Jonas Karlsen Åstrøm

Theming in Experience-based Tourism

Visitor and Provider Perspectives

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Sammendrag

I turismen og besøksnæringene har det tradisjonelle fokuset vært på produkter og tjenester som grunnlaget for verdiskaping. Imidlertid, i tråd med den opplevelsesbaserte vendingen i reiselivet, har mange aktører innenfor reiseliv nå endret fokus mot å tilby forbrukerne unike opplevelser for å unngå kommodifisering. Dette betyr at bedriftene har brukt tematisering for å skape opplevelsesrom for sine gjester. Selv om mye forskning har blitt gjort på tematiserte turistopplevelser, har det vært viet mindre oppmerksomhet til tematisering som fenomen. Hvordan kunnskap om tematisering kan forstås som en form for opplevelsesinnovasjon er også mindre kjent.

Som følge av dette er det overordnede målet i denne avhandlingen å utdype kunnskapen om tematisering i opplevelsesbasert turisme, samt hvordan kunnskap om tematisering fra både et besøks- og tilbyderperspektiv kan fasilitere opplevelsesinnovasjon. Mer bestemt har avhandlingen som intensjon å utforske hva temaer og tematisering er, hvilke faktorer som driver tematisering, tematiseringens dimensjoner, og hvilke formål tematisering kan ha. Avhandlingens mål utforskes med opplevelsesbasert turisme som kontekst, en arbeidskraftkrevende bransje som forsøker å skape merverdi ved å tilby symbolske og hedonistiske fordeler og fremkalle sterke emosjonelle og opplevelsesbaserte reaksjoner hos de besøkende. Denne avhandlingen inkluderer tre separate artikler som undersøker og diskuterer tre forskningstemaer: (i) hvordan temafaktorer som driver opplevelsesbasert turisme kan bli bedre forstått, (ii) identifiseringen av tematiseringsdimensjonene i opplevelsesbasert turisme, og (iii) hvorfor tematisering brukes i opplevelsesbasert turisme. Det fjerde forskningstemaet, (iv) hvordan kunnskap om tematisering fra både et besøks- og tilbyderperspektiv kan fasilitere opplevelsesinnovasjon, ble utviklet gjennom en abduktiv prosess i avhandlingen, og blir besvart i synopsisen. Tematisering i opplevelsesbasert turisme utforskes i både et besøks- og tilbyderperspektiv gjennom å benytte både kvantitative og kvalitative metodologiske tilnærminger. Den empiriske analysen i den første vedlagte artikkelen er basert på data fra en spørreundersøkelse. Den andre og tredje vedlagte artikkelen bruker data fra halvstrukturerte intervjuer.

Avhandlingen har fire bidrag til opplevelsesbasert turismefeltet, markedsførings- og ledelsesfeltet. Avhandlingens første bidrag omhandler temafaktorer. Temafaktorene navn, medarbeiderinteraksjon, og lyssetting er de mest sentrale direkte driverne av turistens kundeopplevelse, mens andre (design og musikk) avhengig av bruk og kontekst bidrar til

oppfatningen av tematiserte omgivelser på en annen måte. At temafaktorer, særlig navn, bidrar til oppfatningen av tematiserte omgivelser er et nytt funn. Avhandlingens andre bidrag omhandler tematiseringsdimensjoner. De ti tematiseringsdimensjonene autentisitet, kronotop, kohesjon, digital teknologi, immersjon, interaksjon/samskaping, flersanselighet, nyhetsverdi, gjenkjennbarhet, og historiefortelling/narrativ er sentrale og betydningsfulle for tematiseringen i en turismekontekst. Dimensjonen interaksjon/samskaping har paralleller til dimensjoner fra forskningen på opplevelsesinnovasjon. Avhandlingens tredje bidrag omhandler formålene med tematisering i turisme: å sørge for differensiering; øke salgene av et merke eller et produkt; skape bånd mellom gjester og et tema, merke, eller produkt; tiltrekke, stanse og få besøkende til å bli; å påvirke eller endre atferden deres, og forbedre ende-til-ende-opplevelsen. Det viser seg at disse formålene er essensielle gjensidig relaterte mål for ledere i turismen. Denne avhandlingen diskuterer de dypere meningene og samspillet mellom temafaktorene, tematiseringsdimensjonene, og formålene med tematisering fra både et besøks- og tilbyderperspektiv. Avhandlingens fjerde og endelige bidrag er implikasjonene de empiriske funnene fra de tre artiklene har for opplevelsesinnovasjon. Avhandlingens hovedbidrag er en omfattende undersøkelse av temafaktorer, tematiseringsdimensjoner, tematiseringsformål, og hvordan disse kan fasilitere opplevelsesinnovasjon, noe som gir en bredere forståelse basert på ny og tilgjengelig kunnskap om hvert aspekt av fenomenet som blir undersøkt, og diskuterer deres betydning.

Avhandlingen argumenterer for tilbydernes betydning i å omhyggelig orkestrere temafaktorer og tematiseringsdimensjoner for å møte formålene med tematisering i opplevelsesbasert turisme. Design av opplevelser krever ofte at tilbyderen kritisk bruker temaer og tematisering for å skape innovative, lønnsomme og minneverdige omgivelser av høy kvalitet for besøkende. Tidligere forskning har kun satt søkelys på at tilbyderne iscenesetter tematiserte produkter og tjenester i omgivelsene. Imidlertid er ikke iscenesettingen av omgivelsene tilstrekkelig for tilbydere av tematiserte omgivelser. I stedet gjør disse omgivelsene det nødvendig for tilbyderne å skape fasiliterende tematiserte omgivelser som legger til rette for at de besøkende gjennom interaksjon kan samskape verdien i sine individuelle opplevelser—noe som leder til opplevelsesinnovasjon.

Ledere anmodes til å forbedre sine tematiserte omgivelser for å sørge for kontinuerlig differensiering og økt salg. Ansatte bør få kontinuerlig opplæring og lederveiledning for å kunne oppføre seg og snakke konsistent med det valgte temaet, og de ansattes interaksjon med besøkende bør oppmuntres. I tillegg bør ledere søke å forbedre koherens og systematisk

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sammenheng mellom alle elementene i tematiserte omgivelser for å kunne kommunisere et positivt harmonisk inntrykk. Ledere bør vurdere tematiseringsdimensjonene nyhetsverdi, historiefortelling, og digital teknologi, og bruke disse i tilstrekkelig grad for å forbedre unikheten, tilhørighetsfølelsen, og en opphøyd virkelighetsopplevelse.

Følgelig er ikke hovedbidraget i denne avhandlingen knyttet til tradisjonell tjenesteinnovasjonsforskning. I stedet undersøker avhandlingen temafaktorene og tematiseringsdimensjonenes rolle i turistenes opplevelse, og hvordan organisasjoner kan bruke disse for opplevelsesinnovasjon. Resultatet av dette har implikasjoner for innovasjon i opplevelsesbasert turisme. I denne avhandlingen forstås tematisering som en prosess som kan føre til opplevelsesinnovasjon. Denne formen for opplevelsesinnovasjon kan kalles tematiseringsinnovasjon, en interaktiv prosess hvor besøkende gir tilbydere informasjon om hva som er verdifullt for dem, og hvor tilbyderne bygger prototyper, evaluerer og tester konsepter gjennom å bruke temafaktorer for å samskape nye eller forbedrede opplevelser, noe som skaper tematiseringsdimensjoner som rammer inn og støtter utviklingen av temafaktorer. Videre understøtter denne prosessen tilbyderens oppnåelse av tematiseringsformål, og helst bedre enn sine konkurrenter.

Opplevelsesinnovasjon fokuserer mer på omgivelser enn produkter og tjenester som kan fungere mer som rekvisitter i iscenesettelsen av en opplevelse. I stedet for en leverandørkjedesentrert stage-gate-prosess hvor firmaer skaper verdi gjennom å tilby ulike produkter og tjenester, så vektlegger opplevelsesinnovasjon verdi som er interaktivt samskapt i stadig mer oppslukende, ofte teknologisk forbedrede omgivelser. Dermed fokuserer denne avhandlingen på verdien i å skape ny og dypere kunnskap om tematisering i innovasjonsprosesser/design som fører til opplevelsesinnovasjon. I et utvidet perspektiv handler opplevelsesinnovasjon om å holde seg relevant og overleve i fremtiden.

Abstract

In tourism and hospitality, products and services have been the traditional foci and bases of value. However, in line with the experiential turn in tourism, numerous tourism businesses have changed focus toward providing consumers with distinctive experiences to avoid commoditization. In turn, this means businesses often employ theming as a method and practice to create experiencescapes for and together with their visitors. Although much research has been conducted regarding themed tourism spaces, less attention has been given to the phenomenon of theming. How knowledge about theming can be understood as kind of experience innovation is also less understood.

The overall aim of this thesis is to deepen knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism, and how knowledge about theming from both a visitor and provider perspective can facilitate experience innovation. More specifically, this thesis intends to explore what themes and theming are, what factors drive theming, the dimensions of theming, and the purposes of theming. These aims are explored in the context of experience-based tourism, a labor-intensive industry that seeks to provide symbolic and hedonic benefits and evokes more robust emotional and experiential responses from visitors. This dissertation includes three separate papers that investigate and discuss three research topics: (i) how the theme factors that drive experience-based tourism can be better understood, (ii) identifying the dimensions of theming in experience-based tourism, and (iii) why theming is used in experience-based tourism. The fourth research topic (iv), how knowledge about theming from both a visitor and provider perspective may facilitate experience innovation is developed during the abductive process with the dissertation and is answered in the synopsis. Using quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches, theming in experience-based tourism is explored from both a visitor and a provider perspective. The first appended paper's empirical analysis uses survey data. The second and third appended papers use semi-structured interviews.

The contributions of this thesis to the fields of experience-based tourism, marketing, and management literature are fourfold. The first contribution of this thesis relates to theme factors. The theme factors *name, employee interaction*, and *lighting* are the most central direct drivers of the tourist customer experience, while others (*design* and *music*) contribute to the perceived themed environment differently, depending on usage and context. The fact theme factors, in particular, *name*, contribute to an environment's theme perception is a novel find. The second contribution of this thesis relates to theming dimensions. The 10 dimensions of theming,

authenticity, chronotope, cohesion, digital technology, immersion, interaction/co-creation, multisensory, novelty, relatability, and *storytelling/narrative* are crucial to and significant for theming in a tourism context. The dimension *interaction/co-creation* parallels dimensions from experience innovation research. The third contribution of this thesis relates to the purposes of theming in tourism: *ensure differentiation*; *increase sales of a brand or a product; create bonds between the guests and a theme, brand, or product; attract, stop, and make visitors stay; or influence and modify their behavior* and *enhance the end-to-end experience*. These purposes are revealed to be essential interrelated business objectives for managers in tourism. This thesis discusses the more profound meaning and the interplay of the theme factors, theming dimensions, and purposes of theming from both visitor and provider perspectives. The fourth and final contribution in this thesis is the implications of the empirical findings from the three papers for experience innovation. The thesis' overall contribution is a comprehensive examination of theme factors, theming dimensions, theming purposes, and how they can facilitate experience innovation, which provides a broad understanding based on new and available knowledge on each aspect of the studied phenomena and deliberates their significance for theming innovation.

This thesis argues for providers' importance in carefully orchestrating theme factors and theming dimensions to fulfill the purposes of theming in experience-based tourism. Designing an experience often requires providers to critically use themes and theming to create innovative, high-quality, profitable, and memorable environments for visitors. Previous research has focused solely on providers staging themed products and services in an environment. However, staging the environment is not sufficient for providers of themed environments. Instead, the experience environment necessitates those providers facilitating themed environments that accommodate interaction with visitors to co-create value in their individual experiences—leading toward experience innovation.

Furthermore, managers are urged to enhance their themed environments to ensure differentiation and increased sales. Staff should receive ongoing training and managerial direction to act and speak often around the chosen theme, and staff interaction with visitors should be encouraged. Also, managers should strive to improve cohesiveness, fit, and orderliness between all elements in the themed environment to convey a positive impression of harmony. The theming dimensions of novelty, storytelling, and digital technology should be assessed and used adequately by managers to improve uniqueness, a sense of connectedness, and a heightened sense of reality.

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The main contribution of this thesis is not towards traditional service innovation research. Instead, this thesis examines the role of theme factors and theming dimensions in tourists' experiences and how organizations can use them for experience innovation. These results have implications for innovation in experience-based tourism: Thus, the focus of this thesis is on theming as a process that may lead to experience innovation. This kind of experience innovation can be called theming innovation, an interactive process in which visitors deliver providers with information about what is valuable to them, and providers prototype, evaluate, and test concepts with the use of theme factors to co-create new or improved experiences, creating theming dimensions that frame and support the theme factor development, in turn fulfilling the providers' theming purposes, and does this better than their competitors.

Experience innovation centers more on environments than products and services, which may act as props in staging an experience. Rather than a supply-chain-centric stage-gate process where firms create value through offering various products and services, experience innovation emphasizes value as interactively co-created in ever more immersive, often technologically enhanced environments. Thus, this thesis focuses on the value of creating new and more profound knowledge of theming in innovation processes/design, leading to experience innovation. By extension, experience innovation is about staying relevant and surviving in the future.

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visits have also led me to visit more theme parks, campfire outings, office Christmas parties, museums, castles, and more! I also need to thank the people who made my two stays at Clarion Collection® Hotel Folketeateret, and Scandic Neptun in Bergen pleasurable. If I forgot to mention someone here, I am genuinely sorry. I am finalizing this thesis coming out of the global coronavirus pandemic and amid a new war in Europe, filling my mind with news, strange perspectives, and reflections I never thought possible.

I will end these acknowledgments with a loosely translated verse from the beautiful poem "Menneskets liv" ("The Life of Man") by Arnulf Øverland (Vi overlever alt!, December 31, 1941), which I found befitting this same quest for, well, *words*. It was written while Øverland was under arrest by the Gestapo at Akershus central prison, a few months before he was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

And man studies and searches

the stars and sea and earth;

he explores learned books

where golden words come forth.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you, everyone.

Jonas Karlsen Åstrøm

Bergen, April 30th, 2022

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Appended papers

I. Åstrøm, J. (2017). Theme factors that drive the tourist customer experience. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 11 (2). 125–141.

II. Åstrøm, J. (2018). Exploring theming dimensions in a tourism context. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 20. 5–27.

III. Åstrøm, J. (2019). Why theming? Identifying the purposes of theming in tourism. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, 21 (3). 245–266.

Appendices 1–2: Survey instruments

Appendix 1.   Questionnaire used for the survey with cruise tourists
                     (Empirical base for Paper I)

Appendix 2.   Interview guide for interviews with experts
                     (Empirical base for Papers II & III)

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

My father had one rule for summer holidays: "to visit at least one theme park each summer vacation." Little did he know that he helped sparked my lifelong fascination for themed places from childhood. Therefore, working in theme parks came easy to me, and why I have hundreds of theme park visits in my memories. I even go on themed cruise vacations as often as I can and explore themed restaurants and other themed experiences when I go almost anywhere. I also tend to gravitate back to many of the same providers every few years because they always add new reasons for going back – new attractions, new food services, new merchandise. Thus, the interest in themed places was there long before my academic interest for them grew. Gradually, I started wondering why these places existed in the first place. Why would providers spend so many resources on designing, building, and redeveloping these places yearly for decades? What does it take to make something feel innovative to visitors? Despite the apparent objective of profit, what other reasons were creating these places that attract hundreds of millions of tourists like me each year? As I became an adult, a student, and started critically examining my interests and behaviors, I realized it was not new and innovative rollercoasters and dark rides that attracted me the most. Instead, it was the immersive theming that made me feel like I had been transported to a place that for a short time existed outside of the imagination; a real, interactive world I could touch.

The phenomenon studied in this thesis is theming, and the context is experience-based tourism. Theming, which in tourism is the practice of creating an experience around a core theme, is growing in prevalence in the tourism sector. Theming, for this thesis, is defined as a provider's staging and conveying of a theme through the consistent, coherent, and comprehensive application of physical and nonphysical cues to an environment to alter a visitor's experience and perception of reality, time, and space, and create memories (Bryman, 2004; Muñoz et al., 2006; Pine & Gilmore, 2019) (Chapter 2.4.2). Hence, this thesis focuses on themed environments (themed social and physical surroundings), such as themed hotels, theme parks, and themed restaurants (Chen et al., 2020; Mossberg & Eide, 2017; O'Dell & Billing, 2006). These environments are sometimes referred to as places, spaces, surroundings, worlds, and similar alternative expressions. However, for this thesis, these expressions refer to themed environments. A theme is a foundational central idea, concept, narrative, or a set of cohesive ideas that provide sense and meaning to an experience (Paper II). Although themes can vary in

complexity and abstraction, there are commonly occurring sources of themes such as the age of the Vikings, pirates, and the Wild West.

Themed experiences are a concept in the tourism marketing and management literature that are increasingly attracting researchers' attention. A new journal, *Journal of Themed Experience and Attraction Studies* (JTEAS, first volume published in 2018, second publication in 2022), supports this. Studies show that tourists' experiences of a holistically themed environment at a tourist attraction or destination affect their overall satisfaction (Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005; Dong & Siu, 2013; Meng & Choi, 2017; Sørensen, Fuglsang, Sundbo, & Jensen, 2020; Tsang, Lee, Wong, & Chong, 2012). However, empirical studies of the phenomenon in experience-based tourism are minimal (see review in Table 2), despite growing research on how tourists act and react in various themed environments (Hung, 2015; Li, Zhang, Hua, & Jahromi, 2020; Oliveira, 2020). Studies of concepts specifically connected to theming refer to, e.g., its physical manifestations, composition, and imagery, such as theme factors and dimensions of theming in tourism (e.g., Kao, Huang, & Wu, 2008; Lukas, 2016b), have been sporadic (see examples in Table 3 and Table 4). Additionally, they tend to take on either the visitor's perspective (e.g., Park, Reisinger, & Park, 2009) or the provider's perspective (e.g., Pikkemaat & Schuckert, 2007).

Furthermore, few studies explore the various purposes of theming in tourism. The purposes that are studied in the research literature (e.g., memorability or interaction) are often provider perspective proposals instead of empirically derived concepts (see more examples in Table 5 in section 2.5.2). It is essential that experience providers and scholars understand what theming will add to experience-based tourism in the future if tourism is to find and adopt new and innovative ways of creating lasting memories for visitors and tourists (Botha, 2016; Fırat & Ulusoy, 2009; Manthiou, Kang, Chiang, & Tang, 2016). Experience innovation is defined as a spiral process of repeatedly prototyping (building a physical or virtual representation of themes and brands), evaluating, and testing an item or activity in an experiencescape to develop new or improved experiences and create competitive advantages (Jernsand, Kraff, & Mossberg, 2015; Zátori, 2016). Experiencescapes are commonly themed social and physical places that include services, products, and symbols designed to shape an interactive framework created to influence tourists and deliver hedonic benefits (Mossberg, 2007; O'Dell & Billing, 2006). Experiencescapes are the further developed understandings of Bitner's (1992) servicescapes. "Experience innovation" is a specific type of innovation that requires environments as a central component (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). The emphasis on innovation and recreation

appears crucial for developing unique themed environments with a superior experiential quality (Jensen & Skallerud, 2015). Specific themes can differentiate between various offers and add increased customer value in this context. Jensen and Skallerud (2015) argue that experience-based tourism needs to be observed from two perspectives: (1) a consumer/market perspective and (2) a managerial/industry perspective. The first perspective concerns distinctive characteristics of experiences as they appear to visitors. The other perspective focuses on production or management-related aspects of a business. The managerial perspective implies that specific experiences can be designed and organized. The visitor's value is central in these types of experiences. Experiences or value propositions like these carry a high emotional value to visitors, for instance, a specific theme (Duerden, Ward, & Freeman, 2015; Sørensen, Fuglsang, Sundbo, & Jensen, 2020). To ensure a high level of visitor value, innovation in experience-based tourism should combine the two perspectives. Innovation processes should take place in an interactive process. This interaction process could include different representatives in which the visitors themselves play the most significant role. After all, the visitors define meaningful and memorable experiences, influencing satisfaction and loyalty. Research-based empirical knowledge on how innovation experience design is vital for tourist providers to develop competitive visitor offerings is limited (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015), and is often focused only on how experiences can be facilitated. However, how employees can co-create experience as an emotional value in brief moments of truth has been demonstrated (Jensen & Sørensen, 2018). That is why new knowledge from *both* visitor and provider perspectives is valuable.

The change in attention for experiences in consumer research in the last decades (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), in addition to the experience economic research field (Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013), has contributed to what can be called "the experiential turn" in tourism (Lindberg, Jensen, & Østergaard, 2015). *Experience-based tourism* represents a shift in focus from an instrumental view on tourism products and services toward more customer experience-centered tourism. This view differs from conventional tourism (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003) because services that carry an exceptionally high value to visitors can be differentiated through specific themes, multisensory involvement, and other elements that increase value for visitors. Experience-based tourism describes "offerings with a relatively high degree of differentiation and intangible value perceived by the customers at a certain place and in a certain time" (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015, p. 1). This perspective covers both the provider ("*offerings*") and visitor ("*customers*") sides. The experience-based view means that the tourist experience is more than

the sum of its parts and that these parts—e.g., transportation, lodging, dining, events, services, and souvenirs—all act as props in the staging of the complete experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2019). Experiences are defined as constant flows of thoughts and feelings during moments of consciousness (Carlson, 1997; Mossberg, 2007), and *tourist experiences* can occur in a commonly themed experiencescape, require a host and a guest, and create positive memories (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015; Lashley, 2008; Mossberg, 2007; O'Dell & Billing, 2006; Uriely, 2005). In an experience economic context, experiences can also be defined as the mental consequence of personal feelings and memories caused by the personal perception of experiential stimuli (Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013, p. 13). This definition indicates that experiences can be interpreted to be meaningful and memorable—or not (Lindberg et al., 2015; Seyfi, Hall, & Rasoolimanesh, 2019). In other words, the facilitation and sale of products and services and use of theming are instruments in the orchestration of the complete experience. For example, smaller tourist destinations in Norway such as the Flåm Line railway, Kristiansand Zoo and Amusement Park, or Brimiland in Lom benefit from offering tourists a complete concept meeting the customers' needs and wants, but where the focus is on the overall experience rather than several fragmented products or services. Unlike tourist destinations with certain attractors that draw ever-increasing crowds all year round, providers in other types of tourist destinations, both large and small, must fight to catch the demanding tourist eye when facing seasonal variations, changes to workforce demand, changing habits, trends, and market sizes (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Wanhill, 2002). Given the option, most tourists will choose to experience what gives the "*most bang for their buck.*" Themed concepts could potentially offer attractive benefits to most experience-seeking visitors: memorable, extraordinary, and sometimes even mind-altering experiences that promise to touch your heart, stir your emotions, and dazzle your eyes (Cabanas, 2019; Hansen & Mossberg, 2013; Kao et al., 2008). Hopefully, gaining and offering these benefits may in part be why providers in tourist destinations often elaborately and at some cost theme their tourist experience (Richards, 2010). Consequently, the suggestion that theming is a way of promoting and developing tourist experiences may in part be why we now can observe its growth (Botha, 2016; Edensor, 2001; Paradis, 2004).

1.2 Knowledge gaps

As previously mentioned, thoughtful empirical and explorative treatises and research on the theming phenomenon are few despite some notable exceptions (e.g., Bryman, 2004; Gottdiener, 2001; Lukas, 2007, 2013, 2016b). The reason for this may be that themed environments for years received harsh criticism and, to some extent, were considered places unworthy of

scientific interest (e.g., Baudrillard, 1996, 2001; Brown, 2016; Yoshimoto, 1994). Lukas (2016a) lists several such (often predictable) critiques. Although the prevalence of theming is growing in all aspects of businesses embracing the principles of the experience economy (Erb & Ong, 2016; Piazzoni, 2019; Weaver, 2009), Ellis, Jiang, Lacanienta, and Carroll (2019) assert that "[e]xtensive anecdotal evidence suggests that theme elevates experience quality, but research on theming is in its infancy" (Lacanienta, Ellis, Taggart, Wilder, & Carroll, 2018). Although, as the previous section shows, there is research and knowledge on both experience-based tourism and theming, there are still gaps that need to be filled. The following three knowledge gaps described in this section motivate this thesis.

First, previous studies have focused on theming as a component of a place, usually in a themed setting and with a provider perspective (Lukas, 2016a; Xiao, Zhang, & Huang, 2013). For instance, Kao et al. (2008) develop the scale item and measurement "Consistency of theme" as part of a theme park's theatrical elements. However, this itemization changes and diminishes the role of a theme to a component rather than the main principle intended to guide the staging and conveying of the same theme through its application in the environment (Bryman, 2004; Muñoz, Wood, & Solomon, 2006; Pine & Gilmore, 2019). Using the archetypical example of theme parks, Trischler and Zehrer (2012) depict themes' centrality as developing a themed environment. Li et al. (2020) acknowledge theming (or thematization) as essential for designing a themed experience for visitors and for classifying physical and nonphysical elements in theme parks as literal or interpretive thematization (Mitrasinovic, 2016). However, even in Li et al.'s study, the significance of themes and theming is reduced to a theme park dimension rather than the main principle guiding its comprehensive design. The staging and design of material and immaterial components are undoubtedly central to all types of theming of settings (Lukas, 2016b). However, there seems to be a need for research focusing on theming as the central idea for designing places and settings, including contributing "theme factors" or "outward manifestations," rather than sidelining theming as a mere component or dimension of a themed environment.

Second, previous research on theming in tourism seems to focus strongly on a service quality perspective (e.g., Astari et al., 2020; Tsang et al., 2012; Valčić, Komšić, & Simpson, 2015), while ignoring what makes theming a differentiating factor in the experience economic paradigm (Pine & Gilmore, 2019). In hospitality research in particular, the servicescape perspective has been prevalent (Bitner, 1992; Chen, Suntikul, & King, 2020). In tourism, the dominant context for studying theming seems to be theme parks and themed hotels. However,

theming as a phenomenon has grown considerably in the last two decades, both in complexity and extensiveness, even spurring social pushback from citizens worldwide (Gottdiener, 2020). When theming expands both within and outside tourism, terms and theories describing the concept decades ago merit reexamination. There is a substantial volume of research *related* to so-called "themed environments" because the research is often context dependent. Current research on topics in themed environments provides increasingly rigorous theoretical and applicable knowledge to the field. However, defining what theming in various contexts is and means rarely seems to receive thorough research treatment (Li et al., 2020). Thus, empirical articles tend to reiterate previous and uncontested definitions (for noteworthy exceptions, see, for instance, Crawford, 2015; Dale & Robinson, 2001; Lacanienta et al., 2018; Piazzoni, 2019). Instead, rather than exploring themes and theming as theoretical concepts in themselves, the research aims to advance understandings of *other* processes and phenomena in themed experiencescapes (physical and social, often themed surroundings). Thus, the concept and its dimensions are rarely explored. Therefore, these arguments emphasize the need for more research on the dimensions of theming and the concept, especially dimensions of themed environments across contexts.

Third, how themes appeal to different consumers seems to have been a shared focus in several studies of themed environments (e.g., McClung, 1991; Wassler, Li, & Hung, 2015; Zins, 1998). Their conclusions help tourism managers and developers evaluate new and future consumer preferences to successfully develop themed offers. For instance, using an empirically based managerial (provider) perspective, Milman (2001) predicts ranges of themes that were most likely and less likely to be popular in the theme park and attraction industry in the future. Hospitality facilities and other leisure-related experiences (such as movie theaters, espresso bars, bookstores, and shopping centers) attempt to meet the twenty-first-century consumers' demand for themed experiences (Benedikt, 2001; Milman, 2010). Therefore, it is surprising that asking *why* theming and themes appeal or what drives the perception of themes in a visitor's mind seems to have been much less a focus in the research literature on theming. Hung (2015) observes that research related to theming in a themed environment is noncomprehensive, especially research on how theming may be incorporated into businesses and what customers look for in a themed environment. Little is known about the relative importance of theming purposes because they are haphazardly referred to and often mentioned only one at a time (see Table 5, page 67 for examples). These observations thus warrant a need for more comprehensive research for why theming and themes appeal in tourism.

Fourth, the role of innovation in the experience economy is indisputable for the creation and design of memorable, compelling tourism experiences (Zátori, 2016). Theming differentiates the various experiences on offer. Experience innovation is a process that involves technology, co-creation, and design (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003; Scupola & Fuglsang, 2018; Zátori, 2016). The research field of experience innovation is emerging (Sipe, 2021). Experience innovation is essential to experience-based tourism; there is a need to develop new or improved experiences and create competitive advantages (Jernsand, Kraff, & Mossberg, 2015; Zátori, 2016). However, there is a need for more empirical research that focuses on the tourist in the experiencescape (Lindberg et al., 2015). Scupola and Fuglsang (2018) argue that services, experiences, and innovation research fields lack a systemic, integrative, and holistic approach. They present a model that explains services and service industries as being on a continuum to address this gap. Furthermore, the model displays two types of integrative perspectives on this continuum: A systemic and a practice-based understanding of innovation as an interactive process, creating the four dimensions of "total experiences," "co-creation of value," "experience practices," and "practices of value co-creation." The two integrative experiences are linked through technology.

Although theming is not directly addressed in Scupola and Fuglsang (2018), Sørensen et al. (2020, p. 293) argue that "most tourist settings are somewhat themed" and that the practice-based approach an improve the "understanding of how experience value is created in practices in different context and how these come into being". Furthermore, the Sørensen et al. (2020) claim that the practice-based approach can "enrich [the] understanding of importance of interaction and co-creation of tourist experience value when several actors are involved," and "how such value creation can be improved." The practice-based approach is a corrective to the linear versions of innovation processes common to many innovation theories (Scupola & Fuglsang, 2018) and keeps practice the unit of analysis. There is a need to add to the fields of experience and innovation research addressing theming as a type of experience innovation practice because the movement towards experience innovation is inevitable (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). There is a need for more knowledge on innovation, especially innovation from an experience economy perspective, research that can observe different attributes of innovation processes, and experience innovation studies that use both quantitative and qualitative data aligned with experience logic (Eide & Fuglsang, 2015; Eide & Mossberg, 2015; Sipe, 2021). Hence, for this thesis, a response to these needs is interpreted through a focus on how theming from both a visitor and provider perspective can facilitate experience innovation.

In summation, previous studies focused more on theming as a component of a place instead of examining the concept and its dimensions from a provider perspective. Because the research is often context dependent, there is much less research on the dimensions of theming and the concept across contexts. Why theming and themes appeal or what drives the perception of themes in visitors' minds have rarely been in focus in the research literature on theming. Moreover, little research has focused on defining theming as a theoretical phenomenon in experience-based tourism, either to interpret the concept itself further or to find why theming is used in experience-based tourism. Previous research on theming has predominantly focused solely on either a visitor or a provider perspective. Finally, theming as an approach to experience innovation practice seems to have received some but not a lot of attention in research. These knowledge gaps are what this doctoral thesis and its appended papers aim to remedy: move the research on themes and theming forward with the dual perspective of both providers and visitors. This dual perspective is also consistent with the nature of tourist experiences, the interaction, and the co-creation of value between provider and visitor.

There is a call for more research to advance the understanding of experiencescapes in tourism (Chen et al., 2020). Hence, this thesis will deepen our understanding of theming in experience-based tourism so that tourism experience providers will be more aware of the benefits that theming may bring to their customers' experiences. This thesis contributes to the experience-based tourism literature by expanding the understanding of theming using empirical analysis. This thesis is the rare story of "the what and the why" of theming in experience-based tourism. Furthermore, by highlighting theming components, both physical and abstract, this thesis combines empirically sourced perspectives to explain the importance of theming in experience-based tourism in great detail. This thesis does so by addressing theming as a principle of experience-based tourism, portraying its central role in facilitating memorable and profitable experiences for increased value/added-value for different tourist segments.

The background and four knowledge gaps presented above form the basis for the aim, research questions, and purpose of this thesis, discussed in the next section.

1.3 The aim, research questions, and purpose of the thesis

Based on the four knowledge gaps, the aim of this thesis can be summarized in the following four research questions (RQX):

RQ1: Which factors drive the themed tourism experience?

Paper I is a study based on quantitative survey data from a visitor perspective that examines which theme factors drive the tourist customer experience and how the perception of a theme can be measured.

RQ2: What are the dimensions of theming in experience-based tourism?

Paper II is a study based on insights from key informants; it explores and identifies what themes and theming are from a visitor perspective and deduces abstract dimensions of theming in experience-based tourism. Dimensions refer to the nonphysical and intangible aspects of theming.

RQ3: What are the main objectives of theming?

Paper III is a study that uses insights from the same informants as in Paper II and examines the purposes of theming from a provider perspective.

RQ4: How can knowledge about theming from both a visitor and provider perspective facilitate experience innovation?

This thesis will add to experiences and innovation research fields, and to a better understanding of how knowledge about theming from both a visitor and provider perspective can facilitate experience innovation.

This thesis aims to deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism. The thesis also aims to add to the knowledge on how novel insights from both visitor and provider perspectives facilitate experience innovation. These insights are essential because theming is a technique that tourism managers (providers) can use to facilitate memorable, personal, and profitable experiences for which tourists (visitors) are willing to pay (Botha, 2016; Edensor, 2001; Pine & Gilmore, 2019; Richards, 2010). Furthermore, this thesis discusses what can be learned in addition to theming in experience-based tourism. The thesis has implications for innovation in experience-based tourism, focusing on theming as a process that may lead to experience innovation. This thesis emphasizes the value of developing new and more thoughtful knowledge of theming in innovation processes/design. Additionally, this may lead to experience innovation.

The three appended papers form the basis for the extended discussion, both separately and collectively, of all the presented topics to achieve these aims.

Figure 1-1 illustrates how the three papers are connected to the research questions and thus contribute to the aims of this thesis. The diamond represents theming as a phenomenon, and the three appended papers are placed here. The diamond shape is the context spectrum of theming in experience-based tourism. The context spectrum refers to either specific contexts found on the diamond's narrow sides (*context dependent*), or broader contexts found closer to the middle part of the diamond (*context independent*). The *visitor perspective* refers to how Paper I and II's contributions mainly relate to the visitor experience. The *provider perspective* refers to how

THEMING IN EXPERIENCE-BASED TOURISM

THEMING FROM VISITOR PERSPECTIVE   THEMING FROM PROVIDER PERSPECTIVE
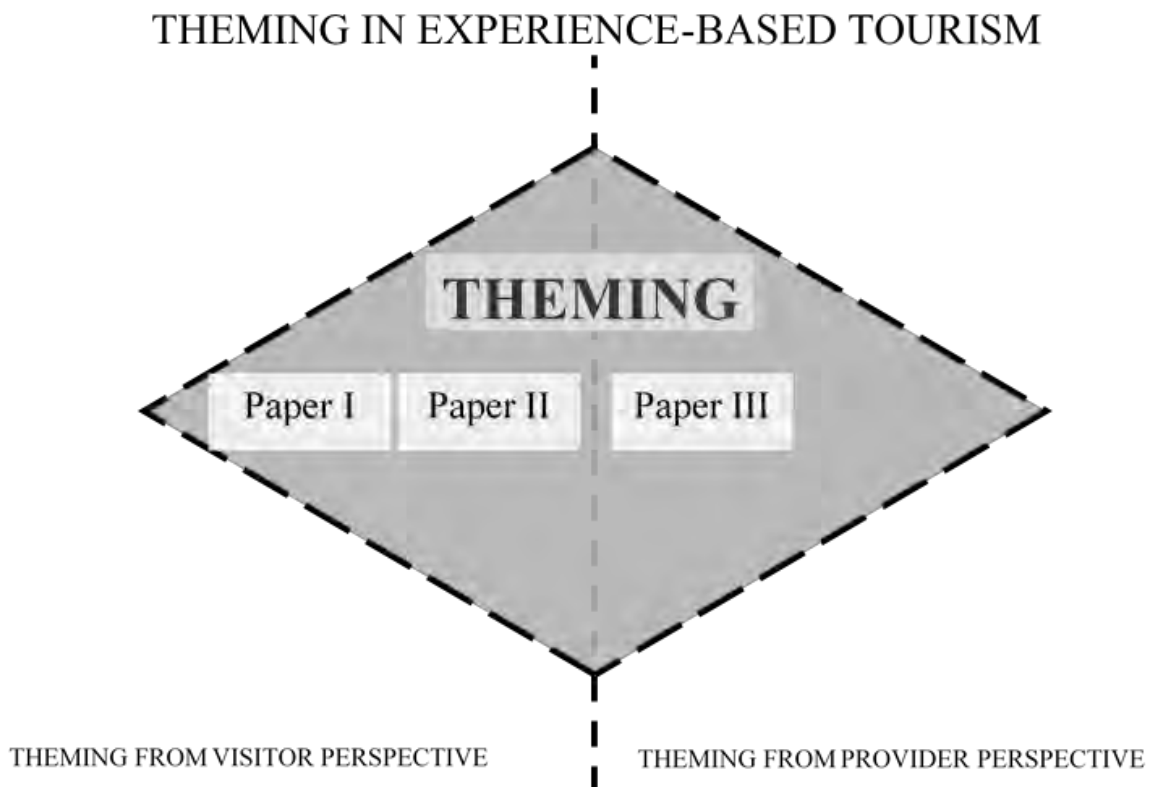
Figure 1-1. Overview of the links between the appended papers

Paper III's contributions relate to the providers' benefits (for more details, see section 3.3). The placement of Paper I is on the narrow side of the diamond to show how this research is context dependent (cruise ship). Paper II is placed closer to the middle to illustrate how its contributions are context independent and have broader and more general applicability. The gray vertical line represents both the distinction and the interrelation between the visitor and provider perspectives. These contributions are also more general and less context dependent, hence their placement closer to the diamond's wider part.

The insights gained from the three appended papers will be presented along with examples where appropriate. This thesis improves and updates the understanding of theming in experience-based tourism, although it also provides some suggestions for theming's relevance outside of tourism. This thesis will not fully explicate how theming is applicable outside of

tourism. However, theming is a multidisciplinary form of art that draws on knowledge both inside and outside tourism. The reason for this is because of the process of *touristification* or *dedifferentiation*, or how the mindset, discourse, aspects, practices, images, and tools of tourism progressively cross over into and turn commercial spheres, public and private spaces, urban development, housing, business, events, culture, and everyday life into tourist commodities— and vice versa (see, e.g., del Romero Renau, 2018; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

Hence, the insights brought forth in this thesis may be of interest and inspiration to scholars, professionals, students, and others from fields other than tourism. To my knowledge, this is the first doctoral thesis dedicated uniquely to studying the phenomenon of theming in experience-based tourism.

The purpose of this thesis emerged through a study of the literature and applications of the methods used. This thesis' primary purpose is to convey why theming in experience-based tourism is relevant to both visitors and providers by extending the existing research. Specifically, the theoretical contributions will serve as guidelines on concrete and abstract factors and dimensions that can serve as elements of themed environments. These contributions are meant to enter the broader discussion on the nature of theming in tourism, its main concepts and dimensions, and the various theming purposes. The practical contributions provided in the thesis are meant to be of use to managers in tourism who would like to know what theming is, what it is suitable for, and what to consider in a strategic theming design process to find new and innovative ways of facilitating lasting memories for guests/visitors.

In the next section, the structure of the thesis is presented.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 introduces the background, aims, research questions, and the purpose of this thesis. Furthermore, a model of how the papers fit within a spectrum of theming in experience-based tourism is briefly presented.

Chapter 2 presents and reviews the central literature and previous research that forms the theoretical framework's base. First, the link between experience innovation and theming is introduced. Then, experience-based tourism, the experience economy, the tourist experience, and the concept of theming are described and explained. This description is followed by an explanation of how experience-based tourism and theming are connected.

Chapter 3 presents the methodologies used in this thesis and its appended papers, reflections on the consequences of these methodologies, the papers' research design, and the trustworthiness of the thesis.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the empirical analyses and summarizes the research findings.

Chapter 5 concludes this thesis. First, the contributions from the different papers are introduced and described. Next, how this thesis and its appended papers contribute to the literature theoretically and empirically is discussed. Furthermore, the managerial implications of these contributions are debated. Finally, future research based on these contributions is suggested.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter presents a review of the research literature that establishes the theoretical framework (paradigm, or its "highest class of the theoretical system level," Neuman, 2013) of the thesis. The chapter focuses on theming in experience-based tourism in its larger theoretical context to increase the thesis' readability. First, the chapter introduces experience-based tourism, its relation to the paradigm shift of the experience economy, and the nature of experiences. The next section discusses the relationship between theming and experience innovation and the difference between traditional and experience innovation. A review of the perspectives of theming follows this section. Finally, the relation between experience-based tourism and theming is summarized, followed by reviews of theme factors, theming dimensions, and theming purposes. These are assigned either a visitor or provider perspective (as illustrated in Figure 1-1). When articles focus mainly on the visitor experience, they are consigned a visitor perspective. When articles focus mainly on providers' benefits, they are consigned a provider perspective.

