service sector or as an economic sector in its own right?

As pointed out by Bell (1974), all economic phases have had an extensive amount of service activities, although of differing character; from the private servants of the pre-industrial society through the intermediate support services of the industrial society to the dominance of welfare services and professional services of the post-industrial ‘service society’. The service sector is clearly characterized as being extremely heterogeneous. One solution to solving challenges with a very large and heterogeneous category would be to define a fourth sector at the highest level of classification, as an addition to the traditional division into the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. Such an attempt was made by Gottmann (1961), who suggested a ‘quaternary’ sector where sophisticated, highly qualified services are separated from the tertiary sector. Abler and Adams (1977) developed this categorization further, defining all services dealing with material objects as belonging to the tertiary sector, whereas services dealing with routine information were classified as quaternary. In addition, they suggested a fifth main sector, the ‘quinternary’ sector, consisting of all advanced, non-routine information processing and decision-making. A similar solution was suggested by Porat (1977), who tried to distinguish an ‘information’ sector, consisting of service activities dealing with information.

All of the above-mentioned attempts were faced with data problems, as they had to cut across even low-level statistical categories (Illeris, 2007). However, several of the ideas were followed up in later suggestions for classification, such as the one by Selstad and Sjøholt (1990) who, building on Miles’s definition of services (mentioned in Subsection 4.3.1), suggest a division into ‘goods handling services, person-related services, information services and knowledge services’. This division is also cross-classified with the dimension ‘producer services – mixed services – consumer services’. Such classification schemes can be useful for some analytical purposes but not for others. As Illeris (2007, p. 21) claims, ‘a number of subclassifications of services compete, and none of them has been accepted to cover all purposes’.

The idea of a quaternary sector is in many ways parallel to the arguments of Pine and Gilmore for a fourth sector, which they label ‘the experience sector/economy’. The increased focus on experiences could then be seen as a new characteristic of

contemporary good and service production, a response to new demands and a way to survive and prosper in today's market and economic reality. An alternative to creating a fourth sector would be to 'extend' the current praxis by continuing to see experience industries as a subclass of the service sector, although with a more prominent place than they have at present.

When creating such subclasses or categories, a revisit to the pros and cons of categorization would be recommendable. The critique that categories are descriptive is not necessarily a problem, as to problematize and discuss can happen elsewhere in a research process. Some would say that reification is the case with the experience industries; that what we are theorizing and discussing is a created phenomenon and not a 'real' industry. Hence, there is still a need for further research. Also, the fact that classification is static rather than dynamic may be a valid objection as the world it is supposed to represent is never static. This point may be even more relevant for the experience industries than many other industries as innovation, and thereby change, is of central importance in experience industries (Sundbo, 2009).

When categorizing according to the principles mentioned in Subsection 4.2.2, it is clear that car sales, regardless of the value of the experience gained from purchases, should be categorized according to the physical product that is sold, that is, the car, rather than the experience accompanying the purchase. By contrast, parachuting would fit better in an experience category than under sport, particularly in cases where a novice is strapped to an experienced parachutist and does not need any form of skills themselves.

4.6 CONCLUSION

One point of departure for our discussion in this chapter was the claim by Pine and Gilmore (1998) that experiences are as different from services as services are from goods. As we have demonstrated, this is far from the case. The blurred distinction between goods and services has been acknowledged among service researchers for several decades, and the same kind of arguments also apply to the relationship between experiences and goods. Even if services or experiences are basically non-material 'products', in many cases both have been materialized into goods.

Despite a range of similarities between service and experience industries, we have also pointed out their differences. A shared, consistent and operational definition of experiences requires a base in the unique and fundamental characteristics of the primary or pure experience industries, instead of trying to cover the whole of the 'experience economy'. As experience industries and services are very heterogeneous groups, it is a challenging task to develop such a definition. Our discussion of characteristics (summarized in Figure 4.1) can nonetheless be seen as a contribution in that direction. As a starting point, experience industries can be defined as industries where experiences are the main product, that is, a product that gives the customer a unique, personal, out-of-the-ordinary and memorable event. In order to develop such a definition further, it would have to be tested and evaluated in empirical contexts.

Even though it is challenging and perhaps impossible to arrive at a consistent definition that can be applied to all experience industries, working towards a definition still seems to be the only way forward in order to assess the scope, growth, economic

importance, regional distribution, possibilities and challenges of this group of industries. Another option would be to study one experience industry or branch at a time. In any case, a necessary next step would be to discuss in detail which industries or branches would fit such a definition. One place to start could be the existing lists of what can possibly be regarded as experience industries, such as those mentioned in the Danish reports.

In this chapter, we have also discussed some of the consequences of using a narrow versus a broad definition of experience industries, arguing that in the case of Norway, the present statistical category labelled 'experience activities' in official Norwegian statistics is far too narrow. On the other hand, some of the Danish studies and reports are operating with categorizations that are too broad in our opinion, and include all kinds of creative and cultural industries. That does not mean that we approve of the opposite standpoint or choice of avoiding the concept 'experience industries' by 'hiding' the industries under the cultural or creative label. Rather, we have tried to demonstrate that it is possible to do good research based on existing statistics, even with imperfect data.

Another point of departure for the discussion in this chapter was the question of whether experiences should be seen as a subclass of the services or whether their unique characteristics are sufficiently strong to justify categorizing them in separate economic sectors. The modest size of pure experience industries and their many similarities with services have led us to conclude that ideally they should be seen as a subclass of services, although allocated to a separate and distinct subcategory in order to ensure that they have a more clearly identified position than they have today.

Due to the complex and heterogeneous nature of experience industries, we consider it unlikely that they will be included as a separate category of any size in NACE in the near future. Moreover, their inclusion would also be dependent on similarities between the various member countries of the EU and Schengen Area that may not exist. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of experience industries indicates that categorizations and definitions will be challenged, as in many regards the industries represent trends, and therefore will continually change. As illustrated by our discussion regarding the problems of categorizing services and also very well illustrated by the discussions regarding the concepts 'cultural industries' and 'creative industries', these traits are by no means unique to the experience industries. Even so, the NACE system is impressively updated, and the experience industries may not be any more problematic to demarcate functionally in public statistics than any other industry.

