Exploring theming dimensions in a tourism context

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Abstract

Theming is used to differentiate places and how they are experienced and is thereby a growing phenomenon within tourism and society at large. Although there is an increasing body of research that examines themed environments, there is a lack of empirical studies that explore the concept of theming and its dimensions in a tourism context. This study aims to contribute to the exploration of the concept of theming and its dimensions. Based on this aim, a qualitative study was undertaken. Half-structured interviews with 10 strategically selected key informants in various theming related fields were conducted over the course of one year. The findings reveal 10 dimensions that were significant for theming: (i) authenticity, (ii) chronotope, (iii) cohesion, (iv) digital technology, (v) immersion, (vi) interaction/co-creation, (vii) multisensory, (viii) novelty, (ix) relatability, and (x) storytelling/narrative. The contributions of this study are both theoretical and practical for tourism.

Introduction

The aim of this study is to add to the understanding of theming by exploring the concept and its dimensions. Theming enables service providers to elevate their offerings from ordinary services to extraordinary experiences, stimulate and direct consumption, provide an escape from reality, create brand tangibility, and increase the attractiveness and pull-factor of a place (Young and Riley, 2002, Brown and Patterson, 2000, Kozinets *et al.*, 2002, Schlehe and Hochbruck, 2014, Gilmore and Pine, 2009, Kozinets, 2008). Few empirical studies explore the concept of theming. The aim is to explore the concept of theming and its dimensions by examining the scholarly understanding of the concept among practitioners in themed environments.

Gilmore and Pine (2002) describe a *theme* as the dominant idea or organising principle. When this staging process is exercised by applying a theme, unifying structure and organisation, it is called *theming* (Scheurer, 2004, McLellan, 2000, Strömberg, 2015). Organizations use theming to orchestrate an integrated experience, not only through physical means but also through the more

abstract dimensions that pertain to the physical place.

Specific and related literature on theming comes from a variety of scientific fields, approaches, and contexts, e.g., advertising (Olson, 2004), festivals and event management (Allen and Harris, 2002, Bladen *et al.*, 2012, Bowdin *et al.*, 2011, Getz, 2012, Robinson, 2015), marketing innovation and research (Gothelf *et al.*, 2010, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2013), and strategy and strategic marketing (Lillestol *et al.*, 2015, Wong and Cheung, 1999, Ponsonby-Mccabe and Boyle, 2006, Brown and Patterson, 2000). The focus of this study is on tourism. Prominent theming and tourism related studies include McClung (1991) who identifies theme preferences for theme park visitors, Park *et al.* (2009) who identify major theme motivations for attending theme parks, Botha (2016) who recognizes theme as the most important tool in all models for enhancing visitor experiences, Trischler and Zehrer (2012) who develop a service design analysis model for analysing theme park experiences, Carlà-Uhink *et al.* (2017) who extensively explore time and temporality in theme parks, (Gao *et al.*, 2016) who find that thematically linked destinations create value for customers, and Ulusoy and Fırat (2009) who emphasize the importance of incorporating visuals in research on thematization. The literature spans both conceptual and empirically based analyses that apply both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Thus, the field of theming is interdisciplinary, with the result that the contribution of this study also applies to multiple fields. However, the main contributions are specifically directed towards the domain of tourism.

There is a lack of empirical studies that explore the concept of theming in tourism. For instance, Mossberg (2007) calls for more research on themes in a tourism context. Botha (2016) asserts that more research on theming is necessary to help develop comprehensive guidelines for attraction managers, and Åstrøm (2017) proposes qualitative approaches to advance the understudied field of theming. Based on these calls for more research, the objective of this paper is to answer two research questions: (1) How can the concept of

theming be understood? (2) What kinds of theming dimensions are central in a tourism context?

First, this study starts with theoretical perspectives on the concept of theming. Second, the chosen method for the study is presented along with the findings and discussions. The study concludes with recommendations for future research.

Theoretical perspectives
The concept of theming
The literature describes two perspectives of theming (Bryman, 2004, Lukas, 2007, Gottdiener, 2001). One considers theming tied specifically to the realm of hedonic consumer places such as theme parks, hotels, restaurants, and museums (e.g., Voss, 2004); here, the primary target markets are tourists and pleasure-seeking consumers. The other considers theming to be part of every space, or object, that humans create, in other words also churches, homes, virtual worlds, hospitals, and so on (Fırat and Ulusoy, 2011, Ulusoy and Fırat, 2009), and thus more utilitarian in nature. Consequently, this means the target market can be essentially everyone. The latter perspective is becoming commonly accepted as obvious theming, as for example the operations of theme parks become increasingly acknowledged by the public and gain widespread acceptance (Weinstein, 1992, Brown, 2016, Mitrasinovic, 2008). Today, replicas of entire cities can be transplanted around the world as a themed environment (Reisenleitner, 2016). The problem with this is that theming becomes harder to define, either as a phenomenon of our time, or as being different from design, decoration, and spiritual rituals. In tourism, the terms "theming", "themes", and "thematisation" are applied generously (Paradis, 2004, Tarssanen and Kylänen, 2006). Themed tourism, however, is invariably central to different types of tourism (Viken and Granås, 2014). For kinds of tourism such as MICE tourism (Mistilis and Dwyer, 1999), active tourism (such as mountain climbing), and health or medical tourism (such as visiting a weight-loss camp or dental tourism), the purpose of the visits are more instrumental in nature. Equally, for other kinds of tourism, the experience is more central to

the tour, and thus, the symbolic aspect of theming is more important (Hansen and Mossberg, 2013, Carù and Cova, 2007). It is reasonable to assume the longstanding need for theming in tourism is connected to making environments more attractive to tourists.

Moscardo (2010) connects themes with stories in tourism research. Bryman (2004) also claims it is the application of a *narrative* that separates theming from minor decorative changes (similarly explained by Lorens, 2011). If we are to follow the logic of Pine and Gilmore (2011), Fırat and Ulusoy (2009), and Mossberg (2008), this means environments can be categorized into at least three separate levels of theming: (1) the unthemed, decorated setting with no narrative, (2) unintentional theming where a narrative emerges, and (3) intentional theming where a clear theme and narrative has been applied. Together, these emphasise a basic point of this study: the structural separation of the more physical concrete elements and the intangible, abstract dimensions.