2.1 Experience-based tourism

In this thesis, theming is studied in the context of tourism. Experience-based tourism often involves offering tourists experiences in commonly themed experiencescapes (e.g., themed hotels, theme parks, and themed restaurants) (Chen et al., 2020; Mossberg & Eide, 2017; O'Dell & Billing, 2006). The industries and phenomena associated with the tourism sector yielded a vast amount of research recognizing tourism as its own economic activity (Mavrič & Urry, 2009; Stabler, Papatheodorou, & Sinclair, 2010). Tourism has traditionally been viewed as a type of "production" in which tourists buy resources (goods and services) to produce experiences (Andersson, 2007). Tourism is concerned mainly with "visiting, seeing, and living in a different mode of life" (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). However, a shift occurred as new concepts, perspectives, and forms of tourism emerged, namely the *experience economy* (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 2019; Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). This perspective considers *experiences* as the next economic offering following the commodification of services and goods (Pine & Gilmore, 2017), and its concepts and premises have had a profound impact on the field of tourism. Paradoxically, while tourism had always relied on providing experiences long before the arrival of the experience economic perspective, *experience*-based tourism's emphasis prevailed. What experience-based tourism refers to has various interpretations. However, for this thesis, experience-based tourism refers to "offerings

with a relatively high degree of differentiation and intangible value perceived by the customers at a certain place and in a certain time" (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015). This definition highlights both what *providers* seek to offer and how these offers are perceived by *visitors* (customers). Jensen and Prebensen (2015) find that among other elements, the differentiation can be linked to "specific themes" and that the idea of *experience-based tourism* is consistent with the experience economy of Pine and Gilmore (1999). Furthermore, Jensen and Prebensen (2015) view the term from both management/industry and consumer/market perspectives. In other words, this view of experience-based tourism coincides with the chosen perspectives of both visitors and providers in this thesis.

2.2 The experience economy, experiences, and the tourist experience

This section elaborates on the experience economy concept because of its central role as a framework for theming, experiences, and tourism. Different interpretations of the concept of experiences are discussed in this section. Finally, the section explicitly addresses the tourist experience.

2.2.1 The experience economy

Although the modern experience economy concept and perspectives can be traced to Pine and Gilmore (1999, 2011, 2019), the idea that society or the economy has moved away from goods and services as the basis for economic offerings is not new. In 1971, Toffler suggested that the service sector was moving on to the next "strange" level of the economy, which he called the "experience industries." He argued that goods, especially in the United States, were increasingly designed and manufactured to give consumers a "psychic load"—an intangible benefit, increasing consumers' willingness to pay more. Much later, Sundbo (2015) observes that experience had come onto the agenda, particularly within management theory and service marketing, although as its own field (e.g., Jensen, 1999; Mossberg, 2003; Schmitt, 1999; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013). As Snel (2011) explains, several other "offerings" have been suggested as directions of economic development, such as attention, empathy, entertainment, emotions, fascination, information, and knowledge (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Maes & Parson, 2000; Nussbaum, 2005; Porat, 1977; Powell & Snellman, 2004; Schmid, 2009; Wolf, 1999). Snel (2011) does, however, emphasize that the elementary premise for all these concepts is driven by the risk of commodification leading to increased attention to the customer's role.

As illustrated in Figure 2-1, Pine and Gilmore (2019) find that as goods and services become commoditized because of decreased differentiation, customers increasingly turn
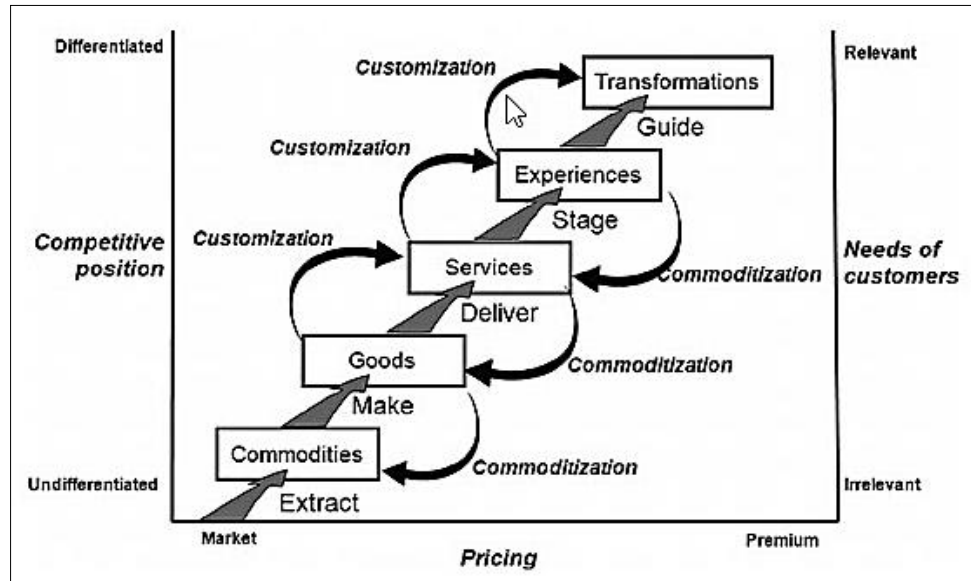
Figure 2-1. Progression of economic value (Pine & Gilmore, 2019)

to experiences on which to spend their time (and money). Through customization, experiences are made more relevant and thus more memorable for the customer. Customized experiences can ultimately lead to transformations of the customers' traits, a stage in which "the customer is the product" and beyond commodification. The focus of the experience economy, however, is still on the experience stage. Pine and Gilmore argue that services can be made into experiences through *theming* (Gilmore & Pine, 2002; Pine & Gilmore, 2019). The goal of "experientialization" is to engage people in memorable and personal ways because these are the kinds of experiences people value more (Pine & Gilmore, 2019; Rossman & Duerden, 2019).
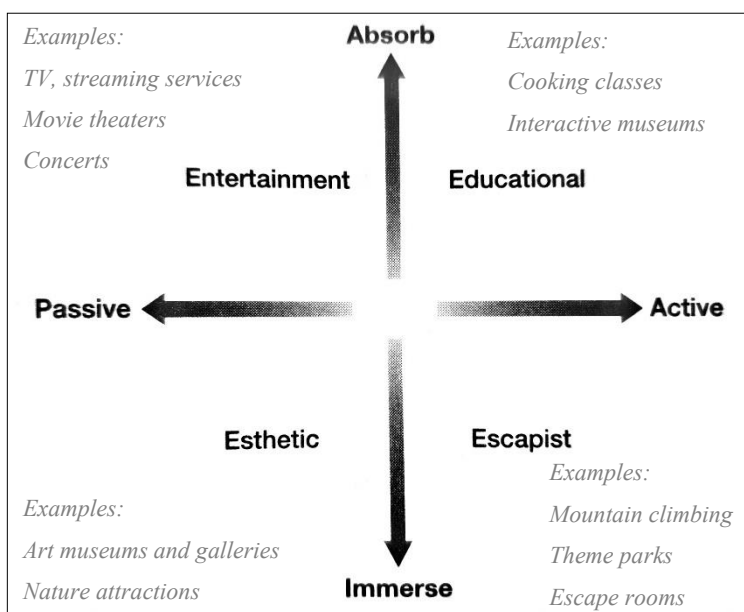
Figure 2-2. Experience realms with added examples (Pine & Gilmore, 2019)

Equally important are the different dimensions of experiences called the "experience realms" (Figure 2-2) (Pine & Gilmore, 2019). Guest participation is placed along the spectrum between passive and active (horizontal arrows) and connection or relation to the environment between immersive and absorption (vertical arrows). The experience realms have

30

received some attention in the literature (e.g., Breiby, Holmengen, Hauge, & Puijk, 2017; Garrod & Dowell, 2020; Manthiou, Lee, Tang, & Chiang, 2014; McLellan, 2000; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2016; Radic, 2017). The four dimensions of the experience—entertaining, educational, esthetic, and escapist—can be interpreted as an experience akin to the four Ps of marketing (product, price, place, and promotion): experience stagers need to consider the appropriate dimensional component mix and value of their experience offer (Pine & Gilmore, 2019).

2.2.2 Experiences

This thesis has adopted and made use of the experience economy perspective and its many concepts and applications. Several attempts have been made to define what an *experience* is even before the conception of the experience economy's ideas. Experiences can be explained as constant flows of thoughts and feelings during moments of consciousness created inside a person (Carlson, 1997; Mossberg, 2007). Experiences, even ordinary ones, bring greater happiness than material possessions (Carter & Gilovich, 2010; Kumar, Killingsworth, & Gilovich, 2014; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Even waiting for experiences can be valuable (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014), and experiences are more favored when shared socially with others (Caprariello & Reis, 2013). It is worth noting the distinction that German and other languages make between lived-through (*Erlebnis*) and accumulated (*Erfahrung*) experiences (Duerden, Ward, & Freeman, 2015; Highmore, 2002). The experience economy builds on and emphasizes the former (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). However, defining the concept of experience as most relevant for this thesis demands a more thorough investigation.

Sundbo (2015) finds there is no official definition of an experience. To explain, Sundbo (2015) clarifies that the modern idea of experience developed from the theories of the services marketing concept and its measurement (e.g., Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996; Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009). However, as shown by Toffler (1971), experience as an economic concept had variously been proposed even before the modern services marketing concept (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Schulze, 2005; Snel, 2011). It is most commonly explainred as a complex mental phenomenon (Boswijk, Thijssen, & Peelen, 2006; Moscardo, 2010). Furthermore, Rossman and Duerden (2019) highlight conscious interaction with and reflective interpretation of experience elements when defining experience.

Experiences can also be explained as the outcome of an interaction with a computer interface, physical object, or organization (Pine & Gilmore, 2017). Because physical goods and products are *consumed*, Thomas Levitt argues (as cited in Hussain, 2016, p. 73), services are *experienced* (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002; Schmitt, 2003). In other words, experiences are the outcomes of using services. Shaw and Ivens (2005) define a *customer experience* as the interaction between an organization (Edvardsson, Enquist, & Johnston, 2010) and a customer. However, Pine and Gilmore (2013, 2017) categorize *customer* experiences (CX) and *user* experiences as "experience arenas" distinct from experiences as an economic offering. They argue the latter to be events that engage people in personal ways (Pine & Gilmore, 2017). Their understanding of experiences is comparable to that of Ariely and Norton (2009), who find that consumption of *symbols* or *concepts* is replacing physical consumption (of goods) (Levy, 1959). Because physical or "real" consumption commonly presumes conceptual consumption, the two kinds of consumption are not necessarily separate. An external physical stimulus is often necessary to induce an internal experience. Internal experiences as outcomes are arguably subjective and highly personal depending on mood, state of mind, and reaction to a "staged event" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008; O'Dell, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 2011; Schulze, 2005; Sundbo, 2015; Wang, 2002) or "staged experience," which is often explained as taking place in an artificial, simulated, and prefabricated environment (Walmsley, 2003).

2.2.3 The tourist experience

However, commercial experiences related to the tourist are the focus of this thesis (Shobeiri, 2016). How to understand the tourist experience has been reviewed by Moscardo (2010), Cutler and Carmichael (2010), Walls, Okumus, Wang, and Kwun (2011), and Song, Lee, Park, Hwang, and Reisinger (2014). Based on their findings, the tourist experience is defined in this thesis as a complex, obscure, diverse, and emotionally engaging event created between a host and a guest intended to create memories (Lashley, 2008; Uriely, 2005). This definition involves the provider (host) and visitor (guest) perspectives corresponding to the experience-based tourism view (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015). Furthermore, a tourist experience includes travel and took place in the past (Larsen, 2007). Tourism occurs in chronotopically unique times and spaces (Noy, 2007), and the tourist is looking for the experience of self in this place or of the place itself (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). This place is often referred to as an *experiencescape*, a social and physical commonly themed surrounding. It also includes services, products, and symbols designed to shape an interactive framework created to influence tourists and deliver hedonic benefits (Mossberg, 2007; O'Dell & Billing, 2006).

As a concept, the experiencescape is particularly applicable to tourism research, although it can be applied beyond tourist attractions and establishments, such as urban contexts (Chen et al., 2020). Ellis, Freeman, Jamal, and Jiang (2019) similarly refer to what they call a "structured experience," which they explain as a planned invitation extended by experience providers such as tourism industry professionals. Thus, tourists are invited to a "heightened subjective state of motivation, attention, and emotion" (Ellis, Freeman, et al., 2019). Structured experiences are characterized by (1) having definable beginnings and endings, (2) lasting from a few seconds to a few hours, (3) being uninterrupted by other activities, and (4) being deployed through planned encounters (Ellis, Freeman, et al., 2019). Rossman and Duerden (2019, pp. 9-11) outline a structured experience model built on the same principles where microexperiences make up three phases of the macroexperience: (1) anticipation, (2) participation, and (3) reflection (Duerden et al., 2015). They urge experience designers to keep the two perspectives in mind when designing a vacation experience. Staging and designing an experience thus refers to the simulated and fabricated physical environment (Lukas, 2016b; Walmsley, 2003) and the structuring of the temporal architecture experience (Ellis, Freeman, et al., 2019; Rossman & Duerden, 2019).

For this thesis, experiences are defined as constant flows of thoughts and feelings during moments of consciousness created inside a person (Carlson, 1997; Mossberg, 2007). *Tourist* experiences occur in a commonly themed experiencescape, require a host and a guest, and create positive memories (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015; Lashley, 2008; Mossberg, 2007; O'Dell & Billing, 2006; Uriely, 2005).

In this section, various understandings of the concept of experiences emphasizing tourist experiences were introduced. In the following section, theming and experience innovation and how experience innovation differs from traditional innovation in the meaning of product and service innovation will be discussed.

2.3 Theming and experience innovation

The aim of this thesis is to deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism. It also aims to add to the knowledge on how novel insights from both visitor and provider perspectives facilitate experience innovation. As theming in experience-based tourism is inextricably connected to a provider's physical staging of an experience in an environment, this thesis contributes to and has managerial implications for experience innovation of providers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). There are calls for knowledge about different attributes of

innovation processes in the experience economy, and the use of experience logic linked with qualitative and quantitative information (Eide & Fuglsang, 2015; Eide & Mossberg, 2015; Sipe, 2021). Therefore, this thesis is not empirically focused on broad and general innovation, but on how knowledge about theming from both a visitor and provider perspective can facilitate and have implications for experience innovation.

Theming is a central topic in experience innovation and further experience-based tourism development. Thus, if theming is the providers' staging of physical and nonphysical cues in the environment, coherent and consistent with a theme to facilitate memorable experiences for visitors, it is reasonable to assume theming can contribute as a valuable topic of discussion in innovation processes. Furthermore, new knowledge about theming can contribute valuably to development and experience innovation. Zach and Krisaj (2017) highlight a conflicting view on experience innovation, which can be interpreted as focusing on improving services for better customer experiences. However, Pine and Gilmore (2017, p. 61) explain how the customer experience perspective aims to make "interactions with customers nice, easy, and convenient." The customer experience perspective thus tends to be *service*-focused, and the experience becomes secondary. This thesis leans on Pine and Gilmore's (1999) original theoretical perspective in which products and services acts as *props* in staging an experience, and so the service perspective is not the focus here. It is therefore crucial the experience staging approach remains *experience*-centric. Jensen and Sørensen (2018) clarify these distinctions, stating service quality is linked with quality of the delivered service and efficiency, while experiences are linked with memories related to a particular event and its mental impact.

Theming is a critical practice, especially for providers in tourism. Besides tourism, theming diffuses outside of tourism and into other business areas (see touristification and dedifferentiation in section 2.4). This diffusion means tourism companies can learn about theming as it is being used elsewhere, and vice versa. Furthermore, theming is recognized as a "particular form of innovative marketing and a valuable business tool in competitive environments, such as tourism, restaurants, and theme parks" (Wassler et al., 2015).

Edquist (2009, p. 25) considers innovations to be "new creations of economic significance, primarily carried out by firms (but not in isolation)." Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003) call this traditional innovation perspective "product- and company-centric" (see bottom left in Figure 2-3). This perspective includes both *product* innovations, which Edquist (2009) defines as "new - or improved - material goods as
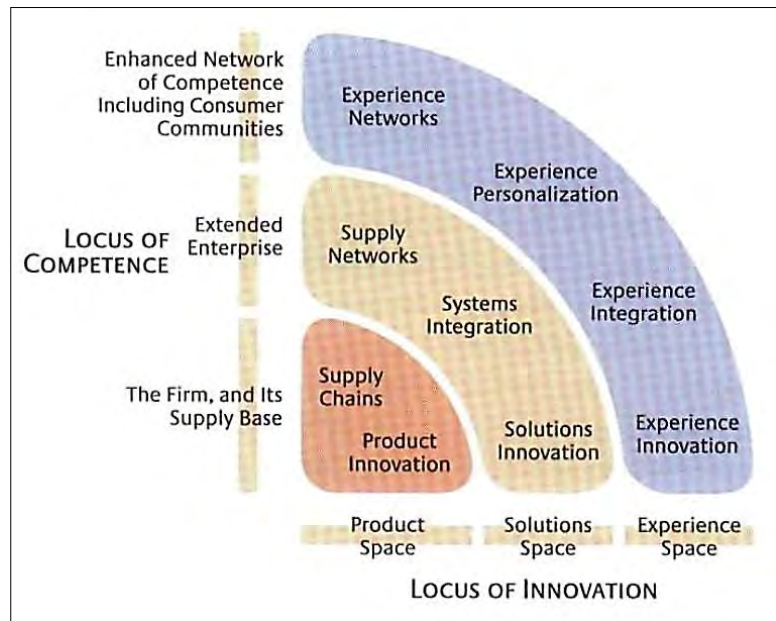
Figure 2-3. Locus of competence and innovation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003)

well as new intangible services," and *process* innovations, defined as "new [technological or organizational] ways of producing goods and services" (2009). Innovation in tourism experiences may be incremental rather than radical (Jernsand, Kraff, & Mossberg, 2015). Incremental experience innovation refers to "small improvements integrated in day-to-day work" (Sundbo, Sørensen, & Fuglsang, 2013). An example of this could be the adoption and implementation of vacuum cleaning and germ sterilization robots for cleaning hotel rooms. However, radical innovations are also found in tourism (Williams, 2014). An often-cited example is Disneyland's development and opening in California in 1955 (see Paper III). At the time, amusement parks with themed attractions were not a novelty. For instance, Li et al. (2020) assert the opening of Santa Claus Land in 1946 to be the first modern theme park. What was radically different with Disneyland was the "immersive cartoon world" filled with new experiential innovations, launching the modern version of a *theme* park (Pine & Gilmore, 2019). This launch ushered in a new era of theme parks; they were large immersive worlds radically different from the past's fairground-like amusement parks offering visitors "a totalizing, three-dimensional, and multisensorial experience" (Piazzoni, 2019).

Unlike other business sectors in which innovation outcomes have traditionally been measured by tracking patents (e.g., Argyres & Silverman, 2004; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Dosi, 1982), outcomes from tourism experience innovations can instead be observed as the spread of "something new for a certain region or country" (Eide & Fuglsang, 2013; Jernsand et al., 2015;

Toivonen, Tuominen, & Brax, 2007). A relevant example of this is the study by Weidenfeld, Williams, and Butler (2010), which examines how spatial proximity impacts knowledge transfer and innovation diffusion between tourist visitor firms in Cornwall, England.

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003) explain that traditional innovation is fundamentally different from experience innovation because, in the latter, the co-creation of value is individual centric (see Figure 2-3). They argue that the shift towards co-creating experiences as the basis of value has implications for how innovation is practiced, as the focus of innovation thus turns to experience environments rather than products and processes. Co-creation is recognized as an essential concept for experience (Alsos, Eide, & Madsen, 2014; Jernsand et al., 2015; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Furthermore, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003) highlight technology as a *facilitator* of experiences (as opposed to technological features and functions in traditional product innovation). This argument resembles that of Urry and Larsen (2011), who consider technology an acceleration tool for theming. For example, in the construction industry, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) headsets and devices can be used not only to aid engineers and architects in creating buildings and spaces virtually, but also for their customers to co-create, experience, and interact with the buildings and spaces before they are built in the real world.

Another example is Google's Project Starline, which through 3D imaging, rendering, and display, aims to advance now ordinary video calls to a feeling of actual presence by "looking through a magic window" or being able to "feel like you're there, together" (Google, 2021). Pine and Gilmore (2017) underline the same evident shift in understanding that it is the staged memorable and personal experience being sold and that products and services act as props in delivering this experience. Thus, a theme will act as the guiding principle for providers for how these props are staged for delivering and co-creating the experience together with visitors. Ultimately, this means the locus of innovation shifts away from products, services, and the firms and centers on experience space (see Figure 2-3) (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003), or, in the case of this thesis, the themed environment. The goal of shifting focus from goods and services to high-quality experiences is to increase the price point, which has implications for the innovation focus (Pine & Gilmore, 2014).

Jernsand et al. (2015) call attention to the experiencescape, matching Prahalad and Ramaswamy's experience space (2003) as a critical notion for understanding experiences. Jernsand et al. (2015) define the experiencescape as being "where [the] physical and social surroundings as well as symbols, products and services form the context for tourists' influences

and interactions" (Mossberg, 2007; O'Dell & Billing, 2006). They express that experience innovation is an emerging research area, exploring its differences from service innovation. Precisely defining experience innovation is also an onerous undertaking because of its similarities to other innovation types (e.g., product, service, or process innovation) (Jernsand et al., 2015). However, Jernsand et al. (2015) describe contemporary experience innovation as a spiral process of repeatedly prototyping (building a physical or virtual representation of themes and brands), evaluating and testing an item or activity in an experiencescape to develop new or improved experiences.

In her overview of 100 innovations that transformed tourism, Hjalager (2015) lists sampling categories, of which two are mainly applicable to the experiencescape and theming: (i) changing the properties and varieties of the goods and services as the tourists experience them, and (ii) forming new destinations. Such experience innovations may be of the utmost importance for providers in our time, e.g., building sustainable tourist destinations through preserving biodiversity and working toward carbon-neutral (or even carbon-negative) tourist experiences.

To summarize, experience innovation differs on basic levels that relate to theming more so than to traditional innovation. First, equivalent to theming, the focus of innovation is on experience environments. Second, providers co-creating experiences with visitors are the basis of value creation, consistent with Paper II's findings on interaction/co-creation as a dimension of theming (see section 4.2). Third, the view of technology coincides with the understanding of digital technology as a theming dimension that facilitates experiences. Fourth and finally, personalization of experiences is consistent with interaction and mass-customized storytelling as a theming dimension. The main elements of traditional and experience innovation are summarized in Table 1.

Traditional vs. Experience Innovation		
	Traditional Innovation	**Experience Innovation**
Focus of Innovation	Products and processes	Experience environments
Basis of Value	Products and services	Co-creation experiences
View of Value Creation	Firm creates value	Value is co-created between providers and visitors
	Supply-chain-centric fulfillment of products and services	Experience environments for individuals to co-construct experiences on contextual demand
	Supply push and demand pull for firm's offerings	Individual-centric co-creation of value
View of Technology	Facilitator of features and functions	Facilitator of experiences
	Technology and systems integration	Experience integration
Focus of Supply Chains	Supports fulfillment of products and services	Experience network supports co-construction of personalized experiences

Table 1. Traditional vs. experience innovation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003)

The juxtaposition of Table 1 exhibits the traditional (firm creates value) versus the experience innovation view of value creation, in which value is co-created between individuals. This view shares similarities with Vargo and Lusch's service-dominant logic of marketing perspective (S-D logic, 2004, see also Lusch & Vargo, 2006; Lusch, Vargo, & O'Brien, 2007), where the "customer is always a co-creator of value" (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Whereas these views of value creation and co-creation are supported and adopted for this thesis, especially as theming is central to facilitating experience environments and co-creating experiences (see more on the theming dimension interaction/co-creation in section 5.1.2), the contribution of this thesis is not toward the service-dominant logic perspective of value creation.

This section discusses what differentiates experience innovation from traditional innovation and how experience innovation relates to theming. In the following section, different perspectives on the concept of theming will be presented.

2.4 Perspectives on the concept of theming

The previous section explained how the concept of experiences can be understood. Particular attention was paid to experiences and how they are significant to the experience economy. Furthermore, what separates and distinguishes tourist experiences was given particular attention. In this section, different perspectives on the concept of theming will be explained in further detail. This explanation aids the reader in understanding how theming can be connected to experience-based tourism. First, because of their close relationship to the research questions,

four critical studies on theming are reviewed briefly. Then the knowledge gaps addressed in this thesis are exposed through an analysis of selected research that defines theming.

2.4.1 Theming concepts in research and literature

The main theming concepts investigated in this thesis have been given limited attention in the appended papers. Therefore, to provide the reader with comprehensive and in-depth knowledge, the concepts will be discussed more extensively. The discussion will also explain how these concepts in part inspired the research questions in this thesis.

Paper I draws on concepts found in the literature. Paper II defines the concepts of "*theme*" and "*theming*". In empirical research, these concepts are commonly treated casually (see examples in Table 2). Despite several books having been written on theming and themed spaces (e.g., Lukas, 2007, 2013, 2016b), few empirically derived studies define the most critical concepts. One reasonable explanation for this is that theming as a practice is growing extensively within the realm of tourism and outside of it (e.g., retail, real estate development, public services, professional workplaces, urban development, and so on). Thus, the consequence of this development makes it more challenging to define the concepts across various sectors. Another obstacle is the trends within the various domains in which theming occurs themselves. Until recently, the main trend in theming involved creating large theme parks or transforming aquariums into more attractive visitor destinations. Now, entire themed villages and cities are constructed during urban development, thus blurring the distinction between theme parks and cities (Falcato, 2016; Paradis, 2004; Piazzoni, 2019; Reisenleitner, 2016). The spread of themed cities results from increased economic liberalization, the rise of the experience economy, and new production modes (Bryman, 2004; Piazzoni, 2019; Warren, 1994). Recently, Kraler (2018) finds there is a trend of "de-theming" within the architecture and urbanism of globalized metropolises, which refers to gentrification and "minimization of discernible themed environments."

In other words, theming as a concept stretches across both a societal and dimensional scope. Trends within all these fields may thus have implications for how the concept of theming should be interpreted. It is argued in Paper III that theming has a solid footing within tourism. However, there is an argument to be made that the interdisciplinary field of theming also draws on several other practices, disciplines, and professional fields (e.g., sociological and anthropological research). Theming is debated within fields such as destination marketing and branding (e.g., Botha, 2016; Cabanas, 2019; Cheng, Fang, & Chen, 2015; Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005;

Heeley, 2014; Huijbens, 2011), the experience economy (e.g., Gilmore & Pine, 2002), urban studies and development (e.g., Amin & Thrift, 2002; Lorens, 2011; Mitrasinovic, 2008; Paradis, 2004), and architecture, game design and development, education, and youth development (Crawford, 2015; Dale & Robinson, 2001; Deterding, 2016; Ellis, Jiang, et al., 2019; Kraler, 2018; Lacanienta et al., 2018; Sternberg, 1996, 1997). The various fields can be argued to be interconnected to tourism and one another. For example, game design development leads to the creation of massive themed virtual video game worlds. While the games themselves can be the object of esports (e.g., electronic sports) drawing thousands of esports tourists to large international tournaments. Video games also serve as direct inspiration for new theme park development (e.g., Super Nintendo World at Universal Studios Japan and soon Universal Studios Hollywood). Youth camp experiences (youth development) are commonly themed using familiar or even licensed IPs like Star Wars, (Lacanienta et al., 2018) and the youth development field borrows its terms from the experience economy, psychology, tourism, and marketing when examining themed camping experiences (Ellis, Jiang, et al., 2019; Lacanienta et al., 2018).

This thesis mainly draws on consumer-oriented, business, and marketing interpretations of theming because these research fields are the most relevant for the research questions in this thesis. Furthermore, Pine and Gilmore's book *The Experience Economy* (2019, first published in 1999) discusses theming from a business and marketing point of view. The book also served as an inspiration for both research questions one and two (**RQ1** and **RQ2**) in this thesis because despite reciting numerous examples, it presents itself as mainly empirically unfounded. Furthermore, the book is explicit and pragmatic on theming as a practice. Pine and Gilmore underline the narrative, or "scripting a story," when defining theming. Several authors have listed familiar sources of themes (Gottdiener, 2001; Kozinets et al., 2002; Lukas, 2013; Schmitt & Simonson, 1997). Pine and Gilmore explain that the domains where themes can be found are unlimited. Pine and Gilmore also assert that "every experience has a theme," whether the theme is intentionally designed or emerges haphazardly through discovery. Upon emphasizing integrated cohesiveness as one of several commandments for theming, those authors discuss the "tri-universe" demarcating space, time, and matter as integral aspects that need to work together to make a whole. Space is undeniably tied to theming and ties into the argument on whether to call the space, "space," "environment," "place," or other equivalent terms. This connection can refer to the physical space where the experience occurs, but it can also refer to the "worlds," as Lukas (2013) defines them—a place where you "want to be" and not

necessarily limited by the physical or even realistic ramifications. Time can refer to the past, the present, and the future and can matter to the motifs. The lack of empirical connection between perception of a theme and theme factors and empirically deduced theming dimensions led me, the author of this thesis, to believe a gap could be bridged, especially from a visitor's perspective.

Bryman (2004) expands on George Ritzer's McDonaldization theory (Ritzer, 2011). Ritzer outlines several principles that comprise McDonaldization, on which Bryman develops his theory of Disneyization. Theming is one of the principal dimensions that characterize Disneyization, explained as "clothing institutions or objects in a narrative mainly unrelated to the institution or object to which it is applied, such as a casino or a restaurant with a Wild West narrative" (p. 2). *Why* providers of both services and products theme their offerings is treated briefly. While Bryman's arguments superficially appear logical, they are not empirically based. Because of the third gap in empirical knowledge on the business reasons for theming an environment from a managerial perspective, the "why theme?" or the purposes behind theming became a central question (**RQ3**) to be examined empirically in this thesis.

Gottdiener (2001, first published in 1997) navigates through central terms to theming, especially *signs* (which denote meaning) and *symbols* (which connote meaning). He exemplifies the use of the word train, which can stand for "transportation" but also, for instance, imply "old-fashioned travel." Furthermore, Gottdiener suggests "profit incentive" and "the price of theming for a customer," which served as inspiration and the basis for research question three (**RQ3**) in this thesis. That author's anecdotal observation that theming "adds 100 percent to the cost of the food at a non-themed, fast food diner" (Gottdiener, 2001, pp. 81-82) sparked the initial search in this thesis for the objectives of theming.

Lukas (2007) mainly discusses critical dimensions of theming and clarifies distinctions for categorizations (expanded upon more practically in Lukas, 2013). Authenticity concerning theming is one of the main dimensions that act as an overarching subject in several parts. Authenticity, which remains one of the most widely discussed dimensions, has been researched in themed settings with varied and compelling results (e.g., Lego, Wood, McFee, & Solomon, 2002; Meng & Choi, 2017; Muñoz et al., 2006; Piazzoni, 2019; Wood & Muñoz, 2007a). The emphasis on dimensions of theming in this book inspired research question two (**RQ2**) in this thesis.

To summarize, few empirically derived studies define this thesis's most critical main theming concepts. Together, the literature encompasses theming as a concept within and outside the realm of tourism. Despite this, theming is arguably part of the touristification of realms less commonly associated with tourism, such as youth camps and esports tournaments. However, there is a need to examine further what distinguishes theming as a concept more specific to tourism because of the relationship between theming and the tourist experience (section 2.2.3).

2.4.2 Theming distinctions in tourism research

The aim of the development of Table 2 and the subsequent review was to provide a concise and comprehensive overview of the various theming distinctions in research found primarily in tourism and hospitality journals and books. More specifically, the purpose was to (a) develop an understanding of how the fundamental concepts of themes and theming were explicated in the texts, (b) whether there are clear fundamental concept demarcations rooted in empirical material, and (c) to understand their commonalities or characteristics concerning the included studies and their contexts. Table 2 provides an overview of selected tourism and hospitality research that, in some way, defines theming in tourism. Table 2 does not supplement an existing conceptual model showing theming dimensions, theme factors, and visitor/provider perspectives and is therefore sorted in chronological order by time of publication. The table results from a thorough search for, finding, collecting, reading, and analyzing research related to theming since 2014, when the idea for the project was born. The first part of the Ph.D. process leading to this thesis was developing a project proposal. Thus, vital to the project, I had to familiarize myself with the extant literature on theming. This familiarization included acquiring, reading, identifying, refining, searching, sorting, and selecting literature, which is the inner circle of the hermeneutic approach (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). While the thesis has changed from the proposal, the directions for continuously reading were laid out in the text. These directions were to start "collecting" the definitions of theming as defined in the literature and then analyze the differences in definitions. The research questions and the aim of Paper II are the results of this analytical process. Although this circular process of the hermeneutic approach is potentially endless, leaving the process is suggested when the researcher reaches saturation, such as when research questions can be satisfactorily crafted or when facing time constraints (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014).

Because the appended research papers in this thesis are context dependent and context independent (Figure 1-1), specific searches in various tourism journals and more general journal searches were performed predominantly through Google Scholar and Oria (BIBSYS, which

grants library resource access to interdisciplinary databases such as Scopus and Web of Science to researchers and students in Norway.) The searches included variations on crucial terms such as "theming," "theme-ing," "thematization," "thematizing," "thematic," and "theme." Often, the terms were searched for in combination with other vital terms, including "tourism," "tourist," "parks," "experience," and so on. Other publications by authors who had published research on theming were checked for relevance. Reference lists in books and research on theming were similarly checked (snowballing or citation tracking, Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). Although the research gathering had a broader scope (including all research both within and outside of tourism), the references included in Table 2, except Sircus (2007), whose context is a broader understanding of themed environments, are to some extent those with contexts more specific to tourism. All referenced research has been downloaded, classified by main topic (e.g., "tourism," "innovation," or "experience economy," and so on), and cataloged if available electronically. Some references only exist as electronic or physical library books. If budget allowed, some books were obtained physically. Organizing and indexing the literature was considered the beginning of generating the body of knowledge (Hart, 1998). Research that defined theming using older references or failed to, at least in part, and interprets these definitions in a unique way, was excluded from the overview. Sometimes the empirical context was themed, and the relation to themes or theming was poorly explained. There is a chance that other relevant research exists, but was not found and included. However, to my knowledge, the research listed is assumed to provide an adequate sample. Finally, research articles that had cited the initial selected research were examined to determine whether they should be included in the selection.

Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2014) present a possible tabular means for mapping and classifying literature for literature reviews. Table 2 shows (in the columns) which materials were chosen for the thesis. Hart (1998, p. 145) explains how mapping and classification describe "what has been done, when it was done, what methods were used, and who did what." For a Ph.D. thesis, Hart (1998) suggests a literature review should function as an analytical synthesis covering "all known literature on the problem," conceptual linking within and across theories, and provide a summative and formative evaluation of previous work on the problem. For this thesis, the tabular literature reviews have been sorted to be intelligible to its readers. Thus, in Table 2, the following is presented in each subsequent column. Although Table 2 is not author-centric (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014), the authors are presented first. Second, the primary focus of the article is offered. Third, the type of study is presented. Fourth, the

empirical contexts, whether the research had a provider or visitor perspective, and country/region are presented. Whether the study had chiefly a visitor or provider perspective was assessed based on a holistic evaluation of each article. This holistic evaluation meant that if the article's focus was mainly related to the *visitor experience*, it was assigned a visitor perspective. If the article's focus was mainly on the *providers' benefits*, it was assigned a provider perspective. In some articles, both perspectives are included. These are labeled as mixed. The column containing empirical context, perspectives, and country or region is provided to show relevance to tourism research. Fifth, to the extent that they can be summarized, central findings are given. Sixth and finally, how themes and theming are related in each article are briefly described.

Author(s), (Year)	Primary focus	Type of study	Empirical context(s), perspectives, country/region	Central finding(s)	Finding(s)/idea(s)
McClung (1991)	Identifies influencing factors in the selection of a theme park, profiles visitors/nonvisitors, analyzes preferred attractions and appropriate themes.	Quantitative (conceptual, review)	Theme parks, visitor, USA.	Visitors prefer family, thrill, and leisure attractions, nonvisitors only family and leisure. Visitors prefer learning, wet/wild, and botany as themes, nonvisitors learning, and botany.	Preferences for different themes are considered a factor that draw visitors to theme parks.
Davis (1996)	The current scope of the global theme park development and its impact on cultural and mass consumer development.	Qualitative (review)	Theme park industry, provider, international.	Shows how theme parks work as a medium of mass communication.	Amusement parks become theme parks by making film and television (corporate owner's proprietary images) spatial, textural, and kinetic. Theming is the totalizing effort of highly coordinated surface stylistic characteristics, and more importantly, the meanings are centrally produced and nonconflictual, a framework of overall uniformity of message.
Zins (1998)	Uses psychographics to find which consumers choose theme hotels.	Quantitative	Theme hotels, visitor, Austria.	Age and sex have highest direct effect on hotel theme choice, then (in descending order of influence) lifestyle, personal values, benefits, and vacation style dimensions.	Hotel themes are understood as the benefits offered to segments (special-interest groups).
Beardsworth and Bryman (1999)	Provides a working definition of a themed restaurant.	Qualitative	Themed restaurants, provider, international.	The signifiers of what constitutes a themed restaurant, theming categories.	A restaurant is themed when "clothed" in a readily recognizable narrative drawn from popular culture.
Wong and Cheung (1999)	Examines the importance of the theme in the marketing of theme parks.	Quantitative	Theme parks, visitor, Asia.	A "nature" theme is considered the most popular/essential for a mass-market approach. Combining different themes may appeal to specific niches depending on their demographic profile.	The central theme (general idea or personality), the subthemes, and the transitional (periodical events) make up a theme park and distinguish it from an amusement park.
Wanhill (2002)	Reviews historical aspects of Nordic theme parks, model key design, economic and financial aspects.	Mixed	Theme parks, provider, Nordic countries.	The most suitable commercial practice to minimize the risk of failure is to follow a market → imagescape → location path to exploit visitor attendances.	Theming gives meaning to attractions, facilities, and infrastructure, tells a story, provides entertainment value, individuality, product differentiation, competitive advantage, perception of quality, memorability.
Chang (2007)	Develops a method for measuring theme park visitors' perceptions of the level of newness of physical surrounding and explores the effects this has on repurchase shopping values and behavior among visitors.	Quantitative (PhD thesis)	Theme parks, visitor, Taiwan.	The greater the level of newness of physical surroundings (spatial aesthetics, placement, décor, and functionality, and point-of-purchase), the higher the level of shopping values (utilitarian and hedonic value) and actual repurchase behavior.	Themes are what make amusement parks into theme parks.
Pikkemaat and Schuckert (2007)	Analyzes which factors are essential for the management and success of theme parks.	Qualitative	Theme parks, provider, Austria, Germany, Switzerland.	"Quality" and "safety and security" ranked highest (9.0 on 1–10 scale) (continuity and theming second lowest, 7.3).	The core theme distinguishes theme parks from amusement parks. The central theme becomes the main part of the experience.
Sircus (2007)	Examines invented places and place-making.	Book chapter	Themed environments, mixed, international.	All places are invented. However, successful ones are planned, designed, and programmed with a story to make them more meaningful and accessible.	Connects "theme" with "story," considers theme the overriding "big idea" that connects the story/stories told, establishes the context in which the story provides the content.

Author(s), (Year)	Primary focus	Type of study	Empirical context(s), perspectives, country/region	Central finding(s)	Finding(s)/idea(s)
Ulusoy and Firat (2009)	Shows the importance of incorporating visuals into research on *thematization*.	Qualitative	Cities, theme parks, tourist destinations, visitor, USA.	Visuals, especially signs and words, enhance other senses.	Use of visuals in research considered natural for acquiring deep insights into the phenomenon (of thematization).
Park et al. (2009)	Identifies the major factors that motivate visitors to attend theme parks in Orlando, Florida, and segment visitors accordingly.	Quantitative	Theme parks, visitor, USA.	Fantasy and myth were the themes that motivated theme park visitors the most.	Theming is an effective strategy for theme parks to distinguish themselves from each other. The theme is considered the most critical factor of the park experience.
Gothelf, Herbaux, and Verardi (2010)	Identifies the determinants of entry prices and attendance.	Quantitative	Theme parks, mixed, Europe.	Develops a typology of parks based on high and low quality and theme.	"Theme" is used as a variable summarizing the degree of theming of a park ranging from 0 to 10, based on the number of themed attractions (has a particular story or set), that the park has a well-defined theme or image (represented by a specific character or has a well recognizable theme), and proportion of themed areas (designed with specific or having a specific character as the theme).
Weaver (2009)	Addresses previously unexamined connections between nontourism products and vacations.	Qualitative	Trade journals, provider, international.	Conceptually linking tourism's symbolic meaning (through tourism-related sweepstake prizes) to the promotion of everyday, nontourism products (frequently purchased consumer goods).	Themed spaces are meant to attract and enchant consumers by evoking a set of meanings to inspire the purchase of goods and experiences. Mentions many sources of themes. Theming also provides coherence and can be considered a scheme for selling. Theming is a consequence of business competition (saturated markets, marketers seeking advantages).
Urry and Larsen (2011)	Explains the relation between the tourist gaze, theming, malls, contemporary architecture.	Book section	Themed environments, provider, international.	Observations of themed environments variously explain different aspects of theming in tourism, such as how more realistic themes become more widespread because of technological development or that postmodernist architecture strives to achieve ambiance.	Primarily relies on previous assumptions on theming, however: - Considers theming to be an aspect of contemporary architecture - Theming revolves around the tourist gaze - Themed environments stimulate visually through spectacular and expected and familiar signs - Uses hypersensuous stimuli to create experiences
Xiao et al. (2013)	Investigates the importance and performance (guest satisfaction) of hotel theme elements (attributes).	Quantitative	Theme hotels, visitor, China.	Guests were generally more willing to pay a higher price for theme hotels than for nontheme hotels. General, nonthemed elements (or attributes) were still considered more important than those that were themed.	The servicescape's tangible and intangible aspects can be centered on unique themes to design and create an attractive alternative (to standardized, undifferentiated alternatives) with a robust thematic atmosphere offering a memorable experience. This experience can be considered a competitive advantage.
Waldrep (2013)	Explains how theming in Las Vegas works and compares with other themed places.	Qualitative (book section)	Theme hotels, provider, US.	Las Vegas lacks narratives and meta-themes and does not offer experiences (like Disney) but rather a search for the feeling of a middle-class life.	Theming a tool to increase gambling, a derivative of real places, but not for the enjoyment of the places.
Hung (2015)	Develop a measurement scale for normative expectations of religiously motivated travelers to help hotel managers create a unique religious hotel experience for hotel guests.	Quantitative	Religiously themed hotels, mixed, China.	A measure for normative expectations of travelers seeking Buddhism-themed hotels.	Theming is a generic term for distinct features being reflected by a product/service. Coherence is a crucial feature of theming that enables association among different products/services and enables products/services to have a storyline and a unique image.