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PRESENTING EXPERIENCES ONLINE: CONSTRUCTING PLACES OF WELL-BEING

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Abstract

The article presents a qualitative web-analysis of Norwegian spas' home pages, with an aim to extend our academic insight into how this kind of commercial experience is created and communicated. More specifically what characterises the virtual spa industry, how it is marketed and how the spa phenomenon is related to other societal trends is addressed. This topic is under-researched while at the same time constituting a massive consumption trend in Western societies in the last 10-20 years. The various spaces that are presented on the spas' home pages are made up of an eclectic combination of exotic cultures, historic references, material elements, physical surroundings, complementary and alternative medicine, as well as modern Western medicine, and the analysis reveals how a geographical approach is well suited as it is able to embrace all these aspects. Despite the spa industry's coherent appearance due to specific elements and messages that we recognize as 'spa-like', four different spa types or trends are identified – day spas, spa hotels, medical spas, and alternative medicine spas. Well-being, immersion/flow and an escape from everyday life are central components in the marketing, but also how spas can improve your appearance and modify your body are emphasised. The central position of material and immaterial components that make up the various spa spaces offering a range of experiences and associations is underlined. What the spas' interior, treatments, philosophies, texts and images reveal is that hedonic consumption is no longer immoral and luxury is something we all deserve, that authenticity is a relative concept, that bodies to an increasing degree are becoming sites of consumption, and that the exotic 'others' are still used to identify 'us'.

Keywords: body, consumption, experiences, representation, spa, well-being

Introduction

Experiences play an increasingly bigger part of people's lives in general and not at least in relation to consumption (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Boswijk *et al.* 2007; Bærenholdt and Sundbo 2007). Commercial experiences have developed into a heterogeneous conglomerate of action-filled sensation seeking on the one hand, to experiences of well-being and relaxation on the other. An applicable definition of a commercial experience is provided by Fuglesang *et al.* (2011), who see it as being a memorable and intentionally generated event by a company for a customer, which the customer ideally will remember as well as communicate to others. In some cases the intensity of an experience is relevant, where Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) 'flow' and Caru and Cova's (2006) 'immersion' are two of the more well-known approaches. A complementary view to the more common psychological understanding of the actual experience (Jantzen and Vetner, 2007) is emerging, which sees the experience as a relational accomplishment, with a strong focus on the role of the material surroundings in creating experiences (Svabo *et al.* 2013).

More than 30 years have passed since 'marketing researchers discovered the importance of experiential aspects of consumer behaviour' (Same and Larimo 2012, p. 481), and it is 20 years since Jackson and Thrift (1995, p. 225) pointed out how cultural studies ought to pay more attention to the development of 'niche markets and lifestyle advertising'. This is still argued for by Schellhorn and Perkins (2004, p. 96) ten years later, who claim that advertisements ought to be studied to a greater extent, as they reflect contemporary thoughts and the 'language of consumption'. Hillis' (1998, p. 559) relates this issue to geography:

Geographers, with their access to sophisticated conceptualizations about space, spatiality, place and the construction of material landscapes...have a stake and a claim in positioning themselves more centrally in contemporary debates about how communication technologies and ITs relate to the production of meaning and identity.

To study spa consumption and get an understanding of how these spaces of well-being are constructed, a whole range of topics become relevant to look into, such as consumption as status buying, the distinction between 'old' and 'new' luxury, the body as locus for

consumption, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), authenticity, the links between consumption and spatialities, and representations versus non-representations to mention some. The spa industry in Norway has with few exceptions (Bjelland 2006, 2008; Engelsrud *et al.* 2011; Klepp 2009; Roos 2009), received little academic attention. Hjalager and Konu (2011) go as far as saying that remarkably little research has been done on the well-being industry in general, thereby supporting Erfurt-Cooper and Cooper's (2009) claim that spas can be considered a new industry in an academic context.

This article highlights how a geographical angle can further our knowledge about how places of experience are constructed and communicated, demonstrating how communication technologies create experience spaces containing elements and communicate messages that can be linked to a number of other aspects descriptive of contemporary society. Through the analysis of Norwegian spas' home pages, this article seeks to address the following questions:

What characterizes the rapidly expanding spa industry and how are spas created through virtual staging and facilitating of experiences?

Which elements and what messages are used to market and create these experience spaces, and how is the spa phenomenon an expression of other societal trends?

The next section gives a brief presentation of various theoretical strands that contribute to understanding the variety of components in the marketing of the Norwegian spa-industry, and the societal trends that they are expressions of. A presentation of the Norwegian spa-industry and the results of the analysis follow, before discussion and conclusion.

Central trends in the spa industry

One aspect the 'language of consumption' speaks of is 'considerable evidence of status-buying' (Chao and Schor 1998, p. 108). Identity narration and its particular relevance in the case of experience consumption (De Bres and Davis 2001; Hannam and Halewood 2006; Boswijk *et al.* 2007; Nilsen and Dale 2013), can be further linked to the fact that 'individual wealth has increased (...) causing people to seek new experiences and more customized services' (Hjalager and Konu 2011, p. 880). To describe the development where ever more consumers can afford products or services that were previously reserved for the elite, Granot and Brashear (2006) make a distinction between 'old luxury', when goods were consumed and displayed to communicate social advantage, and 'new luxury' which is supposed to appeal to consumers across economic and social classes. This 'devaluation' of luxury goods

and services, alongside the neo-liberal rise of the individual (Springer, 2010) has led to an increased focus on the body as a locus for consumption and identity display. Cultural capital can be expressed through the body when consumption is no longer simply about 'possessing the cultural capital associated with travel knowledge and conspicuous leisure, but of being able to mark that upon and express it through the body' (Bell *et al.* 2011, p. 139).

Crewe (2001) shows ways in which the media and fashion photography promote stereotypes of the perfect body as young, beautiful, and thin, something which quite naturally corresponds with an increased concern to *appear* younger, thinner, and more beautiful. This concern in turn answers to expectations in society for people to exercise self-discipline with regards to their own bodily appearance (Bordo 1993, Valentine, 1999). However, as a result of increased wealth, welfare and living conditions in general, the population is not getting younger or slimmer. The increased gap between the ideal body (young and thin) and the 'real' body (aging and overweight) opens up for a range of products and services aimed at decreasing the visibility of this gap, and in addition the consumer culture promotes a concern of active aging in order to utilize it commercially (Powell 2010). People's desire and willingness to modify their own appearance has created a massive market for commercial solutions to this desire. To be able to market and realize this new product range, the body is divided into manageable parts: 'The effective operation of the commodity system requires the breakdown of the body into parts – nails, hair, skin, breath – each one of which can constantly be improved through the purchase of a commodity (Doane 1989, p. 31). The body is however not interesting only as a site of consumption. Since spa-experiences are promoted as a source of well-being, the body also takes on a separate role as the locus for sensing and experiencing this well-being.

One very visible component of the spa industry is complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). According to Doel and Segrott (2003, p. 740) not only is CAM currently an enormous phenomenon in the West as an 'important leisure-pleasure complex' but a phenomenon that has not been given sufficient attention from geography. One problem with that is that this highly un-regulated area covering an array of practices also might include elements that can 'be put to uses far removed from health and well-being' (Doel and Segrott, 2003, pp. 740). They further state that although appearing to be an alternative to the 'superficial' focus on looks and appearance, CAM is in essence also about consumerism. In spas however, CAM is presented to be offering healing in many respects of the word through various health benefits, energy-balance, stress-release as well as a cure for a vast number of pains and aches. What CAM is an alternative of, is obviously traditions in the West, and

Bodeker and Buford (2008) discuss how these various traditions can be seen as signs of globalization as spas offer a variety of treatments and products sourced from all over the world, particularly non-Western traditions.