The compositional nature of themed environments, particularly in the tourism industry, draws on several clear terms, categories, and subcategories. Generally, there is a *main theme* (which runs through most attractions or subunits of the enterprise), *subthemes* (differently themed areas, or multi-theming, see Rubin *et al.*, 1994), and *transitional themes* (special events for a limited period) (Wong and Cheung, 1999, Milman, 2013). Main themes bear a resemblance to *meta-themes*, a second-order understanding of themes that either connect the subthemes or are self-referential (Pine, 2011, Waldrep, 2013). Theming can also be considered a technological effect meant to make environments thematically coherent by using sets of *symbols* and *motifs* (Dicks, 2007, Gilmore and Pine, 2002). Many terms are borrowed from a variety of fields because of the numerous specialised professional and academic skills and practices involved. Many of these terms have sprung out of the *arts* vocabulary (e.g., painting, sculpture, architecture, music, literature, and performing arts) because of historically themed environments such as medieval themed gardens (Young and Riley, 2002). For instance,

in music, the term "*theme*" appeared as early as 1558 (Drabkin, 2001). Today, newer types of art forms and professions (e.g. film, photography, video production, video games, and design) have absorbed, reinforced or added new perspectives and meanings to the different terms (e.g., theming in games, events, and urban development, see Deterding, 2016, Getz, 2012, Chang, 2000, Amin and Thrift, 2002, Crawford, 2015, Richards and Wilson, 2006, Lorens, 2011). Consider also the contributions of creative industries to the diverse products offered to tourists (Mossberg, 2007).

Themes do not need to be explicitly articulated to customers, which means theming varies in distinction. Furthermore, themes will "emerge" whether the communicated theme was intentional or not, which means theming also varies in intention (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). Themes can be categorised into at least four overall types: (1) place and culture, (2) brand, (3) interest and lifestyle, and (4) mood and association (Lukas, 2013). Finer categorisation can be found in various professional domains, such as event management (Getz, 2012), tourism education (Dale and Robinson, 2001), and restaurants (Beardsworth and Bryman, 1999, Lego *et al.*, 2002, Ebster and Guist, 2005). Within event management, the theme of the event is what differentiates it from other events (Bowdin *et al.*, 2011). There are some recurring and expected themes within the theme park industry (Milman, 2001) and the hotel industry (Zins, 1998). In the hotel industry, theming can be used to gain a competitive advantage (Wassler *et al.*, 2015) where a "theme orientation" facilitates creating unique theme experiences (Xiao *et al.*, 2013). Beardsworth and Bryman (1999) categorize theming into four classes: (1) *reliquary,* which links artefacts, "relics", to revered or heroic figures or events and processes in the public domain (e.g., Hard Rock Café or Planet Hollywood restaurants), (2) *parodic,* which draws on stereotypical, exotic representation (e.g., wild west, medieval or pirate themes), (3) *ethnic*, which uses theming elements to reflect an exotic and recognizable culture (e.g., Chinese or Mexican restaurants), and (4) *reflexive*, through which a theme and a brand become coterminous in their expressions.

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Cornelis (2011) observes that theming varies in levels, such as *macro-* and *micro-theming* (Lukas, 2007, but also Lukas, 2013), or theming and decoration (Gottdiener, 2001, Bryman, 2004).

Hung (2015) observes that literature on theming follows two streams: (1) topics in a themed environment (e.g. authenticity or novelty, Ebster and Guist, 2005, Gilmore and Pine, 2009, Muñoz *et al.*, 2006, Wood and Muñoz, 2007, Gilmore and Pine, 2007, Ariffin, 2007), and (2) studies related to theming in a themed environment (e.g., Erb and Ong, 2016, Agapito *et al.*, 2014). Many scholarly studies use theme parks as their empirical setting (e.g., Pikkemaat and Schuckert, 2007, Davis, 1996, Milman, 2013, Yoshimoto, 1994, Yildirim, 2011), and commonly use Disney theme parks as their prime example (e.g., Meamber, 2011). Theming is central for design consideration when creating an experience. This understanding, the theme as a central idea for instance in design, service design, logistics, and communication, is characteristic of several academic and professional areas (e.g., Ham, 1992, Trischler and Zehrer, 2012, Bowdin *et al.*, 2011, Olson, 1999, Mossberg *et al.*, 2014).

In summary, this literature review suggests that the concept of theming is theoretically embedded in a variety of fields, and especially in tourism research. Some effort has been made to define and categorise themes and theming. However, comprehensive literature reviews and explorations of the field are sporadic, but some have appeared recently (see for example Lukas, 2016). While it has been recognised that theming is growing in prevalence in many domains in public life, most studies only scratch the surface of the phenomenon and rarely uncover novel considerations for theming. Scant research exists on theming as a concept. Moreover, most studies only describe the phenomenon briefly and rarely question its purpose and its theoretical implications both outside of and within tourism. This study contributes to the discourse on theming by attempting to explain how the concept of theming can be understood, and what kinds of theming dimensions are central in a tourism context.

Methods

The aim of this study is to explore the concept of theming and its dimensions. To achieve this, strategically selected experts, both practitioners and academics, were interviewed on their understanding of the concept of theming, and which dimensions they consider current and relevant for theming in a tourism context. Examining how theming experts, both practitioners and academics, understand the concept of theming is crucial to providing the detailed data necessary to extract the relevant and current dimensions. The use of both practitioners and academics is a strategy used to capture the various nuances of this interdisciplinary concept. There are three reasons for this choice of experts. First, academics observe and study fields, whereas managers, especially senior managers, act and react to developments in the field, and develop and implement strategies for performance (Kuhn, 1970, Hales, 2001, Drucker, 1974, Hambrick and Mason, 1984). Second, Gopinath and Hoffman (1995) argue that academics rely on useful input from practitioners (e.g., managers) in order to build theory. Furthermore, studying experts within both academia and industry helps bridge theoretical gaps in the experience and perceptions of both (Lee *et al.*, 2002, Gravani, 2008). Consequently, the use of one-on-one qualitative interviews is appropriate for this study to obtain the detailed data required to meet the study's aim (Palmerino, 1999, O'Donnell and Cummins, 1999, Underwood, 2003).

The experts are from Europe and the United States. To obtain various viewpoints, representatives both inside and outside the tourism industry were selected. As these people represent various disciplines, this will help capture the concept of theming in its complexity, and thus establish the scope of this study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The number of informants needs to be large enough to make meaningful comparisons and obtain adequate information, that is, to reach the level of theory-saturation (Mason, 2002). As such, this is the boundary for the number of cases (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The selection criteria for the interview objects are not random, but purposive (Kuzel, 1992, Morse,

1989, Onwuegbuzie and Daniel, 2003). This sampling strategy is theoretical, meaning it is concepts and not the people that are sampled (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Rather than aiming for a large sample size, the individuals considered for selection are "information rich" (Patton, 2002).