Author(s), (Year)	Primary focus	Type of study	Empirical context(s), perspectives, country/region	Central finding(s)	Finding(s)/idea(s)
Wassler et al. (2015)	Understand concepts behind hotel theming in China.	Qualitative	Themed hotels, provider, China.	Western paradigms are less applicable to the Chinese theme hotel market. Chinese theme hotel guests have different tastes than Western guests that need to be considered to develop future theme hotels.	Considers theming a marketing tool (for hotels) that plays on experience factors for customers.
Lillestol, Timothy, and Goodman (2015)	Provide a model of strategies employed in the theme park industry from both a tourism and business perspective.	Mixed methods	Theme parks, visitor, USA.	The largest US-based theme parks utilize strategies of value, uniqueness, niche markets, innovation variety, and quality.	Themes are part of the variety strategy for theme parks.
Beames and Brown (2017)	Explain "Disneyization" as a theoretical framework for examining leisure experiences.	Qualitative (book chapter)	Ski slope inside a large shopping mall, provider, United Arab Emirates.	Leisure settings such as restaurants, pubs, theme parks.	According to Bryman (2004), theming is defined as an overall narrative that imbues an experience.
Weaver (2017)	Discuss how the ocean is represented in connection with the commercial practices of the cruise industry.	Qualitative (book chapter)	Cruise ships, provider, international.	The representations are contradictory (contrast nature versus exploitation) and diverse.	Theming is a response to homogeneity, and growth and acceptance of themed spaces are driven by the desire for meaning and profit.
Ali, Kim, Li, and Jeon (2018)	Assess visitor experience in theme parks and their effect on delight, satisfaction, and loyalty.	Quantitative	Theme parks, visitor, Malaysia.	The physical setting, interaction with staff, and other customers impact customer delight and satisfaction. Customer delight influences satisfaction and loyalty.	Theme parks are the context and are considered elaborate environments that provide hedonic services and experiential products (entertaining activities performed by staff).

Table 2. Literature review of theming from either a provider or visitor perspective

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In summary, a review of 21 studies published between 1991 and 2018 in Table 2 reveals a nearly equal share of qualitative and quantitative studies, with two using mixed methods, in varied empirical tourist contexts. Furthermore, theming is seldom the focus of the study. Table 2 exposes several gaps in knowledge of theme factors and theming dimensions in experience-based tourism, which are related to the knowledge gaps in section 1.2. The five initial studies (Beardsworth & Bryman, 1999; Davis, 1996; McClung, 1991; Wong & Cheung, 1999; Zins, 1998) do not integrate this thesis' experience perspective because it was first introduced in 1998 and disseminated and adopted after that year (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 1999). Of the selected studies, the experience perspective first appears in 2002 (Wanhill). While some studies do include research on theme factors, these are commonly not researched as part of what constitutes a *themed* environment. The themed physical setting is viewed as essential, but the theming itself is rarely in focus.

Furthermore, theming dimensions are often examined one at a time and rarely connected to theming itself (e.g., Chang, 2007; Sircus, 2007). Studies that either entirely or partly focus on theming as a phenomenon are sporadic, few, and far apart. Good examples of the opposite are, for instance, Fırat and Ulusoy (2009), Weaver (2009), Waldrep (2013), and Wassler et al. (2015). Ten of the 21 studies adopt a provider perspective, and nine that of a visitor perspective. A mixed perspective approach, which applies both visitor and provider perspectives, is infrequent, appearing only three times in the selected research (Gothelf et al., 2010; Hung, 2015; Sircus, 2007).

Moreover, while several purposes for theming are provided, these are commonly suggested based on the authors' ideas and less rooted in the empirical material (for a more thorough examination, see Table 5 in section 2.5.2). A striking similarity between the studies in the review is that most tend to frequently focus on theme parks (11 studies) and themed hotels (four studies) as empirical contexts. The themed restaurant has also received increased attention as an empirical context (Lukas, 2016b). However, this is the focus of only one of the studies in the selected research. The frequency of recurring empirical contexts shows that the nuances that are revealed are context dependent. While the various empirical contexts are prominent and usual places in which to examine theming in experience-based tourism, the approach leaves room for exploring other visitor venues that may be themed, such as escape rooms, airports, cruise ships, museums, guided tours, or even products (e.g., Weaver, 2009). In other words, many studies use themed tourist attractions at destinations as their empirical context. Drawing out nuances between venues matters (Lukas, 2016b), especially to context-independent

findings. Applicability of what theming is and intends to communicate between a theme park, a cruise ship, a museum, a health spa, and even a religious worship site varies. However, all the spaces are created for tourists and are often themed. Furthermore, because of touristification and dedifferentiation of tourist spaces and consumption, theming is spreading into venues both within experience-based tourism and outside of it (Bryman, 2004; del Romero Renau, 2018; Urry & Larsen, 2011). If we suppose that nuances between venues and context matter, then established objectives for theming will vary in empirical contexts even within experience-based tourism. Thus, Table 2 reveals gaps in knowledge on why theming is used in experience-based tourism because few if any studies delve into the question of "why theme?," especially across venues and contexts.

Concerning the use of previous assumptions about theming, two patterns emerged in the studies selected for review. First, the exact definitions tend to reappear using the references from, for instance, the four significant works summarized before the review. Gottdiener (2001) is a typical example. However, whether his book has become the field's classic tome or if it was "simply the first" to delve into the phenomenon at length remains unclear. Second, which may be related to the various empirical contexts, theming is commonly seen to be conducive to selling products and services (e.g., Waldrep, 2013), to the experience of the themed environment (e.g., Pikkemaat & Schuckert, 2007), or to both (e.g., Weaver, 2009). These distinctions bear semblance to the distinctions drawn by Pine and Gilmore (2017), especially between a customer experience and the experience as a separate economic offering. The first perspective focuses on products and services as what is being sold, and theming becomes a tool for improving their sale. This perspective has implications for how innovation is viewed, as traditional innovation is product centric (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). In the second perspective, theming turns services into experiences (Gilmore & Pine, 2002), and products and services become instruments in the orchestration of the actual product being sold: the environment. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003) emphasize how the environment is crucial for experience innovation (see section 2.3).

This thesis initially revealed two related gaps. First, there is a need for more research focusing on theming as the central idea for designing places and settings, including contributing "theme factors" (or "outward manifestations,") because theming is often simply considered a component or dimension of a themed environment. Second, a need for more thorough research for why theming and themes appeal in tourism was identified. These gaps correspond well with one of the aims of the thesis: to deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism.

The review of the 21 studies underlines this. Theming dimensions should receive more scholarly attention. To get a fuller picture of what theming is within experience-based tourism, research may need to focus on a wider range of tourism venues than the commonly used empirical contexts of theme parks and restaurants. Also, adopting a mixed perspective approach (both visitor and provider) should likely be used more frequently.

To summarize, this thesis emphasizes experience-based tourism concepts when defining theming. Ultimately, clear demarcations are rarely found despite theming being debated across various fields (Li et al., 2020). Theming may be context dependent, which partly explains this lack of distinction on how theming adds value to facilitating experiences. What is objectively familiar across themed contexts may be understood through further multidisciplinary and empirical research on theming. Thus, for precision in this thesis, theming in experience-based tourism is defined as the provider's staging and conveying of an idea, a concept, or a narrative— a *theme*—through the consistent, coherent, and comprehensive application of physical and nonphysical cues to the environment, to completely alter a visitor's experience and perception of reality, time, and space, and create memories (Bryman, 2004; Muñoz et al., 2006; Pine & Gilmore, 2019).

This section detailed how the concept of theming has been interpreted in the literature. In the next section, the relation between theming and experience-based tourism is presented in more detail.

2.5 Experience-based tourism and theming from different perspectives

Sections 2.1 and 2.2 establish how experience-based tourism is a tourist offering with a high degree of intangible value and differentiation linked to "specific themes" as perceived by the customers in a particular time and at a particular place (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015). These places are commonly themed experiencescapes (Mossberg, 2007; O'Dell & Billing, 2006). Tourist experiences also require a host and are intended to create positive memories (Lashley, 2008; Uriely, 2005). In other words, experience-based tourism often involves offering tourists experiences in commonly themed experiencescapes. Section 2.4 discusses the concept of theming as found and interpreted in the existing research literature and provides an overview of theming distinctions in Table 2. For clarification, this section will present how theme factors, theming dimensions, and theming purposes fit within experience-based tourism from visitor and provider perspectives.

2.5.1 Theme factors and theming dimensions from a visitor perspective

The discourse on theming revolves around the division of two broad issues: *theming components* (or factors, see examples in Table 3) and *theming dimensions* (see Table 4). It is reasonable to believe this is because theming is about constructing both a physical and a conceptual space. Therefore, these two issues are crucial for the thesis, reflected both in the knowledge gaps (section 1.2) and the first two research questions (**RQ1** and **RQ2**). This section addresses these two most prominent issues on theming in experience-based tourism. Table 3 and Table 4 result from a similar developmental process, as Table 2 described in section 2.4.2. In other words, when I first began reading and analyzing research and other literature on theming in 2014, I noticed the division of the material theming components and immaterial theming dimensions. Thus, I systematically began making notes of which they were, categorizing them, and noting their sources. Over the years, this has led to the extensive overviews found in Table 3 and Table 4. Although several theme factors and dimensions are listed in the tables, not all of them have been researched. Thus, to address these gaps, the source columns on the right have been named "Representative literature."

To explain, theming relates to the material (e.g., building materials, furniture, and landscaping) because theming is conventionally about constructing a physical space following a theme. While "a theme" remains an abstract concept, for a theme to be translated into something other people can experience, *theming* is needed. Thus, the act of theming is, perhaps apart from the virtual space, a process that includes planning and the physical act of implementation. The visitor perspective refers to how the focus of the research relates mainly to the visitor experience. The research in Table 2 with a visitor perspective focuses mainly on what motivates visitors, theme selection preferences, and theme elements (analogous to theme factors). Hence, the visitor perspective is the chosen focus of this section.

In this thesis, the tangible and intangible (often atmospheric or "ethereal," Kozinets et al., 2002) factors that contribute to the themed environments are called *theme factors* (Paper I). Theme factors are the "outward manifestations" or expressions of the theme in an environment. The factors are in both the various academic and nonacademic literature referred to as *components, physical evidence, features, atmospherics, simulacra, cues, clues, nodes, indicators, elements, attributes, signals*, and *motifs*. This correlation between the words is essentially semiotics or the theory of signification (Martin & Ringham, 2000). In addition to the physical/nonphysical dimension, the symbolic expression level also adds to the factors' dimensionality. Sometimes components act as the vehicle or canvas for a symbol (e.g., a marble slab with engraved Roman

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letters), and sometimes they are the literal symbols (e.g., a statue of a Roman god holding mythical and representational objects). Often it is difficult to separate the two, as objects; however, given time, they can change from being functional to becoming symbolic (e.g., a traditional national costume historically worn because it is made of the most widely available, inexpensive materials and fabric). Thus, factors vary in tangibility and symbolic interpretation. According to Martin and Ringham (2000), the American school of semiotics is often concerned with categorizing signs, whereas European semiotics focus more on "the existence of universal structures that underlie and give rise to meaning."

An example may assist in explaining the difference between theme factors and theming dimensions, as the terms may, in some research, be used interchangeably. When entering an old house, the lighting, building materials (e.g., wood, bricks, tile floors), scent, décor, and various symbols are all different *theme factors*. However, they also influence a visitor's perception of, for instance, how authentic the house appears—whether the house is actually an original old house from perhaps the 1700s, or if it is a house that is built to *appear* to be from that time period. Thus, this authenticity is an example of a theming dimension. Theme factors contribute to theming and building a physical space. Theming dimensions help construct the conceptual themed space in a visitor's mind.

Theme factors

In this thesis, theme factors refer to the tangible and intangible factors that contribute to the perception of a themed tourist environment. Table 3 lists in alphabetical order the many associated theme factors that have been suggested or researched in various studies mainly related to tourism or hospitality. Just how Table 2 was developed, Table 3 results from the ideas from the project proposal from 2014. A general model that was used as a point of departure were the environmental dimensions from Bitner's (1992) servicescape model. However, this model stems from the service-oriented paradigm and does not include Pine and Gilmore's experience perspective, which emerged some years later. Furthermore, the lists of "ambient conditions", "space/function", and "signs, symbols & artifacts" were not exhaustive, and the paper has no distinct connection to theming. Therefore, I began the pursuit for a more extensive list of environmental dimensions specific to themed environments. Another example is the project development guide by the Themed Entertainment Association (2007), which mentions many environmental factors. However, the guide is very focused on shows and attractions, and does not encompass the broader scope of themed tourism environments that are the focus of this thesis. I began gathering theme factors as a "side activity" (not unlike the method pursued

by Hjalager, 2015) during the analytical reading of the various theming literature, systematically noting every time such a factor was mentioned in the text and its reference in a separate document. Now and again, certain factors would reappear or be mentioned with synonyms words. I would then assess whether they carried the same meaning and add the word to the same factor or as a separate factor. The theme factor list in Table 3 stems from this process. It has been reduced and edited for clarity and relevance for this thesis. The review of Table 3 aims to show how the researcher developed an ability to identify key concepts of theming in experience-based tourism (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). This table categorizes the manifestations or "signs" of theming in semiotic terms, including symbols, images, objects, behaviors, practices, and more (Brannen, 2004; Martin & Ringham, 2000). The theme factors are listed in the first column on the left, and the selected studies in which they appear in the next column. The following column shows the aim of study, and the final column to the right shows the study's connection to tourism and hospitality.

Theme factor	Representative literature	Aim of study	Connection to tourism and hospitality
Activities with guest participation (e.g., guided walks, hikes, tours, excursions, self-guided trails)	Xiao et al. (2013)	To identify the key theme elements perceived to be most important to guests, explore how satisfied guests are with the theme hotel's performance of those elements, and compare the perceived performance and importance to those elements with other well-recognized, general (non-theme) attributes to find out how much theme elements really matter in shaping guests' experiences in theme hotels	Uses themed hotels as empirical context
Architecture, area décor and design (exterior and interior), utilities (e.g., a garbage can)	Beardsworth and Bryman (1999)	To discuss the various perspectives on theming as a cultural device, and argue the techniques of qualification by focusing on the themed restaurant and its place in the contemporary cultural landscape	Uses themed restaurants as empirical context but acknowledges theming to be a contemporary trend for theme parks, hotels, shopping malls, and casinos.
	Clavé (2007)	To define and explain the development and characteristics of the theme park industry on a global level, approach analytically the role theme parks play in the social construction of space, and view the main operative, strategic, and conceptual aspects needed for developing and managing theme parks	Uses the global theme park industry as empirical context
	Milman (2010)	To provide a general overview of the theme park and the attraction industry	Uses the global theme park industry as empirical context
	Tasci and Milman (2017)	To identify the experiential consumption dimensions in the context of theme parks and develop a measurement scale to identify visitor experiences while visiting a theme park	Uses theme parks as empirical context
	Themed Entertainment Association (2007)	To establish and develop a standard set of project guidelines for the experience design and themed entertainment industries	The Themed Entertainment Association (TEA) is an international non-profit member association that includes members from, e.g, theme parks, museums, and zoos
	Urry and Larsen (2011)	To investigate and analyze pleasure, holidays, tourism, travel, how and people leave their place of work and residence, and the consumption of in some sense unnecessary goods and services	The book is about tourism and travel
	Wilson (1994)	To analyze how the Disney corporation produces nationalism	The essay uses the theme park Epcot as its subject of study
	Xiao et al. (2013)	Same as above	Same as above
Art, artifacts (an object made by a human being, typically one of cultural or historical interest)	Beardsworth and Bryman (1999)	Same as above	Same as above
	Weaver (2017)	To discuss how the representations of the ocean are intimately connected to the cruise industry's commercial practices	Uses the cruise industry as the empirical context
Atmosphere	Geissler and Rucks (2011)	To identify significant factors that influence customer evaluations of and satisfaction with overall theme park experience	Uses a theme park as its empirical context
	Han and Ryu (2009)	To investigate the relationship between the physical environment, price perception, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty	The study uses restaurants as its empirical base, however, the study is published in the Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research

Theme factor	Representative literature	Aim of study	Connection to tourism and hospitality
	MacLaurin and MacLaurin (2000)	To examine the theme restaurant industry in Singapore, how consumers perceive two Eastern-themed restaurants and two eateries based on Western themes, and analyze the implications of these findings and provide recommendations to developers and investors in theme restaurants	Uses themed restaurants as its empirical context, these are however linked with Singapore's tourism industry
	Slåtten, Mehmetoglu, Svensson, and Sværi (2009)	To focus on what types of atmospheric experiences emotionally touch visitors in a winter park	A theme park is the empirical context
Attractions, rides	Davis (1996)	To show how theme parks works as a medium of mass communication	Uses theme parks as its subject of study
	Milman (2010)	Same as above	Same as above
	Wong and Cheung (1999)	To identify and describe a distinct set of theme types and attributes in a theme park, and examine the relationship between visitors' motivation for visiting theme parks and theme preferences	Uses theme parks as its empirical context
Costumed personnel, uniforms	Milman (2010); Themed Entertainment Association (2007); Wilson (1994); Xiao et al (2013)	Same as above	Same as above
Food services	Milman (2010); Tasci and Milman (2017); Themed Entertainment Association (2007); Weaver (2017); Xiao et al. (2013)	Same as above	Same as above
Images	Wood and Muñoz (2007a)	To examine ethnic-themed restaurants and the interplay between the media and the consumers' cultural expectations of ethnic restaurants	Uses themed restaurants as its empirical context, the study is published in the journal *Tourism and Hospitality Research*
Iconic buildings, structures (weenies/wienies), and places	Botterill (1997)	To evaluate Disney's model of the contemporary theme park by tracing its genealogy, and better understand what theme parks are, what they have been, what they might have been, what they displaced, and why they exist	Uses theme parks are the empirical context
	Mannheim (2002)	To examine and analyze the history, physical planning, the architecture and construction of building concepts, public and private funding, philosophies and policies, and development of Disney's theme park Epcot	The theme park Epcot is used as the subject of study
	Richards (2010)	To trace the development of creative tourism as a new form of cultural tourism, and outline the different forms that creative tourism can take	Uses tourism development as its empirical context
	Themed Entertainment Association (2007); Urry and Larsen (2011)	Same as above	Same as above
	Walt Disney Imagineering (1991)	To document a workshop on how Disney (Walt Disney Imagineering) does business, including quotations of statements of company philosophy concerning what and how things are done particularly in Disney's theme parks	Part of "Tourism and Travel Commons", an open access full-text scholarly articles from the Digital Commons Network
Landscaping (including trees, flowers, plants)	Milman (2010); Tasci and Milman (2017); Themed Entertainment Association (2007); Wilson (1994)	Same as above	Same as above
	Young and Riley (2002)	To examine past and current, public, and private, subtly and obviously themed landscapes in North America, Asia, and Europe, and respond under what conditions theme park landscapes emerged, how they entered mass culture, why they are popular, how they are connected to the social order, what functions they service, and other questions	Links theme parks with landscaping, and uses these as subject of study
Lighting	Themed Entertainment Association (2007)	Same as above	Same as above

Theme factor	Representative literature	Aim of study	Connection to tourism and hospitality
Merchandising, souvenirs	Davis (1996); Milman (2010); Themed Entertainment Association (2007)	Same as above	Same as above
Music, background music (BGM)	Tasci and Milman (2017); Themed Entertainment Association (2007); Xiao et al. (2013)	Same as above	Same as above
People	Firat and Ulusoy (2011)	To study the phenomenon of thematization, to see whether it's a contemporary phenomenon or if it has been around for a long time	Used themed environments particularly from tourist destinations as empirical context
Services (all, other) that impact guest experience,	Ali et al. (2018)	To examine the effect of customer experiences (both social and physical) on their delight, satisfaction with and loyalty to Malaysian theme parks	Uses theme parks as empirical context
employees (as part of the production process)	Milman (2010); Xiao et al. (2013)	Same as above	Same as above
Shows (choreography, stunts)	Davis (1996); Milman (2010); Themed Entertainment Association (2007)	Same as above	Same as above
Smell, aromas, and scents	Clavé (2007); Tasci and Milman (2017); Xiao et al. (2013)	Same as above	Same as above
Talks, scripts, public address announcements (PA)	Wilson (1994)	Same as above	Same as above
Values, ideology, morality, national identity (propaganda)	Tasci and Milman (2017)	Same as above	Same as above
	Zhang and Shan (2016)	To identify areas of concentration of theme park articles in key Chinese journals and reveal gaps in research related to that field	Uses theme park research as its empirical context
Web pages (marketing), TV, technology	Themed Entertainment Association (2007); Weaver (2017)	Same as above	Same as above

Table 3. Overview of associated theme factors

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When reviewing the theme factors in Table 3, it becomes clear that although theme factors have been suggested in various studies, many have rarely been researched as part of a themed environment. Instead, they are often listed and mentioned as *expected* components of themed environments or attractions (e.g., Borghini et al., 2009; Kozinets et al., 2002). Lighting, for instance, as part of a physical environment or servicescape, has naturally been extensively researched in various ways. However, as part of a themed environment, research on lighting as a theme factor is either arbitrary or nonexistent. The aims of the studies reveal that several studies attempt to provide overviews and developments of industries, such as a national theme park industry or a theme restaurant industry. What this means for theme factors is that they are mentioned only arbitrarily

Themed Entertainment Association (2007), for instance, provides a wide-ranging list of theme factors for developing and designing themed attractions. Many theme factors were grouped because of their innate similarities, while others were kept as distinct categories despite sharing some parallels. Atmosphere, for instance, is arguably a broad category that may include ambient factors such as music and scent. However, different theme factors are kept as more refined categories in this thesis to show their broad range.

The theme factors in Table 3 reveal an extensive list of the many material theming components suggested in various studies. They vary in degrees of tangibility and symbolic interpretation, with several overlaps in the real world (e.g., people, services, and costumes). Furthermore, the review suggests there are few limits to what can be used to theme environments. Additionally, there are close relations between the factors and the theming dimensions, both as separate groups and within groups. A multisensory experience would, for example, infer the use of (i) smell, aromas, and scents, (ii) lighting and architecture, (iii) food, (iv) background music, and (v) artifacts, utilities, and merchandise. The time and space, or chronotopical dimensions, have ramifications for selecting theme factors for a themed environment and for how it may influence the perception of authenticity. However, it is reasonable to assume that not all factors are crucial to all themed environments. Using the example of themed landscapes, landscapes are an arbitrary part of a themed cruise ship or airplane the same way they are intentional and curated for a theme park or an outdoor open-air museum. A vital factor such as restroom facilities could be a hygiene factor in one environment, whereas in another environment, restrooms may be part of the themed experience.

Although this section distinguishes between theme factors as "more material" and theming dimensions as "more immaterial," theme factors can similarly be deemed as either more or less

tangible. Stories and narratives are arguably less tangible as a theme factor compared with souvenirs and plants. Some theme factors border on abstract and ephemeral, such as values, ideology, morality, national identity, names, and symbols. However, they are part of a themed experience, for instance, during a national holiday, in a religious theme park, or in a war museum. These examples point to degrees of material tangibility, symbolic representation, and mental imagery that display the intersection of themes as symbolic abstractions in people's minds and their manifestations both mentally and physically. A national holiday may evoke images of flags, fireworks, specific foods, and people celebrating. However, it may also be associated with democratic values, a belief in solidarity, a sense of community, names of historical figures, happenings, and other abstract and intangible factors. In other words, which theme factors drive a themed experience may be context dependent. The aims of the studies also reveal this as some are rather specific on context, studying theme elements important to guests in, e.g., themed hotels, a winter (theme) park, or even Disney's Epcot theme park in Florida. It is reasonable to assume that more specific the context, the less generalizable the conclusions. However, these are the studies that are likely to provide the most "theme factors" for further studies along the line of Paper I. Some studies specifically look at the meaning of theming, such as discussing theming as cultural device or if it is a contemporary phenomenon. Finally, some studies try to link the themed environments to for instance satisfaction, price perception, and customer loyalty. The low variation of empirical contexts is unusual. There could be several reasons for this. First, the variation among themed environments in an experience-based tourism context may be low. There are for example different kinds of theme parks, different kinds of themed hotels, and different kinds of theme restaurants. However, the variation is not big enough to be of interest to most researchers given the specific context. Second, theming and themed environments receive inadequate attention in research for many reasons, such as being "places unworthy of scientific interest" (see 1.1 and 1.2). Therefore, there may be few authors except for a few (e.g., Milman or Weaver) who will continuously provide and build the scientific field of theming within experience-based tourism. Some authors (e.g., Wood and Muñoz) have provided the field with crucial studies but have not continued to work specifically on themed environments for years.

Theming dimensions

In this thesis, theming dimensions refer to the abstract, nonphysical, and intangible aspects of theming in experience-based tourism. Table 4 lists, in alphabetical order, eight theming dimensions suggested and researched in different studies. The theming dimensions are listed in

the left column, and the right column shows the selected studies in which they appear. Lukas (2016b, p. 7) suggests six "simplified" dimensions of theming. However, these dimensions refer to which expressive direction themed consumer spaces may take (e.g., abstract or postmodern), thus differing from how dimensions are understood in this thesis.

Theming dimension	Representative literature	Aim of study	How the author(s) categorize the dimension/argue for their importance
Authenticity (perceived)	Wood and Muñoz (2007b)	To examine ethnic-themed restaurants and the interplay between the media and consumers' cultural expectations to ethnic restaurants	The dimension is a desired attribute used in the foodservice industry, not necessarily 'true' but often "good enough" if only presented as an 'illusion'; authenticity is "locally constructed" and a "subjective construct" with potential important implications for marketers in the tourism and hospitality industries
Immersion	Blumenthal and Jensen (2019)	To explore the relationship between the immersion process and the experiencescape in which the process takes place	Understanding the connection between the immersion process and the experiencescape is vital as it enables experience providers to facilitate greater immersive experiences
	Mossberg, Hanefors, and Hansen (2014)	To explore guides' basic roles, their performances in enclavized, secure and thematized context, and discuss specific performances with the potential for co-creation of extraordinary experiences and facilitate tourists' immersion	Immersion is crucial to experiential marketing, tourism research, and connected to extraordinary experiences; if prerequisites (enclavization, security, thematization plus extra facilitation) are met and guide performance is above basic there is a higher chance of co-creation and immersion (tourist becoming one with the experience)
Multisensory experience	Agapito, Mendes, and Valle (2013)	To contribute to the conceptualization of the sensory dimension of tourist experiences by discussing its theoretical underpinnings.	Human senses are vital to the individual's perception of the world, sensory stimuli influence consumer behavior, and places and environments are multi-sensorial providing multi-sensorial encounters, therefore important to destination marketing and management
	Agapito, Valle, and Mendes (2014)	To identify meaningful sensory-informed themes by analyzing sensory tourist experiences in Southwest Portugal, segment rural tourists using these sensory-informed themes, analyze the connection between activities and tourist segments, understand and analyze this/these connection(s)	Sensory stimuli can create and market visually attractive and appealing competitive, sustainable and succesful tourist destinations; the sensory dimension is key to engaging and co-creating consumer value
	Urry and Larsen (2011)	To investigate and analyze pleasure, holidays, tourism, travel, how and people leave their normal place of work and residence, and the consumption of in some sense unnecessary goods and services	Themed environments primarily stimulate the visual sense through "spectacular but also predictable and well-known signs," and use "hyper-sensuous experiences" (where, e.g., offensive smells are eliminated)
Novelty (and nostalgia)	Ariffin (2007)	To define the novelty construct in the corporate meeting tourism perspective and develop a preliminary instrument to measure novelty preference for corporate meeting destination choice	Novelty is a vital motive for leisure choice and decision-making in a tourism context

Theming dimension	Representative literature	Aim of study	How the author(s) categorize the dimension/argue for their importance
	Chang (2007)	To develop a method for measuring theme park visitors' perception of level of newness of physical surroundings, and explore the effect of level of newness of physical surroundings on theme park visitors' repurchase shopping values and actual repurchase behavior	New physical surroundings can refresh consumers' experience, enhance service firm's marketing performance, attract consumers/shoppers, and entice them to purchase a product
	Weinstein (1992)	To present the origins and development of amusement parks in the US focusing on how Disneyland borrowed from or built upon Coney Island patterns of amusement to create a new popular cultural form	New parks presented a variety of attractions that appealed to all classes and crowds, especially Disneyland which used television to create awareness for his new and innovative park (clean, safe, friendly for the entire family)
Orderliness	Weaver (2017)	To discuss how the representations of the ocean are intimately connected to the cruise industry's commercial practices	The dimension of orderliness ("shipshape" standard of tidiness) is an aspect of maritime tradition which complements ocean-based theming
Stories/storytelling	Moscardo (2010)	To integrate concepts and issues from research into both the role of stories and themes in tourism and factors that contribute to positive tourist evaluations, thus improving the understanding of tourist experiences	Stories are a core element in human cognition and social interaction, and critical to understanding tourist experiences
	Mossberg (2008)	To provide insight into «stories about a story», when businesses or parts of businesses (such as hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, or events or destinations) are built around that story	Storytelling creates a holistic image of a concept, shape the brand, and generate an experience in the servicescape for consumers; servicescapes can tell stories and stimulate imagination, emotionally involve and amuse consumers, hence managers want to plan and control the servicescape
Technology (as an acceleration tool for theming)	Urry and Larsen (2011)	As mentioned above	The authors consider the technological ability to create new themes to appear "more real than the original"
Time and space (chronotope)	Urry and Larsen (2011)		The authors claim theming concerns "importing places and stimulating imaginative places elsewhere," where "the first kind of theme is dividing up countries in terms of new spatial divisions new place names"

Table 4. Overview of suggested and researched theming dimensions

Unlike the theme factors, the theming dimensions have been, to some extent, more subject to research. However, the experience-based tourism research literature does not mention many theming dimensions the way they are understood in this thesis. As mentioned in section 2.4.1, authenticity is one of the most discussed dimensions. This may in part be because of the place the dimension holds in tourism research and discourse in general (likely beginning with MacCannell, 1973), but also because the theming often has been deemed inauthentic (Lukas, 2007). However, as Table 4 shows, authenticity in themed tourist settings has, with only one reference, not received much attention in experience-based tourism research. Immersion as a theming dimension seems to only have received some attention in recent years, the selected research examples being from 2014 and 2019 (now part of a Ph.D. dissertation, Blumenthal, 2021). In fact, of the selected research, the oldest reference is that which introduces novelty as a theming dimension (Weinstein, 1992). A noticeable observation from Table 4 is how there are few consistently repeating literary references for the suggested theming dimensions. For example, Urry and Larsen (2011) recurs only once for the dimensions technology and time and space. This observation underscores the argument from section 2.4.2 that theming dimensions are often examined one at a time. The aims of the studies underpin these observations. Often, they aim to either simply measure physical surroundings newness/novelty, how stories work as foundations for building businesses or parts of businesses (e.g., hotels, tourist attractions, or destinations), or how themes can work for tourist segmentation. Some go deeper into the dimensions, such as attempting to conceptualize the sensory dimension for tourist experiences or how stories can contribute to positive tourist evaluations.

How the author(s) categorize(s) the dimension or argue(s) for their importance provides more insight into each dimension, sometimes connecting them to each other (e.g., immersion and co-creation) or even to theming purposes (e.g., sensory stimuli is crucial to create attractive tourist destinations). However, no clear and discernable pattern emerges from reviewing these arguments. The reasons for this could be that the theming dimensions are more abstract components of a themed environment, and that this makes them harder to distinguish and classify as a collective group of components. Second, as is the argument in 5.1.2, the theming dimensions can be viewed as sets of tools, practices, effects (of theming), processes, or even sensations. This means they would have to be categorized into finer classifications for even deeper comparisons. However, this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Furthermore, there are no comprehensive reviews of theming dimensions in experience-based tourism. Even Table 4 itself is not extensive, listing merely eight dimensions with research spanning 27 years (1992 to 2019). This lack of comprehensive reviews leaves the unfortunate impression that research on theming dimensions is arbitrary and not considered essential to experience-based tourism.

When reviewing Table 3 and Table 4 together, three aspects become apparent.

First, the reviews reveal how infrequently theme factors and theming dimensions have been the foci of tourism research involving theming. Second, the representative literature does not go further back than 1991. Third, while the theme factors may appear numerous in Table 3 (20 theme factor categories), one would expect that in the years since the emergence of the modern-day theme parks (e.g., Disneyland first opened in 1955), the number of theme factors revealed in theming-related research would be much more significant. Fourth, the reviews also echo the review of Table 2 in section 2.4, that theme factors are commonly not researched as part of what creates a themed environment, and theming dimensions are often examined only one at a time. Additionally, theming dimensions are seldom connected to studies of theming as a phenomenon.

Consequently, the lists of theme factors and the theming dimensions are not exhaustive and represent factors and dimensions that have been researched, suggested, or both. It is also not the point of this thesis to find and explain every factor and dimension that could go into and be part of theming.

In conclusion, previous research on theme factors from a visitor's perspective is moderately extensive. However, theme factors' connection to a themed environment is generally conceptual and suggestive rather than rooted in empirical research. Similarly, theming dimensions often suffer the same fate in research. With notable exceptions (e.g., on authenticity, Muñoz & Wood, 2009; Muñoz et al., 2006; Wood & Muñoz, 2007a), theming dimensions are seemingly discussed or researched in contexts and environments that "happen to be themed." These connections do not mean theming is not considered vital to discussing the dimensions. It is merely not intended to drive the understanding of the field of theming forward.

In this section, theme factors and theming dimensions were reviewed and discussed concerning this thesis from a visitor perspective. However, this thesis also aims to deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism from a provider perspective. Thus, the following section therefore reviews theming purposes using this perspective.

2.5.2 Theming purposes from a provider perspective

This thesis aims to deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism from both a visitor and provider perspective. There are several suggested hypothetical purposes for theming in the literature of theming in tourism.

Table 5 provides an overview of suggested and researched theming purposes in alphabetical order in the column on the left, together with examples of representative studies in the column on the right. The theming purposes listed in Table 5 result from a developmental process similar to that described in section 2.4.2 (Table 2). I noticed how different sources seemed to claim numerous and diverging purposes for theming, even when referring to the same related environments. I then began systematically writing these purposes down with their sources between 2014 and 2020 when searching, collecting, reading, and analyzing research related to theming using Google Scholar and Oria/BIBSYS.

Theming purposes	Representative literature	Aim of study	How the author(s) argue for its importance
Brand tangibility and identity	Olson (2004)	To examine how the normal distinctions between the cinematic world and the real world become obscured	Theming is one corporate strategy (media) companies use to create large, immersive placement of products through mostly brand associations (brand placement); it overwhelms the consumer with omnipresence and omnipotence of a given brand identity
	Kozinets et al. (2002)	To conceptualize and explore themed flagship brand stores in terms of the mythological attractiveness of the narratives communicated by their symbolic and physical structure	Theming meant to build or reinforce the image of an existing brand rather than sell a product; themed flagship brand stores generate profit through the sale of entertainment services; consumers seek out the stores to experience the brand in a controlled provider environment
Commodify urban experiences	Amin and Thrift (2002)	To understand power and force with a transhuman approach to the city and examine the rise of new state practices and technologies, and how these fixes and regulate urban life	People are no longer passive consumers of goods and services, instead they perform their presence in specific interactive, aesthetically appealing theatrical, omnisensory, and adaptive environments; it's a way for spaces to compete
Communicate symbolic meaning	Gottdiener (2001)	To show new ways of how cultural processes affect the built environment, show the limits to theming and its sustained popularity, and the development of themed environment in America since the 1960	Themed environments are meant to convey meaning to inhabitants and user through symbolic motifs to cause a response of desire and pleasure
Create standardized audience effects	Adkins (2005)	To identify how relations of property and between people and their labor are being reworked in the new economy characterized by knowledge and service intensity; and to contribute to the project of specifying the dynamics of the new (virtual, reflexive, or network) economy	Theming (theme-ing) is a device that tries to ensure a link between the labor process and audience effects (creation of cultural value)
Culture representation	Ebster and Guist (2005)	To explore the role of authenticity in the ethnic theming of restaurants and its implications for restaurant planners and managers, and identify whether a customer's familiarity with the culture portrayed in the restaurant plays an important role in determining authenticity	The themed environment in ethnically themed restaurants is intended to represent the ethnic origin of the food, and the restaurant owners/managers likely believe the visitors value the authenticity of the ethnic restaurant
Customization, individualization	Wanhill (2002)	To review historical aspects of theme parks, model key design, economic and financial aspects of developing these attractions in a Nordic context	Through theming, theme parks can create competitive advantage, individuality, and product differentiation given the imagescape is well recognized and popular; provides meaning to attractions, facilities, and infrastructure; tells a story of another place; continually repeated in the imagescape; creates perception of quality;

Theming purposes	Representative literature	Aim of study	How the author(s) argue for its importance
			entertainment outside of the attractions; reduces frustration in queues
Differentiation, competitive advantage, uniqueness	Allen and Harris (2002)	Among other objectives, to make event managers able to discuss the application of an event theme to various event elements to enhance the event experience	Event creation and theming are at the heart of the event management process, and the processes determine the quality of the event experience as well as the emotional impact it has on the audience; the theming shapes and unifies all aspects of the event
	Valčić et al. (2015);	To fill the gap in research on measuring service quality in theme parks, assess the perceived service quality attributes, and investigate the relative importance of the service quality dimensions influencing overall satisfaction level of visitors	The themes create a feeling of unity with the surroundings (a contrast to everyday life); themes are also used to create and sustain a feeling of life involvement with a setting that is very different from one's daily life
	Wanhill (2002)	See same reference above	See same reference above
	Wood and Muñoz (2007a)	To examine ethnic-themed restaurants and the interplay between the media and the consumers' cultural expectations to ethnic restaurants	From a marketing perspective, themes can be used for differentiation
Entertain and educate consumers	Wanhill (2002)	See same reference above	See same reference above
	Wood and Muñoz (2007a)	See same reference above	In addition to providing an entertainment benefit, themed environments can educate visitors about foreign cultures, historical events, and lifestyles
Improve guest experience quality	Ellis and Rossman (2008)	To explain concepts introduced by Rossman during his Butler Lecture (Rossman, 2007), and propose a model for staging participant experiences based on technology from the experience industry	Staging recreation encounters should include attention to factors that influence judgements of service and experience quality, such as "multi-sensory staging", "theme performance" (including cues, staying in character, perform to form and eliminate negative cues", and "performance in providing unanticipated value" (empathy, surprise and memorabilia), which adds to co-creation of value. These differ from SERVQUAL or technical performance.
Influence behavior and consumption	Pearce and Wu (2016)	To identify the dominant instrumental and expressive phrases and concepts used by visitor in reporting their experiences online, and examine how visitors with various overall evaluations of their experiences respond to attraction themes	Citing other sources, the value of themes is considered to have an emotional appeal and build visitor mindfulness, affecting sustainable behaviors, length of stay, and commercial revenue

Theming purposes	Representative literature	Aim of study	How the author(s) argue for its importance
	Young and Riley (2002)	To examine past and current, public and private, subtly and obviously themed landscapes in North America, Asia, and Europe, and respond under what conditions theme park landscapes emerged, how they entered mass culture, why they are popular, how they are connected to the social order, what functions they service, and other questions	Theming stimulates and directs consumption through how it communicates with different audiences
Interaction	Gottdiener (2001)	To describe the variety of themed environments in contemporary society, explain how they are used, and understand the reasons for their increased presence	Themed environments offer opportunities for creative interaction in space
Key message memorability	Ham (1992)	To show how environmental interpretation can translate the technical language of natural science or related field in an interesting and entertaining way into ideas and terms that non-scientists can understand	Interpretation of the environment requires a theme, these themes are the main message or major point a communicator wants to convey about a topic
Profits	Weaver (2017)	To discuss how the representations of the ocean are intimately connected to the cruise industry's commercial practices	The desire for profit (and meaning) has stimulated the growth of theme-driven commercial spaces; through differentiating products and services and satisfy the demand for entertaining and meaningful environments
Qualification	Beardsworth and Bryman (1999)	To discuss the various perspectives on theming as a cultural device, and argue the techniques of quasification by focusing on the themed restaurant and its place in the contemporary cultural landscape	Theming is a general process for fabricating an environment to be experienced as if it were something other than what it technically is, including cultural product elements such as drama, ritual and cinema
Reality escape	Brown and Patterson (2000)	To examine the theme pub phenomenon, and reflect on the postmodern rise of themed environments	Although themed environments are inauthentic versions of the reality they try to represent, they also try to evoke or capture the essence of the concept they communicate (e.g., Irish pubs)

Table 5. Overview of suggested and researched purposes

The 15 suggested purposes stem from literature that spans the years 1992 to 2017. Noticeable is the interrelation of the suggested theming objectives. For instance, "commodify urban experiences" and "create standardized audience effects" have conceptual similarities. "Brand tangibility" and "interaction" is another example. However, echoing the review of Table 2 in section 2.4, few studies explicitly explore the different purposes of theming in tourism, and the purposes listed in Table 5 are often suggested rather than empirically derived. To provide examples, "influence behavior and consumption" is mainly for the benefit of a provider, whereas "improve guest experience quality" and "individualization" point to improving the tourist experience for visitors.