In this context, Schellhorn and Perkins (2004) refer to the tourist as a 'secular pilgrim' that in search for his own identity uses the authentic experiences of 'the Other'. They further show how historical Eurocentric place meanings and myths are incorporated in how places are portrayed in tourism brochures. In such a rewriting of the content of places, both culture and history are creatively modified to fit our often simplified understanding of 'the Other'. However, there 'is a fine line to be drawn between "exotic" and "uncomfortably different"' (Schellhorn and Perkins 2004, p. 96), and the exotic and the modern can be hard to seamlessly promote simultaneously (Bell *et al.* 2011). This use or abuse of the foreign or 'the Other' relates to the issue of *authenticity*, which has received great academic interest in the last 20 years (May, 1996). Overend (2012) problematizes a view of cultures and places as constant or fixed in any respect, and argues instead that both places and cultures are constantly changing, created through performance. In this process they are also constantly redefining themselves, which 'seriously problematizes any notion of an authentic original cultural identity' (Overend 2012, p. 45). He gives examples from modern society that show the lack of appreciation of real or 'authentic' experiences, and where poor copies or meagre imitations are 'too easily given the status of truth and reality' (Overend 2012, p. 46). According to Urry (2002), this is something the post-modern tourist is well aware of, and still appreciates. It can however be seen as challenging in media's accounts of 'reality'.

Media intervenes and arbitrates the semiological chain of signifieds and signifiers, infusing signs with meaning, ideology and hegemony. It is simultaneously naturalized as it intervenes, producing simulacra that allow ideology to appear as fact and myth to appear as truth (Lukinbeal, Craine and Dittmer, 2007, p. 1).

This point resonates with Baudrillard's (1994) simulacra, that the copy erases the original, or Eco's (1986) hyperreality, whereby newer and better imitations are preferred to their original, and can also be linked to Marc Augé's (1995, p. 79) speak of 'non-places' when discussing effects of globalization. He states that 'place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed'. Rather than being fooled by the staging of 'non-places' or the simulacra, Augé claims that it is in fact the illusion that people see as the attraction. On the producer's side, no money is generated by

being sensitive to a particular place or culture (Overend 2012), so it might turn out that ‘true’ authenticity is not in the interest of either producer or consumer of an experience; rather, a modified version of the authentic is sought.

The connection between consumption and spatialities is of great interest from a geographical point of view with regard to studying the ‘ways in which places and spaces are connected and made meaningful through consumption’ (Mansvelt 2005, p. 11). To analyse the communication between spaces of experience and the sensing body, several theoretical angles are looked into. Elements from representational theory as well as ‘non-representational theory’ (NRT), both prove to be relevant in understanding how spas-spaces are constructed and marketed. The fact that NRT in general is attempting to bring to the fore aspects of spaces and life that are not easily represented, does not imply that these aspects are either more or less important, only that they are harder to grasp and present through the use of representations like language and symbols. The concept which originates from Thrift (1996, 2007) indicates a refusal of representations which might not be completely apposite, and Lorimer (2005) instead suggests the term ‘more-than-representational’. Not only is the term less excluding, it also fits better for approaches concerned with representations as well as ‘more-than’ representations, through interpreting the virtual spa-spaces as created through becoming or being (Anderson and Harris, 2010), bodily mobility (Cresswell, 2006) and materiality (Massey, 2005), expressed through ‘atmosphere’, ‘mobility/immobility’ and ‘artefacts/objects’. There is a variety of ways in which places in a globalized world of consumption can be used as representations in marketing, at the same time as spaces can be seen as ‘more-than’ representational through their appeal to motions/emotions, sensations, and memories.

The link between geography and communication is important, since ‘contemporary societal conditions is permeated, perhaps even constituted by a media and communication apparatus’ (Ek, 2006, p. 43). As the web-analysis of the spas’ homepages will show, elements in the media marketing of spa experiences are identified, and the various spaces of well-being that are produced on these homepages is discussed. In this context, media and geography are mutually constituted: ‘they are representational and non-representational, lived and virtual (...) real and imagined’ (Lukinbeal, Craine and Dittmer, 2007, p. 2). Modern spas with a focus on health and fitness, by some called ‘American spas’ are expanding rapidly (Smith and Jenner, 2000) and O’Dell (2010, p. 19) underlines that also the framing of spa experiences is new and reflects present realities: ‘the manner in which they organize and define their services today is unique – a reflection on the times in which we live’. As a prosperous

representative of a consumption trend that encompasses so many aspects of current societal development, the industry deserves attention and requires more insight.

Marketing and method

According to Schmitt (1999), whereas traditional marketing sees the consumer as rational and caring primarily about function and benefits, experiential marketers view consumers as both rational and emotional, with a desire for pleasurable experiences. Desmet and Hekkert (2007, p. 58) underline that all '*actions and processes* that are involved, such as physical actions and perceptual and cognitive processes will contribute to the experience'. In marketing terms these 'meetings' between the potential customer and the business are often referred to as 'moments of truth', and Menon and O'Connor (2007) claim that focusing on customer's affective commitments in these moments is the way ahead in marketing. Also, to appeal to the individual's 'desire for self-improvement', our need to be valued by others as well as belonging socially is answering to the standards of experience marketing (Schmitt 1999). O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy argue that marketing ought to 'arouse or intensify the anticipation, attending to, contemplation in fantasizing about the product (including services/experiences), as this feeds the urge to buy' (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy 2002, p. 540). The importance of our senses as essential dimensions of consumption is recognized also by Crewe (2003), who underlines the increased performativity in consumption places, engaging all of our senses to produce bodily reactions that in turn lead to memorable experiences.

To grasp these memorable experiences, a qualitative content analysis of Norwegian spas' home pages is here chosen as a methodological approach. Media analysis is discussed from several angles within geography, including viewing media as a text (Lukinbeal, Craine and Dittmer, 2007) as is done in this analysis. An article by Schellhorn and Perkins (2004) proved to be a great source of inspiration in this analysis, as they successfully demonstrate how interesting an analysis of a commercial text can be. Further inspired by Mayring (2004, p. 266), the choice was made in order to apply 'the systematic nature of content analysis for the various stages of qualitative analysis'. Apart from focusing on content, the importance of contexts is also recognised. Semiotic elements 'concerned with the way words, things, pictures and actions come to be "signs", that is to convey meanings in particular times and at particular places' (Crang 2005, p. 227) – or what is often referred to as representation, is

another essential part of this analysis. In addition the analysis has also leaned towards locating ‘more-than-representations’ in the marketing, to see if the spa industry is agreeing to Desmet and Hekkert’s (2007, p. 58) view that ‘perceiving, exploring, ... remembering, ... and understanding’ are important components of how an experience is perceived, and O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy’s (2002) argument that marketing ought to arouse both feelings and anticipation.