The interview guide was designed with input from research experts and feedback from relevant peers in the field. Development of the interview guide was "literature-driven" in that questions were derived from the literature review. While the literature review does reveal that the field of theming is interdisciplinary with different definitions and categorisations, to this author's knowledge few empirically address the inquiries raised in this study. Questions were constructed to be as open and nondirective as possible to allow informants to tell their story on their terms, including biographical questions, "grand-tour questions", planned floating prompts (on for example categories and exceptional incidents) and examples (McCracken, 1988, Leech, 2002, Spradley, 1979). Three initial interviews provided valuable insights into the refinement of the final interview guide, and questions were consequently rephrased or removed. The alterations and insights gained from this process provided valuable clues on how to reflect upon the process itself (Alvesson, 2003). However, no significant moderations were done, and these first interviews were both included in the final dataset and used as a "pilot study" for the remaining data collection (Yin, 2009, Alam, 2005). Interviews took place over the course of a year (2015–2016) either in person or for practical reasons via Skype. All interviews except for one were transcribed.

Because of an unsuccessful audio recording in one interview, the author's notes were used instead. A presentation of the informants is found in Table 1.

For this study, we use thematic analysis, a technique that requires the researcher to identify and describe implicit and explicit ideas, or themes, within the data (Guest *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, abductive reasoning is employed, for which Van Maanen *et al.* (2007) make three observations. First, the data should be sufficiently detailed, rich, and complex. Second, the results (concepts) are linked to the conceptual plane, a post hoc interpretation, and available empirical evidence (data). Third, adopting a "principle of opposites" (Bailyn, 1977) refers to quantifying qualitative data whenever possible, meaning count and classify what you can. Braun and Clarke (2006) present a stepwise guide for the thematic analytical process, demarcating six distinctive phases while emphasising their recursive, non-linear arrangement for analysis. First, researchers need to familiarise themselves with the data, including repeated active reading of the empirical material. This means the researchers read and re-read the data, search for meanings and patterns, and note their initial analytic ideas and thoughts. Transcription of the verbal data is part of the interpretive act, as well as checking the data against the audio recordings for accuracy. Second, initial codes should be generated, where interesting and meaningful features of the data are identified. The themes, which in this context refer to "*some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set*", are more data-driven than theory-driven. Data-driven means the data are coded without specific questions in mind. Coding is conducted

Table 1. *Presentation of informants*

Informant	Discipline	Academic/practitioner	Nationality
1	Experiential economy	Academic	Dutch
2	Cultural anthropology	Academic	American
3	Tourism geography	Academic	Spanish
4	Cultural studies	Academic	German
5	Concept design/development	Practitioner	American
6	Experience design	Practitioner	Norwegian
7	Creative writing	Practitioner	American
8	Architecture	Practitioner	American
9	Geography	Academic	German
10	Storytelling	Academic	Dutch

using NVIVO, applying the constant comparative method of "*comparing with previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category*" and "*stop coding and record a memo on your ideas*" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This grounded-theory analytical approach requires constant questioning of initial interpretations to validate original concepts and develop them further (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). In the third to the fifth phases, coded extracts are sorted, analysed, and combined to form overarching themes. The sixth and final phase is the report, which is this resulting article. The final phase includes illustrating extracts that substantiate arguments.

Findings and discussion

To answer the two research questions in this study, the following section is divided into two parts. The first part presents how the informants defined a theme, and how they understood the concept of theming. The second part presents what specific dimensions they considered essential for theming.

Theme

There are diverse understandings of the concept of themes between the groups of academics and practitioners. For example, one practitioner explained it as:

> "… a set of cohesive ideas and elements that bring together an experience. So, it can be as broad as a themed location, a themed event … I think it's taking into consideration every element of what somebody might be a part of, and drawing it together with a single storyline."

This statement highlights the plurality of both physical and non-physical (dimensional) items that help define the term: cohesion, experience, place, theme elements, and storytelling. In contrast, academic informants were more sparing and vaguer in their descriptions: "*[S]omething that refers to something else*" or "*something that is applied, to make something more appealing*". The referential aspect of these definitions seems to voice the symbol-laden nature of what the term "theme" evokes. Another practitioner informant equated a theme to *style*, which ties it both to its design

dimension as well as what it might be. The visual as well as imagery and "what the visitor reads" was mentioned by two practitioner-informants. It seemed tempting for all informants to explain by the power of examples, such as using the common theme of the "Wild West" (mentioned twice) or the more illuminating theme of Macbeth's "unbridled ambition." On the latter, the practitioner informant brought the discussion into the realm of traditional literature, thus leading it back to the arts discourse. The same informant called a theme "*the big idea*" and "*the foundation for creating the place, and experience*", and accordingly differentiated between the "*master story, master theme*" and the "*subthemes*", resonating the hierarchical division of themes (Rubin *et al.*, 1994, Wong and Cheung, 1999, Milman, 2013, Pine and Gilmore, 2011, Waldrep, 2013). As one academic informant explained:

> "A theme is … the sense that gives to both the contents and the forms and the shape of one specific … product – all the meaning. I think it is the essential meaning of a theme."

This understanding is less concrete and a broader understanding of what a theme is. Although it is easy to link a theme to a commercialised view (such as a product to be marketed), it can be interpreted as what infuses all meaning through content, form, and shape of whatever one's offer of value may be. Other than the Wild West, examples of common and less common themes referenced by the informants were music, sports, adventure, hope and love, and pirates. Themes can become absurd or indeterminable, with examples given such as the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles, or the sketch restaurant in London. Furthermore, themes that were unique, such as those created by theme parks, were frequently mentioned by informants as more anticipated (in contrast to expected themes, Milman, 2001). Themes are often placed in another time (and space) than our own, either in the future or the past, giving them a chronotopical dimension (Carlà-Uhink *et al.*, 2017). A pirate theme is an example of this, romanticising a period of the past and place as a theme. Modern day piracy was thus deemed unsuitable as a theme.

Theming

Speaking of a theme often led logically into speaking of what theming is. As an academic informant said:

> "It's a complex process. It's not a simple process, a process that includes many things. It includes … storytelling, it includes material developments. It depends if it is an object or it is an intangible … place … – but it is a process that includes many processes and many parts."