Studies show that there is a wide range in aims from the highly conceptual (e.g., "explore themed flagship brand stores in terms of the mythological attractiveness of the narratives communicated by their symbolic and physical structure") to the practical (e.g., "fill the gap in research on measuring service quality in theme parks"). This range means that the aims vary significantly. The papers have also used both qualitative and quantitative methods to reach these aims. Furthermore, the aims seem to be wide in context (e.g., themed landscapes in North America, Asia, and Europe, and in cities) and approach (e.g., examine, discuss, describe, argue). This means there is potentially a lot to learn from each study. How the author(s) argue for the importance of each purpose ranges from the very commercial (e.g., stimulates and directs consumption) to the conceptual (e.g., create a feeling of unity with the surroundings). This range could be because the contexts vary far more. What theming means for a city and what it means for a single themed flagship brand store is likely to have very different purposes. At the same time, there is an interesting blend of what providers (be it governmental or commercial) want visitors to experience (for instance inhabitants or customers). At the heart of it all is exchange of value. Purposes are inextricably linked to what a provider wants a visitor to value from an experience. Sometimes that is selling a product (e.g., in a brand store) to experience a brand for creating unique bonds (e.g., visiting a brand store) to even "consume a fabricated environment" (e.g., the environment is only there to be experienced, not to sell anything but the experience). In this respect, the themed environment follows the experience economic logic in which value follows every step from products to services to "pure" experiences.

It is helpful to view most of the purposes as methods for increasing the experience's value. For most businesses, this is likely to be increased profitability, and for themed public tourist venues, it could mean entertaining, educating, or even communicating symbolic meaning.

This thesis limits its focus to the purposes related to experience-based tourism, even though it could be interesting to include more studies that could be interpreted as proposing and discussing other theming purposes. Although the purposes in Table 5 superficially appear sound and logical, they are usually not a result of careful empirical analysis. Based primarily on the third knowledge gap (see section 1.2), I asked the question, "why is theming used in experience-based tourism?" (**RQ3**). Therefore, this thesis aims to close this gap by contributing a more empirically derived set of theming purposes for experience-based tourism providers. In turn, using insights from both visitor and provider perspectives will help deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism.

2.6 Summarizing the theoretical framework

The overall aim of this thesis is to deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism, and to add to the knowledge on how novel insights from both visitor and provider perspectives facilitate experience innovation. The theoretical reviews of the theme factors, theming dimensions, and theming purposes reveal a need to explore these concepts from both visitor and provider perspectives in experience-based tourism. In summation, the different definitions and aspects presented above represent tourism development, the experience economy, and the concept of experiences toward an interpretation of experience-based tourism. There is a variety of experience concept subcategories with overlapping similarities and relations. This thesis, however, emphasizes the *tourist experience* (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015; Lashley, 2008; Mossberg, 2007; O'Dell & Billing, 2006; Uriely, 2005) (section 2.2.3). The tourist experience is helpful because the tourism industry likely evokes stronger experiential and emotional responses from visitors more than any other service industry, and where the types of benefits are hedonic and symbolic (Otto & Ritchie, 1995, 1996).

Additionally, the relation between theming and experience innovation was presented. Experience innovation is a process to develop new and improved experiences within an experiencescape (Jernsand et al., 2015; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003), and theming shares crucial dimensions with experience innovation, such as interaction/co-creation (Alsos et al., 2014; Jernsand et al., 2015; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) and digital technology (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). Often, the process of experience innovation involves developing a prototype based on a theme (Jernsand et al., 2015). From the experience innovation perspective, value is considered as co-created between providers and visitors (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003).

Three knowledge gaps introduced in this thesis (see section 1.2) reveal a need for more research, focusing on: (i) theming as the central idea for designing places and settings, (ii) on the dimensions and the concept of theming, (iii) why theming and themes appeal in tourism. The fourth gap reveals a need for more research focusing on (iv) (1) theming as a type of "experience innovation practice", and (2) knowledge on innovation connected to the experience economy.

First, the literature review of the visitor perspective in Table 2 exposes how empirical contexts are repetitive despite theming being a growing practice both within and outside of tourism. Theming as a phenomenon is rarely the focus of the research. When theming *is* the focus of the research, previous definitions and ideas tend to be repeated. Thus, one purpose of this thesis is to focus on theming as a phenomenon by (i) seeing its application across and outside of the contexts of, for instance, theme parks and theme hotels, and (ii) attempting to challenge previous ideas and exploring and suggesting new definitions for theming in experience-based tourism. In other words, this is how this thesis will attempt to bridge the first knowledge gap.

Second, the visitor perspective reviews of theme factors following Table 3, and theming dimensions following Table 4, reveal that, while they often appear in various studies, they are rarely the foci of studies. Theme factors tend to be studied in themed environments. However, their importance for the perception of the theme is often unclear or nonexistent. In other words, the connection between theme factors and the themed environment is haphazard. The same is true for theming dimensions, which are often studied individually, and, with some exceptions, have a loose connection to the themed context. Another purpose of this thesis is thus to enhance these connections by (i) studying theme factors and the way in which they drive the perception of a theme in a themed environment, and (ii) examining several theming dimensions and their interrelation. These examinations are how this thesis aims to bridge the second knowledge gap, calling for more research on the dimensions and concept of theming.

Third and finally, the review of theming purposes from a provider perspective following Table 5 reveals two essential gaps. First, there are few in-depth explorations of the purposes of theming from a provider perspective in experience-based tourism. Second, the purposes are often based on the authors' suggestions and not empirically derived. Thus, another purpose of this thesis is (i) to explore what the purposes for theming in experience-based tourism may be, and (ii) to discuss their interrelation and applicability. These explorations and discussions attempt to bridge the third knowledge gap of why theming and themes appeal in tourism.

Previous studies on theming have mainly focused solely on a provider or a visitor perspective. The focus has predominantly been on theming as a place component rather than examining a concept with specific dimensions from a provider perspective. What drives the perception of themes in visitors' minds, or why themes and theming appeal, have seldom been given significant attention in the research literature on theming in experience-based tourism. Likewise, few studies have emphasized defining theming as a concept in experience-based tourism, whether by interpreting the concept or its general use in experience-based tourism. This doctoral thesis contributes by extending the theoretical understanding of theming in tourism. Precisely, it does so by looking at the phenomenon from both visitor and provider perspectives, which, according to Table 2, is an infrequent undertaking in tourism research related to theming. The thesis also provides theorized interrelation of factors, dimensions, and purposes. However, the contributions also have managerial implications for managers of themed environments. Altogether, this thesis attempts to improve our understanding of theming in experience-based tourism.

The next chapter describes, discusses, and reflects on this thesis' research methodology and design.

3. Methodological choices and reflections

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the methodological choices and design of the thesis. The chapter is organized as follows. First, an introduction is provided with an emphasis on my background and relevance to the research areas and research questions. This introduction addresses the "*wish to do research*" stage, as illustrated in the chronological stage model of the research process by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2015, p. 12). Second, the philosophical foundation is outlined. This outline addresses the stage of "understand your philosophy and approach" (Saunders et al., 2015). Third, the research design of each paper is presented. Fourth, a discussion of the thesis' trustworthiness is presented, with an emphasis on its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Fifth and finally, the limitations of the data and final reflections are given.

To what extent a researcher should describe their path to the research area at hand tends to depend on the tradition of the qualitative or quantitative approaches the researcher follows. Presenting the researcher's knowledge background is less valued in quantitative research than qualitative research (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2015). Knowledge, however, is not always unrelated to interest (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). This thesis builds on three research papers using quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches and can be considered a mixed-methods approach. It aims to extend our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism. This aim means I attempt to understand the meaning behind social phenomena rather than find causal relations. Paper I is a quantitative and context-specific research article more focused on explaining a phenomenon rather than understanding it. However, the qualitative articles Papers II and III spring out of my need to explore and understand the phenomenon more thoroughly and are less dependent on context. Thus, I moved the thesis away from a positivist view and toward the interpretivist tradition of *Verstehen* or "understanding" (Mehmetoglu, 2004; Weber, 1968).

Remaining entirely objective in research represents a positivist view of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Postpositivism recognizes the difficulty of conducting "value-free" research and accepts how the researcher's background, values, and theories may influence the research (Clark & Bryman, 2019). This view aligns with Guba and Lincoln (1982), who argue that it is impossible and even ethically undesirable to "abandon one's own humanness" for anyone performing research on humans. This thesis is primarily written in the

third person, which could be interpreted as an attempt to convey objectivity (Billig, 2013). However, this stylistic choice boils down to my preference for certain traditions and conventions.

First, there is a clear link to how my background influenced my interest in experiences and theming as research areas. As a 15-year-old working for a Norwegian amusement park, I was first exposed to what I now know to be emotional labor (Hochschild, 2003). All service workers at the park were expected to greet every guest with eye contact, an oral greeting, and a smile. It was not until nearly six years later that I, at the age of 22, became acquainted with performative labor (Bryman, 2004) while working as a server at Walt Disney World. The latter job carried a far deeper expectation of living out a theme (Fırat & Ulusoy, 2011) through dressing appropriately, playing out my "*Norwegianness*," and providing as correctly as possible an authentic Norwegian experience for the guests. Working in these places in conjunction with a long-held fascination for themed environments and attractions was why I applied for the bachelor program in Experience and Attraction Development at Lillehammer University College in 2007. It is easy to gain the personal visitor perspective of theming. However, working for providers of themed attractions, entertainment, and events gave me a peek into the even more essential "back region" of those worlds (Goffman, 1959). Thus, my academic interest in theming and experiences as valuable scientific fields was sparked during this time.

Second, the research questions were not instantly evident from the beginning of my time as a doctoral student. Marx (1997) lists 13 sources of research questions, of which several contributed to shaping my questions. In addition to sources such as "societal trends" and "personal experiences," it was primarily the *available literature* on the topics that helped form the research questions. In 2007, there was not much literature within the domain of theming in experience-based tourism. By 2020, while the field had expanded, the exploration of theming is still in its early stages (Ellis, Jiang, et al., 2019; Piazzoni, 2019). Although some existing literature considered various related topics when I started my time as a doctoral student, several questions remained at the back of my mind. What is theming *really*? Are tourism experiences genuinely this complex? Can they be explained more simply to be more valuable? What in these research areas has not been examined yet? These questions and the guidance of my PhD supervisors led to the final research questions. The research questions **RQ1**, **RQ2**, and **RQ3** are answered through the three appended papers in this thesis. Research question **RQ4** is also answered in this dissertation.

In summation, presenting the researcher's knowledge background as it pertains to their interest in the research field and how this led to the research and research questions is commonplace and often relevant within a qualitative tradition. In the next section, the philosophical foundation of the thesis will be discussed.

3.2 Philosophical foundation

3.2.1 Epistemology, ontology, and implications for methodological choices

Basic terms relating to the philosophical foundation are briefly explained in this section, as well as how this philosophy relates to my background and choices for this thesis will be identified.

Paradigms can be defined as differing axiomatic systems or sets of fundamental beliefs and assumptions about the phenomena into which they are designed to inquire (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, 1994). Paradigms deal in irrefutable or indemonstrable ultimates, first principles, or propositions (axioms) that must be accepted simply on faith or convention (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, 1994). A paradigm shared by several scientists may provide them with standard ways of understanding, conducting, and evaluating science (O'Leary, 2007). According to Thomas Kuhn (1970), paradigms are a "locus of professional commitment regarding standards and rules, … they are not reducible to their components, … they are not to be tested, … and they are not to be corrected" (Kindi & Arabatzis, 2012). For example, I prescribe to constructionism as the paradigm that guided my research designs. The nature of the world and how it should be studied is the basis for the philosophical foundation that should guide any study's research design (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). Stemwedel (2014) explains (i) that central concerns of these philosophies of science are to find what is distinctive about "*science*" rather than one particular field of science ("science-as-actually-practiced"), (ii) that their goals are to answer questions about *science* rather than scientific questions, and (iii) that not all practicing scientists need to account for their philosophy of science to answer scientific questions. In other words, it is not the aim of this thesis to challenge and discuss scientific paradigms. Rather, this section will describe and narrow down the philosophical foundation of this thesis.

Moses and Knutsen (2012) find that most contemporary social science research can be placed on a dichotomous continuum between the two methodological position paradigms: (i) *naturalism* and (ii) *constructivism*, with (iii) *scientific realism* as a distinct "third option"

movement. The methods one chooses to use fit a predetermined methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

An *epistemological issue* refers to what is or should be regarded as sufficient knowledge in a discipline (Bryman, 2016). In addition to positivism, realism (both empirical and critical realism), and interpretivism (including hermeneutics and phenomenology), Saunders et al. (2015) outline the methodological positions of postmodernism and pragmatism in their "research onion" illustration. Ontology (or rather, *social* ontology, Bryman, 2016) refers to the nature of reality as assumed by the researcher, the nature of social entities, and how the world is viewed (Veal, 2011). Thus, the triad items of epistemology, ontology, and methodology complement one another because the first two (ontology and epistemology) inform the last (methodology) (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010).

During my student years, I was introduced to and influenced by all earlier mentioned methodological position paradigms. However, over time, constructionism became the paradigm of choice for the reasons explained below.

Two positions within the social ontology are referred to as objectivism and constructionism (Bryman, 2016). Whereas objectivism considers social phenomena and their meanings (such as organization, an organization, or culture) to exist independent of and beyond our reach or influence, constructionism (or constructivism) considers these phenomena and their meanings to be accomplished social actors (Bryman, 2016) continually. This thesis is inspired and influenced by constructionism, an ontological position that posits that social phenomena and their meanings are constantly being accomplished by social actors and, thus, is antithetical to naturalism and realism (Bryman, 2016). There are two reasons for this statement. First, this thesis' overall aim is to deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism. As a researcher, I had to approach my research subjects with an open mind and let myself be influenced by their "voices," quite literally, especially when performing interviews. Second, the research subjects helped the me *construct* my understanding of abstract and complex phenomena such as "themes" and "theming" and their importance for experience-based tourism. In a sense, one could say this thesis' meaning is constructed through the puzzling of pieces together, assisted by the research and my own experiences and instincts. Thus, this thesis is influenced mainly by constructivism (or sometimes *constructionism*, Moses & Knutsen, 2012), through which scientific facts are considered (socially) constructed (van den Belt, 2003). The social actors in this thesis are both the researcher and the research subjects.

Drawing upon Saunders et al. (2015), two approaches can be used to make more informed and active philosophical choices. One, begin to ask yourself questions about your research beliefs and assumptions, and two, familiarize yourself with significant research philosophies within your field of study. The philosophies, methodologies, and methods presented by Moses and Knutsen (2012) and Bryman (2016) provide the most helpful framework for understanding the philosophical foundation layers of this thesis. First, I used my foreknowledge in the research. This approach is integral and necessary for any constructivist research project (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). Second, particular sciences require naturalist approaches. However, I am skeptical of a naturalist approach to social science (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). Third, I agree with other constructivists that the world is a (socially constructed) human construction (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). Fourth, as this thesis uses mainly a qualitative research strategy, it aligns more closely with a constructivist (or constructionist) ontological orientation as opposed to an objectivist one (Bryman, 2016).

Researchers are, for instance, innately captive to their language and prior understandings. Hence, the broader debate on ontological, epistemological, and even axiological components of one's self includes questions on *reflexivity* (Berger, 2015). Axiology refers to "the role of values and ethics within the research process" (Saunders et al., 2015). Berger (2015, drawing on Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Pillow, 2003; Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, & Piper, 2007) find that "*[r]eflexivity* is commonly viewed as the process of the continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality". Out of the many versions of reflexivity that Lynch (2000) lists, two of the most prominent in methodological writings are addressed here (Bryman, 2016): (i) philosophical self-reflection, and (ii) methodological self-consciousness. In this thesis, one article is based on quantitative data and analysis, and the other on qualitative data and analysis. I am aware that my choice of methods, biases, values, and decisions has implications for our knowledge of the social world (Bryman, 2016).

Moreover, reflexivity also means "(the) active acknowledgment and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome." Apart from the appended papers, the contents of this thesis reflect the included research. In their article on research methodology development, Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) present guidelines and directions on theorizing from empirical material. When "constructing" this PhD thesis, finding "what is interesting" was the process' core goal. Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) warn against gap-spotting as a method, emphasizing how this is an undesirable path to generating interesting theories because it leads

to (i) a consensus-seeking focus in theory development (adding to existing literature, ignoring own assumptions and prejudices), (ii) the scope (researcher and subject matters) becoming too narrowly confined, (iii) additive and incremental theories (which could be dull and formulaic), and (iv) publications in journals in designated journal lists. Rather than falling prey to these "traps," a "reflexive and inventive scholarship mode" is suggested.

The reflexive approach can help both relax and focus the researcher, for example, when interviewing for research. First, Alvesson (2003) calls for the researcher to have a theoretical understanding, especially when processing the empirical material, in particular, to avoid naïvety in interpretation. I used the proposal for the thesis, multiple course papers, and working on articles as opportunities to read, process, and internalize the extant literature and discourse of the central and tangent fields in this thesis (e.g., theming, experience, tourism, and innovation). Second, "working with alternative lines of interpretation and vocabularies" is part of this reflexive pragmatism. Reflexive pragmatism means that I had to be aware of differences in understanding of terms when interviewing people from other countries for this thesis (Alvesson, 2003).

Deductive theory or reasoning method refers to when the researcher draws on what is already known about a specific research area to deduce a hypothesis logically (Bryman, 2016). The opposite of deduction is inductive theory or method of reasoning, which refers to using the implication of a researcher's findings to logically conclude and "feed" a theoretical area (Bryman, 2016). This thesis adopts an abductive approach to theory development. Abductive reasoning is sometimes considered a form of inductive reasoning (e.g., Charmaz, 2006), and in, for example, grounded theory construction, all three methods (inductive, deductive, and abductive) can be used (Khanal, 2019). It is the argument that this thesis uses abductive reasoning given how I describe the world of theming in experience-based tourism based on both previously described scientific accounts as well as from "those voices who provided the data" (Bryman, 2016).

Van den Belt (2003) describes nature and society in *moderate* constructivism as "self-contained components of the world that interact at localizable interfaces," representing a relativist stance to scientific knowledge. Truth in moderate constructionism is derived from empirical data and is community based (Nightingale & Cromby, 2002; Schwandt, 2000). This assertion means truth is (epistemically) acceptable depending on whether (i) it is based on evidence acceptable to the (scientific) community, (ii) and the community is open to scrutinizing said truth and its proof in an openly critical manner (Järvensivu & Törnroos, 2010). Järvensivu and Törnroos

(2010) find that in moderate constructivism, (i) local truths can be understood through empirical observations and community-based knowledge (*epistemology*), (ii) reality may exist (*ontology*), and (iii) community-based knowledge is created through empirical observation bounded by subjectivity (*methodology*). The methodological techniques applied in the appended papers (namely, the data collection and analysis), the strategies of using a cross-sectional survey and half-structured interviews, the methodological choice of mixed methods, and abduction as an approach to theory development, are frequently used within the moderate constructivist scientific community. Finally, (iv), the research process is considered abductive with both theory generating and testing, as is found in this thesis. Although those authors also acknowledge and argue moderate constructivism is closely related to critical realism, the latter is more concerned with finding "the one universal truth". However, I find the moderate constructivist stance more acceptable because I believe a "one universal truth" may be out of reach for any scientific community, as a "local truth" is far more obtainable.

3.3 Research design in the appended papers

In the following overview (Table 6), all appended papers are presented with their purpose, applied approach and methods, and empirical bases. Detailed descriptions of each paper follow the overview.

Paper	Type of paper	Purpose	Applied approach and method(s)	Empirical base
I	Empirical	Investigate the factors that drive the tourist customer experience around theming and draw research on theming into the themed cruisescape guest experience realm.	Quantitative Cross-sectional survey Linear regression analysis	328 Norwegian cruise travelers
II	Empirical	Add to our understanding of the concept of theming and its dimensions by examining the concept's scholarly understanding among practitioners in themed environments.	Qualitative Thematic analysis Half-structured interviews	Ten one-on-one interviews with both practitioner and academic theming experts.
III	Empirical	Identify and add to the knowledge base of different purposes of theming in a tourism context.	Qualitative Thematic analysis Half-structured interviews	Ten one-on-one interviews with both practitioner and academic theming experts.

Table 6. Overview of research design in appended research papers

In the following sections, extended understandings of each paper's research design are discussed regarding their aims, purposes, research question(s), data collection methods, models,

if any, and data analysis procedures. Furthermore, how the papers are logically connected and consequently complement each other is also addressed.

3.3.1 Paper I

The empirical Paper I, "Theme factors that drive the tourist customer experience" (2017), examines which theming components affect the guests' perception of a theme (see Table 6). In other words, it corresponds to research question **RQ1**: *Which factors drive the themed tourism experience?* The purpose of the paper is to "draw research on theming into the realm of the themed cruisescape guest experience" because (i) there is little research on theming in cruise ship settings in general, and (ii) even less empirical evidence of which theme factors or components that make up a themed cruise environment. Furthermore, this explains why Paper I is considered context dependent (see Figure 1-1) and adds to our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism, which is the aim of this thesis.

The survey consisted of five pages, including demographic questions and questions about travel habits, experience, price levels, spending estimates, intentions to use activities onboard, image, different descriptive statements, and feelings and emotions. Examples of these statements are "I am satisfied with my decision to travel on this cruise ship," "to travel with Color Magic, makes me forget about time and place," and "it is worth spending time traveling on Color Magic." A shortened version of the questionnaire in Norwegian appears in Appendix 1. The empirical material on which Paper I is based comprises the responses to the specific questions found in Table I in Paper I.

Data collection. Paper I is based on survey data collected as part of several projects connected to "innovative research" focusing on the theme "experience-based tourism" at (formerly) Lillehammer University College in 2010. I participated as a research assistant in the project from November 1, 2009 to April 30, 2010. The project was nicknamed "the Cruise Project" and included the project tasks (i) suggesting and developing constructs and sets of items of measurements to be included in a more extensive questionnaire (Churchill, 1979), (ii) execution of the survey data collection process, and (iii) entering the data into the data editor SPSS. I participated as part of one of three groups of research assistants.

The model. The purpose of Paper I is to investigate which factors drive the tourist customer experience around theming. Thus, the conceptual model is based on five selected "theatrical" experience components (Pine & Gilmore, 2011) considered essential to a themed cruisescape (Kwortnik, 2008; Lu & Lien, 2014). Table 3 provides a broader variety of theme factors for a

wider extent of themed spaces and places. However, not all these factors were applicable in a cruise ship setting (e.g., building architecture, landscaping, and even brochures). I had previously traveled with the cruise line and cooperated with another research assistant, thoroughly cross-referencing the company's website and online resources to assess whether the selected theme factors were present on board the ship.

Data analysis. I was responsible for the linear regression analysis in Paper I. While the analysis was performed solely by myself, the preliminary analyses and results were checked and reviewed by supervisors and professors at my university college. They provided valuable and critical feedback on the factors, the model and asked critical questions on whether the constructs indeed measured what was intended for the paper. This feedback and their questions were included and answered in the manuscript as it was prepared for journal submission. The two peer review processes asked for more extensive information on the factor analysis, reliability tests (Cronbach's alpha, see Table II in Paper I), uni-dimensionality of each construct, as well as the inclusion of a variance inflation factor (VIF), as one of the reviewers considered this the most suitable measure for multicollinearity issues. Paper I employed the process detailed by Hinkin, Tracey, and Enz (1997), specifically for hospitality industry field research settings, to ensure scale validity. This process included asking "naïve respondents" (who can be students) if they could read and understand the definitions and items, and exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (for internal consistency assessment). Both applications support construct validity (Hinkin et al., 1997). The VIF analysis results were included to confirm discriminant validity. Although exceeding the journal's maximum word limit, all this information was adequately and properly included for the final manuscript.

The measures and items developed for the study in Paper I as well as its methodological approach may be used in future studies to identify if and how strongly various theme factors contribute to the perception of themes in other tourist settings, such as museums, theme parks, and interpretation centers. The first research question of this thesis is addressed through Paper I.

I performed the analysis and was the paper's sole author. The methodology used in Paper I and its aim and relation to the other appended papers are summarized in Figure 3-1.

3.3.2 Paper II

Paper II, "Exploring theming dimensions in a tourism context" (2018), is a qualitative study. The study aims to "add to the understanding of theming by exploring the concept and its

dimensions" (see Table 6). In other words, Paper II's aim relates to the aim of this thesis: to deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism. Paper I established how theming could be measured. This affirmation drove the need to deepen the understanding of theming's dimensionality (see Figure 3-1). Paper I recognizes the need for a qualitative approach to thoroughly investigate the many dimensions of theming, both in tourism and in a broader context. This need caused a change from the quantitative approach adopted in Paper I to a qualitative approach in Paper II (see Figure 3-1). Thus, this is how Paper II relates to research question **RQ2**: *What are the dimensions of theming in experience-based tourism?* Additionally, this decouples the study from a specific context and makes it context independent, as illustrated in Figure 1-1. Development of the interview guide questions followed the guideline process outlined by Bryman (2016, p. 470). The following paragraphs will expand upon the method as described in Paper II using this guideline structure.

The interview guide (Appendix 2) was developed out of the "literature-driven" research questions. This development is different from theory-driven research questions that aim to extend existing theory and are more closely framed within the existing theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999). Paper II's specific research questions are derived from the existing (research) literature (Bryman, 2016; Marx, 1997). If the research questions are inspired by the literature and match the research problem, research questions will proceed naturally (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Thus, the research questions of Paper II are formulated with calls for more research on themes with a tourism context in mind. Paper II examines how the concept of theming can be understood and what kinds of theming dimensions are central to a tourist context.

Kvale (1996, pp. 131-135) suggests nine different kinds of questions and how one may derive interview questions from research questions. As Bryman (2016) observes, most interviews will contain variations on all of them. A literature-driven half-structured (or semistructured) interview may mean it is (i) detailed, and that (ii) the questions are standard from informant to informant (Ponterotto, 2005). The interview guide had four parts based on the topics from the research questions. First, informants were asked to introduce themselves, state their profession, and describe their work. Second, the next set of questions' central theme was "Theming in tourism" and consisted of about 13 to 14 questions, depending on the progress of the interview. The third set of questions' main theme was "Theming dimensions," and there were three questions in total. Fourth and finally, the last set of questions was meant to check whether there was anything the informants would like to elaborate on, if they felt something had been

overlooked during the interview, and if they had any recommendations for theming ("Ending questions," Charmaz, 2002).

Data collection. The paper is based on a qualitative interview designed to obtain statements and explanations on what key informants considered "the concept of theming" as it is and could be, both generally and in a tourism context. The number of informants can be considered a limitation. It is therefore relevant to clarify to a larger extent why the informants were selected and how. Given more time I could have found more informants depending on factors such as research object and homogeneity (Kuzel, 1992). However, in addition to time and resource constraints, the criteria as addressed in the Methods section of Paper II and III did still count. (a) The informants were *experts on theming*. This meant they had to either have specifically worked with theming either academically (published in journals or scientific books) or professionally. In several cases both were true, and as Gopinath and Hoffman (1995) observe, practitioners inform academics with useful inputs to build theory. (b) Furthermore, informants had to be information rich (due to limited resources) (Patton, 2002). Information rich means that the individuals or groups of individuals are particularly practiced in or educated about the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Palinkas et al., 2015). How information rich informants were identified and selected can be described as follows. The key academic informants were identified and selected from the same extensive literature review of publications at the beginning of this thesis (see more detailed description in 2.4.2, and Methods section of Paper II). The practitioners were identified through proposals from the same academic scholars, researchers, and other authors stemming from the literature review process. All names were put on a long list together with information about their professional backgrounds, current positions, publications (if any), contact information, and other relevant information if available. Honesty in *availability* of people (in addition to time and money) and *willingness to participate* are crucial questions to any researcher (Bernard, 2006; Spradley, 1979). At times obtaining information about the informants, especially contact information, proved difficult. All academics and practitioners on the long list were contacted and asked whether they would like to be interviewed for the project. However, many of the people on the list responded at first, then stopped responding, or did not respond altogether. Some people on the list claimed they could not respond to the questions, or argued their knowledge was out of date or too limited. Thus, a potential bias in the people selected for the interviews could for instance be that the informants were particularly eager to offer answers. I tried to persuade some of the more reluctant informants, resulting in either no more response or tips on other names

that could be contacted instead. The long list has been deleted for privacy and data protection causes.

While the key informants were separated into the categories of practitioners and academics, most informants had diverse professional experience in various fields, physical venues, and professional areas. The categorization of the informants was based on their positions at the time of the study. Their professional experience includes architecture, concept design, creative consulting, creative director, creative project management, creative writing, experience design, experience director, experience innovation, freelance editing, freelance writing, lecturing, operations integration, research (Ph.D. level), strategic development, theme park design, theme park directors, theme park ride design, and theme park strategic planning. Some of the scholarly and professional fields this professional experience related to were content and brand development, creative production, cultural anthropology, film, geography, Imagineering, leisure, performance, sociology, theme park studies, tourism, and tourism innovation. These fields show how informants were knowledgeable about theming from both inside and outside the tourism industry. The professional experiences and fields were drawn from the informants' work on physical venues and professional areas such as theme parks, architecture, bars, branding, cruise ships, films, hotels, museums, pubs, offices, restaurants, retail stores, set design, some private homes, television, videogames, and zoological gardens. The previous information on the key informants was presented in alphabetical order so that the specific information cannot be connected to any particular informant, to protect their privacy and not make them recognizable. While the professional experience of the informants on the surface seems abundant, their backgrounds can bias the findings through what is most prevalent and what is not. Theme parks dominate their experiences throughout. While this dominance is unsurprising, this also means other themed tourist venues such as nature parks, casinos, and reenactment centers are left out.

Furthermore, alternatives to the dual-context perspective (practitioners and academics) could have been a single-context in which a broader selection of only professionals or academics were interviewed for this paper. Other exploratory approaches that could have been picked to fulfil and complement the aim and purpose of Paper II could have been social media analysis (such as Instagram posts from themed tourism environments and online discussion forums), case studies, or document analysis. However, time and resource constraints limited my choices to include and complement the research with other qualitative data collection techniques.

Therefore, the research questions informed the choice of data collection technique (Clark, Foster, Sloan, & Bryman, 2021) resulting in the choice of techniques as outlined in this thesis.

While Paper II's focus is the tourism context, informants were also asked how they interpreted the subject outside of tourism. This line of questioning was applied to encourage richer, more detailed answers that could highlight what was particular about the tourism context (Bryman, 2016). Furthermore, informants were asked to provide examples and elaborate on their statements. Specifically, the informants were asked (1) how they would define *a theme*, (2) how they understood *the concept of theming*, and (3) what *dimensions* they considered essential for theming. Ten half-structured interviews were conducted. Sometimes the informants would naturally move on and start answering the following question so that I (the researcher and interviewer) did not have to ask the question explicitly. Frequently, examples both inside and outside of the context (tourism) were given without my encouragement. Crucial and valuable information would occasionally surface after the interviews were over. This information was either recorded as audio or notes were made and included in the final empirical set. Additionally, the I followed Kvale's (1996) advice on being attentive and listening to allow the informants to reflect upon and amplify their answers.

Data analyses. Charmaz (2002) notes that there is no single qualitative analysis approach despite many procedures for organizing, categorizing, and interpreting data. Furthermore, she describes how the constructionist approach likely emphasizes and aims to describe *how* facts come into being and that the goal is to reveal how social actions and interactions become data. Järvensivu and Törnroos (2010) argue that abduction is suitable as a research process for moderate constructionism because it accepts existing theory. Furthermore, they claim it is less theory driven and more data driven for theory generation. This claim is valid for Paper II. Although the literature review guided the construction of the research questions, which guided the creation of the interview guide, coding the data in this instance meant partly freeing oneself from the original questions. Otherwise, coding and recognizing patterns in the responses would have been overly influenced by the initial questions. I used thematic analysis as a technique in Paper II. Bryman (2016, p. 584) interprets such *themes* as categories identified by the analyst through her/his data, (i) that relate to her/his research focus (and possibly the research questions), (ii) that build on codes identified in transcripts or field notes, and (iii) that provide the researcher with the foundation for the theoretical comprehension of her/his data, which can be turned into a theoretical contribution to the research literature in focus. In Paper II, the theming dimensions as identified in this analysis can be interpreted and oriented as a "visitor

focus" as they rely on the perspective of how a visitor interprets the themed environment more so than the provider.

In Paper II, I did all the research, including data collection, analysis, and writing. Paper II's aim, summary of the methodology used in Paper II, and its relation to the other appended papers are illustrated in Figure 3-1.

3.3.3 Paper III

Paper III, "Why theming? Identifying the purposes of theming in tourism" (2019), is also a qualitative study. As shown in Table 6, the study aims to "identify and add to our knowledge base of [the] different purposes of theming in tourism." Paper III's aim, therefore, clearly relates to this thesis' aim: to deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism. Similar to Paper II, the research question in the paper is literature driven. Lofland and Lofland (2006) challenge the researcher to ask herself or himself: "Just what about this thing is puzzling me?" Paper III's research question is "What are the main objectives of theming?" (**RQ3**). The research question in Paper III stems from a need to explore the many purposes of themed environments using a qualitative approach as recognized in Paper II (illustrated in Figure 3-1). Parallel to Paper II and unlike Paper I, Paper III's research is context independent (see Figure 1-1.) Unlike Paper II's contributions, the responses to the questions related to this central research question change the study's focus from a visitor to a provider perspective.

Data collection. The same half-structured interview guide (Appendix 2) used in Paper II was also used for Paper III. However, only three questions were directly relevant to this study (2019, pp. 7-8). Thus, while the same empirical material is used in Paper III as in Paper II, the focus is different because the purpose behind theming stems from the objectives of the providers of themed places (see Figure 3-1).

Data analyses. Sifting through the lengthy responses in the empirical material, the "theme-identification technique" closely followed the "verbatim, textual data-rich narrative" process as defined by Ryan and Bernard (2003). Five primary purposes of theming in tourism were identified. While some informant statements made comparisons easier by using similar words and phrases, I had to listen and interpret metaphors to sort, categorize, and distinguish between the different purposes.

I did all the research, including data collection, analysis, and writing. Figure 3-1 summarizes Paper III's aim, methodology, and relation to the appended papers.

Figure 3-1 condenses and graphically illustrates the contents of Table 6 and summarizes the thesis' methodological approaches in each paper. Furthermore, Figure 3-1 compares each appended paper's aims with this thesis' aim: to deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism. The figure depicts the chronologically uncovered gaps and logical relations between the three papers. The visitor perspective on the diamond's left side refers to how Paper I and II's contributions primarily relate to the visitor experience. The provider perspective on the diamond's right side refers to how Paper III's contributions relate to the providers' benefits. The narrow sides refer to more context-dependent perspectives (appropriate for only one context) regarding the wider and context-independent middle perspectives (appropriate across more contexts).

Paper I is context dependent (cruise ship), building on previous research and examining how theming components (or theme factors) affect guests' perception of a theme from a visitor perspective. However, a need for qualitative approaches to context-independent theming and theming dimensions is revealed in Paper I, leading to the development of Paper II (the first arrow on the left). Paper II uncovers the need to qualitatively investigate what context-independent purposes might be behind theming in experience-based tourism, leading to the development of Paper III (the second arrow in the middle of Figure 3-1). Finally, this chronological depiction means the model can also be viewed as a timeline for this thesis, displaying the progression and developmental process toward my increased knowledge on theming in experience-based tourism.

THEMING IN EXPERIENCE-BASED TOURISM

THEMING

| Paper I | Paper II | Paper III |

Empirical
Quantitative
Cross-sectional survey
Linear regression analysis

Aim: Investigate theming factors of the tourist experience

Empirical
Qualitative
Thematic analysis
Half-structured interviews

Aim: Explore concept of theming and its dimensions

Empirical
Qualitative
Thematic analysis
Half-structured interviews

Aim: Identify different theming purposes in tourism

Paper I uncovers the need for a qualitative approach to investigate dimensions of theming.

Paper II recognizes the need for a qualitative approach to explore the "why of theming", i.e. the many purposes of themed environments

THEMING FROM VISITOR PERSPECTIVE   THEMING FROM PROVIDER PERSPECTIVE

Figure 3-1. Overview of the methodology used in the appended papers

3.4 Reflections on the research process

This section discusses the qualitative criteria for evaluating this thesis' trustworthiness—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Moreover, I reflect on what necessary steps were taken to address these issues and the implications these criteria have on trustworthiness. The section ends with limitations and my final reflections on the research process.

3.4.1 The trustworthiness of the thesis

Trustworthiness is a term used to describe a set of criteria typically assigned to assessing the quality of qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). Whereas this thesis builds on both quantitative and qualitative papers, the three appended papers are not a collective quantitative approach. Although this does not automatically translate this thesis into a qualitative thesis, applying qualitative quality criteria is more appropriate when viewed as a complete text. This part of the thesis will discuss four essential *naturalistic* criteria of trustworthiness, analogous to the *rationalistic* approach of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. The

naturalistic approach's axioms (Guba & Lincoln, 1982) are more closely aligned to moderate constructionism.

Credibility. The criterion of credibility (or validity) refers to whether findings may be considered accurate and credible by the researcher, the participants, and the reader (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). A mixed-methods approach was chosen to answer all three research questions in this thesis with sufficient methodological tools. Mixed-methods research usually refers to all procedures that include collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data in a single study (Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib, & Rupert, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). What *kind* of mixed-methods design it is, depends on how one views the three appended papers in relation to one another. It could be argued that the approach in this thesis is an *exploratory sequential design* in which a quantitative study is followed and more elaborately explained by a qualitative study or an *embedded design* where either qualitative or quantitative research is used to enhance the other approach. In this thesis, however, all three studies are given equal weight. As is most common in mixed-methods research, the individual studies do not build directly on one another, e.g., the theming dimensions from Paper II could have been used in a quantitative testable survey for a new study. Another approach could have been a qualitative study using selected informants from the respondents from the first paper. Instead, for this thesis, the results of the first paper informed the design of the two consequent studies. A limitation is that since the results of each appended paper were never intended to directly build on one another, this could hinder their integration in this thesis.

Although data collection did not occur concurrently, analyses, findings, and contributions are compared and merged to form this thesis. Hence, this thesis uses the basic mixed-methods design called *convergent parallel design* (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This design means that although the appended studies are given a chronological and sequential order in this thesis (see Figure 3-1), this illustrates the "larger theoretical picture" rather than showing a sequential process. If one cannot explain and state one's integration strategy clearly, and discuss the sets of findings together, a project is likely not to be considered a mixed-methods study (Bryman, 2006; Clark et al., 2021). In this thesis, the predominant integration strategy of the results in this thesis was always to first explore both physical and abstract theming components and purposes, and then combine these empirically sourced perspectives to explain the importance of theming in experience-based tourism.

Mixed-methods research is not without its criticism. While various quantitative and qualitative research approaches may carry different epistemological positions and implications, applying

the strategies of using a cross-sectional survey and half-structured interviews are collectively generating theory and testing abductive research processes for finding truth understood through empirical observations "acceptable to the scientific community" (Järvensivu & Törnroos, 2010). Of the 16 justifications, Bryman (2006) found that four are appropriate justifications for this thesis for combining quantitative and qualitative research. First, *triangulation* in the sense of results from different methods are joined to form this thesis (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). However, for this thesis, this does not mean the results are *similar*, but rather the analytical outcomes of papers that views different aspects of the same phenomenon merged to form a larger understanding of that phenomenon. Second, *different research questions* suggest that certain research approaches are better for answering specific research questions. Third, credibility in both approaches enhances the findings' integrity across Papers I, II, and III. Four and finally, *enhancement* occurs in the sense that the research in this thesis builds on previous findings and helps expands our knowledge that stems from these.

I do not consider qualitative and quantitative research to be separate paradigms (Bryman, 2016), but valuable categories for labeling different methodological approaches. Other than that, I consider both alternatives suitable for collecting valuable data (Aldrich, 2014). There are three advantages this thesis identifies using a mixed-methods approach (Lund, 2012).

(i)   Mixed-methods research is more suitable for answering complex research questions. In this thesis, there are three research questions, but also more overarching aims. A mixed-methods approach is more appropriate for achieving this aim.

(ii)   Qualitative and quantitative results complement one another, thus yielding "a fuller and richer picture of the phenomenon under review" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) in this thesis.

(iii)   Should the results diverge or contradict one another, this could lead to further reflection, hypotheses revisions, and further research. These advantages have all been discussed at length throughout this thesis.