Spas’ home pages generate a lot of information, are easy accessible, and give a broad and representative impression of the industry, and are therefore well suited as sources of data for this research. In addition to texts, the home pages are also full of informative and communicative images, which in sum provide a multitude of data on various topics related to how an industry like the spa industry is marketing experiences. The analysis was carried out by locating Norwegian spas through an internet search, before checking all spas for an active home page. The home pages were then listed in an Excel column, with the characteristics of the spa listed in the next columns (e.g. accommodation and cosmeceuticals). To make interesting relationships visible (Crang 2005) and to gain an overview of the data, as well as being inspired by previous research (e.g. Leavy and Bergel 2003), the industry was categorized according to typical traits. The next step was to gain an overview of treatments on offer in the various categories, and therefore all treatments and textual and visual contents were identified and listed.

When analysing the data, thematic contents of texts and images was identified, and ‘archetypes’ was made for each topic that occurred in either the texts or the images. For example, one such visual archetype was ‘young, tanned, woman relaxing on a non-identifiable place surrounded by elements such as pebbles, orchids, candles’ and one textual archetype was ‘explaining the “authentic” origin of the spa industry’. The archetypes were then interpreted according to their main message and assumed intended impression. The experience industries in general are challenging to categorize and demarcate (Nilsen and Dale, 2013), and at this final stage in the analysis it became clear that much of the treatment range in the spa industry is overlapping rather than purely characteristic of one spa category. The categories can therefore be said to describe trends in the material, and no content was exclusive of any of the categories. Quotes from the home pages were translated¹ and are used quite extensively in the analysis.

The Norwegian spa industry: contents and categories

The global spa history stretches over many centuries and the traditional spa does not have only one origin. Rather, different parts of the world have local traditions, such as Japan's *onsen* (hot springs), the Finnish *saunas*, and the Turkish *hammams* (Tabbachi, 2008). The belief in the healing powers of water led a substantial number of places worldwide to develop spa resorts, such as Spa in Belgium, Istanbul in Turkey, Vichy in France, Baden in Switzerland, Baden in Austria, Budapest in Hungary, Rotorua in New Zealand, Beppu in Japan, Bath in England, and Huaqing in China (Erfurt-Cooper and Cooper, 2009). With the development of antibiotics and an overall progress in Western medicine, in addition to modern psychopharmacology starting to develop, the traditional 'curing' spa eventually lost grounds (Tabbachi, 2008). After World War II, indulgence in relaxing environments replaced potential health benefits, constituting a global movement that 'is a significant departure from the original concept of health spas that mainly specialized in rehabilitation or recovery from illness and/or injury' (Erfurt-Cooper and Cooper 2009, p. 12). Foley (2010) sees the modern spa as a cultural phenomenon that has become worldwide since the early 1990s. In line with his thinking, although clearly inspired by traditional spas, I consider the contemporary spa industry a phenomenon linked to modern consumption praxis rather than the revitalization of the traditional spa.

In a small country such as Norway, not known for traditional spas, what must be considered an impressive number of spas have emerged since the early 1990s. According to an extensive study done by the National Institute for Consumer Research, spas are now consumed on a regular basis by a large number of people in Norway (Roos, 2009). Like spas around the globe which offer 'hydrotherapy and wellness programs ... are aimed at fitness and nutrition, or day spas offering services such as manicures and massages' (Tabbachi 2008, p. 29), so can also the Norwegian spa industry be seen as a conglomerate of various products and treatments. According to Leavy and Bergel (2003), the modern spa industry in the USA can be divided into several subcategories, such as destination spas, resort spas, day spas, medical spas, wellness centres, and rehabilitation centres. In this study of the Norwegian spa industry, four main categories of spas are identified: day spas, hotel spas, medical spas, and alternative medicine spas.

Despite the variation and conglomerate nature of the Norwegian spa industry it is possible to summarize the main contents of its home pages in just a few sentences, where the images are: (1) of people receiving treatment of some kind, or (2) of people relaxing and

enjoying themselves or (3) of additional facilities or equipment, either of the featured spa or in commercial images. The accompanying text: (a) refers to what is on offer or (b) why you ought to purchase certain products and treatments. The marketing of products and treatments are about: (i) creating well-being or (ii) improving your health or appearance - through the use of objects and artefacts representing and 'more' – remote places and times. Conveying these messages is however done in a multitude of ways using a variety of means. The following section will provide answers to my first question: *What characterizes the rapidly expanding spa industry and how are spas created through virtual staging and facilitating of experiences*, through the presentation and analysis of the four categories of spas.

Day spas

The main component of the modern Norwegian spa industry is the day spa. Day spas bear much resemblance to traditional beauty parlours, but in addition offer some form of hydrotherapy, massages, or body treatments aimed at providing a sense of well-being. Although this section of the spa industry represents a vast variety of businesses, according to their home pages, they primarily offer a breathing space in a busy life through spa treatments for relaxation, anti-stress and well-being.

The typical spa image is of a tanned, slim, young, beautiful woman lying down with her eyes closed, sometimes while receiving a massage, or sitting in a yoga position with orchids, water, and pebbles or candles in near proximity, looking relaxed, clean, and delicate (Fig. 1)².



Figure 1, Day spa (Shutterstock, 2014).

The image is a professional spa image, selling not only youth and beauty, but in contrast to images in fashion magazines or beauty parlours, also relaxation and enjoyment. In this respects, the images are both representations – of the yearned for beauty and youth, in clean, luxurious and delicate environments, but possibly also ‘more-than- representations’ in their possible awakening of reactions and emotions in the viewer. The woman is perfectly still, and looks completely content, appearing to be ‘in the moment’ or fully immersed in her experience. This ‘act’ of being can invoke a specific memory and the sensory perception of for instance a massage might be re-called. The items surrounding the women are used to create a certain atmosphere, which is easily recognizable if you have been to a spa before: the smell of scented candles, the special-genre music, the temperature, the water, mud, oil and cream applied to your skin, the touch, the hushed voices, thoughts and associations to places far away, the thick towels, the steam from the saunas, the taste of strawberries or champagne, the company of close friends or family, or blissful solitude. In this way the creation of a spa atmosphere is corresponding to Anderson’s (2009, p.77) claim that atmosphere ‘holds a series of opposites – presence and absence, materiality and ideality, definite and indefinite,

singularity and generality'. By presenting these images packed with symbolic representations, the viewer's interpretation might include more.