This statement is analogous to McLellan (2000) and Pine and Gilmore (2011) in emphasising the story as central to theming. All informants, however, did not universally agree on the assertion. While the inclusion of a narrative appears a dominant element of the literary understanding of theming, informants were not definite in their suggestions. Spaces can be planned and yet have different goals. Olson (2004) confirms this and adds that for a "*synergy theming strategy*" the "*narrated space*" is one of the traits the environmental simulacra corporations may use to assert brands and products (in a so-called brandscape, Ponsonby-Mccabe and Boyle, 2006). One academic informant compared theming as a construct to an experiment, where theming was the stimulus that would cause responses among visitors of the said themed environment. Thus, these reactions, or effects, could be desired or undesired.

It might have been simpler to define what a theme is because delimitating the activity itself appeared far more arduous. The challenge of defining theming could be because of the issue exemplified in the response above: the complexity of the topic. Another reason could be the fact that theming pertains and ostensibly applies to an increasing number of venues (Gottdiener, 2001, Fırat and Ulusoy, 2009). When informants were asked where theming is found, "theme parks" was the most common and obvious response. Theme parks, with origins back to the fairs of the Middle Ages, have developed and borrowed functions from, *to illustrate*, circuses, carnivals, markets, gardens, national parks, sports events, shops, restaurants, theatres, film production, and other kinds of tourist attractions and cultural and leisure venues. As such, they have been a favoured object of investigation since they appeared in modern form in the 1950s (Young and Riley, 2002, Weinstein, 1992, Davis, 1996, Pikkemaat and Schuckert, 2007, McClung, 1991). Other venues mentioned by informants were cruise ships, hotels, bars, museums, interpretation centres, landscapes, restrooms, offices, retail stores, children's playgrounds, assisted housing, communal housing, contemporary consumer spaces, products (e.g., a 1950s toaster), and, unexpectedly to the interviewer, peoples' private homes (this was mentioned by both academics and practitioners). Certainly, if one can have themed products and furniture (Davis, 1996), theming one's home is not a stretch of the imagination (Gottdiener, 2001). In particular, the theming of cities, public services and places deserves extra attention, as they move from functional-symbolic purposes towards the experiential (Amin and Thrift, 2002), such as the Pokémon Gym in Osaka, Japan, the Hallstatt village in China, the Hello Kitty Maternity Hospital in Taiwan, or the retirement and assistant living facility of Lantern of Chagrin Valley in Ohio. For a city, a theme may position and distinguish it from others through, for instance, the use of a specific cultural theme (e.g., European Capital of Culture) (Richards and Wilson, 2006). Lorens (2011) asserts that the intent behind theming public spaces is to create an "*urban spectacle for the masses*" and "*introduce a particular narrative.*" Furthermore, he separates between the themed spaces and stylized places, the latter lacking the urban spectacle or the spatial narrative. One practitioner informant explained:

> "… in my industry it's kind of [a] connective tissue that is overlaid when they're building a physical environment, which helps to draw in your consumer and your internal base as well. It helps give your place a sense of purpose. A thing isn't in a particular spot just because it was haphazardly placed – there is an intentional design made that helps every element of that place come together to tell a story."

Thus, theming needs to be put in context. When public spaces and services are themed, they differ from commercialised business

venues as they are more often free of charge (paid for by government revenue) and likely to be complete and to facilitate a community, rather than to compete. In fact, when trying to define theming, one academic informant said:

> "I guess the boundary is not that clear-cut. Sometimes an airport lounge or something that is definitely designed. And I think also it's sometimes themed."

Again, another practitioner informant articulated the narrative and immersion as central for theming, as well as the constructional aspect:

> "Theming implies that you're taking something and adding something to it (…) the purest form of theming is developing the storyline so that it becomes an immersive environment."

Upon trying to define theming, an academic informant contemplated the contextual relation of theming:

> "I mean, if you use theming in the traditional sense that I think it gets used in the literature, it's typically a place-based, culture-based, time-history-based association. But you could talk about the Apple Store, right; you could talk about that in a sense as a themed space. But, I think you just have to be careful in terms of how you're defining your terms, and how you're trying to understand what it is you're looking at in terms of context."

Another practitioner informant expressively said:

> "Theming ... is the voice and personality of the place."

In other words, theming needs to be more specifically defined for each context to which it is applied (e.g., theme parks, restaurants, public spaces). While some definitions and elements are broad enough to cover all or most contexts, such as the experiential purpose, their usefulness could hypothetically surface when a cruise line seeks to theme their cruisescape experience or a city faces a decision on the addition of a themed place, event, or business.

Dimensions of theming

The findings reveal 10 dimensions that were significant for theming: (i) authenticity, (ii) chronotope, (iii) cohesion, (iv) digital technology, (v) immersion, (vi) interaction/co-creation, (vii) multisensory, (viii) novelty, (ix) relatability, and (x) storytelling/narrative. All dimensions were mentioned either with the explicit or synonymous terms by both practitioner and academic informants. The section ends with a table summary of the dimensions and subdimensions.

Authenticity

The experts refer to authenticity as a kind of experience perspective. Moreover, they describe it similarly to the literature, which defines authenticity as the credibility that a customer attaches to the product, in other words, a subjective perception of its genuineness (Tarssanen and Kylänen, 2006, Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011). One academic informant mentions some criticisms against themed environments and the themed experience (for others, see Brown, 2016), and makes a distinction between separate experiences:

> "I think … we have to make the distinction between the authentic experience, as a staged experience, and a lived experience. And it can be a lived, authentic experience …"

This quotation illustrates the concept of perceived authenticity, which is part of the overall evaluation of an experience (Milman, 2013). It is important to note that this perception is relevant to a tourism experience if authenticity is part of what the tourist is looking for (Cutler and Carmichael, 2010). Authenticity in a themed setting has been the focus of some debate and research (Yoshimoto, 1994, Ebster and Guist, 2005, Gilmore and Pine, 2009, Muñoz *et al.*, 2006, Wood and Muñoz, 2007, Milman, 2013).

In describing a themed environment, one practitioner informant referred to a city neighbourhood as "*themed by default*". Las

Vegas is an example where authenticity and theming both exist, such that the referential recreation of "real" places can still appeal as authentic to consumers (Gilmore and Pine, 2007). Another practitioner informant explains:

"… for us a theme isn't something you would pose on one's site as much as it's something you would try to extract from the site. (…) There's somehow a connection to the site. Because that makes the project unique."