The final arguments for the credibility of this thesis are as follows. First, I believe that the tools, processes, data, and analyses applied in this thesis are appropriate responses to the aim and questions of this thesis (Leung, 2015). Second, this thesis' claims are supported by the data (Järvensivu & Törnroos, 2010; Longino, 2018). Third, all papers appended in this thesis have been subjected to two or more rounds of peer review from the scientific community before being published, which increases their credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Järvensivu & Törnroos, 2010; Longino, 2018).

Transferability. Transferability (or generalizability) refers to "the ways in which the reader determines whether and to what extent this particular phenomenon in this particular context can transfer to another particular context" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). For Papers II and III, the issue of generalizability is better addressed as the term *transferability*. Guba and Lincoln (1982) argue that even in the "hard sciences," generalizations are rarely valid "forever." Cronbach (1975) points out that even star maps for navigation are undependable over the scale of time, as stars shift in their courses over time. If time is such an essential factor, arguing for transferability dependent on human behavior free of context becomes even more difficult. Taken to the extreme, this would mean that all research involving people has no transferability value.

While Guba and Lincoln (1982) explain how a naturalist generally may discount generalizability, they also argue that some transferability is possible under certain circumstances. These circumstances include two conditions.

The first condition is *theoretical* or *purposive* sampling, meaning that the sampling intends to maximize the range of information collected. The three appended papers in this thesis result from two separate sampling instances, neither of which were random. Paper I's findings, implications, and conclusions are based upon analyzing a sample of 328 respondents traveling with a specific cruise line on a particular itinerary. Whereas it is undoubtedly advantageous that these findings are generalizable to other populations or a larger population, issues of, e.g., locality, time of data collection, and changes to tourist preferences over time could limit generalizability (Bryman, 2016). In Paper I, generalizability issues were first addressed using the guidelines for scale development and analysis by Hinkin et al. (1997). The purpose of these guidelines is to aid the development of reliable and valid measurement instruments to be used in any hospitality industry field research setting. In Papers II and III, the sampling strategy is *theoretical* to find *information-rich* informants (Patton, 2002). In other words, Papers II and III meet the first condition, as emphasized by Guba and Lincoln (1982).

The second condition, which mainly applies to qualitative studies, is providing "thick descriptions," which refers to depth, detailed descriptions, richness, and "enough information about a context" to provide a basis for a claim to relevance in some broader context (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Schram, 2003). The reader of the research decides the transferability of context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The scientific article format is often restricted upward to a certain number of words, limiting the rich descriptions' extent. This thesis, however, extends and deepens the contributions of the appended papers. In addition to context, the second condition

of transferability may include a "rich, thick description of the participants" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). I have provided as much description of the participants in the appended studies as the article format and Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) allow before compromising their anonymity. It should also be noted that generalizability was not the intended goal of the two qualitative papers in this thesis.

Dependability. Dependability is suggested parallel to qualitative research reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The term "stability" is offered as an alternative term to reliability. Although they admit qualitative studies are rarely replicable because a "second inquirer" may choose a different path given the same empirical material, Guba and Lincoln (1982) offer an approach for dependability. (i) Using *overlap methods* is a kind of triangulation claiming reliability based on complementary results. In this thesis, both quantitative and qualitative method approaches were applied to research the same phenomenon, although from the different perspectives of visitors and providers. (ii) *Stepwise replication* means that inquirers and data sources are split between two teams for independent investigations. I am the sole author of all three appended papers and this text. However, scientific supervisors have followed the process closely to guide the proper use of methods, mainly when inconsistencies might occur. (iii) *Dependability audit* refers to the transparency of the research method process: problem formulation, selection of participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, data analysis decisions, et cetera (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Peers will then act as auditors to ensure that proper procedures have been followed. All three appended papers have been through peer reviews before being published. This text has been exposed to several "peer reviews," both public and in separate meetings throughout its creation.

Confirmability. The confirmability concept refers to "the notion of objectivity in quantitative research" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Objectivity is considered a futile attempt in qualitative research. However, Guba and Lincoln (1982) offer more guidelines for confirmability. (i) *Triangulation* is analogous to the "overlap of methods" as described under dependability. (ii) *Practicing reflexivity* is the same practice described at the beginning of this chapter. This practice includes uncovering one's epistemological assumptions, biases, and subjectivity. (iii) The *confirmability audit* refers to how each finding should be backwards traceable by analyzing the original data. This audit means the researcher should identify and uncover their decision trail for public judgment (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The empirical material used in Papers II and III had to be anonymized and then promptly deleted to ensure the privacy protection of the

informants. However, I tried to maintain a consistent, open, and transparent process as much as possible in my research process.

Guba and Lincoln (1982) warn against using their guidelines as an orthodoxy because they recognize that all the steps may not be possible either fiscally or logistically in all inquiries. Furthermore, they may still not guarantee the trustworthiness of a study. However, all steps have been discussed above concerning this thesis.

3.4.2 Limitations of the data and final reflections

An effective researcher must learn from the research process (Clark et al., 2021). No matter how carefully one plans a study, there will always be limitations. There will always be errors associated with any study, no matter the empirical inquiry method (Sechrest & Sidani, 1995). Meehl (1978) argues that the "softer" social sciences seem more concerned with their methodologies compared with the natural "harder" sciences. I am no less concerned about my choices while reviewing the literature, choice of methods, reflecting upon my philosophical foundation, consequences of the various methodological choices, et cetera. I have been questioned on sample sizes, sample choices, replication, validity, and analytical approaches for years. Thus, I have had to justify every choice and step on the way, and not without frustration.

For instance, in this thesis' first paper, the context is a cruise ship that runs between a Norwegian harbor and a German harbor. The survey was conducted solely in Norwegian, which means it did not include non-Norwegian speakers' input. This lack of input means some nuances may have been lost, as differences, if any, between Norwegian and German speakers were not studied. As I am Norwegian, this means I could "take for granted" that my understanding of the phenomena being examined corresponded with the ideas of my research subjects. Facts, as Kuhn argues, can be language dependent (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). This possible error is usually corrected by translating from one language to another and then back into the original language to see if meanings and understandings may have changed. However, as the research was directed at capturing Norwegians' input, this was unnecessary in this instance.

Additionally, there are valid discussions to be made about the internal validities regarding both the content and relevance of some of the constructs and survey questions in Paper I. These are especially evident because the theme factors music and design were not found to be significant for the perception of a themed environment. These issues are elaborated upon in 5.1.1.

While performing interviews, I may have had certain preconceived understandings of different terms, which hypothetically could shape the follow-up questions needed to explicate what the interview subjects meant in response to various questions. When analyzing responses, given my age, position, and national background (which may operate as biases) versus my research subjects, an easy path to conclusions could be agreeing with the opinions of all subjects. However, this would be both dishonest and unethical.

The limitation of the number of informants for Papers II and III has been addressed in 3.3.2 as well as in each paper. However, the categorization of their responses as a visitor perspective or a provider perspective can also be considered a limitation. In this thesis, sorting their responses therefore relies on the understanding of what these categories mean. This thesis uses the perspectives and meanings as outlined by Jensen and Skallerud (2015). The visitor perspective concerns distinctive characteristics of experiences as they appear to visitors. The provider perspective focuses on production or management-related aspects of a business. These categorical perspectives may appear artificial when interviewing with the dual-context separation of practitioner and academic informants. How do you know when something is more valuable to the supply side, and when something is more valuable for the visitor? I assessed what belonged to which category ("this is mostly important to providers" and "this is mostly important to visitors") based on whether the value in the interview was expressed as most vital to the providers or the visitors. This process took place both during the interviews, and when reading and re-reading the transcripts for the analysis of the empirical material. Although the interviews mostly followed the setup from the half-structured interview guide, informants did move back and forth between answering different questions. Often, they would return to something they responded to earlier because they remembered something that could extend that information. Other times answers to one question would be answered in responses to other questions in addition to that specific question. I still asked all questions in the interview guide, and, if I felt it necessary, asked additional probing questions for the informants to provide a more extensive perspective and give more examples. For this thesis, this means that even if for instance Paper III three of the questions from the interview guide were considered (most) relevant, the informants would touch upon the various relevant subjects throughout most of the interviews.

Taking the role of an interviewer was a learning process with room for improvement. When for example doing a qualitative data analysis approach such as thematic analysis (for Paper II and III) it is vital to reflect on what is *not* in the data (Clark et al., 2021). Are the findings and the

results included in the Ph.D. project relevant despite its limitations (Clark & Bryman, 2019)? Did the limited number of informants truly capture all dimensions of theming in experience-based tourism (**RQ2**)? Did the limited number of interviews find all relevant main objectives of theming (**RQ3**)? An ideal approach could perhaps be to employ 5-10 researchers, provide them with more time than one year to find all possible informants who could respond to the given research questions of this thesis. What is an idealistic versus a realistic approach for a research project? Bernard (2006) urges researchers to ask themselves several "realistic approach" questions for the pursuit of all research questions.

First, does the topic (or even the data collection method) really interest the researcher? I have a personal interest with all topics in the introduction of this thesis. Of course, this interest and the personal interests of the informants could bias the results in that personal favorite subjects emerge both when constructing the project, the interview guides, and during the interviews and the analytical process. That is where there is a chance that dimensions and objectives of theming could "slip" and be omitted from the data. When the researcher works alone, trust in this process comes down trust in the researcher and the people who will vouch for his work. For this thesis, the individual papers have undergone at least two review processes each. My supervisors have read, reread, and offered feedback to all text for years. Feedback from other researchers has also been continuously incorporated such as from the compulsory 80% feedback seminar.

Second, are the research questions "amenable to scientific inquiry"? This comes down to how topics are scientifically studied and if the research questions can be studies by methods of science. The first three research questions in this thesis have actively been answered in Paper I-III as well as expanded upon in this dissertation. As the papers have been reviewed by several scholarly journals, the research questions appear to have been found worthy of inquiry.

Third, are there adequate resources available to investigate the topic (that is, time, money, and people)? I spent a significant portion of his life both to reflect on the appended papers and the dissertation. Money has not necessarily been a problem. Despite issues with availability of research subjects, interviewing through Skype or with inexpensive travel has not been problematic. Finally, while many have been involved in the research process (e.g., supervisors, other scientists) I relied much on his own skills to analysis. When issues in interpretation arose, I would go to supervisors or other researchers for help and input.

Fourth, do the research questions or choice of methods lead to ethical problems? Except for minor issues addressed in this chapter (on, e.g., follow-up questions or privacy of informants) there have not been compromising ethical issues with this thesis.

Fifth, is the topic of practical or theoretical interest? This thesis attempts to bridge certain gaps in research (see 1.2). However, first and foremost, it aims to deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism. 'Relevance' and 'usefulness' is a prime concern for most research performed both with private and public funding in Norway. This has been challenging; even to myself. As time passes, the researcher can begin to question the aim of the thesis and its applicability outside the realm of a few readers. However, I use my knowledge gained from the work on this thesis for lectures across several higher education institutions. The papers have at the time of writing already been cited 47 times in other works. These examples can be interpreted as both practical and theoretical interest in the topics addressed in this thesis.

A challenging issue has been maintaining the privacy of informants for Papers II and III. Following the guidelines provided by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), I affirmed that each informant would remain anonymous after each interview. However, in peer reviews, reviewers asked for more data on informants, which might have compromised their privacy. Thus, finding a balance between relevant, sufficient, and satisfactory information and what could expose their identities proved challenging. However, on both accounts, this was achieved to the reviewers' satisfaction.

When proposing this thesis to fellow PhD scholars, the idea was to apply quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the research problem and research questions. This was critiqued immediately as a risky endeavor as this meant both choices would have to be defended in a future disputation. Additionally, this was considered more ambitious and thus more time-consuming than was deemed necessary. However, a PhD project is both a risk and an ambition for the individual and includes some naïvety. The research problem and the research questions are connected to the question of methodological choice. Research that requires extensive and deep analysis is often time consuming and often requires an analytical process of combining both survey data and qualitative data (Driscoll et al., 2007). Constructivist researchers often use quantitative and qualitative information from, for example, key informants to increase their understanding (Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, & Collins, 2009). It is thus my conviction that the mixed-methods approach strengthens its contributions. The process of repeatedly being questioned and questioning oneself is a demanding undertaking (Lofthus, 2020). If I were to

repeat all processes that led to this dissertation, I would probably have chosen to seek more collaboration and work less in isolation (Summers, 2001).

4. The empirical studies and research findings

The three appended papers for this thesis and their findings are presented in this chapter.

Table 7 summarizes the papers, their main findings, methodology, and the author's contribution.

Paper	Title	Findings	Methodology	Author's contributions
I	Theme factors that drive the tourist customer experience	The most important drivers for the cruise theme customer experience were (i) name, (ii) employee interaction, and (iii) lighting.	Quantitative survey	Sole author
II	Exploring theming dimensions in a tourism context	Findings reveal 10 intangible central theming dimensions: (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.	Qualitative interviews	Sole author
III	Why theming? Identifying the purposes of theming in tourism	Findings reveal five purposes in theming that are essential for tourism managers who are considering theming their products and services: (i) ensure differentiation, (ii) increase sales of a brand or a product, (iii) create bonds between the guests and a theme, brand, or product, (iv) attract, stop and make visitors stay, and (v) enhance the end-to-end experience.	Qualitative interviews	Sole author

Table 7. Overview of appended papers

4.1 Paper I

Theme factors that drive the tourist customer experience

Åstrøm, J. (2017). *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 11 (2). 125–141.

The first article appended in this thesis examines which theme factors or indicators contribute to a cruise ship's tourist customer experience. A few fundamental questions are asked in this paper. What are themed environments? Furthermore, are cruise ships themed environments from which guests can perceive said themes? Additionally, what contributes to a themed environment? This paper aims to answer these questions and contribute to developing an instrument that can measure a themed environment's success. In turn, achieving this aim can provide managers of themed environments with a tool to better manage their themed offerings. Paper I has a guest-centric focus, which for this thesis means it is categorized as a visitor's perspective.

This paper builds on existing research and literature to examine which theme factors (also called components) create an overall theme experience in a cruise ship environment. The components were hypothesized to contribute to the themed cruise environments, leading to the development of a conceptual model. Data for testing these hypotheses were collected using questionnaires during a cruise in March 2010. The structured questionnaire was developed as part of a research project on cruise travel (Appendix 1). Of the 408 completed questionnaires, 328 were returned as valid.

In particular, the paper focuses explicitly on five relevant theme components in a cruisescape: (i) name, defined as the guests' association with the name of the cruise ship, (ii) *employee interaction*, defined as travelers' evaluation of staff behavior and appearance, (iii) *music*, defined as the guests' evaluation of musical quality in their surroundings, (iv) *lighting*, defined as an ambient condition that visually appeals to the guest experience, and (v) *design*, defined as the functional and aesthetic setting. Research notes from 2010 discloses the process behind how the components were selected. Because of close relationship between theming and branding (Beardsworth & Bryman, 1999), the brand elements listed by Keller, Apéria, and Georgson (2008) were considered sources. However, a brand differs from a theme. A brand can be source for a theme, but themes represent a higher order "brand" because themes can be sourced from other places than brands and extends the meaning of these sources. While there were "general" components available for all themed environments, it was the cruise context

that aided in reducing these to the most relevant. This reduction was done through studying the pictures and text on the cruise line's web pages. All components (or theme factors) were identified through analytical reading of the theming literature available at the time (2010), then selected based on group discussions with the supervisor and the other six research assistants, and what was found on the web pages. The theme components are hypothesized to contribute to the *perception of a theme*, defined as the consumer's ability to recognize the theme through its holistic application throughout the material and social environment. Table 8 summarizes the five hypotheses and shows whether they were supported (S) or not (NS).

Hypotheses	Res. [1]
H1. Name is positively related to a guest's perception of a theme.	S
H2. Employee interaction is positively related to a guest's perception of a theme.	S
H3. Music is positively related to a guest's perception of a theme.	NS
H4. Lighting is positively related to a guest's perception of a theme.	S
H5. Design is positively related to a guest's perception of a theme.	NS

[1] Support of hypotheses is indicated by S, and no support is indicated by NS.

Table 8. Generated hypotheses and overall results

Linear regression was chosen as the analytical technique to test the model. This technique was considered a suitable choice because previous studies with components predicting the outcome in comparable fields had similar theoretical reasons. Three of the five hypotheses were supported, and "name" was the most crucial factor. The second most crucial factor was employee interaction, and finally, the third was lighting.

As a result, this has specific theoretical and managerial implications. The theoretical implications are twofold. First, the results confirm that cruise ships are themed environments and that some indicators positively contribute to this perception. Second, the argument that guests can derive a theme from the environment is also substantiated and is a unique finding. Therefore, naming, employee interaction, and lighting should be considered necessary in theming a cruisescape. Practically, this means managers need to be aware of these components' effect on a themed cruisescape, especially when they want to enhance the impact. Although music and design were found to contribute less to the perception of a theme in this study, this does not mean they should be disregarded. This shortcoming may be contextual. As components, they may be dissatisfiers—missed when absent, but less impactful when present.

It is the theoretical implications of this study that contribute the most to this thesis. After observing the lack of existing empirical research and literature, the paper concludes with calls for future qualitative research on theming as a field, the dimensions of theming, and theming both in tourism and in a broader context.

4.2 Paper II

Exploring theming dimensions in a tourism context

Åstrøm, J. (2018). *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 20. 5–27.

In the second paper, the aim was to explore the concept of theming in a tourism context and its more abstract dimensions. This exploration was conducted by analyzing how academic scholars and practitioners within the field of theming understand the concept and its dimensions. Theming dimensions can be defined as the central abstract and nonphysical attributes of a themed environment that managers and developers should consider. Paper II, like Paper I, has a guest-centric focus. Thus, it is categorized as a visitor's perspective in this thesis.

Theme and theming

The concepts of themes and theming are summarized as follows.

Informants refer to a theme as a set of cohesive ideas and elements that refer to something else meant to bring together a meaningful experience. Informants refer to theming as a complex design process or set of processes providing objects or places with a voice, personality, and an intentional sense of purpose through storytelling and material development.

The findings are summarized and alphabetically presented as follows.

Dimensions of theming

i. Authenticity

Informants refer to authenticity as a subjective evaluation of a themed environment, often improved by connecting to the original site. Authenticity was the most mentioned dimension, which reflects how widely it has been debated in tourism research since the 1970s (MacCannell, 1973).

ii. Chronotope

Informants refer to chronotope as a "guest-centric" perception of a time period, such as the future, present, or most conveniently the past, and this is highly relevant for and related to the sense of authenticity.

iii. Cohesion

Informants refer to cohesion as a thematic effect that applies to all business aspects, and it is rarely fully achieved. Cohesion means all elements and aspects of a themed world should contribute to a consistent sense of theme and reduce the chance of intrusion from the "outside (unthemed) world." In this study, this effect is conceptually related to the informants' definition of a theme.

iv. Digital technology

Informants refer to digital technology as a dimension used to enable innovation in the other dimensions and improve the experience. However, caution is urged as digital technology should be avoided if it substitutes for the core experience or becomes the theme rather than improving it.

v. Immersion

Informants refer to immersion as a potential requirement for the suspense of disbelief and a sense of difference in time and place. It is also essential for world-building, although the immersion level may be limited by contexts such as a space's size or weather.

vi. Interaction/Co-creation

Informants refer to interaction as co-creation in themed environments, which allows for more individualized experiences. Interaction can alleviate boredom in themed environments.

vii. Multisensory

Informants refer to themed experiences as multisensory experiences with both psychological and existential impacts. The multisensory stimulation completes the theme, which, in turn, is suggested to lead to memorability.

viii. Novelty

Informants refer to novelty as what attracts people to themed environments for their first visit. A lack of novelty is a risk in themed experiences, and creating something unique is creating something new for each experience. Novelty is closely related to nostalgia, which is related to the dimension of relatability through familiarity.

ix. Relatability

Informants refer to relatability as what connects visitors to the theme. It is suggested that themes only work if people can recognize them. Using already successful intellectual properties (IPs) is a typical modern approach. However, the search for familiar themes may lead to commodified theming.

x. Storytelling

Informants refer to stories and storytelling as expected, although not required, entities for themed environments. Stories are a popular source for themes, and the most compelling stories often spring from the original site. It is suggested that stories are mass-customized, and they can create constant uniqueness, which connects this with the dimension of novelty. Informants highlighted storytelling as a dimension many times in the interviews, which may indicate their relative importance compared with the other dimensions.

In this paper, the dimensions are considered guidelines that tourism managers of themed environments and attractions should assess so as to find to what extent these immaterial dimensions of theming apply, what they offer, and how to manage them. Furthermore, the dimensions can be used to develop an instrument for measuring a themed environment's success.

Furthermore, the interrelation of these dimensions is underlined in this paper. All dimensions are not universally relevant for all themed environments, although they should be considered simultaneously.

This study's findings contribute significantly to this thesis by exploring the main concepts of themes and theming and elaborating on 10 theming dimensions. However, the existing empirically based research and literature leave many questions to be answered. Therefore, Paper II concludes with calls for further research, especially research on the many purposes or the "why" of theming in tourism. Research on this topic would explain why tourism managers consider theming their products and services to turn them into experiences.

4.3 Paper III

Why theming? Identifying the purposes of theming in tourism

Åstrøm, J. (2019). *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, 21 (3). 245–266.

Building on the previous two papers and the lack of empirical research on theming, the aim of the third paper appended in this thesis was to examine the purposes of theming in a tourism context. Furthermore, it aimed to challenge these commonly accepted assumptions and identify new objectives.

This examination was conducted by analyzing how practitioners and academic scholars within theming understood and defined these purposes.

Five distinct purposes that can be considered business objectives behind theming in tourism were revealed. Unlike Papers I and II, Paper III has a manager-centric focus. Thus, Paper III is categorized as a provider's perspective in this thesis.

The subdimensions demonstrate that the objectives are interrelated. Hence, the purposes are summarized and alphabetically presented as follows.

i. Attract, stop, and make visitors stay, or influence and modify their behavior

Informants consider theming as an approach to modify and manipulate behavior and feelings. A themed space is first meant to attract visitors. However, this is not enough. It is suggested that a themed environment is also meant to connect guests with the brand identity using space, which requires making people want to stay in the environment longer. As a result, this means having complete control of the themed space to ascertain whether the experience aligns with the space's intention.

ii. Create bonds between the guests and a theme, brand, or product

Informants consider theming as an approach to create bonds with their guests. This type of branding is where the bonds are built with the associations or values that the existing brand space creators want to convey. It is suggested that this results in people feeling they are consuming the atmosphere of the space.

iii. Enhance the end-to-end experience

Informants consider theming to enhance the end-to-end experience by immersing guests in an identifiable world made sensical through, for instance, a story. The themed experience begins before and ends after the physical and sensory experience, such as through a website. This understanding suggests that the attractiveness and quality output need to be consistent throughout every aspect of the themed experience.

iv. Ensure differentiation

Informants consider theming as an approach to differentiate and separate experiences from each other. Theming is part of creating a visitor destination, creating attractiveness, and displaying "the spirit of the place."

v. Increase sales of a brand or a product

Informants consider theming to facilitate experiences out of products, services, or brands, thus adding value that demands a higher price. Sales are suggested to be dependent on repeat visitation.

4.4 Summing up

The three appended papers and their central findings are presented in this chapter. Together, they help bridge the knowledge gaps, and shed light on and respond to the research questions raised in this thesis. The findings' contributions to the thesis, the existing research on the theoretical field of theming, other implications, and the overall contribution of this thesis are discussed in the next chapter.

5. Contributions, implications, and further research

This chapter concludes this doctoral thesis and summarizes its contributions. First, the various research contributions will be introduced and described with the help of an overview model. Second, how the thesis and its appended papers contribute theoretically and empirically is discussed. These discussions are organized according to the visitor and provider perspectives chosen for this thesis. Third, the managerial implications will be debated. Fourth and finally, future research is suggested.

5.1 Theoretical contributions regarding theming in experience-based tourism

Few empirical studies explore the concept of theming in experience-based tourism. This thesis contributes to deepening our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism, what themes and theming are, what goes into theming, its dimensions, and what the purposes of theming are. Specifically, the thesis attempts to determine which factors can drive the themed tourism experience, what the dimensions of theming in experience-based tourism are, and why theming is used in experience-based tourism. Lastly, the issue of the purposes of theming has rarely been empirically explored.

Previous research has been relatively superficial in its description, analysis, and treatment of the complex phenomenon of theming (Lukas, 2016a). First, this thesis enhances and expands on the existing research because it focuses on the links between themes and theming, theme factors, theming dimensions, and theming purposes. Second, this thesis intends to illustrate how they come together and form part of the theming discourse. Therefore, the thesis covers the current research on theming in experience-based tourism that disregards the question of what theming in tourism is. This thesis' overall contribution is an expanded conceptual understanding of theming in experience-based tourism, providing tourism experience providers with the benefits of theming. The thesis seeks to explain "the what and the why" of theming in experience-based tourism by stressing physical and abstract theming components and dimensions crucial to the purposes behind theming for creating lucrative and memorable visitor experiences.

Figure 5-1 is a developed version of Figure 1-1 (p. 25) and illustrates this thesis' various contributions. The three appended papers are placed in a context spectrum of theming in experience-based tourism. The gray diamond in the middle of the figure represents the

phenomenon of theming. The first paper's contributions are placed on the left side of the gray diamond with the sublabel "theming from a visitor perspective." The paper is placed on the diamond's narrow side because it signifies research on a context-dependent level.

Furthermore, the theme factors are the methods of theming used to produce the themed experience. The second paper's contributions are placed closer to the middle of the diamond, which means its contributions are more comprehensive in applicability and less context independent. It is also on the side of theming from a visitor's perspective and signifies themed environments' more abstract components. With the sublabel "theming from a provider perspective," the third paper's contributions are on the right side. These are the purposes of theming in tourism and are thus more general than context-independent ones; hence their placement.
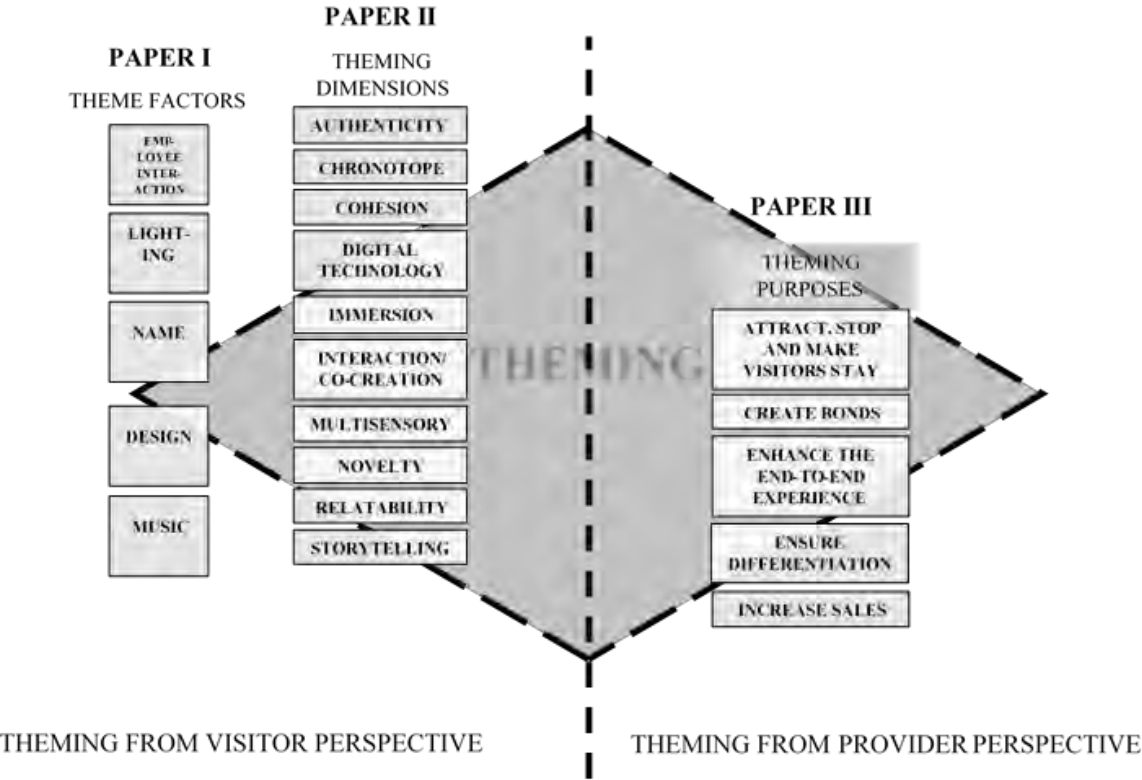

Figure 5-1. Overview of contributions in appended research papers

A more comprehensive discussion of the empirical and theoretical contributions is found in the next section. The structure of the discussion is as follows. First, theme factors are discussed. Second, the discussion then moves onto the theming dimensions. The final discussion ends with theming purposes.

The contributions of this thesis regarding theming in experience-based tourism comprise four main aspects: (i) an extended understanding of theme factors from a visitor perspective, (ii) an extended understanding of theming dimensions from a visitor perspective, (iii) an extended understanding of theming purposes from a provider perspective, and (iv) an extended understanding of theming for experience innovation. The first three following discussions relate to the research questions: (**RQ1**), Which theme factors drive the themed tourism experience?, (**RQ2**), What are the dimensions of theming in experience-based tourism?, and (**RQ3**), What are the main objectives of theming? The fourth and final discussion links the contributions of this thesis to experience innovation. This is a response to the fourth research (**RQ4**). In this thesis, theming in experience-based tourism is how a provider stages and conveys a *theme* through applying physical and nonphysical cues to an environment, intended to alter a visitor's reality perception and experience, and create memories (Bryman, 2004; Muñoz et al., 2006; Pine & Gilmore, 2019). The discussions extend the understanding of this thesis' contributions regarding the previous and current research in each field, and in this sense deepens our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism.

5.1.1 *An extended understanding of theme factors from a visitor perspective*

This thesis' first contribution is theme factors, found on the left side of the research contributions' overview in Figure 5-1. The purpose of the discussion in this section is to integrate Paper I's findings into the existing literature on theming in experience-based tourism. First, this section will discuss the three theme factors that were significant for the perception of a theme. Then, the two factors that were not significant will be briefly discussed. The discussion will follow the order the factors are given in Figure 5-1, delineating the factors between less and more tangible. Theme factors contribute to the themed experiencescape, whose intention is to stage experiences for tourists (Lashley, 2008; O'Dell & Billing, 2006).

Names, as a themed environment factor, offers a more in-depth understanding of the visitors' perspective. Name as a factor for Paper I originated from Schmitt and Simonson's table of how themes can be expressed (1997, p. 149). The other factors from the same table were symbols, plot, slogans/songs, concept, and "combination" (of several elements). Plots could include characters, music, or design (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997). Previous research on names connected to theming and tourism seems to be rare and is often conceptual and explorative (Light, 2014). To my knowledge, Paper I is the first attempt to empirically establish why those

who want to provide their visitors with themed experiences should name their places, services, and products carefully to holistically fit the theme. Furthermore, considering the relation between branding and theming (Beardsworth & Bryman, 1999), it is perhaps not surprising that Paper I shows the theoretical significance of *names* for theming. However, names are arguably one of the less tangible factors, although perceivable through word of mouth, websites, and material signs.

This thesis promotes the importance of names for theming, which means naming in theming is crucial and should receive significant attention. Urry and Larsen (2011) consider theming to be about "importing places and stimulating imaginative travel elsewhere," also typified by international brands, among other things. Furthermore, they consider *new* place names the "first kind of theme." In fact, Paper I supports Light (2014), who highlights the role of names and naming in creating new place identities as part of coherent themed landscapes that can be promoted to visitors. Light explains how toponymy (the study of place names, Soanes & Stevenson, 2009) and tourism have rarely been studied. However, he explains how place names are connected to the visual (place names as tourist sites), the performative (tourist performances of place names), and merchandising (place names as souvenirs). All three connections are inarguably familiar factors of several themed environments.

Although essential to experience-based tourism, Light (2014) also underlines the significance of place names to heritage tourism, cultural tourism, and rural tourism. Additionally, place names can be or become attractions in themselves. Paper I substantiates the importance names have for the themed space. Lew (2017) debates the concept of "placemaking" as a type of global theming carried out by governments and tourism authorities. Examples of this are the introduction of colorful and thematic street name signs or themed pedestrian-oriented shopping streets (Gottdiener, 2001; Lew, 2007; Paradis, 2004). Lew connects naming and theming from the conceptual to the material. Names must be communicated to have the desired effect. Moreover, naming in theming in Paper I refers to conceptual consumption, meaning the consumption of concepts or symbols rather than products (Ariely & Norton, 2009; Levy, 1959). Paper I complements and extends the works of Olson (1999), Gottdiener (2001), Paradis (2004), Lew (2007, 2017), and Light (2014) by providing an empirical argument as to why providers should name their places, services, and products to fit the theme.

Lighting in service environments has not been studied extensively in previous research despite its acknowledgment as a crucial component of the consumer experience, unlike, for instance, scent and music (Robson & Kimes, 2007; Zemke & Shoemaker, 2008). Lighting is important

to a themed environment because it can transform the environment into an illusion, which could even mean the perceived time of the day (Goss, 1993; Schenker, 2002). In themed environments, lighting aids in the referential recreation of other times and places (Corbin, 2002). Lighting for a themed environment is an atmospheric factor; its placement, color, intensity and type takes part in developing beauty, charm, texture, attention, and a "desirable atmosphere" (Slåtten, Mehmetoglu, Svensson, & Sværi, 2009). In Paper I, *lighting* is a significant factor for how theming is perceived in a themed environment, and as such, it confirms its importance for a themed environment. Lighting as a factor in a themed environment is one of several ambient factors from the original servicescape (Bitner, 1992). Baker, Levy, and Grewal (1992) found ambient cues, including lighting, to influence pleasure and arousal, which had a positive relationship with willingness to buy in retail environments. Paper I studies lighting in a cruise ship environment, which does include retail environments. In other words, it is reasonable to assume lighting influences both the perception of the theme and the willingness to buy.

Furthermore, Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman (1994) find that soft lighting, together with music, could provide cues on which consumers based their quality inferences. There is little research on theme factors and, for instance, service or experience quality. However, Paper I and Baker et al. (1994) indicate that researching this is worth pursuing. Additionally, Han and Ryu (2009) find that ambient conditions, including lighting, had a significant independent role in shaping customer loyalty. Paper I thus supports their claim that lighting is essential for creating a complete guest experience. Ryu and Han (2011) find that lighting could influence disconfirmation, which is the consumer's comparison of expectations around a product or service before and after purchase (met, not met, or exceeded). The effect on disconfirmation has, in turn, an effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Paper I clearly extends our understanding of what lighting may influence and the perception of a theme, in addition to loyalty, customer satisfaction, and willingness to buy.

Employee interaction's importance to a themed environment is established in Paper I and confirms that employees contribute to a theme's perception. Employee interaction is thus a positive predictor for the perception of a theme. Employee interactions as a factor in themed environments have been given more research attention than, e.g., names. Employee interaction is important to themed environments because it adds fun and joy to visitors' experience (Kao, Huang, & Wu, 2008). Furthermore, employee interaction contributes to theming and can contribute for instance to loyalty (Ali et al., 2018; Ryu & Han, 2009). Often referred to as part

of the communicative staging of Bitner's (1992) servicescape (Arnould, Price, & Tierney, 1998), employees are, in this thesis, considered more part of the tangible side of the factors considering their less abstract appearance, including direct and indirect interaction with visitors, scripts, and performances, as well as their attire in the form of, for example, costumes and uniforms.

Previous research has shed light on many aspects of employee interaction in various themed settings. Grove, Fisk, and Dorsch (1998) consider service personnel as part of four "key theatrical components" (they call them "actors") in a "service drama." Paper I encompasses this understanding because Grove et al. (1998) find that actors influence people's response to service more than the audience, service setting, and overall performance. Beardsworth and Bryman (2001) expand on the idea of the process of Disneyization by introducing Hochschild's concept of emotional or performative labor (2003, first published in 1983) in connection with theming. Respondents in Paper I were asked if employees met them with eye contact when spoken to, if employees were cheerful and smiled, and if they dressed presentably. The measurements' indicators follow the theoretical foundation of theming and employee interaction: emotional or performative labor and aesthetic attire. Employees can serve practical functions in many ways by directing people in a desired direction or instructing them on security, such as a mandatory safety drill on a cruise ship. These often scripted and standardized performances omit the many other services employees often perform—emotional, performative, or aesthetic labor (Bryman, 2004; Witz, Warhurst, & Nickson, 2003). Edensor (2001) confirms that employees can be considered actors in tourism. The different kinds of performances are discussed in this article, such as the staged theatrical drama actors, workers whose outfits and expressions are harmonized with their themed environments, and cultural intermediaries who display "native" local dancing and music. These assumptions partly support the theoretical understanding of employee interaction in Paper I. Stuart and Tax (2004) reiterate the theatrical perspective put forth by Pine and Gilmore (2011), and Pikkemaat and Schuckert (2007) discuss the staging of experiences and authenticity as critical success factors for theme parks. Both studies underline the rationale for studying employee interaction in Paper I. In their research, Pikkemaat and Schuckert (2007) find that poor and missing service contributes to failed theme park concepts. Some limitations to the construct as employed in Paper I exist. Employee interaction in a themed environment could have included more and other measurement indicators such as staff's friendliness, staff's helpfulness, staff's availability, and staff's knowledgeableness (Slåtten et al., 2009). Kao et al. (2008) refer to interaction as

"participation" and measure employee interaction with "I interacted with the expositors". The employee interaction construct in Paper I captures only eye contact during communication, the cheerfulness of the employees, their smiles, and their attire as perceived by the visitors. Some of these indicators could rather have been included for other construct such as "consistency of theme" or "attractiveness of scripts (actor)" (Kao et al., 2008). Future research may therefore include additional indicators to discover further the significance5 of interaction in theming. These could include more service quality indicators (SERVQUAL), or perhaps a more appropriately adapted theme quality scale (THEMEQUAL, see Astari et al., 2020). Tsang, Lee, Wong, and Chong (2012) observed how the universal lack of the SERVQUAL model made it inadequate for measuring all settings, and therefore recommend adding more measuring items or dimensions for adoptability to, for instance, a theme park setting. The THEMEQUAL model adds "courtesy" as a dimension for the themed environment, which includes politeness, respect, consideration, friendliness, and attitude of personnel. In turn, these attributes enable visitors to have a pleasant experience (Astari et al., 2020). However, at the time of the data collection for Paper I, the THEMEQUAL scale had not been developed yet. At that time, the choice of indicators for employee interaction (then named just "employees") was justified by the degree to which employees functioned as image of the service. Therefore, employees were meant to be evaluated as part of the full themed environment, how they worked, their service training, and what was observable. Kao et al. (2008) has one indicator that points towards the same understanding as part of the "Consistency of theme" construct, namely "Workers' clothing is consistent with theme." However, measuring theme consistency was not what part of the research project although in retrospect variations of the same indicator could have been developed to measure more aspects of the employee interaction construct. It is also worth noting that Paper II and this thesis suggest that using employees for scripted storytelling, themed oral communication and employee behavior, and costumes such as uniforms and other types of attire may contribute to environmental cohesion in theming (see 5.1.2 and 5.3).

Additionally, poor human resource management, no team spirit, a high fluctuation and a bad service attitude were no-go factors for parks with negative innovation cycles (Pikkemaat & Schuckert, 2007). Kwortnik (2008) is one of the few papers that addresses the "shipscape" and extends Bitner's servicescape for cruise ships. Paper I owes much to this study and adds weight to its impact as, to my knowledge, few studies empirically and theoretically address the shipscape in connection with theming.

Above, employee interaction as a more tangible theme factor from Paper I was discussed and compared with previous and current research. Below, the theme factors that were found not to be significant for the perception of a theme will be briefly discussed.

Music is often mentioned as an expected component or factor for themed environments (e.g., Beames & Brown, 2017), either as the central theme (e.g., for a music event, festival, or fair) or as something that is meant to be part of the background (in other words, background music). Music connected to theming and tourism has received very little attention in previous research. However, music has been found to affect both advertised message- and nonmessage-based processing by low- and high-involvement consumers (MacInnis & Park, 1991); to influence pleasure, arousal, and surprise in listeners (Kellaris & Kent, 1993), which have a mediating effect on attitude toward servicescape and sales personnel (Dubé & Morin, 2001); to positively affect patronage and felt pleasure in commercial retail settings (Garlin & Owen, 2006); and to influence how food and beverages taste, what people choose to eat, and the perceived pleasantness of food in people's mouths (Zampini & Spence, 2010). Music thus has a place in themed environments, although, as Paper I shows, its contribution may have a lesser effect on the theme's perception. Instead, as Lee et al. (2015) propose, music is part of the ambient condition that "allows consumers to experience the theme through their sensory perceptions." Music is crucial to theming in a cruisescape setting because visitors' associations to various types of music and adds touristic authenticity (Cashman, 2014). For example, Greek-themed bands playing on a cruise in Greece will enhance the overall Greek theme, or classical music would reinforce associations with the "upper social class" (Cashman, 2014). A limitation could be that the music played may in the minds of the visitors just not have been associated with the overall theme.