A non-specific woman, in a non-specific place, it could be anyone, anywhere. The images display 'placeless' spaces, as the women cannot be linked to a particular place or location. Rather than communicating a real image, an ideal representation of the experience of going to a spa is presented. The items surrounding the woman on this typical spa image – the orchids, pebbles, water, stones, bowls of mud and creams, mosaic tiles, and candles – comprise a set of objects and artefacts frequently used as motifs on the home pages. These objects serve as authenticators, symbolizing the connection that the spas have to an original place, to places where orchids grow (Thailand), mosaic tiles originated (Turkey, ancient Rome), where hot stone therapy was invented (China, North America, and Hawaii), the water has healing powers (Bath, Spa, and Vichy), and the mud or clay that can smooth out wrinkles (the Dead Sea and Canada). Through these representations the 'neutral' and non-identifiable space is filled with content, meaning, history as well as potential personal experiences the viewer might have, which is then becoming a part of the image.

While a few spas strive to produce a copy of an authentic original: 'Most products we use are imported from Thailand. The premises are decorated with imported Thai-art to present a true Thai atmosphere, enhanced by the sounds and smells of Thailand' (Phuket Thai Spa & Massage 2011), this is not typical. The reference to the foreign products should usually not be mistaken for actual imports, as the origin is no longer seen as a necessary part of the product, thus resembling Baudrillard's (1994) simulacra or Eco's (1986) hyperreality. The value of the copy has far exceeded that of the original, to the extent that the original that is referred to no longer necessarily exists. The cost of a genuine Thai-massage in Thailand is a fraction of a 'Thai-massage' provided by an employee of any origin in a Norwegian spa. The value of these representations lies in the idea of the exotic, of 'authentic' and traditional knowledge about well-being. In addition, as pointed out by Mansvelt (2005), these representations are the links between places and spaces that are given new meaning through consumption, since the places referred to are not the physical and actual places that still exist, but instead mythical and symbolic versions of those places, representing the genuine and true origins and knowledge of certain spa aspects. These accounts represent ways in which non-Western therapies or artefacts are used (Foley 2010), and as shown by Schellhorn and Perkins (2004) they are representatives of Eurocentric place meanings and myths that are incorporated in the portrayal of the places.

The various texts presenting the spas, as well as accompanying some of the treatments, use references and metaphors aimed at extending the physical and mental spa place, thereby adding to the experience. Some spas offer information about the spa industry – information that represents a certain spa discourse linked to what apparently is the traditional spa industry, from ancient times and faraway places. ‘Hammams have played an important role as a social meeting place and place for ritual cleansing in Turkish culture since the Ottoman Empire’ (Tyrkisk Hamam 2012). Rather than being preoccupied with presenting truths or facts, this discourse reproduces myths through claims such as ‘the concept [spa] stems from Greek mythology’ (Nedre Berg Gård undated), ‘It is believed that it was the Roman emperor Nero who first used the expression’ (Holmsbu Spa 2010), and ‘You might want to relax in a moisturizing milk-bath, like Cleopatra did’ (Vannkanten Spa og Bodycare, undated). This is the illusion that Augé (1995) describes as the attraction, regardless of whether customers believe that Nero was the first to use the expression spa or that Cleopatra used to take milk baths. The references do not have to be ancient to give a specific treatment legitimacy, as some spas refer to Hollywood celebrities as users of a specific treatment, ‘Do like the Hollywood stars, use Hydrafacial’ (Lillehammer Spa undated). These various forms of staging our conceptions of places far away in time or distance is part of what makes the spa experience valued, not only when consuming the experience, but also when anticipating and imagining it.

Spa hotels

Hotels are usually run as bigger businesses than small day spas, and advertising and marketing is generally more professional in this category of spas. They primarily sell accommodation and spa experiences can usually be seen as a supplementary offer. Spa hotels have a clear focus on relaxation, well-being, health benefits, mental calmness, and ‘anti-stress’, but most of them also offer treatments and products aimed at beauty treatments or weight loss. Spa hotels typically offer packages for stays of several nights, combining exercise, diet, healthy food, and spa treatments. These packages often have a social profile, typically designed for and targeted at female friends or couples: ‘Bring someone with whom you want to create good memories, lower your shoulders and enjoy’ (Quality Spa & Resort Son undated) or ‘Bring your loved one or a group of friends to a spa weekend. Here you can enjoy yourselves in a nice atmosphere, participate in a workout or how about ordering treatments from the hotel’s spa menu?’ (Nordic Choice Hotels 2014). In contrast to many

other spa-images, typical spa-hotel images are about movement and action, and we see people as they are in motion, swimming, talking, pointing, eating, laughing or walking. These movements and actions give a very different and much more varied impression of what kind of experiences that are on offer, compared to the motionless woman surrounded by objects typical of day-spas. The social aspect is also portrayed in images used on spa-hotels' homepages, of people in groups of varying ages, males and females, friends, or family – interacting and enjoying themselves in spa surroundings (Fig. 2) thereby underlining the social aspects referred to in the text as well.



Figure 2, Spa Hotels (Shutterstock, 2014).

These types of arguments support the claims that the social aspect is an important component in experience consumption (Nilsen, 2013) as well as Chao and Schor's (1998) findings that consumption is as much about expressing a relation between individuals as between individuals and goods. Anderson and Harrison (2010, p.15) underline that the emphasis on 'how everything, from places to identities, is 'relationally constituted' is a point of general interest in human geography.

Spa hotels actively use both additional facilities and their location for marketing purposes, as they are often located near water or in surroundings with beautiful nature. The experience-spaces created on the spa-hotels' homepages are therefore depending on surroundings and materiality to a large extent. Typical images of spa hotels' home pages are therefore place-specific, showing scenes from the particular spa hotel, usually containing two elements. One element is picturesque views of the hotel's surroundings, the other facilities such as restaurants, training rooms, and conference facilities. The importance of materiality in experience production is thereby illustrated, and the spa-hotels are at the same time displaying their assumed competitive advantage over spas located in less beautiful nature, or with less of the additional facilities. In addition, the text usually mentions the hotel's spa philosophy, spa etiquette, or spa competence:

Spa philosophy: A calm spirit is always a good start on the road to happiness. Your surroundings affect you more than you might think. Being in nature charges body and mind with an energy that lasts a long time. We now invite you into one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world, the view of the Geirangerfjord and the surrounding mountains. The sound of a waterfall and clean, crisp air. (Hotel Union undated)

As pointed out by Crewe (2003), when we imagine a sound or a feeling, our senses are targeted to produce bodily reactions. In the above quotation, the references to the 'sound of a waterfall' and the feeling of 'clean, crisp air' modify the textual representations into becoming something 'more', and thereby creating embodied responses in the potential customers. This illustrates how representations and 'more-than-representations' can be closely linked, and how representations actively can be used to stimulate more than rational, cognitive, associations.

Medical spas

Medical spas constitute the third category in the modern Norwegian spa industry. According to Ellis (2008, p. 75), a medical spa can be seen as a 'place focused on cosmetic dermatology and aesthetics', offering a growing number of substances and techniques (i.e. Botox and fillers) that is supposed to appeal to consumers. Medical spas deliver 'physical modification services' (O'Dell 2010, p. 23), such as cosmeceuticals that can be defined as 'drugs and treatment products that are less superficial and less temporary than cosmetics' (Berry 2007, p.