The theme of the environment may be either external, something applied that lacks the inherent connection, or internal, something applied that has a "local connection". When further probing informants on the importance of a local connection, at least three directions appeared. First, themed environments with themes that were directly related to the specific site or space (e.g., interpretation centre or a museum). Second, themed environments with themes that were external (e.g., branded coffee chain), but were locally adapted to suit the taste of the consumer better. Third, themed environments with themes that had little to no connection with the actual location (e.g., a hotel in the middle of the desert shaped like a cruise ship). Certainly, some places have become the theme in themselves and their customer retention rests almost solely on nostalgia alone. For instance, centuries old Irish pubs cater to this longing for the traditional, the ancient, and the semi-eternal, thus evoking Beardsworth and Bryman's (1999) reflexive theming. At the same time, the consumer-driven society will always create new and competitive advantages, such as an original theme, which become outdated rapidly. Irish pubs are found both in and outside of Ireland, and the latter does raise the question of authenticity and, as Brown and Patterson (2000) calls it, the "spectre of essentialism." However, what makes a place authentic is problematic. As one academic informant said:

"What is the real Venice? The real Venice is not real either, because the real Venice refers to Venice 200 years ago, and they try to keep the image of 200 years ago."

Another academic informant believed tourists would prefer a local connection:

"I think if you go to New Orleans, for instance, and you encounter a Western-themed restaurant there. That is nice for the locals, but not for the tourists. The tourists need the local theming."

A practitioner informant elaborated further:

"I think that the nicer ones *(themes)*, the more interesting ones, the most enjoyable ones, at least for the designer, and I think that maybe translates as the user as well, are themes that spring from the site. (…) And I think that if a theme springs from a site, for example, from ideas about a site, then it's anything but inauthentic."

Authenticity continues to be a much-discussed subject within the world of theming. The recreation of the Austrian village of Hallstatt in China, completed with imported horses, pigeons and even flown in trees, transplants a "memory of Europe" (Reisenleitner, 2016). Concurrently it leaves behind "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be", the "aura" which Benjamin (1968) states belong to the first, original place.

Chronotope
The experts refer to a chronotope as one dimension of theming. A chronotope refers to a certain point in time, whether the past, the present or the future, as well as space. How time and temporality is construed in for instance theme parks has been thoroughly explored (Carlà-Uhink *et al.*, 2017). However, the aspect of time was perhaps of more interest to the informants, and how it made visitors feel. One academic informant said:

"Cornelius Holtorf, who talks about time travel, (…) he has a concept called 'pastness', where he says pastness is not the chronological age of something that you see in a museum or a theme park – it's the perception of a guest. It's the perception that a guest has about something looking old, or feeling old, or evoking some memory

or some sensation they might have about some time period or different place…"

In other words, it relates more to how tourists feel about a period in time or a place than to the reality of it. Thus, the chronotopical dimension is also an effect within the visitor. This dimension seemed to be even more important for when themes are placed in the past, because as an academic informant explained:

"[The] past is always a safe place, because, first of all, no one knows anything, or no one knows what the past was really like. So we can fabricate our own past, that's very convenient."

As illuminated by the example of Venice, visitors to a historic place will still have an authentic experience, irrespective of the level of influential staging. When explaining an imaginary visit to the Tower of London, one practitioner informant stated:

"There's the armour. There are the towers. There is the execution place. There is the gate where people are brought in. If you know any history at all, you just wanna hear the sound of the water lapping at the gate. You wanna see the light gleaming on the armour and imagine what (…) Henry the 8th looked like in the armour or whatever. (…) I'm really here! (…) I'm about 12 feet away from the armour that this king wore. I can imagine his pages helping to put him ... in the armour. I can see the straps. They're probably replacement straps. The old ones are probably rotted. But that's the armour. I can see somebody polishing it 400 years ago."

Therefore, for the chronotopical dimension, a local connection may enhance its authentic impact. However, whether this is important or not could be highly individual. For local visitors, this may be of less importance (see Muñoz *et al.*, 2006). The devotion to historical detail might be of special interest, and not so vital for a themed environment, for as a practitioner informant explained:

"(…) a historical reference, for example, involves accuracy in the detail. And that's not really our business. That's maybe a restoration architect's business."

The argument does not mean complete accuracy is unimportant. When speaking of historical re-enactment, an academic informant tells about the people who partake in creating the event:

"Certainly down to the level of detail that they work with, when they're making costumes. And they want to use particular seams. And even if you're sewing something, and you know that someone watching this won't even know that this seam is done in a historically accurate way – you know."

Cohesion
The experts refer to cohesion as one dimension of theming. Cohesion refers to the need for all elements to logically and seamlessly come together to create the condition where a state of "suspension of disbelief" can be achieved. A practitioner informant adds cohesion as a central dimension:

"So, it's food and beverages; it's operations, it's lodging, it's recreation, reservations, transportation – I think all of it – when you do it really, really well, it all tells a cohesive story. And there's never any intrusions to that story."

The informant echoes Strömberg (2015) who claims theming needs to be cohesive as well as holistic. Theming creating a suspension of disbelief occurs when a visitor's sense of pretence about the place disappears, if only momentarily, and she or he willingly both cognitively and emotionally engages with the premise of the experience. In turn, this will make the experience more joyful (McLellan, 2000, Laurel, 2013). Thus, cohesion, although ultimately an effect created within the person, also affects the creators who have created an environment that they believe is cohesive. Cohesion "*from A to Z*" is, in the words of another practitioner informant, "*rarely achieved*". If one adopts the Disneyization

perspective, fragmentation speaks against theming (Meamber, 2011). An academic informant asserts:

"I think that one of – don't know if it's the most, but – one of the most important, is coherence. (…) I think that this atmosphere of coherence (…) should be in the material things, but also in the non-material, the intangible, and in the symbolic. It's the most important thing for me, and that doesn't mean that … everything has to be perfectly designed. No, it has to be … objects or things that could be half-perfect matching with the rest. But the thing is not if they match in aesthetic terms or in the sense of surface design. But if they are coherent with the history [tied to] the product that they are trying to tell."

Digital technology
The experts refer to digital technology as one dimension of theming. Digital technology is a toolkit of theming that has a potential enabling and amplifying dimension. Six of the informants emphasised digital technology as an "emerging dimension". As a practitioner informant described:

"The computer has to know where everybody is and when to release the fog, how to change the lights, you know, how fast the car should go because there's going to be so many cars in the environment. So, it's technology, it's digital technology, it's personalised technology."