Design, undeniably constituting a large part of most themed environments, has by far been researched the most out of all the theme factors, perhaps because of the term's ambiguity. For instance, Beames and Brown (2017) claim that *décor* is an essential component of coherent theming. However, the position that, for instance, *architecture* holds in the theming literature has been long confirmed (Davis, 1996; Francaviglia, 1995; Kozinets et al., 2002; Lukas, 2016a). Design can influence emotions, behavior, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. It is contradictory and a distinct limitation that design was not found essential for the themed cruisescape. Although both the aesthetic and functional (or practical) are recognized as crucial key attributes for themed environments in Paper I (see also Kao et al., 2008; Milman, 2009), the measurement indicators for these dimensions may have been suboptimal. The indicators

were based on Han and Ryu (2009), Mittal and Lassar (1996), and Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler (2009). However, these indicators originate from a more classic servicescape measurement and therefore are not explicitly developed to measure themed environments. A different approach to assess which indicators were important to a themed cruisescape environment could have been using a survey that first identified which were contextually and environmentally recognizable (e.g., using all décor, artifacts, spatial layout, and ambient conditions as outlined by Han & Ryu, 2009), and then measure these as "consistent with the theme" (Kao et al., 2008, p. 168), and then based on those that were consistent created a better construct for measuring "design" for a themed environment.

Whereas there may be other ways to measure "theme experience", there were few to no established measures on themed environments available in 2010. Measuring "perception of [a] theme" was based on Pine and Gilmore's assumption (2002; 1999) that visitors' could elicit both explicit and implicit themes from environmental clues in and off themselves. This assumption had not been tested empirically before. Therefore, assuming a direct connection between environmental design indicators at the time seemed too presumptuous. Consequently, the dependent variable *perception of theme* was independently developed exactly because there were no established measures for how themes could be perceived by visitors. Paper I therefore establishes that visitors can "cognitively extract a theme from their environment". A limitation may also be that naming the independent variable could arguably have been different. "Theme coherence", a theming dimension that emerges from Paper II, may in retrospect have been a better fit. However, it is vital to consider the chronological sequence of the appended papers. Thus, both music and design as theme factors should be the subject of future research on theming, inside and outside of experience-based tourism.

This section discussed the theme factors that were significant for the perception of a theme. The following section will discuss theming dimensions from a visitor's perspective. The theming dimensions can be found in the second row from the left in the overview diamond model (Figure 5-1).

5.1.2 *An extended understanding of theming dimensions from a visitor perspective*

This thesis' second contribution is the theming dimensions as described in Paper II. The dimensions will be presented in alphabetical order as found in the second row from the left in the research contributions' overview diamond model (Figure 5-1). The theming dimensions are

the indirect, abstract, or immaterial theming components that operate alongside the more material theme factors. Oftentimes it is challenging to separate the two because they operate at different levels that could overlap. For instance, the multisensory dimension both points to something concrete (e.g., tactile and material artifacts) and something abstract (e.g., how a scent can contribute to memorability). It is therefore vital to repeat certain differences to clarify what is meant by *theming dimensions*. The dimensions could be viewed as tools, practices, effects (of theming), processes, or sensations. Whereas both theme factors and theming dimensions can be considered *components* of a themed environment, theme factors are about constructing a concrete physical space and theming dimensions about constructing a conceptual space in the visitors' minds. Tarssanen and Kylänen (2006) make a similar distinction where the bottom of their Experience Pyramid model displays six interrelated features or elements crucial to the visitor where one of these elements is "multisensory perception". This element intersects with the physical level of a visitors' experience, or "sense perception". In other words, the multisensory aspect (similar to a theming dimension) explains how most senses should be engaged and the sensory stimuli (similar to theme factors) harmonized to create a desired impression and strengthen a theme. The visitor perspective is the focus here because "what the visitor reads", how they feel, and how they respond to stimuli (Paper II) relates to the experiential and emotional value to visitors.

Although several dimensions have been suggested in the literature (see Table 4), collectively, the theming dimensions in experience-based tourism as presented in Paper II in several ways complement and extend Tarssanen and Kylänen (2006), Cutler and Carmichael (2010), Moscardo (2010), and Breiby (2015).

Authenticity, related to the other dimensions found in Paper II, such as immersion (Erb & Ong, 2016; Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018), chronotope (Harkin, 1995)*,* and interaction/co-creation (Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Morey, Griffin, & Riley, 2017), emerged in Paper II as one of the prime dimensions of theming in tourism. In tourism, the discourse on what motivates tourists to travel often refers to what MacCannell (1973) labels a quest for authentic social spaces experiences. Furthermore, these social places—the staged authenticity—are a middle ground between the social world's front and back regions (Goffman, 1959). These ideas and terms illustrate how authenticity is discussed in Paper II. The discussion demonstrates how blurred the dimension can seem. Contemporary tourism is too complicated to be fully explained as a search for authenticity (Urry, 1991). As Paper II shows, it is still relevant to certain tourism types (Wang, 1999). Paper II cautiously peers into the complexity of the authenticity

perspective itself and how it may apply to theming (e.g., Urry & Larsen, 2011, pp. 10-13, 125-135). The informants were well aware of the stern criticism that, for instance, theme parks had received over the years. Yoshimoto (1994) describes Tokyo Disneyland as a sign of American cultural imperialism meant to introduce visitors to an "authentic" American flavor. While Yoshimoto's perspective retains a tongue-in-cheek view of authenticity, it is open to the even older debate on whether themed environments are authentic or not and to what degree this renders them worthy places to visit. Findings reveal that while authenticity was a critical dimension, the "aura" of authenticity applied to themed environments is less that of Walter Benjamin (1968, "the original" versus the reproduction) and more that of Lu and Fine (1995): in the eye of the beholder (Lego et al., 2002).

The results show that neighborhoods could be "themed by default," which points to a type of authenticity that may apply to themed environments: Authenticity is granted by time (Belhassen, Caton, & Stewart, 2008; Eco, 1986; Szmigin et al., 2017). It is argued that over time, all spaces (or destinations) will attain authenticity. Instead, it is the reproduction of a themed concept where the authentic uniqueness is in peril of being lost. Findings reveal that this can be remedied by connecting the theme to a site. When the Disney parks opened in Tokyo (1983), Paris (1992), Hong Kong (2005), and Shanghai (2016), the Imagineers (Disney designers) made great efforts to both retain the distinct Disney themes as well as to adapt the parks to their local countries and markets. Gilmore and Pine (2009) argue theming to be a practice of "referential authenticity," enabling visitors to experience a specific place inserted in a different place. Using the examples mentioned by informants, this can mean experiencing recreations of the city of Venice outside of Italy, or the cuisine, flavors, symbols, and design of Japan outside of Japan. The themed space does not refer to a place in real life, which places the themed space somewhere on the spectrum between imagination and re(ty. This spectrum will be addressed further in discussing the dimension that specifically addresses the features of time and space: chronotope.

The concept of (a) *chronotope* (time–space) stems from Bakhtin (1981, p. 84), who borrowed the term space–time from Einstein's theory of relativity. The realm of theming chronotope can be defined as "spatiotemporal fictive experiencescape beyond the dull everyday life"

(Strömberg, 2016). The temporality dimension, another related term, ties chronotopes to authenticity in the tourist experience through the historicity of places, buildings, artifacts, institutions, and art (Harkin, 1995). Additionally, the difference in time and place ties chronotopes to immersion. Paper II reveals the two dimensions of the chronotope concept, illustrated in Figure 5-2. Horizontally, the "past," "present," and "future" are part of the time dimension. Vertically, "fantasy" and "reality" are part of the space dimension.
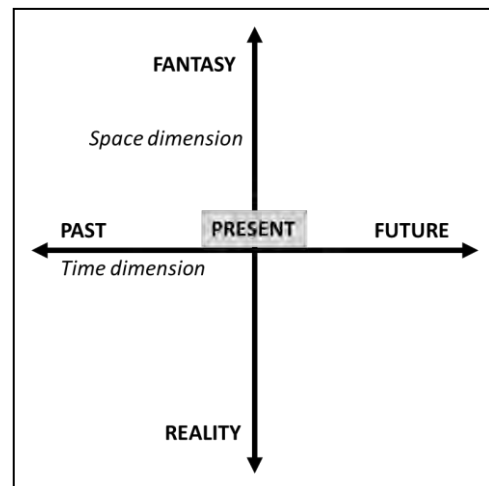

Figure 5-2. The theme realms of space and time

Most, if not all themes, can be placed somewhere within this concept. Much like Clifford's (1988) suggestion of using chronotopes to analyze art and culture, chronotope in theming can be used to position the themed environment's configuration to meet the designer's intention.

The local connection that enhances authenticity, as suggested in Paper II, may take different forms depending on its position in the chronotope. While a themed environment is placed timewise in the present or to a known past and has a connection to an actual physical place, this does not mean themes placed in fantasy or the future detach the environment from its authentic nature. Mythical elements such as King Arthur's legend are connected to England, and science and technology museums can play on the future as a theme, connecting them to still-in-development technological and scientific exhibits. As one informant explains, even the past can appear occluded and conveniently be fabricated with fantastical elements to enter the realm of fantasy. To build on this explanation, the present, in a sense, is the only "safe" place to draw themes from as it is the only place that we can truly represent. However, even then, one might run into issues. One, how can one ascertain that the present is represented accurately, and two, what is the point of recreating what already exists? For instance, why are there recreations of European cities in China—if not to allude to the themed place's fantasy aspect? Hence, all themed spaces are, even when recreating what is chronotopically centered in contemporary reality, fictive, and, in some part, fantasy. Therefore, this is addressed in connection with authenticity in Paper II. Whether one places any themed environment on the chronotopical spectrum, authenticity or inauthenticity breaks down and mainly becomes attractive to a segment whose specific appeal is the "authentic."

Constructing reality involves using elements that belong together and their consistent logical connections, which will be discussed in the next paragraph on cohesion.

Cohesion in Paper II refers to thematic elements' logic and how a theme should control how these fit together (Gilmore & Pine, 2002). In previous research, the term is often used similarly to *coherence*, referring to order, clarity, and unity and is a predictor for liking particular environments (Kaplan, 1987; Nasar, 1987). Thus, the terms cover two assumptions: one, the length of the physical distance between thematic factors matters, and two, there should be a logical consistency between all elements. Paper II extends this understanding, as cohesion is considered an essential dimension for creating the "thematic effect." Bitner (1992) suggests that the more complex services and environments are, the harder it is to achieve complete coherence. However, as services and themed environments undoubtedly expand both in terms of magnitude and geography, avoiding complexity becomes laborious because of, e.g., changes or growth in the workforce, cultural differences, shifts in segments and markets, reorganization, et cetera. Paper II suggests that despite this, thematic cohesion still applies to all aspects of business. In fact, informants did not unilaterally agree on this. Returning to the back, front, and staged regional view of the world (Goffman, 1959; MacCannell, 1973), this can be interpreted as cohesive theming is meant to intersect across all regions of the world even including employees. This view is somewhat radical but not entirely unprecedented. Numerous workplaces have chosen to theme their "backstage" areas to provide their employees with the same experience they offer their customers. This blending and staging of the professional world's front and back regions could be considered an attempt at comprehensive thematic cohesion. Cohesion also rests on theming being intentional rather than haphazard, as an informant in Paper II suggests. Dicks (2007) posits that theming aims at eliminating the "dead space," meaning natural environments free from what is readable, symbols, and the extraordinary (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). She also claims cohesion to be a trend in theming.

Furthermore, Paper II suggests that storytelling may be a precondition for cohesion in theming. While that may be true, stories add yet another dimension to themed environments, and they need to be explicitly and sufficiently communicated either through the environment (e.g., signage, audio guides), with the use of guides and personnel, or a combination of both. Storytelling as a theming dimension will be elaborated upon at the end of this section. Müller and Scheurer (2004, as cited in Pikkemaat, Peters, Boksberger & Secco, 2009), Tassiopoulos (2005, p. 399), and Weaver (2011) claim that theming provides coherence. Paper II supports these claims because theming is meant to "bring together an experience" through "cohesive ideas and elements." People appreciate a higher level of coherence (that is, physically matching, organized and similar elements) (Alpak, Özkan, Mumcu, & Özbilen, 2016). This appreciation

is also the reason why coherent theming is part of the measurement in Paper I. In the next paragraph, the dimension of digital technology will be discussed.

Paper II considers *digital technology* to be a toolkit, enabler, and amplifier for the other dimensions in theming. Paper II complements Dicks (2007), who claims theming is a technological effect meant to make environments coherent, and also Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003), who propose digital technology to be a dimension of experience innovation for developing experience environments. This claim effectively connects digital technology to cohesion. When digital technology emerged as a dimension in theming it was a precarious approximation at best. Although digital computers have been around since the 1940s, it is unclear what digital technology means and when it became widely available and diffused, although it seems to be around the late 1970s to the early 1990s (David, 2000). Digitization has led to declines in the cost of computation and information storage, and especially the internet has led to significant advances in communication and distribution no longer limited by space and time (Lau, 2003). Previous studies show that theme parks are at the forefront of applying technology to their themed rides and attractions (Cornelis, 2011, p. 50), having experimented with digital technology possibly since around the middle of the 20th century (Zika, 2018). The analysis and findings of Paper II support that digital technology improves the customer experience through personalization and engagement beyond the themed environment (Fehringer, 2016). Although almost anything can be and may become a theme (Pine & Gilmore, 2019), Paper II's findings reiterate how digital technology rarely should be the theme itself, as this runs the risk of encountering what is often nicknamed the chronotopical "Tomorrowland Problem." Since 1955, the themed land Tomorrowland in Disneyland—themed to a vision of the future—has needed continuous updates because the future tends to catch up, often in the way one might imagine. This case exemplifies Paper II's arguments because, in 1997, Tomorrowland was rethemed to "the future that never was," creating an alternate retro-reality of a past future vision and finally ending the novelty dilemma (Guffey, 2014; Tesler-Mabé, 2016). This example displays the chronotopical realms illustrated in Figure 5-2, where the present caught up to the future, and the provider instead had to create a fantasy future rather than a future fantasy. The next theming dimension to be discussed is immersion.

As a theming dimension, *immersion* is twofold. First, it relates to the environment, which is meant to be immersive, or as Paper II states, a fully encapsulated setting. Second, it is a "state of total immersion," which is a feeling of spatiotemporal belonging, being fully absorbed, involved in, surrendered to, or consumed by an activity where you forget yourself and your

surroundings (Blumenthal & Jensen, 2019; Hansen & Mossberg, 2013; Mainemelis, 2001). The first speaks to the process that leads to the mental state—the staging process of a completely immersive environment. For example, themed attractions such as dark rides have developed over more than 100 years from "illusion rides" to the comprehensive "immersion rides" of today (Zika, 2018). The second speaks of the sensation that takes place within the individual visitor. Paper II addresses and extends the research on both dimensional components. Blumenthal and Jensen (2019) explain how immersion can be an essential dimension for experience concepts such as flow, peak, and extraordinary experiences. Paper II finds that a sense of difference in time and place relies on immersion, both the built world and the inner, experienced world. As Paper II supports, immersion is the state where the unthemed world outside dissolves to leave only the themed world's impression. Carù and Cova (2006) find that consumers of an experience need to be guided by staff members and rituals to reach an immersion sensation in addition to theming and designing the environment. Thus, these requirements fit well with how tourist experiences occur in commonly themed experiencescapes, require a host and a guest, and create positive memories (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015; Lashley, 2008; Mossberg, 2007; O'Dell & Billing, 2006; Uriely, 2005).

Moreover, Carù and Cova (2007) add securing and enclavization of the space as necessary components, building onto a far more comprehensive structural concept of immersive experiences. The discourse on immersion in theming thus starts to look similar to the necessary conditions of a quasi-experiment, subjecting visitors to a pseudo-isolated controlled and fully immersed environment—the theming—with no other stimuli other than what supports the theme (Bollen, 1989; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). The "theming as an experiment" is evident in Paper II. Nevertheless, no matter how physically immersive the themed worlds are, the famed suspension of disbelief still relies on an active mental choice to achieve immersion. The following paragraph discusses interaction/co-creation.

In Paper II, *interaction/co-creation* are described as dimensions that allow for more individualization of experiences (Martins et al., 2017) and contribute to uniqueness in a themed environment. Interaction is co-creation in themed environments, where the findings of Paper II suggest coupling themed environments with immersion and thus moving them from passive to actively participatory escapist experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). These conclusions complement and extend the works of Harvey, Loomis, Bell, and Marino (1998), Gottdiener (2001), Pikkemaat and Schuckert (2007), and Campos, Mendes, do Valle, and Scott (2016), who find interaction and co-creation to increase time spent at exhibits, feelings of belonging to

a community (interaction between customers, guides, and other travelers), attention, meaningfulness, and memorability. Furthermore, interaction/co-creation in theming is shared as a crucial dimension in experience innovation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Previous research often refers to interaction/co-creation as something that happens between people such as visitors and service personnel, enabling more memorable and authentic experiences with an increased feeling of belonging with like-minded others (Campos, Mendes, Valle, & Scott, 2018; Szmigin et al., 2017). However, interaction/co-creation in Paper II primarily revolve around the environment, which Campos et al. (2018) call "experience influencers." In addition to promoting interaction, Harvey et al. (1998) recommend multisensory environments, leading to the next dimension discussed in this section.

In Paper II, the themed experience is *multisensory*, where multisensory stimuli have psychological and existential impacts such as memorability and completing the theme. This finding supports Tarssanen and Kylänen's (2006) work which advocates that harmonious sensory content is key to a themed impression. However, while the idea of congruence in a multisensory environment is widely accepted, previous research explains how this is complicated further.

First, it is challenging to measure because all senses operate simultaneously, and laboratory measurement results are not necessarily applicable to the real world.

Second, even though sensory cues may seem consistent to the management of, for instance, a store, they may overload or deter customers, or even change customer behavior in unwanted ways (for instance, lead to less spending) (Lund, 2015; Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, & Roggeveen, 2014). Despite this, themed multisensory environments have been suggested to increase engagement (Harvey et al., 1998) and, coupled with technology and interaction, increase enthusiasm in children (Challis, Kang, Rimmer, & Hildred, 2017). To an extent, Paper I studies visual sensory input and finds support for, e.g., lighting but not design. Paper II complements Martins et al. (2017), who argue that the more engaged the senses, the better the immersion and memorability. Furthermore, they argue that experiences can be better customized in combination with digital technology such as virtual reality (VR).

Novelty as a theming dimension, especially considered alongside the previously discussed relatability dimension, is treated in Paper II as an opposite to nostalgia. This continuum of novelty, or newness on one side, and nostalgia, the familiar, or the commonplace on the other side, are thus key motives for different segments of visitors of themed environments. Previous

research suggests novelty as a key "pull" motive (Crompton, 1979; Mak, 2014). Paradoxically, seeking both what is novel and what is familiar at the same time can be present in tourists when, for instance, choosing foods (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010). This paradox supports one of the arguments of Paper II, which is the importance of handling a balance between the two. Paper II points to the massive investments in the theme park industry and their impact on the visitation rate. However, simultaneously, this adds the chance of turning the existing customer base away, mainly if something is too new or replaces what visitors may have already experienced and expected to see again. Novelty is a dimension that quickly becomes old, so Paper II is cautious about embracing it.

Paper II, however, also suggests that seeking familiarity can lead to commodified theming, and thus some novelty is almost always suggested. For instance, novelty and uniqueness are among the top reasons or motivations for people attending events (Nicholson & Pearce, 2001). Travelers who seek novel experiences place greater importance on pleasure vacations, feeling the trip is more deserved, seeking more advice, finding the trip to be more exotic, staying away from home longer, spending more money, and perceiving the trip as expensive (Bello & Etzel, 1985). It is, therefore, an important dimension to consider for theming in tourism. However, can the themed offering be made new while still retaining the core experience that makes people return in the first place? Can elements of it be updated, replaced, or reconfigured to make it "new"? The next dimension that will be discussed is relatability.

Relatability is a dubious dimension because there seems to be an underlying apprehension that visitors prefer familiar themes. Paper II supports this because it suggests recognizable themes connect better with people. There are good arguments for this. Shaw and Williams (2004) state that themed landscapes increasingly use popular culture themes to draw tourists because they are fans of novels, music, literature, and films associated with different sites. Sometimes, this is suggested to exist more than on a superficial level. Drawing from a marketing perspective, Olson (2004) argues themed environments based on already familiar brands work better because they are reassuring and comfortable. Paper II also supports this argument because familiar brands provide particular preconceived visions that, even though the environmental simulacra are new and unreal, they will still cause the place to look familiar (Olson, 2004).

Furthermore, the same understanding is reflected by Levy, Lambeth, Solomon, and Gandy (2018), who claim that using relatable and intuitive themed environments (in computer games) helps players play with less instruction and with decreased learning time. In other words, familiar and relatable environments may also help interaction/co-creation in themed

environments. As addressed in Paper II, comparable to using brands for developing themed environments is the use of already established and successful IPs (e.g., Harry Potter, Star Wars, Nickelodeon, Ghibli).

While this can be a less high-risk choice of development in theming, it is also arguably less innovative. When using relatable, familiar, and recognizable themes, one risks not inventing newer and more innovative themes. The informants in Paper II voiced this concern in the interviews and enunciated that they would also like to see more original themes in the future. While relatability is likely a safe and powerful dimension of theming, it can be detrimental to originality and uniqueness. Ebster and Guist's (2005) findings reveal that restaurant visitors preferred culturally "authentic" restaurants to themed restaurants. However, this was clearer with those visitors that were more familiar with the displayed culture. Paper II supports and extends these findings because keeping the target demographic in mind will reduce the chance of turning away potential visitors that are unfamiliar with the chosen themes or view them negatively (Levy et al., 2018). Another important dimension that can be juxtaposed to relatability is the previously discussed novelty. In the next paragraph, the dimension of storytelling will be discussed.

Storytelling in theming and tourism has been frequently debated and studied. Paper II addresses, complements, and extends previous studies on storytelling in theming on five levels. One, it is addressed as a part of the composition of the themed reality (Huxtable, 1997). Two, stories can involve visitors as actors in themed environments (McGoun, Dunkak, Bettner, & Allen, 2003; Mossberg et al., 2014). Three, stories connect themed environments with other dimensions such as authenticity, immersion, and cohesion (Mossberg, 2008; Mossberg et al., 2014; Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2006). Four, stories can provide themed environments with uniqueness and thus counteract commodification (Mossberg, 2008; Mossberg et al., 2014). Five, storytelling has implications for both the consumption and the marketing of a themed experience as people tend to think narratively, and stories make it easier to retell an experience from a themed environment (Moscardo, 2010; Mossberg et al., 2014; Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008).

Paper II also recognizes how stories are commonly a source for themes and that the more compelling stories generally originate from the site in which the themed environment is built. However, there is no consensus on whether all themed environments have stories. While, if challenged, visitors to a themed environment may derive a story from the surroundings for consistency, Paper II concludes similarly to Mossberg (2008) that not all themed environments are built on a story. Stories can be the theme's source or be added later as a component

contributing to cohesion. Like themes, there is a balance between how implicitly or explicitly a story should be articulated to the visitor, for instance, using the environment or guides.

Moreover, can storytelling by itself make an environment themed? If a natural environment is used to tell a story, the environment acts as the stage even if it is not overtly constructed (Mathisen, 2014). This reasoning implies that storytelling might make a natural environment themed, if only briefly. Whether the story being told is true or not may be less critical (Mossberg, 2008).

In the previous section, a comprehensive understanding of theming dimensions from Paper II was provided. In the following section, a discussion will give an extended understanding of the purposes of theming from Paper III.

5.1.3 An extended understanding of theming purposes from a provider perspective

This thesis' third contribution is the theming purposes found on the left side of the research contributions' overview diamond model (Figure 5-1). Paper III explains theming purposes as business objectives or the intent behind themed spaces and experiences beyond functionalistic purposes. As such, Paper III delves into the very heart of this thesis' aim of deepening our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism because it responds to the research question (**RQ3**): What are the *main objectives* of theming?

Paper III's findings suggest that a themed environment should *attract, stop, and make visitors stay or influence and modify their behavior.* In several ways, this find complements and extends the works of Cornelis (2010, 2014), Jin, Lee, and Lee (2015), Yildirim (2011), Nelson (2016), Pearce and Wu (2016), and Zhang, Li, and Su (2017) because this understanding involves manipulating how visitors feel and behave, controlling the themed space itself, and connecting guests with the brand identity using the themed environment. Increasing the time visitors spend in the environment is theorized to increase their likelihood of spending more money. However, Paper III also argues themed environments provide visitors a space in which they can act out desirable behaviors that may seem more natural in a themed environment rather than outside of it. Attracting visitors is vital, and in theming, iconic structures often act as visually compelling focal points—weenies (sometimes spelled "wienies"), Walt Disney's term for "visual magnets" or even "emotional magnets"—which keeps people moving toward specific destination points

(Walt Disney Imagineering, 1991). One informant refers to these as an essential theming element:

> (…) the first being in mind is probably the big, big architectures, like the Cinderella Castle. Think weenies and part of these.

While weenies do not necessarily have to be large structures or landmarks, they are elements in themed spaces created to attract physically, orient, modify the behavior of visitors, and even create emotional bonds (Balanzategui & Ndalianis, 2018; Botterill, 1997; Hannigan, 2005; Mannheim, 2002; Sircus, 2007; Themed Entertainment Association, 2007). Thus, weenies can also be events, stores, or any focal element tied to the same intentions mentioned earlier.

Of the findings of Paper III, the theming purpose of *ensuring differentiation* extends and complements the works of Crawford (1992), Beardsworth and Bryman (1999), Gilmore and Pine (2002), McGoun et al. (2003), Allen, O'Toole, Harris, and McDonnell (2011), Tussyadiah (2014), Hung (2015), Falcato (2016); Hung et al. (2016) and Oliveira (2018). It is important to note that this is different from the postmodern Disneyization feature of *dedifferentiation of consumption* (Beardsworth & Bryman, 1999; Bryman, 1999, 2004) which is not the breakdown of the clear distinction between theme parks and the real world, but rather a blending together of themed attractions, and retail and dining venues. Differentiation through theming adds a layer of uniqueness whose intention is to reduce the commodification of a place and make it harder to copy. However, simultaneously involving the added complexity of dedifferentiation could be viewed as a differentiation strategy: unique combinations of places intended for serving different functions tied together with either a meta-theme or different subthemes will elevate the uniqueness. In the world of events, themes differentiate events from one another, and uniqueness is one of the motivations for attending them (Allen et al., 2011; Nicholson & Pearce, 2001). Paper III deepens these understandings by explaining (i) how experiences can be differentiated through theming, (ii) how places can become visitor destinations through theming, (iii) how theming displays "the spirit of the place," and (iv) how theming creates an attractive place. However, differentiation through theming is not without caveats. With time, even unique themes can be imitated. Thus, differentiation through theming must also play on other instruments such as history, storytelling, geographic location, cultural connections, and other elements to create the irresistible impression visitors seek. The challenge of reproduced theming is addressed in Paper III with the examples of chains of themed concepts such as Starbucks, McDonald's, Six Flags and Dungeons. The perceived uniqueness and subsequent

exceptionality of these examples and others will be contested because of how well themed places can differentiate themselves in the future if more steps are not taken to do so.

Another purpose of theming from Paper III is to *create bonds between the guests and a theme, brand, or product.* As informants recognize in Paper II, theming and branding can share many similarities when the thematic elements are internally generated. The expressions are coterminous (Bryman, 2004), a type of self-referential theming Beardsworth and Bryman (1999) have named reflexive theming. Creating bonds between the guests and a theme, brand, or product as explicated in Paper III from various perspectives thus complements or extends the works of Francaviglia (1981), Crawford (1992), Altman and Low (2012), and Jin et al. (2015). Francaviglia (1981, pp. 141-156) argues that some themed environments elicit the shared "anamnestic (memory assisting) response," which forms an important bond for visitors. In Paper III, it is suggested that products sold in themed brand stores may become and act merely as memorabilia merchandise rather than what the visitor initially seeks to purchase, according to Pine and Gilmore's (2019) experience economy features.

Furthermore, the bonds are the benefit created between the visitors, the theme, the brand, the product (or, by extension, the provider), and the themed place. People bond with and form attachments to symbolic or tangible places of various scales, sizes, and scopes (e.g., cities, rooms, and even objects) that have been given meaning through personal, group, and cultural processes. Creating unique themed environments may support developing deeper connections and emotional bonds between guests and a brand or products. However, Paper III thus suggests that "consuming" the atmosphere might become more critical and add more associations to the existing brand or product.

Enhancing the end-to-end experience is yet another purpose of theming in tourism. In various ways, this find from Paper III extends and complements the works of Milman (2008), Yildirim (2011), Chytry (2012), Botha (2016), Lacanienta et al. (2018), and Ellis, Jiang, et al. (2019). As Paper III states, theming can connect all aspects of the end-to-end tourism experience, extended from the very first contact between the provider and the visitor. Theming, as woven into the fabric of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), does not only mean all parts of the customer journey are connected; it means a characteristic and main connective theme link them. The theme integrates and makes the output seamless, and it also makes the whole experience more attractive. Improving and optimizing the end-to-end experience in a themed environment can be done by tracking and using existing data on how visitors behave (Yildirim, 2011). The experience starts before the direct physical experience and is made into a sensible themed world

using a story (storytelling). Theming not only makes the experience identifiable A to Z, but it also gives the provider a chance to transfer the associated emotions of the theme to the real world through the environment (Chytry, 2012). Similar to Paper III, Botha (2016), Lacanienta et al. (2018), and Ellis, Jiang, et al. (2019) find that themes and theming are vital to various experiences, and Paper III argues theming should cover every aspect of any themed experience.

Finally, Paper III's findings propose that themed environments should *increase brands or product sales*. In a sense, this goes against Pine and Gilmore's (2019) experience economy view that products and services act as props in staging the experience because they are the experience being sold rather than products and services. However, themed environments may undoubtedly be constructed to promote selling brands, products, and services. Accordingly, this would explain themed flagship brand stores, concept stores, food, beverage, and destination festivals, so-called "brandships," and other themed environments that "touristify" (del Romero Renau, 2018; Urry & Larsen, 2011) brands or products. Furthermore, this understanding therefore complements and expands Beardsworth and Bryman (1999), Kozinets et al. (2002), Bryman (2004), Scott and Bennett (2015), and Wassler et al. (2015).

Consequently, this also connects branding with theming, which is similar to the purpose of "creating bonds between the guests and a theme, brand, or product." Similarly, theming is also connected to premium pricing because themed environments come with a profit incentive (Gottdiener, 2001). In extension, Paper III, therefore, argues that tourists are likely willing to pay a premium price for products and services sold through the medium of themed environments (see, e.g., Xiao et al., 2013). The themed environment, Paper III suggests, adds value that, in turn, can demand a higher price point, although sales are suggested to be dependent on repeat patronage.

This section concludes the discussion of the purposes of theming in tourism. In the next section, a discussion leading to a comprehensive understanding of how this thesis contributes to the theory of experience innovation is provided.

5.1.4 Theming from both visitor and provider perspectives—toward experience innovation

As mentioned previously, the contributions of this thesis are not predominantly centered on broad and general innovation. However, the focus and separate findings fit arguably well within the experience innovation discourse (Jernsand et al., 2015). In addition to how this thesis aims

to deepen our knowledge of theming in experience-based tourism, it also adds to the knowledge on how novel insights from both visitor and provider perspectives facilitate experience innovation. There are lesson to be learned across the appended studies that can show their importance for experience innovation. This thesis has examined theming in experience-based tourism from visitor and provider perspectives, arguing theming to be a critical practice, particularly for tourism (section 2.3). Central to experience innovation are experience environments, a physically staged environment intended to facilitate memorable experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). In this thesis, theming as a principle in experience-based tourism has a fundamental role in facilitating memorable experiences for tourists and is defined as a provider's staging and conveying of a theme through the consistent, coherent, and comprehensive application of physical and nonphysical cues to an environment to completely alter a visitor's experience and perception of reality, time, and space, and create memories (Bryman, 2004; Muñoz et al., 2006; Pine & Gilmore, 2019). For this thesis, experience innovation has been defined as a spiral process of recurrently prototyping (building a physical or virtual representation of themes and brands), evaluating, and testing an item or activity in an experiencescape to develop new or improved experiences and create competitive advantages (Jernsand et al., 2015; Zátori, 2016). Experiencescape are commonly themed (O'Dell & Billing, 2006). Hence, it is my assessment that if a provider using different theme factors creates a prototype physical representation of a theme (item or activity) as an integrated part of a themed experiencescape environment, to create new experiences, theming can be argued to be a kind of experience innovation. This kind of experience innovation can be called theming innovation.

The theme factors studied as part of this thesis – employee interaction, lighting, names, design, and music – can arguably all be used as items in themselves or be integrated into activities for themed experiencescapes. Examples of these are employees that take part in communicating a story to visitors, or even involve visitors as part of that same storytelling, or when interior and décor in a building are designed and placed together to emphasize a specific theme. Even music can be composed to underscore a themed setting and a story being told in that experiencescape. When several theme factors are put together and used to improve the visitor experience, especially if it actively involves the visitor in creating her own experience, this can contribute to stronger and more memorable experiences.

Theming dimensions studied in Paper II – authenticity, chronotope, cohesion, digital technology, immersion, interaction/co-creation, multisensory, novelty, relatability, and storytelling – can be used as more abstract components for building the same themed

experiencescapes exemplified above. The basis of value in experience innovation is co-created experiences. As Paper II suggests, interaction/co-creation is a crucial dimension for theming. For theming, interaction is how meaningful experiences are co-created. In themed environments, co-creation is the collaborative process that creates value between the environment and the visitor (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). In Paper II, the interaction between visitors and the themed environment is argued to allow for more individualized and personal experiences.

The provider can be interpreted to be present in this co-creative process as the theme factor "employee interaction," where visitors interact with and evaluate the staff in a themed environment (Paper I). Strömberg (2015) argues that theming is a management tool for directing personnel according to the theme. However, there are numerous ways in which employees can interact with visitors to enhance an experience in a themed environment. It can stretch from one-way communication such as meeting guests with eye contact, offer a verbal greeting, and smile to wearing a themed and appropriate costume or uniform, do performative work such as acting, dancing, singing or playing an instrument, to even telling stories and give scripted themed answers to questions. Finally, including guests in co-creating their own experiences such as ask them to "fill in the gaps" of a story or give them acting tasks using props and the environment is the ultimate storytelling technique. To what extent this could increase a sense of authenticity would be speculation. However, it would provide visitors with a closer relationship to their environment if it did include interaction with their surroundings. Themed costumes and dialogue could further the feel of authenticity of a certain chronotope (such as a costumed guide reading an ancient Roman temple carving and explaining how Roman Latin would sound like). Keeping experiencescapes cohesive and consistent is likely to increase their likeability (Kaplan, 1987; Nasar, 1987).

The prototype physical representation of a theme may first be produced through digital technology. Digital technology can act as an experience innovation dimension for developing experiencescapes (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). However, at some point experiencescapes should be physical environments. Digital technology could, however, enhance these physical environments for instance by making them more cohesive and immersive. For instance, modern projection technology can change the physical appearance of a room, an entire building, a building block, or even a mountainside, and create new illusions of different textures, movements, and shapes. Virtual reality technology can be combined with real, physical

environments to create highly immersive and multisensory experiences that involves engaging storytelling in which the visitor appears to have an impact on how the story unfolds.

Theming purposes range from attracting, stopping, and making visitors stay in a themed experiencescape, create bonds between visitors and the themed experiencescape, enhance the end-to-end experience, ensure differentiation, and increase sales. Additionally, theming is meant to make experiencescapes profitable. Theming is also considered to be a certain kind of innovative marketing and business tool for exceptionally competitive environments, such as theme parks, restaurants, and tourism (Gottdiener, 2001; Wassler et al., 2015).

In other words, theming is an innovative marketing and business management technique that tourism providers can use to create memorable, interactive, personal, competitive, and profitable experience environments (Botha, 2016; Edensor, 2001; Fırat & Ulusoy, 2009; Manthiou et al., 2016; Pine & Gilmore, 2019; Richards, 2010). If theming can be part of an innovation process, then the outcome is the themed experience environment. Consequently, the building blocks for the themed experience environment are the products, services, and numerous theme factors acting as sensory marketing stimuli (e.g., brand names, design, music, lighting, employee interaction, et cetera; Paper I) measured against the theming dimensions (Paper II). As a result, theming may be central to experience innovation, however, with a slightly different focus. Pine and Gilmore (2014) highlight several value-creating opportunities that drive innovation in the experience economy. Three of these opportunities can be said to connect well to the findings of Paper II. First, they promote enhancing services, which relates to the theming purpose of enhancing the end-to-end experience. Second, they urge charging for experiences, which relates to the theming purposes of creating bonds and increasing sales. Third and finally, they endorse fusing digital technology with reality, which, according to Paper II, enables innovation in theming dimensions.

Finally, combining both perspectives of visitors and providers to ensure a high level of visitor value is vital to experience and theming innovation. Walt Disney was known for sending his imagineers out into the theme parks to observe guests, stand in line with them, and dine next to them to listen to what they said – all for the imagineers to get to know what the guests really thought and wanted (The Disney Institute & Kinni, 2011). He knew already in the 1950s and 1960s that visitors define what is meaningful and memorable experiences. All any tourism business working in the business of themed experiencescapes can do is design and create various themed experiencescape to facilitate experiences for visitors, as the experience really takes place inside the person. Therefore, a theming innovation process is an interactive process

in which visitors deliver providers with information about what is valuable to them, and providers prototype, evaluate, and test concepts with the means available to them to develop new or improved experiences, and do this better than their competitors. The need for this co-creative interactive process is constant as visitors' tastes and interests change, and there is always a need for new and more creative attraction, or even an entire experiencescape. Today, digital technology can provide guests with highly impactful experiences. Another positive outcome is that data is collected for providers to get an insight into what their visitors are not explicitly telling them. Examples of this data could be physical movement patterns, who they interact with while visiting the experiencescape, what parts of the environment they interact with and with what frequency, what purchases they do, and so on. Combined with what they tell providers explicitly, for instance on more abstract components such as "is that authentic?" and "did something not feel cohesive?" providers can identify parts of the themed experiencescape to improve, update, or even change completely. The perfect themed experience will likely not exist. However, if designed right they can become hugely successful. If providers aim to design themed experiencescapes to fully alter a visitor's experience and perception of reality, time, and space, and create memories, they need to listen to what visitors tell them implicitly and explicitly. Furthermore, this co-creative perspective has to be mirrored and developed in the design process and continuously be kept up-to-date.

While the contributions of this thesis are not centered on a broader and general understanding of innovation, both the thesis' main academic fields and separate findings fit arguably well within the experience innovation discourse. Theming can thus be necessary for further innovation and development (such as co-creation) in experience-based tourism. Table 9 is a development of Table 1 (2.3), which briefly summarizes this section's discussion in particular related to employee interaction and co-creation.

Experience Innovation and Theming

	Experience Innovation	Theming in experience innovation
Focus of Innovation	Experiencescapes	Themed experiencescapes
Basis of Value	Co-creation experiences	Interaction to co-create experiences
View of Value Creation	Value is co-created Experiencescapes for individuals to co-construct experiences on contextual demand Individual-centric co-creation of value	Visitors' interaction with themed environments allows for increased individualized and co-created experiences Employee interaction
View of Technology	Facilitator of experiences Experience integration	Digital technology enables innovation in theming dimensions Digital technology can improve the experience Digital technology can aid in "re-theming" existing environments
Focus of Supply Chains	Experience network supports co-construction of personalized experiences	Experience network supports co-construction of personalized themed experiencescapes

Table 9. Experience innovation and theming, adapted from Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003)

Theming innovation is a particular type of innovation technique within experience-based tourism management and attraction development that aims to co-create experiences with the use of theme factors to create theming dimensions that frame and support the theme factor development. In turn, the theme factors and theming dimensions support the company's theming purposes. Together, theme factors, theming dimensions, and theming purposes center on co-creating visitor experiences. The theming innovation technique is illustrated as a repeat process in Figure 5-3. The figure shows how providers can combine theme factors in a theming innovation process, and through the sensations, tools, processes, practices, or effects of the theming dimensions can contribute to achieving the different theming purposes. Because visitor experiences over time will need reinvention, this is shown as a continued process of renewal to counteract the visitor experiences becoming outdated.
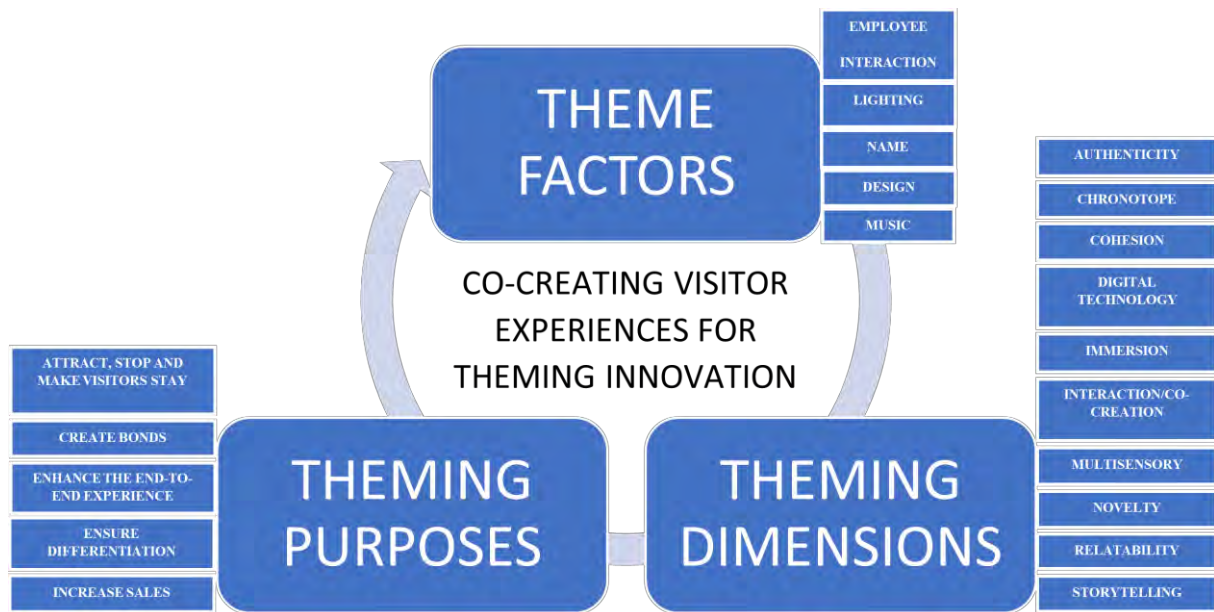
Figure 5-3. An extended understanding of theming innovation in experience-based tourism based on the findings from the three studies

The section above concludes the extended understanding of theming for experience innovation. In the next section, a summary of the research contributions along with final comments will be provided.