64), as well as other treatments requiring specialist equipment, chemicals, and medically trained staff. A medical spa represents a product focus with improved looks as the main argument; beauty is the goal, not relaxation and well-being. Although treatments aimed at improving looks are on offer in all spas, and that ordinary spa products are also on offer in most medical spas, products and treatments offering more extreme body modifications set them apart from the rest of the spa industry.

Accompanying the descriptions of the treatments are 'scientific' explanations of how and why certain treatments work: 'TEOSYAL is developed by TEOXANE Laboratories which was established in 2003 in Geneva. Today TEOSYAL is ranged as the third largest hyaluronic acid-filler on the world market (...) TEOSYAL is a 100% pure hyaluronic acid-based filler with more than 3,000,000 performed injections in Europe.' (Salong Asena, undated). Unlike the link to exotic places and traditional treatments characteristic of much of the spa industry, the quote exemplifies arguments based on numbers, scientific-sounding names, and research from Geneva. European countries and research are attached to these treatments and explanations, not the East, the Dead Sea, or ancient Rome. Thus, exotic elements are replaced by Western, modern standards. The atmosphere created on medical spas homepages is therefore very different from the dimmed, scented, 'Eastern', mythological, atmosphere in other spas. Here the atmosphere is illuminated, sterile, educated, 'Western' and safe.

Images on the medical spas' home pages show the equipment used to perform certain treatments, often machinery that looks very complex, white, and shiny (Fig. 3).



Figure 3, Medical spa (Shutterstock, 2014).

The images are provided by the producers of the machinery or specific treatments, and brand names or logos are usually clearly visible, adding to the modern, technological and sterile atmosphere. Also typical of the medical spas are ‘before and after’ images, where unwanted parts (e.g. facial hair, acne, and cellulite) are improved. Explanations using medical and foreign-sounding vocabulary are often accompanying both types of images. In addition to providing details about the procedures, the explanations focus on results, safety, and qualifications.

This different way of presenting spas and their services, can be explained by the perceived risk in these procedures. While a majority of people in Norway at one point or another in life has chosen to apply non-scientifically proven treatments like homeopathy or chiropractic to ‘harmless’ conditions like back pains or ear-infections, most prefer an oncologist if diagnosed with cancer. This is probably a valid argument also in the spa industry, where treatments deemed to be harmless can be marketed through arguments that represent an ‘alternative’ to Western medicine, whereas treatments or products that imply a certain risk must be tightly tied to educated professionals exercising the safest approaches there is to for instance injecting nerve toxins into the face. In addition, the professional

atmosphere also implies effect and results of the various potentially risky treatments. The ‘before and after’ images are promising improvement, as do the people in white coats and the sterile equipment.

Medical spas promote a wide range of products and treatments aimed at altering and improving looks according to a certain beauty ideal. In these cases, improved looks are pronounced to be the purpose of the treatment – fewer wrinkles and less fat: ‘We guarantee that in just 2 hours you will drop at least 15 cm!’ (Stavanger Spa Clinique 2010). Interestingly, the case for purchasing treatments in medical spas is seldom argued on the spas’ home pages. Only rarely does anyone suggest that you ought to fix your wrinkles or lose weight; the products are simply on offer alongside descriptions of how they work and how safe and sanitary the treatments are. The reason for this can be, if Bordo (1993) is correct, that there is no need to argue for the purchase of these products, as the responsibility for disciplining the body is already placed with the individual, alongside the desire to have a body suited to display cultural capital (Bell *et al.* 2011).

Alternative medicine spas

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is increasingly utilized in the spa industry (Bodeker and Buford 2008), as part of a much larger ‘alternative’ trend in Western society (Doel and Segrott, 2003), Norway included (Fønnebø 2012). CAM is a growing conglomerate of various therapeutic or preventive health care practices. Alternative medicine spas focus on well-being experiences such as stress reduction following massage as something clearly benefiting one’s health. This part of the spa industry is highly engaged in using healing traditions and medicine from non-Western parts of the world. According to Loh (2008, p. 43), these ‘healing traditions of the East ... place great emphasis on a principle of balance of mind, body, spirit and environment as the basis for health’. In cases when a particular place represents something considered to be valuable, the therapists’ credibility can be linked to remote places of training. ‘She has taken a course in acupuncture in China and has also worked in a Chinese hospital’ (Alfaklinikken undated).

In addition, a vocabulary specific to this part of the industry has been developed, where a range of products and treatments are given medically-sounding names such as ‘Otopathy’ (ear light), or foreign-sounding names such as ‘Reiki therapy’ or ‘Ayurvedic therapy’, accompanied by more or less direct promises of health gains: ‘Ear-light is

recommended to treat tinnitus, ... improve hearing, ... treat colds, allergies, stress, [and] migraine' (Helseverket Spa og Velvære 2010).

In alternative spas the body is very much in focus, but with a slightly different angle than the focus on appearance typical of other types of spas. A lot of treatments and therapies affect 'the body's energy pathways' (ABC-klinikken undated). Alternatively, they might offer healing that 'helps the body to heal itself through touch or movement in the aura-field surrounding the body' (Fjellheimen Helse og Ferietun undated). Typical of the alternative medicine spas is that remote places and long timelines give credit to treatments: 'the name Pancha comes from the ancient classic language in India' (Ayur spa 2009). At the same time, it is worth pointing out, as do Bodeker and Buford (2008, p. 417), that the version presented of, for example, Ayurvedic massage in a modern luxurious spa setting is 'a far cry from the original clinic in which they would have been performed in rural villages of India', and where most people do not have the luxury of choice between traditional and modern medicine. The traditions used or referred to in the alternative medicine spas are thus modified representations of the original traditions or therapies, made to fit the modern consumer. Authenticity is therefore also an issue in these types of spas, but less obviously so, as the links to the original are much tighter than in the other types of spas.

Images used by alternative medicine spas are varied and often fewer than is typical of the other three categories of spas. Some images appear to be more 'realistic' and some appear less professional, portraying treatments performed at the premises or in the surrounding area with what appear to be genuine clients or customers rather than models hired for the occasion (Fig. 4).



Figure 4, Alternative medical spa (Shutterstock, 2014).

This gives a more ‘genuine’ impression, in the sense that the alternative medicine spas do not appear to be concerned with appearance to the same extent as the rest of the industry, here you are welcome regardless of your appearance. However, the alternative trend in spas is also continually developing and can now for example offer ‘cosmetic facial acupuncture’:

A natural alternative to Botox and plastic surgery. Cosmetic acupuncture has received great attention during recent years, especially in big cities such as New York and Los Angeles. Now this acclaimed method is available to everyone. The good thing about acupuncture is that it is without side effects and does not supply the body with any unnatural substances we do not know the effect of. (Fab.Lounge 2014)

Thus, the typical ‘Eastern’ or exotic link is replaced by New York and LA, which will appeal to a different kind of clientele, as the marketing of a product as an alternative to Botox departs from the usual argument in the alternative genre. There are also other examples of spas that aim at being an ‘alternative’ to the alternative approach: ‘our reception area does not represent a hushed atmosphere with ding-dong music, orchids and candles where everyone whispers and drinks jasmine tea’ (bARe clinic undated). Thus, such spas are clearly inviting anyone

who does not feel at home in the more traditional ‘alternative’ oriented spas. Alternative medicine spas fuse two big trends in contemporary consumption, namely well-being experiences and complementary and alternative medicine.