The use of technology, especially digital technology, is a new trend in theming. While it has provided new opportunities for theming, such as computer games, and virtual and augmented reality, it can act as an enabler to help innovate and "re-theme" already existing spaces. What defines digital technology is not as much what it can do differently compared with more traditional technology, but rather what it can do better, such as regulate behaviour, create personalised memorabilia, and solve customer problems (Ku, 2002, Durrant *et al.*, 2011, de Brentani, 2001). An academic informant expressed it as such:

"But also the more [recent] creativity that links and develops new elements with technology – using technology. Or creating — ways to create – or to combine! Huge technological environments with emotional and personal and subjective feelings."

It seemed among several of the informants that it was important not to make the technology the centre of the experience unless that was the theme. Pushing technological advances for the sake of its novelty would distract from the purpose and the seamlessness of the experience itself. Technology should only be considered a facilitator for experiences rather than the more traditional company- and product-centric facilitator for features and functions (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). One example are the Inamo restaurants in London, where the "*interactive dining experience*" gives customers the opportunity to "*set their table ambience*" in Asian fusion themed restaurants (inamo, 2017).

Immersion
The experts refer to immersion as one dimension of theming. Their descriptions coincide with what the literature calls a "*sense of wholeness*", allowing "*no intrusions*", and eliminates "*the "dead space" in normal environments*" (Erb and Ong, 2016, Dicks, 2007). Eight of 10 informants mentioned immersion as imperative for theming. An academic informant considered a "*themed environment as a kind of medium that immerses you in a different world*", or as a practitioner informant said, "*… it's something that you can't necessarily find on a regular basis, when I step onboard all of a sudden I feel like I've been transported to a different place and time.*" In other words, immersion is the state when the outside, unthemed world is gone, and all that is left is the themed environment. This coincides well with the understanding of Hansen and Mossberg (2013). As such, it is a goal for those who theme to create the most immersive environment possible, so as to not break the illusion the environment seeks to create. In the words of an academic informant:

"Theming where elements break the illusion ruins the theming experience."

Does this mean a themed environment is an entirely encapsulated setting where nothing from the outside world "shines through"? If the dimension of cohesion is as complete and seamless as possible, immersing a visitor in the themed environment again comes down to the contextual. The open sky, weather and outside temperature are natural elements that certainly connect to and impact a range of themed environments (Tesler-Mabé, 2016). Still, because of constraints such as size, location, and guest capacity, they must be accounted for because they can discourage visitors from visiting, for instance, a theme park or resort. Carù and Cova (2007) accentuate the enclavization, securing and thematisation of experiential spaces, which can be considered steps in building a controlled, immersive, and cohesive themed environment and separating it from the real world. Their example is sponsor activations in relation to branding. In tourism, immersion relates to this enclaved context, or the "tourist bubble" (Mossberg *et al.*, 2014). Some themed environments have chosen to create an illusion of a natural environment with debatable success. Examples are the internationally available Rainforest Cafes, Ski Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, and the Tropical Islands in Germany. While these environments do their absolute best to immerse guests, most visitors are aware they are not entirely real or natural in the strictest sense. Instead, as an academic informant said, visitors accept the "artificial crocodile effect" (Turkle, 2011), which was explained as:

"… we accept the artificiality of things for a guarantee of success."

In other words, immersion, and consequently cohesion, rely on this effect in helping visitors to the themed environment reach a certain level of suspension of disbelief.

Interaction/co-creation
The experts refer to interaction and co-creation as one dimension of theming. Interaction can make each themed experience unique and personal rather than something that is passively absorbed. An academic informant suggests how interaction is linked to co-creation:

"In co-creation, if it's getting more to co-creation, what does it mean for theming? Because if I really want to interact, I want it to be rom-com – romantic comedy, and then I said "no, I wanna be a cowboy", and then … [you] can even go a step further, and that's technological[ly] … possible."

It is necessary to understand co-creation and interaction in connection to theming. Interaction is important for co-creating meaningful experiences, and co-creation can be understood as the "joint process of creation of value where all kinds of interactions are critical touch points" (Mossberg *et al.*, 2014, Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003, Shaw and Williams, 2009). Interaction is part of the core nature of the service (Perks *et al.*, 2012) whether this is between customers and employees or customers and the environment. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003) claim that within a traditional innovation perspective, firm-created value is the basis of value creation. As for experience innovation, co-creation is the basis. Theming is what helps convert services to experiences (Gilmore and Pine, 2002), thus to differentiate the co-creative part and the interactive part is integral to this process of conversion. The number of interactions is also important for customer satisfaction (Voss, 2004)

Multisensory
The experts referred to multisensory as one dimension of theming. They described multisensory stimuli as harmonised sensory inputs meant to evoke specific reactions and emotions. One practitioner informant defined the themed experience as follows: "*It's a sensory experience*". The multisensory dimension in relation to experience and theming has been explored in the literature (Agapito *et al.*, 2014, Olson, 2004, Gao *et al.*, 2016). Informants highlighted the impact of the multisensory stimuli as being profound. The following quotation illustrates this point:

"(…) there's an opportunity to create a sense of a world, and if you're thinking of a world everything that hits you from a sensory perspective. So if you're walking in nature you smell things, you feel things, you have associations that brings up memories,

so theming has the opportunity to connect with you or hit you really in the sense of, you know, what Wagner called the "total work of art" where it's multisensory, it's hitting you psychologically, I would say, it's even affecting you existentially, in terms of getting you to think about certain issues of reality."

In fact, a multisensory input can affect attitudes, moods, and even memory more than only words could (Hilton, 2015). A multisensory input can be even more important when considering what a practitioner informant suggested:

"... when you think back to experiences, you don't always remember what happened, but you remember how you felt about what happened."

Thus, multisensory stimuli should be used carefully to create a memorable experience that remains within the visitor after the themed experience has ended.

Novelty
The experts refer to novelty as one dimension of theming. The dimension of novelty emerged several times throughout the interviews. If novelty is what draws new guests to a space, then *nostalgia* may be what brings them back. As a practitioner informant put it:

"I also always love nostalgia. And granted, I know a lot of people hook on to nostalgia, and I think that that's one dimension that certainly Disney plays on the most, and childhood, and everything. But when we got something there, right, nostalgia is what keeps bringing people back to a place."