5.2 Summary and final comments on contributions

This thesis aims to deepen our knowledge of themes and theming in experience-based tourism and how knowledge from insights from both visitor and provider perspectives may facilitate experience innovation. Furthermore, it explores what goes into theming, theming dimensions, and the purposes of theming. The studies appended in this thesis have examined theming from both visitor and provider perspectives.

The point of exploring theming from both perspectives is to get as complete a picture of the phenomenon as possible. From the visitor's perspective, theme factors related to the perception of a theme were examined and discussed. In this thesis, the theme factors were presented as follows. First, this examination showed that certain theme factors, namely (i) name, (ii) employee interaction, and (iii) lighting, were direct drivers of the tourist customer experience. However, other factors hypothesized to contribute to the themed environment, such as (iv) design and (v) music, likely impact tourists differently depending on context and usage. Second, 10 dimensions of theming were identified as significant for theming in a tourism context. Unlike theme factors, these dimensions were presented alphabetically: (i) authenticity, (ii) chronotope, (iii) cohesion, (iv) digital technology, (v) immersion, (vi) interaction/co-creation, (vii)

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multisensory, (viii) novelty, (ix) relatability, and (x) storytelling. Moreover, this thesis argues the importance of careful orchestration of theme factors and theming dimensions for theming in experience-based tourism.

From the provider's perspective, the purposes of theming in tourism were examined. Presented alphabetically, these were: (i) ensure differentiation, (ii) create bonds between the guests and a theme, brand, or a product, (iii) increase sales of a brand or product, (iv) enhance the end-to-end-experience, and (v) attract, stop, and make visitors stay (influence and modify their behavior). First, each purpose's deeper meanings beyond what is addressed in the paper are explored and discussed. Second, the interrelation of the purposes and connection to the theme factors and theming dimensions is addressed throughout the discussion where applicable.

The previous section offered a discussion on how the contributions of this thesis can contribute to experience innovation with an emphasis on co-creation, interaction, and digital technology. It also provided a framework for how theming innovation can be studied and understood using the findings from the three appended studies.

This thesis has not studied the relations between the theme factors, the theming dimensions, and their theming purposes. The overall contribution is the theoretical discussion of these relations, an expanded understanding based on newly available knowledge on each aspect of the studied phenomena, how they relate to experience innovation, and the significance of all of them.

To summarize, this thesis has extended the existing research on theming in experience-based tourism in a field lacking empirical studies on this phenomenon. Furthermore, it contributes to the more extensive discussion on what theming in tourism is, its main concepts and dimensions, and why it is used in tourism. Finally, it contributes to the knowledge on how theming is a specific kind of innovation technique within experience-based tourism management and attraction development.

5.3 Managerial implications

This thesis' main managerial implication is to carefully consider and plan all aspects of what, how, and why the tourist offering should be themed. Experience and theming innovation is at the heart of this process. Themes and theming are among the most critical aspects of designing an experience (Botha, 2016), particularly if businesses seek to facilitate innovative, high-quality, premium-priced experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2014). In general, managers should

theme their offerings according to a well-planned theme that gives directions for the choice of physical elements and symbolic expressions. Furthermore, this concept and its elements should be aligned across the various theming dimensions. Finally, managers should decide which purposes the themed offering are meant to serve. Figure 5-3 illustrates this continuous process using the results of the appended papers. However, staging an experience is not sufficient for value creation. For that, environmental interaction is necessary for the visitor to co-create personalized experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). To co-create personalized experiences for their visitors, providers should monitor how tourists see and use different theme factors, listen to their implicit and explicit feedback also on the various theming dimensions, and observe whether they achieve the several theming purposes proposed for the themed context. When any of the theme factors or the theming dimensions are insufficient to the visitors, or the purposes are unfulfilled, providers need to redevelop the experiencescape to provide the value visitors are searching for.

Although this thesis does not study any direct interactions between theme factors, theming dimensions, and purposes, the papers' arrangement can be understood as exploring the stimuli, effects, and outcomes. For managers, theme factors and theming dimensions are the stimuli meant to cause a behavioral response or psychological effect. Managers can use theme factors as material stimuli to physically stage the environment. Theming dimensions are more indirect and immaterial stimuli that rely on the same factors. However, the response that theme
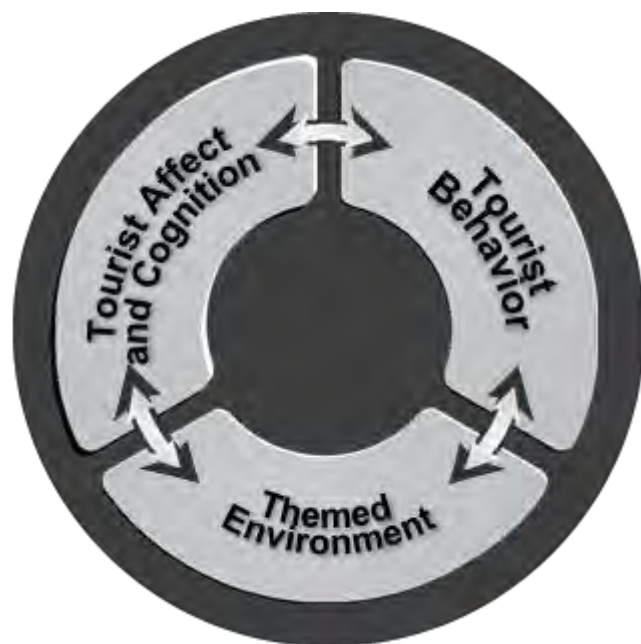
Figure 5-4. Wheel of tourist analysis (adapted from Peter & Olson, 2010)

factors and theming dimensions are intended to stimulate relate to a visitor's perception of a theme. A desirable effect would be to increase *theme perception*, which is the visitor's ability to recognize a theme through its holistic application in a social and material environment. Managers of themed environments should try to build and reinforce the theme perception. Furthermore, a concept that could capture a fuller wider understanding of how visitors perceive, interpret and behave in themed environments – the *theme experience* – could be developed to

give providers a more adaptable tool to better measure the impact of their themed experiencescapes.

For managers of themed environments, the "wheel of tourist analysis" (Figure 5-4, adapted from Peter & Olson, 2010) is a model that could aid in planning and managing themed environments, and especially the analysis of visitors in themed environments. The model incorporates three essential elements: (i) tourist affect (positive or negative evaluations or feelings about stimuli and events) and cognition (knowledge or thinking), (ii) overt behavior (observable physical actions), and (iii) themed environments (influential external physical and social stimuli). A themed environment is a crucial concept in this thesis, primarily referring to the physical stimuli composed of theme factors or theming components. Theme perception is comparable to the consumer affect and cognition component of the model. In turn, the environment and its perception are meant to lead to specific outcomes (or theming purposes), such as differentiation and increased sales. These outcomes can be compared with the consumer behavior part of the model. Theming dimensions take a middle position between being both "environmental" and "affect and cognition" in that they are more a derived component of an environment as well as something visitors evaluate or feel about the environmental stimuli.

Something that becomes clear throughout the discussion is the interplay between the physical themed environment and the dimensionalities of theming on a mental level. The factors, dimensions, and purposes of theming can be viewed as external and internal processes, and the subsequent discussions will highlight this often-blurred division. This revelation is an allusion to the wheel of tourist analysis being a reciprocal system. The reciprocal system refers to how any of the elements can affect or cause change at any given time, which means affect and cognition, behavior, and environments can change one another (Peter & Olson, 2010). This systemic conception is analogous to the experience innovation perspective, in which the tourists interact with the environment and co-create their own experiences.

However, it is also helpful to remember, as Figure 5-1 shows, both the visitors' and the providers' perspectives when analyzing, planning, and managing themed environments. Moreover, there are more specific managerial implications from the insights of this thesis.

Managers of themed environments need to be aware of the various tangible and intangible theme factors that drive the tourist customer experience. Olson (1999) states that "brand name counts for everything in theming" and advises those who want to theme buildings, product packaging, or environments to use single ideas or icons as their concept, or "even a single

word." Pine and Gilmore (2011) emphasize proper names and naming as a first and crucial step in theming and staging an experience to communicate what visitors should expect when visiting a themed place. Lukas (2013) echoes Pine and Gilmore. Furthermore, he considers names as important signifiers for small and large components of a design product, instilling people with a sense of emotion, especially when using product and brand associations. A brand name is often an already established concept and could lend its positive associations to anything from a fleet of cruise ships to the cocktails in the guests' hands. Names could combine a brand and other positive words or concepts (e.g., the cruise ships Disney Wish, Carnival Splendor, and Norwegian Epic). Given the importance of names for themed places, as Pine and Gilmore (2011) suggest, it should be considered the first and most central step in a theming process. Names becoming brand family names have further implications. These names can likely affect brand preference and, therefore, sales if the perceived image is similar to those of the consumers' own "actual, ideal, social, ideal-social and situational-ideal-social images" (Ataman & Ülengin, 2003). Paper I underlines how crucial names are for highly coherent theming, even down to the "name of the dish" (Beames & Brown, 2017).

Hultén (2011) considers a "theme" a part of the sensory expressions, which, together with sounds and other sensory inputs, may reinforce a positive feeling, generate a certain value to the individual, and create a brand image. Dubé and Morin (2001), whose research setting was stores in malls, found that background music mediated "attitude towards servicescape" and sales personnel. Their research suggests that atmospherics (which are the designed spatial aesthetics, Kotler, 1973) and other physical aspects of a servicescape could improve attitudes toward services such as mega-hotels where providing personalized services to thousands of guests proves challenging. While the perception of a theme was less reliant on music as a theme factor in Paper I, music is shown to affect many other aspects of a tourist's experience in an environment. Crafting a complete servicescape with the atmospherics unique to the various contexts, such as the shipscape, should be executed carefully. Music as an ambient factor can influence several attractive outcomes (e.g., shopping and consumption behavior, attitude toward service personnel, positive emotions) and should be sensibly considered for all themed environments. It is crucial for providers to know how music influences behaviors, for instance, such as how visitors move through a themed experiencescape, or if the music played adds or retracts from the sense of authenticity and cohesion on, e.g., a cruise ship.

Lighting and lighting design may, like music, vary significantly in, e.g., brightness, color, placement, and movement. Light can have an artificial or natural origin. A cruise ship has the

advantage of being an almost entirely sealed environment in which most mechanisms and processes can be fully controlled. Except for the ship's movement and the "intrusion" of natural light, lighting is a factor that can be utilized to the fullest. Lighting and colors can be used to simulate different times of the day, different settings (e.g., a forest or urban environment), and different ambiances (e.g., romantic, lively, scary). Hence, lighting has the power and versatility to add substantially to a themed environment. Lee et al. (2015) also state that their research results on ambient conditions, including overall illumination in theme restaurants, should serve as guidelines for an environment in which consumers can experience the theme.

In their research on theme park service quality, Tsang et al. (2012) find that staff performance was below what the visitors expected. Consequently, they recommend more staff training to improve courtesy, helpfulness, understandability, language skills, and even appearance. Beames and Brown (2017) reiterate the performative or emotional labor perspective from the Disneyization perspective and highlight several issues for employees in themed settings: lack of employee empowerment, part-time and casual employment contracts, and low pay rates. Consequently, much of the managerial advice provided in the literature is sound and fundamental. A first guideline is that employees should receive proper and complete training in showing sensitivity to those around them, both guests and their coworkers. Courtesy, knowledge about their venue's offerings and services, and service harmonized with the workplace standards should also be expected. A second guideline is that the workplace should also systematically hire, keep, and develop the right people (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2016). However, a third guideline is not addressed in detail here. While themed workplaces must ensure guests' expectations are met at the service level, they also must make sure employees dress, act, and speak consistently with the theme. Workplaces can provide costumes, uniforms, and other attire that fit the theme. Scripting specific themed answers and behaviors can, to some extent, standardize how employees act and speak.

Nevertheless, some unforeseen guest interaction may still incur; thus, empowering, motivating, and training employees can support them in less expected situations. Wassler et al. (2015) mention an example from a chess-themed hotel in China where guests were easily bored because the employees did not know how to play chess. Ali et al. (2018) advise theme park managers to continue to train, reward, and motivate their employees because interaction with staff is the most potent predictor of customers' delight and satisfaction. Interaction with staff is part of the way guests co-create value in their experiences.

Employee interaction as a factor in themed environments can manifest in many forms. On a cruise ship, tourists will often spend more time and have more frequent encounters with the same crew members compared with similar land encounters because of the nature of the travel mode. However, crewmembers on a cruise ship may swiftly switch between many roles during a single work shift, from tending to cleanliness, restocking, and tidiness of a stateroom to fulfilling guests' numerous needs and wants, while managing different languages and still maintaining the standards and expectations of the cruise line.

Wakefield and Blodgett (2016), in their servicescape research review, suggest that the longer consumers stay in a place, the more likely the servicescape is to influence key outcomes (e.g., a week on a cruise versus two hours at a sports arena). For hospitality and tourism research, in particular, they highlight among other previously cited studies (1) how servicescapes atmospherics may affect positive and negative emotions in restaurant settings (Jang & Namkung, 2009), (2) that specific tourist segments seek out restaurant atmosphere more so than food, prices, and other dining elements (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2003), and (3) that restaurant interiors could explain some increase in willingness to pay for meals in restaurants (Andersson & Mossberg, 2004). Ali et al. (2018) find that theme parks' physical setting influences customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. They advise theme park managers to maintain good physical settings. Kaminakis, Karantinou, Koritos, and Gounaris (2019) suggest carefully designing facilities to stimulate pleasure and arousal for both customers and employees because servicescapes affect interactions between groups.

Managers of themed environments need to know and wisely construct and update their environments according to which theming dimensions matter to their visitors. To what extent the environment expresses an authentic image depends on what authenticity means to one's visitors. In fact, previous research on authenticity reveals how the dimension can guide segmentation, design, and marketing (Ebster & Guist, 2005; Muñoz & Wood, 2009; Muñoz et al., 2006; Wood & Muñoz, 2007a). Furthermore, this thesis also argues for creating immersive themed environments. Creating immersive environments means staging a safe, enclaved, and encapsulated world that may need staff to guide people for interpretation to reach a sense of immersion (Carù & Cova, 2006, 2007). This staging means the theming dimension of immersion applies to both the outer world (the physical environment) and the inner world (the psychological process within each consumer) (Blumenthal & Jensen, 2019).

Furthermore, cohesion in a themed environment depends on the fit of the various theme elements and factors, orderliness, complexity of the service, and the environment (Bitner, 1992;

Gilmore & Pine, 2002; Kaplan, 1987; Nasar, 1987). Thus, this thesis supports Pine and Gilmore (2011), who suggest harmonizing the themed environment by adding positive impression-forming cues and eliminating negative cues that detract from the theme.

Using relatable and familiar themes is a common and safer strategy for developing new themed offerings depending on certain conditions. For instance, the success may depend on whether the themes used are accurately and authentically portrayed and utilized, or to what extent they build on a preexisting and already successful intellectual property or company alliance (Kozinets et al., 2002; Milman, 2008). For example, an escape room provider could draw on an existing fan base if the rooms were oriented around popular IPs, or a high level of authenticity could provide the memorability to draw more future visitors. However, introducing newness also has its merits. Using familiar themes that visitors already recognize, awareness of the main themes, subthemes, and the use of transitional themes as explained in Paper II of this thesis can help introduce novelty. As a central theme could be considered the projected brand image of an identity (Galician, 2013; Schmitt & Simonson, 1997), changing the central theme may be a risky undertaking. However, adapting, updating, changing, retheming, or even abandoning certain subthemes or transitional themes (Davis, 1996; Kozinets et al., 2002; Schmitt & Simonson, 1997) can be a less hazardous task both in cost and perceived strategic risk. Thus, offering novel themed experiences does not mean changing the entire themed offering, but rather parts of it some of the time. Novelty is a crucial motivator for attracting visitors. This thesis also proposes mapping what is essential to the designer and the visitor to create, investigate, and interpret the intended themed chronotope. Borrowing a term from Kärrholm, Barata Salguiera, Soumagne, Rio Fernandes, and Chamusca (2017), this method could be called the "chronotopic approach for theming," and be a measure of time and space as a positioning tool, imaginably as an instrument for measuring the authenticity or accuracy of the theme (Wang & Kroon, 2017).

Storytelling as a theming dimension should be used to coordinate the theme across the entire end-to-end experience. Everything can then be themed and designed to tell the story and create a complete experiential package (Huxtable, 1997; McGoun et al., 2003). Stories bind the theme elements together and thus help visitors enjoy, interpret, and understand the themed environments better, and even be involved as actors (Mathisen, 2014; Mossberg, 2008; Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2006). Stories can also be used to make the themed offering even more unique (Mossberg & Eide, 2017).

Most other theming dimensions can be enhanced through the clever use of digital technology, with some contextual considerations. Sometimes a low-tech themed environment can arguably give a more convincing impression than one that is technically advanced. Chronotopically, we have never lived in a more technologically progressed society than now, so if digital technology is a prominent feature of the themed environment, it should either be cleverly incorporated to look like something it is not (for example, a pool of water), or if visible, either appear contemporary or futuristic.

In this thesis, interaction/co-creation have mainly been treated as something that occurs between visitors and the physical environment. However, interaction/co-creation also happen between visitors and employees, and even between visitors. At the cusp of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, it is plausible that automation, robotization, digitization, and mechanization will displace people working in the service industries (Hjalager, 2015; Wells, Whittington, & Talwar, 2017). While operational expenditures such as labor can often be the largest expense, this thesis argues for caution considering removing service personnel in themed environments. Roles and job descriptions may change, but other people's positive influence should not be underestimated (Jensen, 1996). Besides, interaction/co-creation help make visitors' experiences more personal and, therefore, more memorable. For the sake of profitability, these effects should not be ignored.

Thus, one should employ all senses or consider all of them when creating a themed environment. This consideration is a complex task as each sense has a myriad of different approaches. For instance, touch means everything from temperature, material choice (wood, metal, plastic, liquid), tactile feedback, firmness, surface crudeness, haptic perception, et cetera. Moreover, the orchestration of a whole multisensory experience requires a keen eye for details and knowing that playing on different sensory impressions impacts which segments the themed offering will attract.

Thirdly, managers of themed environments can use the environments as their focus of innovation. Innovation types are challenging to differentiate, and as Eide and Mossberg (2013) and Hjalager (2010) observe, changes in one category may lead to changes in another category, which inevitably breaks down what separates them in the first place. However, this thesis contributes to innovation as a process rather than to innovation as a specific research area. This thesis adopted the experience economic perspective where theming, a provider's staging, and applying a theme to a visitor environment are processes where the innovation occurs in the shift of an offering from a service or a product into an experience (Gilmore & Pine, 2002). This shift

moves the attention away from a product and process focus in traditional innovation and toward experience environments (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003). The co-creation of experiences acts as the basis of value in experience innovation. This understanding of value means managers of themed environments can focus on co-creation when facilitating experiences (for instance, between both provider and visitors) and keeping interaction as the co-creative element within the experience (e.g., between visitors, the environment, and the employees) in the experiencescape. Digital technology has been highlighted as a theming dimension that both facilitates and improves experiences and enables experience innovation in other theming dimensions. In other words, managers should apply and use digital technology wisely to contribute to innovation within their experiential offerings. Finally, customized experiences through interaction and storytelling are the focus of supply chains in experience innovation. This supply chain focus implies managers should use experience networks (consisting of, e.g., other companies, institutions, and customer communities, Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003) to "co-construct" unique personal themed experiences for different visitor segments.

5.4 Further research

Generally speaking, research on theming as a phenomenon is still in its infancy (Lacanienta et al., 2018). Finishing this thesis on tourism experiences amidst the outbreak of the coronavirus COVID-19 (SARS-Cov-2) pandemic changes certain circumstances, if at least temporarily. *How* tourist experiences include socializing, interaction with the environment, other guests, workers, transportation, and sensory-based experiences can be impacted for years to come. *Where* experiences are experienced, whether as experience products that to a more considerable extent are distributed to and enjoyed at home (e.g., online streaming services offering television programs and movies) as opposed to out-of-home experiences requiring guests' physical attendance (e.g., a movie theater) (Bærenholdt & Sundbo, 2007), may also shift in balance. This transformation provides opportunities for new research on the world of theming in experience-based tourism in at least five areas.

First, while the literature related to theming is undoubtedly expanding, as this thesis and appended papers show, there is still a need for peer-reviewed qualitative and quantitative research specifically on theming, themes, and themed environments, both outside and inside of tourism. Constructs with measures such as the "attitude towards the theme" (Kozinets, 2008) and "consistency of theme" (Kao et al., 2008) may be part of developing the "key customer experience outcome measures" specifically for themed environments, as Papers II and III suggest.

Second, while the context in Paper I is a cruise ship, theme factors as drivers of the experience in many different themed environments, both inside and outside of tourism, could be explored in future studies. Table 2 shows that empirical contexts such as theme parks and theme hotels recur frequently in studies that relate to theming. While these are prominent and usual places to study theming in experience-based tourism, it leaves room for exploring other tourist offerings that may be themed, such as escape rooms, airports, museums, and guided tours. This may provide valuable information regarding whether or not theming is a context-dependent concept. As Paper II suggests, learning which theme factors and theming dimensions are specific and critical to each tourist offering may help managers monitor, improve, and keep their theme relevant.

Third, the factors that do not impact the perception of a theme directly may influence other outcomes or dimensions that relate to themed environments, such as the theming dimensions from Paper II, the purposes from Paper III, or, e.g., intent to revisit, visitation numbers, satisfaction, willingness to pay, and so on. Furthermore, music in a restaurant may influence how people perceive the surroundings, service, or food. Beames and Brown (2017) consider music and décor as part of the experience elements for theming, which they suggest should have a high degree of coherency with all other elements. Their suggestion could be part of future research on theming.

Fourth, this thesis suggests considering lesser-known and less well-explored aspects from the theming research literature. For instance, Pine and Gilmore's experience realms (2019) have received some attention in the research and literature (e.g., Breiby et al., 2017; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2010; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Oh et al., 2016; Park, Oh, & Park, 2010). However, how their lesser-known theme-scheme typology classifies and categorizes theme (or motif) strategy approaches as either all-encompassing, self-explanatory, undercover, or undisclosed (Gilmore & Pine, 2002), has to my knowledge not received similar research attention. Therefore, this thesis suggests researching the usefulness or applicability of this framework in future theming research.

Fifth, the link between theming and branding has received some but not overwhelming attention despite its prevalence (see, for instance, Bryman, 2003; Erb & Ong, 2016; Galician, 2013; Kozinets, 2008; Kozinets et al., 2002). This link has, to some extent, been explored in Paper III. However, a review, categorization, discussion, and analysis of the existing literature to identify possible research gaps for academics and guidelines for practitioners is due. Hence, I recommend further studies into the link between theming and branding.

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Furthermore, Gottdiener (2001) anecdotally claims the cost of theming adds 100 percent to a meal's cost compared with a non-themed restaurant when it comes to the connection between price and theming. To my knowledge, research on this comparison has never been performed on a larger scale. This thesis and Paper II suggest that researching this as an increased price point is likely to be a desirable effect of a themed environment. This kind of research could be performed by comparing the prices of similar items sold in both themed and nonthemed venues or using other suitable methods.

Finally, in this thesis theming innovation is proposed as a new domain within innovation. This domain deserves more attention. It is my suggestion that theming as an innovation process could be studied through for example case studies. This thesis is a first step towards studying theming innovation. To empirically outline how theming as an innovation process happens, the frameworks of this thesis could be applied and utilized as analytical tools.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire used for the survey of cruise tourists

(In Norwegian and shortened for the purpose of the thesis)

Empirical base for Paper I

I samarbeid med Høgskolen i Lillehammer foretar Color Line i disse dager en spørreundersøkelse blant reisende på cruisebåten Color Magic. Et av hovedmålene med undersøkelsen er blant annet å kartlegge hvilke forhold ved cruisebåten Color Magic som har betydning for reisendes tilfredshet. Din deltakelse er et viktig bidrag til videreutviklingen av Color Lines cruisekonsept.

Svarene som gis i undersøkelsen vil bli anonymisert, og det vil ikke være mulig å gjenkjenne hva den enkelte har svart.

Det tar ca. 10 minutter å besvare spørreskjemaet.

Vi vil nå be deg ta stilling til noen generelle påstander om Color Lines cruisebåter og om cruisebåten Color Magic

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På en skala fra 1 til 7, hvor enig er du i følgende påstander:
(sett ring rundt det alternativet som passer best)

	Helt uenig						Helt enig
35. Color Lines cruisebåter har et godt omdømme	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36. Color Lines cruisebåter har et bedre omdømme enn sine konkurrenter	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
37. Color Magic har en stemningsfull atmosfære	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
38. Color Magic har et praktisk design	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39. Color Magic gir reisende en følelse av velvære	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
40. Color Magic har overkommelige billettpriser	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
41. Jeg liker Color Magic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Vi vil nå be deg vurdere i hvilken grad de nedenstående påstandene gir en god <u>beskrivelse</u> av Color Magic

På en skala fra 1 til 7, hvor enig er du i følgende påstander knyttet til Color Magic:

	Helt uenig						Helt enig
42. Ansatte er i stand til å svare på de spørsmål jeg måtte ha	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
43. Spennende underholdningstilbud	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
44. Opplevelsen har vært lærerik							
45. Interiøret er tiltalende	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
46. Jeg kommer i god kontakt med andre reisende	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
47. Jeg liker musikken som spilles på Color Magic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
48. Lyssettingen er med på å skape atmosfæren	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
49. Luftkvaliteten er generelt god ombord	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
50. Ansatte har øyekontakt i sine samtaler med meg	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
51. Det er bra kvalitet på maten	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
52. Det er verdt pengene å reise med Color Magic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
53. Denne cruisebåten passer til mine behov	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
54. Ansatte viser interesse for at jeg skal ha det best mulig på reisen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
55. Det er bra variasjon i underholdningstilbudet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
56. Det er god kvalitet på produktene i butikkene	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
57. Ansatte er blide i møtet med meg	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
58. Rengjøringen av lugarene er tilfredsstillende	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
59. Jeg kommer i god kontakt med personalet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
60. Måltidene smaker godt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
61. Det jeg opplever på Color Magic, utgjør et helhetlig tema	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
62. Interiøret har et luksuriøst preg	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
63. Ansatte smiler i samtalene med meg	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
64. Rytmen i musikken som spilles er etter min smak	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
65. Det er bredt produktutvalg i butikkene	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

66. Fellesarealene er rene	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
67. Ansatte får meg til å føle meg velkommen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
68. Lyssettingen er appellerende	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
69. Det er forståelig skilting ombord	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
70. Det er variasjon i ulike typer spisesteder	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
71. Ansatte tar seg tilstrekkelig med tid til å svare på mine spørsmål	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
72. Luftkvaliteten i lugaren er god	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
73. Ansatte er presentabelt antrukket	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
74. Jeg er villig til å betale mer for å reise med Color Magic enn for lignende cruisebåter	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
75. Å reise med Color Magic gir en følelse av økt livskvalitet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
76. Underholdningen på Color Magic var bedre enn forventet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
77. Ansatte har en vennskapelig tone i samtaler med meg	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
78. Det er et overkommelig prisnivå på de forskjellige spisestedene	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
79. Det jeg ser på Color Magic, utgjør et helhetlig tema	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
80. Denne cruiseturen har økt mitt kunnskapsnivå	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Vi vil nå be deg ta stilling til noen flere påstander knyttet til dine erfaringer med å reise med Color Magic

På en skala fra 1 til 7, hvor enig er du i følgende påstander knyttet til Color Magic:	**Helt uenig**						**Helt enig**
81. Jeg er tilfreds med min beslutning om å reise med denne cruisebåten	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
82. Jeg vil omtale Color Magic positivt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
83. Jeg er villig til å betale mer for å reise med Color Magic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
84. Å reise med Color Magic får meg til å glemme "tid og sted"	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
85. Jeg benytter aktivitets-/underholdningstilbudene på Color Magic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
86. Jeg forbinder navnet Color Magic med glede	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
87. Dette cruiset er en kontrast til min hverdag	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
88. Min opplevelse av denne cruisebåten overgikk mine forventninger	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
89. Jeg opplever dette cruiset som en eventyrlig reise	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

90. Jeg vil anbefale mine venner å reise med Color Magic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
91. Det er verdt å bruke tid på å reise med Color Magic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
92. Underholdningen på Color Magic oppleves som nytt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
93. Jeg ble "revet med" av underholdningen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
94. Color Magic har et helhetlig tema	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
95. Å reise med Color Magic er gøy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
96. Color Magic lever opp til navnet sitt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

TUSEN TAKK FOR AT DU DELTOK I UNDERSØKELSEN!

Appendix 2

Interview guide for interviews with experts

Empirical base for Papers II & III

Interview guide for interviews with key informants

Objective: Get as many statements and explanations as possible of what the concept of theming is and can be, both generally and in a tourism context. Ask them to give examples, elaborate statements, etc.

1. Introduction
   - Consent form – agree?
   - Please start by introducing yourself and your profession.
   - Can you talk a little about the work that you do?

2. Theming in tourism
   - When I say "a theme," what thoughts come to your mind?
   - How will you define the term theming in your field?
   - Why is theming important? (What is the purpose of theming?)
   - What kind of theming do you like? Do you have any good examples, bad examples?
   - In which context have you used the concept? How have you been working with it?
   - What is a themed experience?
   - How is theming relevant within tourism, why?
   - Do you think theming can be relevant within other domains outside tourism?
   - How do you think other people (people like yourself) will define the concept of theming in your context?
   - How will you describe a themed experience? Please give examples.
   - When is theming important, in what situations? E.g., the entrance of an area, dining.
     - Do you think there are areas where theming is less important?
   - Do themed spaces have to be locally connected?
   - What kind of theming elements do you think a tourist will highlight after visiting a themed destination, and why?

3. Theming dimensions

    - What kind of specific theming dimensions do you think will influence the tourists' satisfaction with themed experiences?
    - What kind of theming dimensions do you see emerging in your field, and why? Please give examples.
    - What kind of dimensions do you miss from previous research?

4. Summary

    - Is there anything else you would like to add or elaborate, as you consider essential in this context?
    - Do you have a recommendation for those who want to theme an experience?

7. Dissertation articles

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Theme factors that drive the tourist customer experience

Jonas Karlsen Åstrøm

Abstract

Purpose – *This study aims to investigate the factors that drive the tourist customer experience around theming. Theming is considered vital to creating a memorable customer impression.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The cruise industry was chosen as the empirical setting. A total of 328 cruise travelers returned valid questionnaires during a cruise in March 2010. The questionnaire was developed based on a conceptual model of components (name, employee interaction, lighting, design and music) hypothesized to contribute to a themed cruise environment.*

Findings – *Name, employee interaction and lighting were found to be the most important drivers for the customer experience. Theming was less reliant on design and music.*

Research limitations/implications – *This research was limited to one narrow context. Further research on other ships, itineraries and cruise lines should clarify whether factors affecting theme perception are the same across the cruise industry.*

Practical implications – *Cruise industry decision makers should consider the naming of spaces, lighting and employee interaction when designing themed experiences.*

Originality/value – *Theming has received little attention in the research literature. This study is a unique contribution to our understanding of this particular field.*

Keywords *Tourism, Experience, Customer, Cruise, Theming*

Paper type *Research paper*

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Introduction

Over the past decade, the discourse of tourism has shifted markedly toward experiences as offerings rather than mere goods and services. This shift is due in large part to the influential work *The Experience Economy* by Pine and Gilmore (2011, first published in 1999), which challenged providers to sell commercial offerings as experiences that would engage customers in a memorable way. Therefore, it is important to make the distinction between the experience as a product to be sold, and the experience as a tool to sell goods and services. Experience as a concept, and independent paradigm emerged out of marketing and management theory. In literature, key aspects such as service quality, emotions, loyalty, satisfaction and engagement are regarded as the foundation of the customer experience.

The production of experiences has been well studied in tourism and leisure (Sundbo, 2015). However, one aspect of the tourism experience that has been rather overlooked in literature is that of theming – a staging process that unifies structure and organization, commonly exemplified through the archetypical theme parks (Scheurer, 2004). Theming is recognized as one of the most powerful tools that managers can utilize – the conception and implementation of an effective theme are the key factors in creating an irresistible customer impression. Equally important, theming functions as a means for individual enterprises to stand out in a market where their offerings are less distinguishable from those of their competitors (Gottdiener, 2001; Schmitt and Simonson, 1997). For example, theming is used to set apart tourist attractions such as water parks, through coherence, pleasure

and fantasy (Weaver, 2011). The degree of theming varies – it can be light or heavy (Dutton, 2004). Interestingly, except for theme park managers, few managers realize that when constructing their physical spaces around specific themes, they are in fact theming them. For this reason, theming and, in particular, the factors that drive the tourist customer experience in themed environments are the focus of this paper.

Themes are isolated in the time and space where the customer is present because theming is highly context specific (Muñoz et al., 2006; Wood and Muñoz, 2007). Thus, to study how themed spaces are perceived, the context must be considered. Analytical research on theming has typically focused on theme parks, pubs, restaurants, stores and even cities (for example, see Milman, 2009; Brown and Patterson, 2000; Muñoz et al., 2006; Borghini et al., 2009; Wood and Muñoz, 2007; Weiss et al., 2005; Chang, 2000). Hence, theming research on other contexts is limited. A particularly remarkable themed setting is the modern-day supersized cruise ship, where theming acts as a means to recruit first-time passengers and attract repeat customers (Weaver, 2006, 2011). The ships are in themselves "the trip", functioning as "comprehensive holiday environments" comparable to theme parks (Weaver, 2005a). The first cruise lines appeared in the nineteenth century, which led to today's megaships, some capable of hosting more than 6,000 guests (Cruise Critic, 2014). While considered a niche sector in tourism (Papathanassis and Beckmann, 2011), the global number of cruise passengers reached 21 million in 2013 (Cruise Lines International Association [CLIA], 2014). Researchers have studied various aspects of cruise ships and the industry. A common issue addressed is the several unique economic features of the industry for passengers, destinations and the cruise lines themselves (Wilkinson, 1999; Dwyer and Forsyth, 1998; Henthorne, 2000; Biehn, 2006; Larsen et al., 2013; Rodrigue and Notteboom, 2013; Hwang and Han, 2014; Hyun and Han, 2015; Hosany and Witham, 2010). Some studies pertain to experience related factors such as satisfaction and motivation (Hung and Petrick, 2011; Ozturk and Gogtas, 2016). Notable studies that have embraced experience-related research in connection with cruise ships are Kwortnik (2008), Weaver (2005a), Huang and Hsu (2010) and Weaver (2011). Lastly, issues such as sustainability (Johnson, 2002) and destination spatial development (Dehoorne et al., 2008) have been explored. Additional research has been well summarized by Weaver (2005b) and Papathanassis and Beckmann (2011). To the best of this study's author's knowledge, no previous study has researched theming in a cruise setting.

Recently, there has been a call for more research on spatially defined factors that may enhance the memorability of tourism experiences (Kim et al., 2012), as well as greater attention to *cruisescape* factors that influence the customer experience (Kwortnik, 2008). Weaver (2011) underlines studying ship design for themed cruises as an area worth further inquiry. The current study is a response to these calls, and the author hopes, with this paper, to contribute to our understanding of the factors that drive the themed tourism customer experience. This study focuses on the largely under-researched topic of theming in a cruisescape.

Before presenting the study's results and analysis, this paper outlines the study's rationale and testing model and concludes with suggestions for further research.

Research background and hypotheses

A theme is the dominant idea or organizing principle used to harmonize a set of impressions, thereby *effectively and automatically turning a service into an experience*. The use of themes enables service providers such as hotels to "upgrade their offerings from ordinary services [. . .] to extraordinary experiences" (Gilmore and Pine, 2002). Theming can achieve several goals, such as stimulating and directing consumption (Young and Riley, 2002); offering an escape from reality (Brown and Patterson, 2000; IAAPA, 2009); helping people remember a key idea or message (Ham, 1992); and creating brand

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tangibility (Kozinets *et al.*, 2002). A so-called *themescape* may be the experience-amplified version of a servicescape (Lu and Lien, 2014) and, depending on the location, may have different intended purposes. Lukas (2012) coined the term *immersive world* for designed places whose purpose is to make the visitor not want to leave, thus extending our understanding of a themescape to incorporate vastly more of the human-built experience than the commonly recognized theme parks, casinos and similar hedonic places.

The cruisescape – the cruise ship variation of the servicescape – has atmospheric and social effects that influence the experience of cruise travelers. What separates this context from other tourist venues is the prolonged duration consumers spend in the man-built environment (unlike other servicescapes), and the changing natural environment (Kwortnik, 2008). Unlike land-bound tourist destinations, the cruise ship experience consists of both the internal facilities and the external and continually changing seaports. Ships transporting only leisure travelers have developed into "floating theme parks" (Ritzer and Liska, 1997), featuring theme park-worthy attractions such as fireworks, Broadway-style stage shows, water coasters, skydiving simulators and bumper cars. The distinctive features of cruise ships, offering their passengers a complete vacation ecosystem where every piece of the experience is tightly controlled, constitutes a "close-to-ideal laboratory conditions for social researchers" (Papathanassis and Beckmann, 2011). As a result, applying metrics used in the theme park industry to measure cruise ship theming is appropriate. If cruise lines are to provide guests with a themed environment that manages to convey a certain experience, it is important to know which *theming components* (Cornelis, 2011) contribute the most to this experience. These components help to turn the cruisescape into a themed experience. Thus, the aim of this study is to look at which theming components affect the guests' perception of a theme.

Theming components can work together as a kind of sensory marketing, with stimuli in varying degrees of subtleness. Instead of promoting a message, they influence the sense of a theme. Some stimuli are so subtle the customers are barely aware they perceive them (Hilton, 2015). Although the sensory stimuli (e.g. visual, haptic and auditory) are present in an environment, perceiving and understanding them is contextual and often influenced by other sensory inputs and biases (Krishna, 2012).

Five components found in a cruise setting were selected for this study: *name, employee interaction, music, lighting* and *design*. These components reflect the theatrical components Pine and Gilmore (2011) postulate as necessary for experientializing one's business. Beardsworth and Bryman (1999) refer to the process where a theme and a brand become coterminous in their expressions as "reflexive theming", and branding and theming in tourism studies are closely related (Viken and Granås, 2014). A brand can be a *name* (Bennett, 1995), and a name can also be a *theme* (Bryman, 2004). The name is an essential part of a brand strategy, and as such shares several choice criteria similar to those for a theme, such as memorability, meaningfulness and adaptability (Kotler and Keller, 2016; Ham, 1992; Kozinets *et al.*, 2002). *Music* is a highly influential environmental cue (Turley and Milliman, 2000), and an element whose importance for themed cruise has been recognized (Cashman, 2014, 2013). The role of *employee interaction* is related to the actor performance dimension of the business theater principles of Pine and Gilmore (2011). Services are performances that can lead to memorable service experiences (Stuart and Tax, 2004). The service personnel, the frontline employees, are considered part of the social environment, and communicate the theme to guests through performative or aesthetic labor (Bryman, 2004; Witz *et al.*, 2003). *Lighting* and *design* are the visual expressions of the cruisescape and cover tangible and less tangible dimensions of the themed spatial conditions (Muñoz *et al.*, 2006). These components complement each other and constitute part of the cruisescape. The components vary in degree of tangibility and stimulate all senses except taste. Though other components could have been included

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(e.g. ports of call, food quality or store selection), the ones chosen are the most prominent and relevant for the topic, and will now be explained in more detail.

Theming components

Perception of a theme

The definition of theme perception, as adopted for this study, is an understanding that relies on the consumer's ability to recognize the theme through its holistic application throughout the material and social environment. This recognition is founded on multisensory stimuli (Olson, 2004). There is, however, an emphasis on the visual expressions (Ulusoy and Firat, 2009). Coherence, harmony and fitness of the character of the enterprise are critical concepts for a well-communicated theme. Furthermore, in the field of interpretation, the theme is what the interpreter wants the audience to understand and remember (Beck and Cable, 2002), which is in line with the experience concept of Pine and Gilmore (2011). The theme is what the consumer remembers; however, according to Pine and Gilmore, this does not mean that the theme must be explicitly expressed to the consumer. Even if left inconspicuous, a theme will nevertheless emerge, and so every fabricated place has a theme (Pine and Gilmore, 2011).