The Norwegian spa industry: discussion and conclusion

The analysis demonstrates how a geographical approach is able to embrace the whole context of the production of virtual experiences, and thereby shows how various components are interlinked and is affecting what is communicated through the spas homepages. As summarized at the onset of the analysis, spa images are either of people receiving treatment of some kind, or relaxing and enjoying themselves or additional facilities or equipment. The accompanying text refers to what is on offer or why one ought to purchase certain products and treatments. But to answer my second question: *Which elements and what messages are used to market and create these experience spaces, and how is the spa phenomenon an expression of other societal trends?* - it is necessary to look into *how* these images and messages are communicating its contents. And they do so by making use of both representations and ‘more-than’ representations, where the virtual spa-spaces can be seen as expressed through atmosphere, mobility, immobility, artefacts and objects.

The analysis shows how a number of elements are part of the marketing of spa products and treatments, one of which is well-being, or an escape from everyday life and immersion/flow. It is in the essence of a typical spa experience to anticipate some form of well-being, an anticipation that is underlined throughout the spas’ marketing. How to get to the point where you experience well-being differ, as people have individual preferences. The range of products and services aimed at providing this well-being and escape from everyday life that is presented on the spa-industry’s homepages is extensive, through spa therapy, being with friends or family, beautiful nature, good food, improved health, reduced stress to mention some. Well-being is to a large extent permeating both language and images used on the homepages, and need not really be explained or excused. Because what used to be deemed luxury is no longer for the few and increased wealth in the general population, as seen in Norway, has created a massive market for luxury or hedonic consumption. One obstacle has however been that hedonism in general has been deemed immoral in typical protestant societies, and marketing therefore needs to free people of any guilt connected to this kind of

consumption. This is done in the marketing of spas, where it is explained how this used to be seen as hedonic and superficial consumption, but is now perfectly fine:

In the last seven-eight years there has been an enormous development in the spa market in Norway, something which means that many people now do not consider this to be luxury consumption, but instead a fantastic opportunity to find peace, collect energy for their daily routine, and promote health on several levels. (Indigo Velvære undated)

The above quotation contains a clear reference to what Granot and Brashear (2006) have pointed to as the difference between ‘old’ and ‘new’ luxury, where the once immoral pampering of oneself is turned into ‘you deserve to be spoilt’ (Lillestrøm Thai Massasje undated). The shift implies that instead of representing immoral and hedonic self-pampering, this type of consumption is now not only ‘normal’, but a way of dealing with everyday challenges as well as looking after one’s own health and looks. On a more overarching level, this can be tied to neo-liberal thoughts, which implies not only an increased focus on the individual, as well as Foucauldian notions of individual self-disciplining (Bordo, 1993), but of increased responsibility on the individual level (Springer, 2010, Nilsen, 2013), which in turn suggests that it might be immoral *not* to consume products or treatments aimed at self-pampering.

For the segment of products aimed at altering one’s appearance, self-improvement and social belonging are used as sublime arguments in the marketing, and it is here possible to see how the body increasingly is becoming a site of consumption. What follows is that consumption and identity is ever more interlinked, as a well looked after body is a sign of the before mentioned self-discipline, but also of access to capital to purchase goods or services that assists in the pursuit of a young, healthy body. To create demands for these types of goods and services as well as meet already existing demands, the homepages are displaying a body that is divided into parts and where various products and treatments are developed accordingly. In order to look after the whole body, it therefore becomes necessary to consume a whole range of products, including several that offer to improve appearances through treatments that are not necessarily pleasurable. By doing so they follow Schmitt’s (1999) argument that marketing ought to appeal to the individual’s desire for what in this day and age is considered to be self-improvement by many.

Another element on the homepages that can be linked to consumption and identity is how in a globalized world of consumption remote and exotic places and times are used as their 'authentic' otherness appeals to our self-definition through motions, emotions, sensations, and memories. Especially 'the East' is representing a sought after otherness, with ancient 'knowledge', energy pathways, symbolic objects and artefacts, foreign sounding vocabulary and a strong focus on the body's ability to heal itself. This type of knowledge is parallel rather than complementary to knowledge produced by science and research, and this otherness does not aim at being 'true' representations. It is rather about re-creating mythical places and times that are not uncomfortably different. When procedures involving some sort of risk are presented, the East is replaced by modern Western medicine, symbolised as being result-oriented and safe.

The last component central to this analysis is materiality, manifested as both representations and 'more-than-representations'. The spas' home pages are about selling products and treatments, and to do so they construct virtual places of experience where potential customers can find positive images of this consumption taking place. Elements, both physical and non-physical, from traditional spas worldwide, as well as other historical and cultural elements are used to create an eclectic display of exotic elements, well-being, good looks, health, and hygiene. These elements are visible in the interior, treatments, philosophies, texts, and images that the spas use in a variety of ways. According to Lorimer (2008, p. 554) the way forward is precisely this: 'to conceive of representation (context) and non-representation (practice) held together – albeit sometimes in tension – rather than effecting a complete reversal of the earlier disciplinary tradition when signifying (con)texts were privileged over social actions'.

Notes

1 All quotes are translated by me

2 All images are purchased from Shutterstock

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Paper 3

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Information

I am a PhD candidate at the Department of Geography, NTNU, working within the field of economic/cultural geography with the experience industries. In that connection I study the spa and well-being industry.

It is not done much research on this topic in Norway, and I will therefore start with some general interviews with the intention of localizing areas it might be interesting to pursue. Of the fields I want to look closer at is amongst other employment, product-development, competition, marketing and customers (2009). It is not done much research on this topic in Norway, so all information is in principle interesting. My main angle is about finding explanations to why experience products are demanded to an ever increasing degree (despite the fact that they are resource-demanding in many respects) (2010).

Ethical guide-lines within research with an articulated desire to inform my sources

To the best of my ability I will try to uphold ethical guide-lines about informing my sources about the project they are participating in.

Recordings of the interviews will be transcribed by me and then deleted.

If anything from this round of interviews is presented, all informants will be anonymized. It is fully accepted to withdraw from the project at any time should you want to do so, including the withdrawal of whole interviews or statements (as long as it has not been published yet).

Do you have any questions, tips or suggestions, please contact me.

With regards

Berit Therese Nilsen

Interview guide I (manager)

All questions are regarding solely the spa and well-being products offered by your workplace.