A themed space must therefore handle the exquisite balance between the novel and nostalgic influences. Novelty (or newness), especially in tourism, refers to the degree of contract between present perception and past experience (Judd, 1988, Pearson, 1970, Jenkins, 1969). Novelty seeking is a key motive that motivates travellers (Crompton, 1979, Dann, 1977). Thus, for instance, in the theme park industry, there are substantial capital investments in new experiences, new rides, and renovations (Lillestol *et al.*, 2015, Clavé,

2007, Yildirim, 2011), amounting to approximately 10 percent of their yearly turnover (Cornelis, 2014). Lee and Crompton (1992) suggest four dimensions of the novelty construct in their Tourist Novelty Scale: (1) [change from] routine, (2) thrill, (3), boredom alleviation, and (4) surprise. The level of familiarity may range from complete novelty to total familiarity, with either likely to make people indifferent (Ariffin, 2007). Nostalgia may in itself be a thematic categorisation (Weaver, 2011), and is considered one of the tools of theming (Bryman, 2004). However, if the theme is the emphasis on the space, then one cannot rely on one of the factors alone. In an urban experience setting, nostalgia is part of the "*practices of themeparking and theming*" (Mitrasinovic, 2008). Nostalgia can thus be considered a successfully created dimension of familiarity with the themed environment. Though powerful, managers of themed environments tend to reach for novel experiences, and recreating themed environments means preserving a part of the past while still adding a flavour of something new.

Relatability
The experts referred to relatability as one dimension of theming. Relatability refers to the sense of connection that visitors have to a theme that precedes their exposure to the environment. The dimension of relatability (or familiarity or recognition) was mentioned by several informants. One academic informant explained:

" [T]he other thing would be relatability or recognition, in the sense that a theme only works if people are able to recognise the theme."

Another academic informant described the relation through own experiences, and how a relation to the theme creates a specific connection:

"But I feel connected to the place… in the themed, immersive world. And that what we call the placeness, and related and connected, that's what I experience by a theme."

Being familiar with a theme means the visitor to a themed environment arrives with certain preconceived ideas on what the place prospectively should offer. These ideas, in turn, means the provider of the place should have some prior knowledge of what their potential guests expect. The prior knowledge is of particular importance when these providers are working with intellectual property rights, for as the same informant explained:

"If you have a look at the new plans, the new initiatives for theme parks all over the globe, you see many themes are the same. Either they have a third IP, that is intellectual property that is successful, or they have these, certain areas of kinds of themes."

An already proven success from one domain of intellectual properties (such as a book or movie franchise) is likely to reduce the perceived risk of introducing something that is entirely new to the world. Whereas tourists may enjoy novel concepts as the premise for a theme park, IPs that can siphon off established fanbases often numbering in the millions can appear much less venturesome for any theme park developer.

Storytelling
The experts referred to storytelling as a dimension of theming. Storytelling refers to the use of usually entertaining narratives as part of the composition of themed environments. Storytelling came up many times throughout all the different interviews. In fact, one practitioner informant said "*themes can emerge from a story*". Another practitioner informant explained:

"And there are potential technologies in the [theme park] rides. So, for instance, Star Tours now has multiple stories … they used to have one story; now they have multiple. And computer technology allows you to alter the stories, and in the end, it's likely to be a different story. I don't know if they had 20 stories. (…) [T]hat's probably the biggest trend."

The statement resonates the relation put forward by Moscardo (2010). The importance of storytelling and stories has been proposed as central to various consumer experiences (Mossberg, 2008, Adamson *et al.*, 2006). The dimension of technology can enhance a partially *randomised adapted storytelling*, allowing for a mass-modified experience.

The example given by the informant, the Walt Disney World attraction *Star Tours – The Adventures Continue*, allows for unique experiences by breaking the story up into modules and then recombining to offer unique storylines. It is a step towards a kind of mass customisation but lacks the individual input from guests to be considered fully tailored to each customer's individual needs (Feitzinger and Lee, 1997, Gilmore and Pine, 1997). If the stories told in a themed environment are not personalised to the separate visitors, at least randomised stories add a novel twist to the experience. In further elaborating on storytelling, an academic informant stated that stories in themed environments should not be told too explicitly. If some were still left to the imagination – the entire story was not told to visitors – then visitors could fill in the gaps themselves, and as such have a more fulfilling experience. While this may be true, one could speculate whether this contrasts with the dimension of cohesion. If there are gaps in a story, they may be communicated so as not to leave the visitors unsatisfied. Further probing of the informants on the topic led to the question of whether there are stories in all themed environments. Bryman (2004) explains the narrative is what separates themed environments from decorated ones. However, one academic informant did not agree with this. Not all themed environments had, in the informants' opinion, stories as part of their structure. Themes, according to Moscardo (2010), may be the main thing to be learnt from a narrative, and stories are a particular kind of narrative discerned through its intent. Brewer and Lichtenstein (1982) call this the "discourse force", which is the overall purpose of the text and suggest three purposes: inform (e.g., instructions and newspapers), persuade (e.g., propaganda and fables), and entertain (e.g., popular stories and novels). Stories may have one or more of these purposes at the same time. However, they also claim that stories as a subclass have entertainment as their primary discourse force. Thus, while other themes may

be woven into the story to support the main theme, the general purpose of storytelling for a themed environment is to entertain.

The interview process revealed that the dimensions might be considered standards or conditions with which to measure an environment as themed. In other words, if one is to call an environment a themed environment, it is reasonable to assume that several of the dimensions should be present. The aspects of the dimensions are summarised in the tables below with subdimensions from the informants (Table 2).

Conclusions and implications

The aim of this study was to explore and add to the understanding of the concept of theming and its dimensions. This was performed by examining the scholarly understanding of the concept among experts of themed environments. Studying theming provides insight into an evergrowing practice spreading out of the domain of tourism and into other domains, both public and private. These insights can stimulate new and essential questions about what theming does to the experiences of the world around us. There is thus a need for more empirical studies that explore the concept of theming. This article contributes with 10 dimensions: (i) authenticity, (ii) chronotope, (iii) cohesion, (iv) digital technology, (v) immersion, (vi) interaction/co-