Name/position/what functions do you have in relation to the spa and well-being products on offer in your workplace.

1. Employment
 - a. How many are employed and in what type of positions?
 - b. What is the professional background of the employees?
 - c. Do they have formal training/education?
 - d. It is hard to find employees with the right competence?
 - e. What is the level of income (from – to)?
2. Product development
 - a. What was the background for developing this (part of the) company?
 - b. Which products did you start with?
 - c. Which products are the most popular?
 - d. Which products would you like to develop further?
 - e. Do you wish to offer additional products to the ones you already offer?
 - f. Do the products change over time? If so - why and how (and by whom)?
3. Competition
 - a. How would you describe the competition in the industry?
 - b. Is the competition primarily local/regional/national/international?
 - c. Have you changed/adapted/copied products from competitors?
 - d. How has this branch developed since the start for this company?
4. Marketing
 - a. How is the company marketed?
 - b. How are your products marketed?
 - c. Where is the company marketed (media and geographically)?
 - d. Do you consider your own customers to be a marketing channel? If so - how do you address it?

e. Are health aspects, visible results, luxury or other aspects in focus?

5. Customer groups

a. Have you investigated into your company's customers?

b. Who are they (gender, age, residence, occupation)?

c. Do you know why they prefer your company?

d. Do you know why they prefer certain products?

e. Are you satisfied with your client base?

f. Which groups are you targeting?

g. Which groups would you like to reach?

Interview guide II (manager)

1. The spa and well-being industry
 - a. Can you say something in general about the industry for an outsider?
 - b. What would you say characterizes the development in the industry?
 - c. Are there clear divisions inside the industry according to what the different places offer/focus on?
 - d. Are there regional differences?
 - e. Can you say anything about city/countryside (urban/rural) businesses?
 - f. Can you say anything in general about the marketing? (Who makes the homepages, which marketing channels are used the most, what influence does the product producers have?)
2. Therapists
 - a. What relationship would you say the therapists have to their own bodies and appearance?
 - b. How is it desirable for the therapists to appear (clean, caring, fit, professional)?
 - c. Is it important to see the body as a totality (diet, exercise, stress)?
 - d. What kinds of experiences are facilitated?
 - e. How is this done?
3. Customers
 - a. What relation do the customers have to their own bodies?
 - b. Is this relation problematic for some customers in relation to receiving treatment?
 - c. Is age a topic when it comes to how people view their own body?
 - d. What is the purpose of the various kinds of treatments for the customers?
 - e. Which kind of experiences do they express a desire for?
 - f. Can you say anything about gender differences and similarities?
 - g. Is the gender of the therapist an issue for some customers?

Interview guide III (manager)

1. The spa and well-being industry
 - a. Can you say something in general about the industry for an outsider?
 - b. What would you say characterizes the development in the industry?
 - c. Are there clear divisions inside the industry according to what the different places offer/focus on?
 - d. Are there regional differences?
 - e. Can you say anything about city/countryside (urban/rural) businesses?
 - f. Can you say anything in general about the marketing? (Who makes the homepages, which marketing channels are used the most, what influence does the product producers have?)
2. The body in the spa and well-being industry
 - a. What would you say characterizes the view(s) on the body in this business, and would you say this view is changing or not?
 - b. Would you say the industry has body ideals? And if so, what characterizes these?
 - c. How is this mediated? And do these views concretize themselves in any way materially?
 - d. Can you say anything about 'routines' in the industry in relation to how one treat or approach various bodies – customers bodies as well as one's own? (Dressing/undressing, lighting, music, interior etc.)
 - e. What would you say is the goal with the products in relation to body?
3. The body for the customers
 - a. What relation do the customers have to their own bodies?
 - b. What are the goals with the various forms of treatment?
 - c. Is their view on their own body problematic for some customers in relation to receiving treatment?
 - d. Can you say something about gender similarities and differences?
 - e. Is the gender of the therapist an issue for some customers?
 - f. Is age a topic when it comes to how people view their own body?

Interview guide, Customers

Spa

- a. Have you been to a spa more than once? Do you remember the first time, and why you went?
- b. If you have been to several spas, what are similarities and differences between the various spas?
- c. How important is the actual spa-department? Is that depending on whether you go on your own or with someone?
- d. Do you usually pay with money or gift certificates?
- e. Why spa? What could have been an alternative? What is valuable with spas? What decides which spa you go to?

The social and the body

- a. What is different about going alone versus with someone to a spa?
- b. What's it like being 'semi-naked' with others? (Including friends and therapists).
- c. Are you concerned with 'looking after' the body (exercise, diet)? And do you consider spas to be a way to look after the body?
- d. Does going to a spa give you clear or a bad conscience?
- e. How do you think people/bodies are portrayed in a spa-context?
- f. What kind of beauty-ideal is promoted in the spa-industry? Is it similar to the fashion-industry's ideal?
- g. How do therapists appear with regards to looks and body-ideals?
- h. An increasing number of spas are offering Restylane, Botox, chemical peels etc. How do you relate to such products? Does it resonate with the rest of the spa-industry? Have you tried?

Experiences and plans ahead

- a. Do you usually go alone or with others, and in that case, with whom? (friends, husband, family).
- b. Which treatments do you usually buy/prefer?
- c. What can be said to characterize the experience? Positive aspects – what seem to work? Potential negative aspects – what does not seem to work?
- d. What characterises a good therapist? Do you have mixed experiences with any therapists?
- e. Would you say going to a spa primarily is an experience or a treatment?
- f. Will you go to a spa again in the future? If yes – why? If no – why?

g. Have you visited spas abroad?

Interview Guide, groups of costumers

Spa

- a. Who came up with the idea? Which treatments did you have? What was the actual spa-department consisting of?
- b. Why spa? What could have been an alternative? Why this spa? What is valuable?
- c. What can be said to characterize the experience? Positive aspects – what seem to work? Potential negative aspects – what does not seem to work?
- d. How did the therapists appear? Did they make you relax? How?
- e. Would you say going to a spa primarily is an experience or a treatment?

The social and the body

- a. What is different about going alone versus with someone to a spa?
- b. What's it like being 'semi-naked' with others? (Including friends and therapists).
- c. Are you concerned with 'looking after' the body (exercise, diet)? Are you preoccupied with the body in general?
- d. How do you think bodies are portrayed in a spa-context?
- e. What kind of beauty-ideal is promoted in the spa-industry? Is it similar to the fashion-industry's ideal?
- f. How do therapists appear with regards to looks and body-ideals?

Experiences and plans ahead

- a. Is this your first time at a spa?
- b. If not – what are differences and similarities between the various spas?
- c. Does going to a spa give you clear or a bad conscience?
- d. Will you go to a spa again in the future? If yes – why? If no – why? (like it/don't like it, time, money etc.).
- e. A common expression is that 'beauty comes from within' – does anyone have any views on that in this context? How do you feel about Botox etc.?