Table 2. *Dimensions of theming*

Authenticity	Chronotope	Cohesion	Digital technology	Immersion
• Themed environments are subjectively authentic.	• Perception of time "guest-centric".	• Cohesion reduces the chance of intrusion.	• Digital technology can enable innovation in other dimensions.	• Immersion is essential for world building.
• Authenticity differs in staged and lived experiences.	• The past is the most convenient source for themes.	• Lack of cohesion risks breaking the thematic effect.	• Avoid using digital technology as a substitute for the core experience.	• A sense of difference in time and place relies on immersion.
• A connection to the site can improve the sense of authenticity.	• The choice of time period is highly relevant for authenticity.	• Complete cohesion is rarely achieved.	• Use digital technology to improve the experience.	• Context limits the level of immersion.
• A sense of authenticity is attractive to both designers and users.	• Accuracy to historical detail more appropriate for designers than users.	• Thematic cohesion applies to all aspects of business.	• Digital technology should not *be* the theme but should improve it.	• Immersion can be a requirement for the suspense of disbelief.
Interaction/co-creation	Multisensory	Novelty	Relatability	Storytelling
• Co-creation is interaction in themed environments.	• A themed experience is sensory.	• Novelty and lack of it are risky in theming.	• Relatability is about connecting one's visitors to the theme.	• Stories are often a source for themes.
• Co-creation allows for more individualisation of themed experiences.	• Multisensory stimuli complete the theme.	• Novelty attracts people the first time; nostalgia brings them back.	• Themes only work if people can recognise them.	• Compelling stories often spring from the site.
• Interactive elements require regular inspection to avoid unwanted alterations.	• A complete sensory world can impact psychologically and existentially.	• Making something unique is making something new every time.	• A development in theming today is using already successful IPs.	• Mass customized stories create constant uniqueness.
• Interaction can alleviate boredom.	• Sensory stimulation can lead to memorability.	• Novelty and nostalgia are related to familiarity.	• Familiarity seeking may lead to commodified theming.	• Stories are common, but not required for themed environments.

creation, (vii) multisensory, (viii) novelty, (ix), relatability, and (x) storytelling. Orchestrating these diverse dimensions to create a more memorable customer experience is the goal that service and experience providers want to achieve in the coming years. Informants were also asked to define themes and theming. These queries revealed that themes are "sets of ideas" in strong connection to the aforementioned dimensions, and that theming is a highly context-specific process meant to instil a place with a voice and a personality.

Theoretical implications

The power of definition frequently lies with those who write or speak, critically or not, on different topics. This power does not mean other perspectives do not exist, only that their voices may be less cited and reproduced. Rather than outlining hierarchical authority, both academics and practitioners are considered knowledge producers and translators, having a partnered role in knowledge creation in the field (Gravani, 2008). Several of the informants, both academics and practitioners, would explicitly state the value of drawing on each other's insights to advance the field. It seemed among the academic informants that the discourse had moved beyond the traditional criticism against themed environments and that a still small but growing field now had matured and rather focused on cooperation between academia and practice. This study adds to the understanding that a theme can give tourists a more meaningful and memorable experience, and offer some guidelines to managers of themed attractions (Mossberg, 2007, Botha, 2016). Additionally, this study can contribute to developing an instrument for measuring the success of a themed environment beyond its tangible indicators.

Managerial implications

It is reasonable to assume a well-developed theme will engage customers and increase value for customers. Notable revelations within the subdimensions should be of interest for experience designers. It is important to note that not all dimensions are universally relevant for all themed environments and experience design considerations. First, when authenticity is relevant, its level is not only of importance to guests but also to the experience designers. This is true especially when the source of themes is a historical period. The more a chosen target market knows about a specific period in time, the more accuracy of historic detail matters. Authenticity will mean different things when the theme originates from historic and geographic sources or a fantasy world (i.e., which chronotope it is placed in). Second, the dimension of cohesion is theorised to apply to "all aspects of business", which is a radical idea only limited by the imagination. This means theming should extend not only into the environments that guests patronise, but also – at least in part – into those frequented by employees. Themed workplaces have become a more common sight. Third, digital technology used well can heighten the sense of a theme, as long as it does not become the theme in itself. Digital technology also works as an enhancer of other dimensions. Fourth, immersion is an emerging dimension for themed environments, and imperative for the suspension of disbelief. However, fully immersive environments can be both expensive and spatially challenging to create and are thus limited by budgets and available space. Immersion does play an important role if the goal is to create a thematic sense of difference in time and space. Fifth, a primary objective for interaction and co-creation is to create a more memorable experience. Adding interactive or co-creative elements to a themed experience also creates opportunities for customisation and excitement. Sixth, the understanding of the complexity of our senses is highly relevant, which extends much further than the traditional Aristotelian five. Sensory stimulation outside the passive spectator orientation that dominates so many customer and tourist experiences will affect the visitor on a more profound level. Seventh, recreating the experience each time in order to offer a unique and novel experience, without forgoing people's need for nostalgia, may seem both challenging and costly. Still it may be necessary to bring customers back to your themed environment. An increasing use of IPs is as an additional means to ride on existing success within themed environments. Although exclusively new themes and ideas can be successful, people are drawn to what is familiar, proven, and tested. Additionally, this

existing relation more easily helps connect visitors to the themed environment. Finally, as for stories as a source of themes, they will make the themes appear more genuine and thus have a stronger impact on the theme itself. However, they are not a requirement for themed environments, and should be continually recombined to offer uniqueness.

This study reveals that both academics and practitioners consider theming to be a powerful tool for designing a memorable experience. The partially abstract dimensions were of more interest to the academics than the practitioners. However, both sides had thoughts and insights on the matters that are clearly relevant for a common understanding. These are important for those who currently work with theming, both on a scholarly and practical level, as well as those who are considering theming their current or future products and services. It is reasonable to assume that the dimensions of theming are interrelated and should be considered simultaneously in theming. In conclusion, in order to create a memorable tourist experience, it is vital to consider a well-orchestrated themed environment where the relevant dimensions are tuned accordingly.

Limitations and suggestions for future research
This study explored theming from the perspective of experts. Future studies on theming and themed environments should strive to explore the field from a consumer perspective. One way to do this could be to assess the importance of the dimensions and purposes put forth in this study about various theme elements. Such studies can be undertaken using both cross-sectional surveys and through experimentation. Managers of themed environments would benefit from this by identifying critical dimensions and items specific to their area of business. In turn, this could be monitored over time and subsequently be improved to keep the theme relevant. Kozinets (2008) suggests developing constructs as a scale for measuring "attitude towards the theme". Future research should use studies such as this to develop these constructs and frameworks to better measure attitudes, effects, loyalty, intentions to repurchase, and other desirable effects of themed environments. As recognised in this article, the many purposes of themed environments, or the "why of theming", have seldom been explored. There is a need for more qualitative as well as quantitative approaches to address the questions proposed in this study to advance our understanding of theming.

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