Name

Naming the themed experience is the necessary and first crucial step toward staging an experience because it allows guests to know what to expect (Pine and Gilmore, 2011; Lukas, 2012). In this study, name is defined as the guest's association with the name of the cruise ship. For many service and experience providers (e.g. Nike, The Cheesecake Factory), this path is easy, as they are tied to an already existing brand or literally tell you what they offer through their name, which is likely to carry with it a whole range of associations. For other companies, naming their space can take more creative turns, such as Starbucks Coffee or the Library Hotel. Theming can be used as an approach to cross-reference a corporate brand, and a "brand name counts for everything in theming" (Olson, 1999, 2004). The name serves as a bridge between the conceptual expectation and the holistic and final experience.

The author argues that a name is strongly related to a themed experience, and, therefore, hypothesizes that, as part of the customer experience, it is an effective predictor for the perception of a theme. Accordingly, the first hypothesis is:

H1. Name is positively related to a guest's perception of a theme.

Employee interaction

When employees are considered part of the themed space, reducing them to "clothing" vastly underestimates their importance to services and experiences. In this study, employee interaction is defined as travelers' evaluation of staff behavior and appearance. Costumes and attire play a part in constructing a holistic impression, especially when the goal is to create a perception of authenticity (Wassler *et al.*, 2015; Lukas, 2012). Employees also directly play out a theme through staged (scripted) performative (or emotional) service (Lukas, 2007; Beardsworth and Bryman, 2001; Edensor, 2001; Stuart and Tax, 2004). However, the role of employees in a themed experience is multifaceted and may include support in finding an object or place, interpretation of the environment or problem solving. Tsang *et al.* (2012), adapting the SERVQUAL approach into a THEMEQUAL model, found measuring service quality appropriate for a theme park setting. According to Kwortnik (2008), the service staff on a cruise significantly impacts the experience. As the theme is holistically applied also in the social environment, it is, therefore, reasonable to assume that employees will also have an effect on the ship's theme. The prediction is therefore that interactions with employees greatly influences the theme perception by guests:

H2. Employee interaction is positively related to a guest's perception of a theme.

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Music

In this study, music is defined as the guest's evaluation of musical quality in their surroundings. Music is frequently considered important for the servicescape because it can influence and stimulate emotions, moods, behavior, consumption, involvement, patronage, pleasure and sense of identity (Park and Young, 1986; MacInnis and Park, 1991; Kellaris and Kent, 1993; Zampini and Spence, 2010; Garlin and Owen, 2006). As a sense expression, it can also be used to enhance a theme (Hultén *et al.*, 2009), which is a more challenging task because music is complex and an intangible part of the servicescape (Baker *et al.*, 2002). Music can influence customer perceptions, such as their attention and processing of visual stimuli in a store (Chebat *et al.*, 1993). Furthermore, these perceptions can also enhance or create the customers' attitude toward the store (Dubé and Morin, 2001). Themed environments (e.g. theme parks) often utilize especially composed music as part of their environmental stimuli (Carson, 2004; Bryman, 1999). Music thus also carry meaning (Stout and Leckenby, 1988) which is one of the key purposes of theming (Ham, 1992). Based on this, there is reason to assume there is a relation between music and perception of theme. Consequently, the third hypothesis states:

H3. Music is positively related to a guest's perception of a theme.

Lighting

Light and lighting design are an integral part of creating a holistic guest experience (Han and Ryu, 2009). Based on this, lighting is defined as an ambient condition that visually appeals to the guest experience. Light and colors can create sensations of seasons, highlight and focus on brands, people, products and signs and create a variety of specific moods (Hultén *et al.*, 2009). Colors can even lend associations to signage (e.g. green exit signs, red "no entry" lights and yellow "warnings"). Compared to retail environments, lighting has been tested less in a service environment (Zemke and Shoemaker, 2008). However, there is reason to assume the same effect will be observed in this study. Consequently, the fourth hypothesis is:

H4. Lighting is positively related to a guest's perception of a theme.

Design

The functional design (layout, equipment, furnishing, décor and architecture) of a themed place is not complicated for managers to emphasize because of its physical, and thus observable, tangible nature (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011). Hosany and Witham (2009) find that aesthetics is a crucial dimension for satisfaction and intention to recommend; hence, they suggest cruise liners focus on creating aesthetically pleasing environments. The functional and aesthetic setting is what defines design in this study.

Zeithaml *et al.* (2009) state that the physical evidence of a servicescape, the tangible cues, help customers evaluate services both before and after purchase and consumption. The relationship of theming to the physical setting is well established (Kao *et al.*, 2008; Milman, 2009). Because theming is hypothesized to be closely interrelated with services, the postulation here is that what is collectively named "design" will influence the perception of a theme:

H5. Design is positively related to a guest's perception of a theme.

Summary of the theoretical model

The purpose of this study is to draw research on theming into the realm of the themed cruisescape guest experience. Previous research on theming primarily focused on theme parks, retail environments, casinos, festivals and restaurants. Although a cruise ship setting incorporates several of the atmospherics that signifies these environments, it has its own unique combination. Given that there is little empirical evidence about what makes up a

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theme in a cruise environment, the relevant literature on themed environments was used as a basis for compiling five pertinent components. The author hypothesizes that the five components interact to create the overall theme experience in the cruise ship environment.

Figure 1 is the conceptual model of this study and summarizes the hypotheses presented.

Empirical study

Method

Participants were cruise passengers on a cruise line serving a Northern European itinerary, who were asked to complete a questionnaire after a brief introduction to the aim of the study. Collection took place over the course of one week in March 2010. All respondents were informed that their anonymity was guaranteed.

Sample characteristics

The total sample consists of 408 completed questionnaires, of which 328 were valid (age range, 15-88 years, mean 53 years). This average age is higher than the world, and USA averages for cruise passengers (mean ages 45 and 48 years, respectively), and lower than the Norwegian market (mean age 58 years in 2014) (CLIA, 2011; Dowling, 2006; Innovation Norway, 2014). Of respondents, 74 per cent were traveling for leisure, with the remainder there for meetings, conferences, business and transportation only. This sample captures a wider range of passengers than on regular cruises that consist of mainly leisure cruise tourists. Thirty-nine per cent were first-time passengers on this ship, and 91 per cent were traveling with additional passengers in their party; 38.5 per cent had a higher education (college or university level), which is greater than the domestic average (31.4 per cent) (SSB, 2014), although below the global average (44 per cent) (Dowling, 2006).

Measures

The structured questionnaire utilized for this study was developed as part of a research project on cruise travel. The brand name guidelines of Keller et al. (2008) served as the inspiration for questions on name. For measures of employee interaction, design and lighting, scales were modified from studies by Han and Ryu (2009) and Mittal and Lassar (1996). Relevant physical servicescape elements were taken from Zeithaml et al. (2009) (as part of the design construct).

Figure 1 Conceptual model

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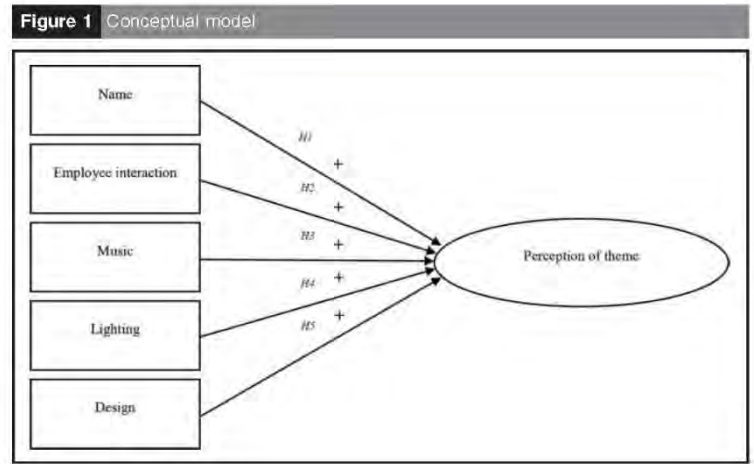
Because research on theming is scarce, questions on perception of theme were developed specifically for this study based on the concepts from Pine and Gilmore (2011). The framework by Churchill (1979) served as a systematic guide to identify and modify questions. The development of survey items for perceived theme followed the adopted definition for this study, where theme perception is an understanding that relies on the consumer's ability to recognize the theme through its holistic application throughout the material and social environment. Furthermore, the item generation and scale development followed the guidelines as suggested by Hinkin (1995). The literature review suggests theming is related to the three aspects experience, visual expression and consistency. Unlike Kao *et al.* (2008) whose construct *consistency of theme* measured whether physical and visual components matched the theme, the questions for this study were formulated so guests could evaluate whether what they *experienced* and *saw* constituted an overall theme. Finally, guests were asked if the cruise ship *had an overall theme*. Research assistants took part in several workshops in the quality assurance of the measures to be used, with expert support from two professors within tourism research. Both the workshops and expert support agreed on the face validity of the constructs. Before distribution, questions were pretested on smaller samples to ensure content validity, leading to some rewording and improvement of some of the questions. Validity was ensured following the recommendations by Hinkin *et al.* (1997). Each question was constructed as a statement that respondents were asked to assess on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

To avoid issues of multicollinearity, and to ensure that scales measured dimensions of the same construct, item performance was analyzed by principal component analysis and varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization. First, three factors were extracted with some cross loadings. Music in particular loads on a single factor, as do lighting and name items. All employee interaction items load on the same factor together with design items. To remedy this, some variables that correlated with more than one factor were removed for further analysis, leading to the extraction of six distinct factors. Employee interaction (indicators ≥ 0.7), perception of theme (≥ 0.598), music (≥ 0.834), design (≥ 0.623) and lighting (≥ 0.684) all load on separate factors with correlations greater than 0.5. One design item loads on both employee interaction (0.477) and design (0.462). While loadings above 0.5 are preferred, values higher than 0.3 can be accepted (Kim and Mueller, 1978). The design item is therefore included for further analysis. When factored by themselves, items load on single factors. In other words, dimensions are coherent within dimension, yet conceptually distinct dimensions may still covary. However, because all variables are subcomponents of the same underlying dimensions, intercorrelation is normal. Second, the result of the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy yield an acceptable value of 0.931 (Kaiser, 1974). Third, variance inflation factor (VIF) values were used to test the impact of collinearity. The VIF values are all below the suggested 10 (Myers, 1990; Bowerman and O'Connell, 1990). They remain less than the yet stricter recommended maximum of 5, 4 and 2.5, though the average value of >1 raises some concern (Allison, 1999; Rogerson, 2001; Pan and Jackson, 2008). Tolerance values are all greater than the 0.2 level of concern (Menard, 1995). High multicollinearity would "prevent the data from speaking loudly on some issues" (Kennedy, 2008) and render them meaningless for this study. Moreover, the results of analysis give credence to the dimensionality of the constructs with moderate correlations and satisfactory internal consistency (Clark and Watson, 1995; Bearden *et al.*, 2011). Although conventional wisdom often advocates at least three indicators for a construct (Howell *et al.*, 2007), fewer should be considered if the construct is narrow (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007; Drolet and Morrison, 2001). The factorial structure of an empirical scale should reflect the theorized dimensionality of a construct (Dietvorst *et al.*, 2009; Gerbing and Anderson, 1988; Hattie, 1985; McDonald, 1981). Thus, the choice in this study was to preserve factors with sound nominal theoretical consistency

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while reducing the chance of biased results. All constructs, indicators and results of the collinearity test are found in Table I.

Results and analysis

The choice of analytical technique was linear regression, considered suitable because the theoretical reasons for components predicting the outcome (perception of a theme) in previous studies from similar fields were sound. Before analysis, professional support quality assured the data set and removed some common errors from data entries. All constructs displayed Cronbach's alpha values well within acceptable standard norms. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table II.

Regression analysis

The analysis shows support for three of the five hypotheses. The most important factor for guests perceiving a theme was the *name* of the venue itself. The second factor was *employee interaction*, and the third was *lighting*. These components explained 64.4 per cent of the factors that shaped guests' perception of a theme in a cruise environment. The results of the testing and the structural model are presented in Table III and Figure 2.

Discussion

This section consists of two parts. The first is a discussion of findings in relation to the theoretical implications of the results. The second is a discussion of the managerial implications.

Table I Measurements and model collinearity statistics

Independent variables	Indicators	Tolerance	VIF
Employee interaction (EmI)	Employees keep eye contact when speaking to me Employees are cheerful when they see me Employees smile while talking to me Employees are dressed presentably	0.433	2.309
Music (Mus)	I like the music that is played on cruise ship I like the rhythm of the music played	0.608	1.645
Lighting (Lgt)	The lighting helps create the mood The lighting is pleasant	0.461	2.169
Name (Nam)	I associate the name of the cruise ship with joy The cruise ship lives up to its name	0.488	2.050
Design (Des)	The cruise ship's design is practical The interior is appealing The interior feels luxurious	0.399	2.506
Dependent variable theme perception (ThP)	What I experience on the cruise ship constitutes a coherent theme What I see on the cruise ship constitutes a coherent theme The cruise ship has a coherent theme		

Table II Descriptive statistics, means, standard deviations and correlations for major variables

Construct	Indicators	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	a	ThP	Stf	Mus	Lgt	Nam	Des
ThP	3	1	7	5.10	1.16	0.85	1.00					
EmI	4	1	7	5.73	0.97	0.84	0.67*	1.00				
Mus	2	1	7	4.66	1.35	0.83	0.55*	0.50*	1.00			
Lgt	2	1	7	5.25	1.26	0.81	0.67*	0.58*	0.58*	1.00		
Nam	2	1	7	5.18	1.37	0.81	0.71*	0.56*	0.53*	0.61*	1.00	
Des	3	1	7	5.57	1.07	0.79	0.67*	0.70*	0.44*	0.64*	0.62*	1.00

Notes: *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); ThP = Theme perception; EmI = Employee interaction; Mus = Music; Lgt = Lighting; Nam = Name; Des = Design

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Table III Results of testing of name, employee interaction, music, lighting and design as antecedents to perception of theme

Types of theming components causing perception of theme		β-coefficients
H1	Name	0.37
H2	Employee interaction	0.25
H3	Music	0.08 not significant
H4	Lighting	0.18
H5	Design	0.09 not significant
Adjusted R Square (n = 328)		0.64

Figure 2 Structural model results

Notes: *$p < 0.05$ = significant; NS = not significant
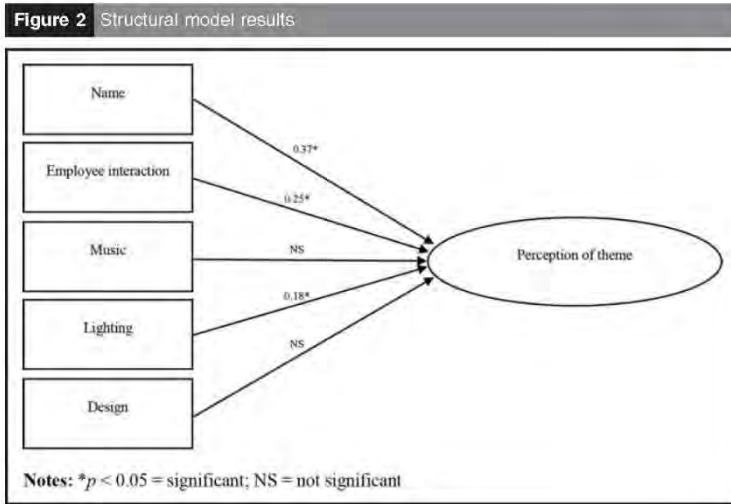
Theoretical implications

This present study makes a contribution to the tourism literature that calls for research on spatially defined factors that could improve the memorability of tourism experiences (Kim *et al.*, 2012), *cruisescape* factors that influence the customer experience (Kwortnik, 2008) and studies of ship design for themed cruises (Weaver, 2011). The findings of this study are twofold. First, they reveal that cruise ships are, in fact, themed environments and that certain indicators contribute to the guests' perception of this fact. Second, the results also show that guests can cognitively extract a theme from their environment, which is in line with the suggestions of Pine and Gilmore (2011). Because theming is a rather recent object of research (Strömberg, 2015), the findings therefore support previous claims that have until now been of hypothetical nature.

Although theming is arguably an old technique for marketing, branding and experiential "world building" (Lukas, 2012; Wassler *et al.*, 2015; Olson, 2004), what it is and what it means in today's world of mass tourism and consumption is less understood. Mossberg (2007) discusses the effects of a theme and how it can successfully connect various services and products in the *experiencescape* as an arena. Moreover, she argues limited research has been done in this area, and that how tourists perceive the theme and linkages to the tourist's experience needs further research. The results of this study are certainly a step in this direction. They indicate, for instance, that *names* play a significant role,

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especially when a themed, immersive world is created. Names on a cruise ship can range from the name of the ship itself to the names of the restaurants, the attractions, casinos, shops and even some of the most exclusive cabins. Names, in particular maritime names or the cruise line brand's own name, can even disseminate down to individual products and services. In this respect, as part of a cohesive theme, the name lends its credence to virtually all parts of the cruisescape. This can be considered reflexive theming where the name is (a part of) the theme (Beardsworth and Bryman, 1999; Bryman, 2004).

Not surprisingly, employee interaction is crucial for the perception of a themed cruisescape. Because cruise ships are particularly labor-intensive experience providers (Clancy, 2012), employees play vital roles in the "cruise theater", thus contributing to the cruisescape theme. Strömberg (2015) claims that theming is a type of management tool for structuring the business concept and that (acting) personnel can be generated from a theme. This study shows that even the service personnel add to the sense of a theme. Thus, to enhance the theme in a cruisescape, frontline employees are clearly as important as any meticulous sensory engagement applied when theming an experience. Consequently, there are few better theming elements to do this than actual real employees, or to quote Walt Disney: "You can design and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality" (James, 2014).

As a stimulus, lighting has repeatedly been found to be influential on a variety of consumer environments (Baker et al., 2002; Turley and Milliman, 2000; Finlay et al., 2010), and these results are compelling. Lighting, however, does not necessarily influence behavior (Robson and Kimes, 2007). Unlike design components, lighting contributes to the theme perception. Lighting as such gives far more weight to a theme perception than the physical environment. This emphasizes the importance of different elements to develop when the goal is to shape a theme in the tourist's mind.

In theme parks, design has been found not to influence the positive emotions of tourists (Slåtten et al., 2011), and the customer experience was perceived as more memorable than infrastructure and the configuration of facilities (Milman, 2009). It seems surprising design and music are not positively related to the perception of a theme. Hence, further research on these aspects of theming components and their relationship with experience factors is needed.

Managerial implications

The major practical implication of the study is that names, employee interactions and lighting have a substantial impact on the perceived theme of a cruisescape. They are central elements of building the holistic environment, both as external stimuli on the cruise tourist and as part of the internal "world building". If theming professionals wish to enhance a particular theme, it is imperative they know which elements to use to create a more impactful, coherent and harmonious themed environment. The staging of experiences is ultimately a way to introduce and increase profitability, and so there is a need to identify the pieces that are required for this staging. Intriguingly, this study suggests naming one's themed experience is essential to creating a holistic experience. Names create expectations and positive mental images of what is to be experienced, for cruises and other themed venues. Thus, to bring the conceptual into the experience, a name is the first step for a pleasurable experience. As for employee interaction, functional labor is insufficient when creating a themed service environment. Performative labor including eye contact, cheerfulness, smiling and proper attire should accompany the tasks of one's frontline employees. In addition, lighting is a necessary ingredient to create the mood and an appealing ambiance in a themed setting.

It is also important to keep in mind that though design and music were found not to influence the perception of a theme, it does not mean that they are not important for every themed setting. This could be context unique to the setting, or it may be the design or the music failing to sufficiently interpret a theme for the guests. Cues in the environment are

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supposed to positively influence the complete experience, and the ones that do not contribute or do so negatively should be removed or at least changed (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). Given how music and design did not positively relate to the theme of the cruisescape in this study, care should be taken to remedy this possible shortcoming. As sensory cues, they may have been commoditized and moved on to become a kind of dissatisfier – less impactful as stimuli for a theme in themselves, but missed if unavailable completely. In other words, it can have become background noise, or the victim of selective perception. Unlike design, music is not ever-present throughout the ship's facilities and, therefore, contributes less to the holistic experience. The music might be "off theme", but instead, make guests consume more food and drinks, or influence their time spent in the environment (Zampini and Spence, 2010). As theming components, music and design might just be less salient because they were less emphasized, and thus there is a potential for improvement. Music especially is an extensively used component and if skillfully and purposefully applied and implemented, can be used to contribute to the customer experience.

The physical design may be more important for a theme in a setting on a smaller scale (such as a theme restaurant, see Lee *et al.*, 2015). It is, unlike music, omnipresent, and its effect may wear off over time. It is, however, a necessary though not a sufficient component to create a perception of a theme. If a themed environment fails to deliver the intended experience, adapting or abandoning themes altogether are strategies that should be taken into consideration (Kozinets *et al.*, 2002).

Conclusions and future research

This study contributes to the growing research on themed environments. Theming is an understudied field, despite its widespread use in tourism, public spaces and even product development. Its many dimensions, suggested in the literature, are occasionally investigated on their own, though seldom in connection with theming. In concurrence with theming and their connection to key customer experience outcome measures, these dimensions may be avenues for future studies. The study was based on the assumption that themes emerge in built environments, as suggested in the literature. Thus, tourists can perceive the theme in a setting by holistically evaluating the social and material environment. For a cruise setting, necessary drivers for this experience may be the name, employee interaction and lighting. In this study, music and design contributed less to the themed experience. However, this could be because of the unique setting or choice of style.

Most existing research examines evident and conventional themed settings such as theme parks, themed restaurants and brand stores as research arenas. An interesting and yet unexplored area would be to examine the distinctive theming components that exist in the wider domain, both in tourism and in broader contexts. The ways in which theming and themes are applicable in different contexts remain to be clearly elucidated.

This study proposes a qualitative approach be taken to address these questions to advance our understanding of theming.

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About the author

Jonas Karlsen Åstrøm is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Innovation in Services at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences. He is interested in how customer experiences can be enhanced. More specifically, his work examines how theming can create experiences out of services. Jonas Karlsen Åstrøm can be contacted at: jonas.astrom@inn.no

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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

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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 Firat (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 (Firat and Ulusoy, 2011, Ulusoy and Firat, 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

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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), Firat 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,

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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

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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

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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, Firat 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

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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

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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

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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

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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."

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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,

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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."

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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

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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.

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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

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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

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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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Why Theming? Identifying the Purposes of Theming in Tourism

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ABSTRACT

There are increasing numbers of studies on themed environments in tourism and other industries because theming has been shown to increase the attractiveness and pull-factor of a space or destination. Little attention has been given to exploring why theming occurs. This study contributes to the understanding of theming in a tourism context and aims to identify the different purposes of theming in tourism. Several purposes have previously been proposed; however, empirical research approaches are limited when exploring these purposes. The purposes identified in this study can be considered essential objectives for managers who are considering theming their products and services. Qualitative interviews were performed with key informants, resulting in five distinct purposes behind theming: (i) differentiation, (ii) increase sales, (iii) create bonds, (iv) attract, stop and make visitors stay, and (v) enhance the end-to-end experience. The study concludes with suggestions for future research.

Introduction

Although theming has been recognized as one of the most powerful tools that managers can utilize (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997), there seems to be a lack of understanding of the purposes of theming. Such purposes are of importance to managers in tourism who need clear business objectives when investing in themed spaces and experiences. This issue has seldom been explored and more qualitative research approaches are needed to help bridge this knowledge gap. Previous studies on theming have commonly accepted and reiterated suggested purposes of theming (Åstrøm, 2018). These ideas have infrequently been challenged and explored empirically. The purpose of theming has ramifications for several professional and academic fields. First, theming has a substantial and fundamental footing within the travel, tourism, and hospitality literature (e.g., Botha, 2016; Mossberg, 2007; Urry & Larsen, 2011; Wong & Cheung, 1999). Theming holds this footing in the literature because it became a professionalized art and practice, particularly with the rise of the modern and

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epitomized theme parks. Furthermore, theming in tourism has been extended to and made tourist destinations out of malls, pubs, restaurants, retails shops, gardens centers, museums, cruise ships, hotels, and even neighborhoods, towns, and cities (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Åstrøm, 2017; Chang, 2000; Ishak, Crang, & Ab Karim, 2017; Sherry et al., 2004; Wassler, Li, & Hung, 2015; Zins, 1998). Theming as an art and practice has attracted numerous critics and academic researchers over recent decades (Brown, 2016). The critique has primarily revolved around the authenticity of themed spaces. However, the research on theming and authenticity evolved together with this criticism (e.g., Lego, Wood, McFee, & Solomon, 2002; Lego Muñoz & Wood, 2009; Milman, 2013; Muñoz, Wood, & Solomon, 2006). Recently, authenticity has been understood as a far more flexible, negotiable, and context-dependent concept (Sinha, Roy Chaudhuri, Fowler, & Mazumdar, 2018). This paper lends credence to theming as a scientific and professional field, and themed spaces as destinations genuinely worthy of thoughtful study. Second, the multidisciplinary nature of theming means it also includes various other fields, such as cultural studies, sociology, consumer and behavioral psychology, and branding and marketing (e.g., Cheng, Du, & Ma, 2014; Cheng, Fang, & Chen, 2015; Dicks, 2007; Jin, Lee, & Lee, 2015; Kemperman, Borgers, Oppewal, & Timmermans, 2000; Martin, Jin, & Trang, 2017; Paterson, 2005; Sherry et al., 2004). Third, many other professional areas such as programming, landscaping, interior design, and staff training can all be affected by the creation, development, and implementation of a themed space. However, these fields also influence the process and dynamics of theming. This influence and the interplay with these relations and processes go to the core of what theming is. How themes can be developed, updated and used in tourism product development has received some attention (Davis, 1996; Ham, 1992; Jernsand, Kraff, & Mossberg, 2015; Kozinets et al., 2002; Milman, 2010). Understanding this use of themes means that theming deserves more attention in education and research in the future. What theming means for products, services, and experiences need to be thoroughly explored and interpreted. An increasing number of studies involve research on themed environments (e.g., Erb & Ong, 2016; Gao, Scott, & Ding, 2016; Ma, Scott, Gao, & Ding, 2016; Torres, Milman, & Park, 2017; Yan, 2017; Zhang, Li, & Su, 2017). However, previous research seems to be based on established assumptions behind the explanations for why businesses theme their market offerings. The purpose of this study is to add to the underutilized understanding of the purpose of theming in a tourism context. The focus of this particular study is on the purposes of theming in tourism because tourism more than any other service industry can potentially elicit strong emotional and experiential reactions by consumers (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). Tourism as an industry has both a historical bond with theming as well as a fundamental link to consumer experiences (Botterill, 1997; Weinstein, 1992; Young & Riley, 2002). Thus, the objective of the study is to identify and add to the knowledge base of different purposes of

theming in tourism. These purposes will be explored in detail and therefore provide new and more profound insights into essential objectives for managers who are considering theming their products and services.

Theming has a longstanding relationship with experiences, and especially tourist experiences because tourism is an experience-intensive service (Cetin & Dincer, 2014). The economic perspective of experiences was introduced and popularized by Pine and Gilmore (2011, first published in 1999). They recognized that businesses had become more economically successful because all their marketed products eventually become commodified and less differentiated from those of their competitors. As an alternative, businesses should move from selling traditional goods and services to offering experiences that would memorably engage their customers. To differentiate their offerings better from those of their competitors, as well as increase their price level, businesses should focus on creating experiences. Certain aspects of this experience perspective need to be explained. First, experiences can be viewed as the product being sold or as a tool used to sell goods and services. Second, experiences are mental phenomena that occur in people's minds and bodies (Jernsand et al., 2015). Third, marketers seek to influence these experiences through multitudes of combined tangible and intangible stimuli in an environment that is often themed (Mossberg, 2007; Poulsson, 2014; Sundbo, 2015). The shift in the discourse of tourism, as well as many other areas in business, toward experiences on several levels, means the paradigm with its assumptions, terms, and applications has proliferated and now tangents unexpectedly different areas of business. These areas include city development, retail, health services, video games, computer repair, and so on (D'Hauteserre, 2012; Pine & Gilmore, 2013; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003; Snel, 2011). Sundbo (2015) proposes using experience as a general business logic, where companies should add experiences as "add-ons" to their core products. This logic means that even if they are producers of raw materials, they can produce events that, in turn, will generate experiences for their potential customers. Well-known examples of companies that seek to deliver experiences to sell otherwise arguably mundane products or services are IKEA, Nespresso, and Amazon.

When businesses choose to "stage events" to create the emotions and responses that make up an experience, they frequently need a physical place in which to arrange their props and choreograph a customer journey. One cannot design an experience, only shape, structure, design, and stage physical environments that yield experiences in the minds of their customers (Ellis, Freeman, Jamal, & Jiang, 2019; Hassenzahl, 2004). A typical design method for theming involves the use of atmospherics (Han & Ryu, 2009; Lee, Wang, & Cai, 2015; Slåtten, Mehmetoglu, Svensson, & Sværi, 2009). The advent of the Internet has opened possibilities for creating virtual nonphysical spaces. However, visiting restaurants and bars, grocery shopping, and haircuts remain tied to a physical visit and experience. Schmitt and Simonson

(1997) recommend using theming to create an irresistible customer impression, where the key factors are the conception and implementation of a compelling theme. To avoid commoditizing the experience with these places, Pine and Gilmore (2011) suggest THEME-ing them. This acronym and its principles constitute "the act of theming," is an "art form" that they consider involves (1) theming the experience, (2) harmonizing impressions with positive cues, (3) eliminating negative cues, (4) adding in memorabilia, and (5) engaging the five senses. It is a challenge for businesses to create, stage, and manage distinctive experiences and enhance them through environmental props (Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011). However, for hospitality providers, such as hotels and resorts, theming efficiently and automatically creates experiences out of services and makes them memorable (Gilmore & Pine, 2002).

The role of theming in tourist experiences is essential to acknowledge, especially considering the many criticisms against it. We know that guest experiences in hospitality are multidimensional outcomes from engaging in memorable, emotional, and personal events and impressions that are created by the environment (Cetin & Dincer, 2014).

Furthermore, this process of environmental influence takes place in what is often referred to as the "experiencescape," a context that includes the physical and social surroundings including products, services, and symbols (Jernsand et al., 2015; Mossberg, 2007; O'Dell & Billing, 2006). Additionally, it is well known that businesses use theming to achieve certain goals. However, what these goals are has primarily been assumed rather than explored empirically.

This study aims to identify the different purposes of theming in tourism and explore the central objectives of theming. The central research question is: What are the main objectives of theming? The study begins with the current theoretical perspectives on the purposes of theming both within and outside tourism. Next, it presents the methods chosen to explore the research questions and obtain the findings. Lastly, the study concludes with the possible implications for managers who are considering theming their services and recommendations for future research.

Theoretical perspectives

Although theming has been a process and professionalized practice since at least the development and opening of Disneyland in California in 1955, the profession and the presence of themed environments have grown considerably ever since. Theming can be viewed as a "staging process that unifies structure and organization" (Scheurer, 2004). A theme can be considered to be the "dominant idea or organizing principle" used to "harmonize a set of impressions," or a "master narrative" added to institutions and exhibits

(Beardsworth & Bryman, 1999; Gilmore & Pine, 2002). Much of the literature on theming in tourism tends to concentrate on theme parks. However, themed environments encompass a large variety of different venues and spaces (e.g., cruise ships, urban development, zoos, restaurants, bars, museums, hotels, landscapes, and even game design). However, themed environments constitute their own category within tourism. Theming commonly comprises a vast selection of professional fields, such as architecture, personnel training, sound and music design, programming, food and beverage development, marketing, story development, lighting design, and so on. According to Hung (2015), the literature on theming follows two streams: (1) topics in a themed environment, and (2) studies related to theming in a themed environment.

When spaces are themed, either as part of their creation or in the context of a redevelopment of a given place, the intent behind various themed spaces can appear uncertain (see e.g., Borghini et al., 2009). In their initial phase, unthemed yet created spaces serve functionalistic purposes (Goss, 1993). A restaurant can serve food to feed people and profit from the process. A restaurant does not need to be themed if it solely exists to seek anything but economic profits. A themed space could achieve several goals: i.e., those of the people who create the space, and those of the visitors. Increased profitability could still be a target for the restaurant owner, but this leaves many questions unanswered. Improved profitability could be achieved by, e.g., using different ingredients, influencing meal duration, or changing the table mix in the restaurant (Kimes & Thompson, 2004; Sharma, Gregoire, & Strohbehn, 2009; Thompson, 2010). Thus, theming may be linked to increased profitability, but also serve other purposes. Hence, one central question remains: what are the main objectives of theming?

A variety of objectives has been suggested in the literature on theming. Gottdiener (2001) outlines at least two: i.e., themed environments are meant to "serve as containers for commodified human interaction" (e.g., malls) and convey symbolic meaning to inhabitants and users. A myriad of objectives have been proposed for various themed environments: e.g., stimulate and direct consumption (Young & Riley, 2002); offer an escape from reality (Brown & Patterson, 2000); aid people in remembering a key idea or a message (Ham, 1992); create brand tangibility (Kozinets et al., 2002); create standardized audience effects (e.g., comfort, pleasure, and contentment) (Adkins, 2005); create unique and different events (Allen & Harris, 2002); commodify urban experiences (Amin & Thrift, 2002); quasification, i.e., fabricate a "pretend" experience environment (Beardsworth & Bryman, 1999); enhance the quality of a guest experience (Ellis & Rossman, 2008); entertain and educate consumers about history, lifestyle, and culture (Wood & Muñoz, 2007); overwhelm consumers with omnipresent and omnipotent brand identity (Galician, 2013); influence behavior (Pearce & Wu, 2016); and

represent a specific culture (Ebster & Guist, 2005). In their literature review, Wong and Cheung (1999) find that for theme parks, theming can boost attendance, encourage repeat visitation and word-of-mouth advertising, add value, coordinate retail merchandise, and create a competitive advantage through differentiation. Because of this spreading of theming as a practice both within tourism, but also outside of it, there is a lack of empirical studies that consider the mechanisms and reasoning behind this phenomenon.

In summary, businesses that trade in services want their offerings to be memorable to distinguish themselves from competitors. Businesses can do this by creating experiences out of their services. These experiences are events that cause emotional and physical responses from their customers. Theming is a method of creating such responses by shaping and designing the surrounding environment. Consequently, theming is a suitable technique for turning services into experiences.

Methods

The specific purpose of this study is to investigate, identify, and discover the meanings of theming in a tourism context. This kind of exploratory research both extends our understanding of the purposes behind theming, while at the same time provides ideas for future research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Suddaby, 2006). This study aims to identify the different purposes of theming in tourism. The research question is: What are the main objectives of theming? The different objectives of theming are explored in this study as understood by both academics and practitioners. Few studies delve into the questions on what theming is and rely on established assumptions regarding its purposes. Thus, to explore these purposes, experts on theming were strategically selected. For this study, this meant the informants would need to be knowledgeable on the topic. To reach a level of "theory saturation," the number of informants needs to be large enough to make meaningful comparisons and obtain sufficient empirical material (Mason, 2002). The selection criteria for the interview objects was purposive rather than random (Kuzel, 1992; Morse, 1989; Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2003). In this study, this meant selecting informants who were experts on the topic of theming based on publications and practical work. This kind of sampling strategy is theoretical in the sense that instead of sampling people, concepts are sampled (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), and instead of aiming for a large sample size, the individuals considered for selection are rather "information rich" (Patton, 2002). While there is no gold standard for numbers of samples in various fields of qualitative research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), a minimum recommendation is from four to six, depending on factors such as homogeneity and research object (Kuzel, 1992). For this study, this implicates the sample size is adequate when concepts repeat in interviews and thus achieves a level of "theoretical saturation." Depending on the size and complexity of the

data, theoretical saturation refers to when all main variations, or themes, of a phenomenon have been identified and incorporated into the emerging theory (Guest et al., 2006; Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Experts chosen from both academia and practice were included as interview subjects. The experts came from both Europe and the United States. Representatives of both the tourism industry and other industries were selected through a careful and extensive literature review to obtain different perspectives about the many purposes of theming. In turn, this helps to establish the scope of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While academic informants were easier to find based on several publications on theming in scientific journals and books, informants from the business side were proposed by other authors, researchers, and scholars. The long-list included further potential informants, especially from the academic side. However, a lack of response shortened this to the current selection. All informants were asked what the purposes of theming are specifically for tourism as well as outside the context of tourism. The strategy of interviewing both practitioners and academics and asking for contexts outside of tourism was chosen to capture as much variation on the suggested purposes as possible. This dual-context perspective is based on a broader view of what products are offered to tourists across industries outside traditional products such as transportation, accommodation, dining, and activities (Mossberg, 2007). Performing one-on-one qualitative interviews is thus an appropriate way of acquiring a rich data set to achieve the objectives of the paper (O'Donnell & Cummins, 1999; Palmerino, 1999; Underwood, 2003).

The interview guide was designed with input and feedback from researchers and relevant peers from the field. The questions were designed to be as nondirective and open as possible to allow informants to tell their stories on their terms. Questions included biographical questions, floating prompts (e.g., categories and exceptional incidents), "grand-tour questions," planned questions, and examples (Leech, 2002; McCracken, 1988; Spradley, 1979). Valuable insights into refining the final interview guide came from three initial interviews, leading to some questions being cut or rephrased to be more open-ended. This process resulted in 19 questions that all relate to different aspects of theming, with the main emphasis on tourism. The empirical material from the first interviews acted as a "pilot study" for the remaining data collection and was included in the final data set (Alam, 2005; Yin, 2009). The following are three questions from the interview guide that are relevant to this study:

- Why is theming important? (What is the purpose of theming?)
- How and why is theming relevant within tourism?

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- Do you think theming can be relevant within other domains outside tourism?

Interviews were conducted either in person or via Skype for practical reasons over the course of one year. All informants were informed of the nature of the research, the subject of the study, and how the data were collected and treated to increase the validity of the responses (Brink, 1993). Furthermore, ethical conduct guidelines were followed to ensure confidentiality. All interviews except one were transcribed verbatim. Because of a failed audio recording during one interview, the interviewer's notes were used instead. The informants are summarized in Table 1.

Thematic analysis was used for this study because it requires the researcher to recognize and describe explicit and implicit concepts or themes within the data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). Moreover, employing abductive reasoning has three implications (Van Maanen, Sørensen, & Mitchell, 2007). First, the data need to be sufficiently detailed, rich, and complex. The interviews lasted about 10 hours and 21 minutes and were transcribed into 214 pages containing more than 91,300 words. These were accompanied by handwritten notes from before, during, and after the interview sessions. Second, the findings require the results or concepts to be linked to the conceptual plane, a post hoc interpretation, and the available empirical evidence. In this study, this was achieved through the distinct yet nonlinear and recursive arrangement phases in the thematic analytical process as presented by Braun and Clarke (2006). In phase one, the researcher acquainted himself with the data, which included repeated active reading of the source material, including transcribing and checking transcriptions against audio recordings for accuracy. In phase two, the initial codes were generated and meaningful and interesting features of the data identified. These themes, which refer to "some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set," were in this context more data-driven than theory-driven themes. Data-driven themes mean the data were coded without specific questions in

Table 1. Presentation of informants.

Informant code	Discipline	University/ business	Academic/ practitioner	Nationality	Gender
I1	Experiential economy	University	Academic	Dutch	Male
I2	Cultural anthropology	University/ business	Academic	American	Male
I3	Tourism geography	University	Academic	Spanish	Male
I4	Cultural studies	University	Academic	German	Male
I5	Concept design/ development	Business	Practitioner	American	Male
I6	Experience design	Business	Practitioner	Norwegian	Male
I7	Writer	Business	Practitioner	American	Male
I8	Architecture	Business	Practitioner	American	Male
I9	Geography	University	Academic	German	Male
I10	Storytelling	University	Academic	Dutch	Female

mind. For this study, this meant concepts such as differentiation and increased sales emerged throughout the analytical process instead of relying too much on the interview guide structure. Coding was performed using qualitative research software while 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 about your ideas" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This grounded-theory analytical approach requires constant questioning of initial interpretations to validate original concepts and develop them further (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Therefore, the researcher reread and listened to the audio recordings to ensure interpretations were sound. The third to the fifth phases involved sorting, analyzing, and combining the coded extracts to form overarching themes or meaningful larger concepts. For this study, this corresponds to the third implication by Van Maanen et al. (2007), the "principle of opposites," which refers to quantifying qualitative data whenever possible. This principle encourages the researcher to count and classify whatever possible. For instance, if concepts occurred in interviews with more than one informant, these concepts may be considered more critical. The sixth and final phase involves reporting results, of which this article is an example. In this phase, illustrative examples are used to substantiate the arguments.

It is important to note that the concepts that emerged, labeled "differentiation," "increase sales," "create bonds," "attract, stop, and make visitors stay," and "enhance the end-to-end experience," intersect and are thus not mutually exclusive. Following this line of reasoning, most tourism businesses will likely have components of several types of goals in various combinations for their themed offerings. It is, however, reasonable to assume that in the long term, one type of purpose will emerge as dominant over time. As a result, there will be variations in motives for theming among businesses.

Care was given to ensure validity and reliability. The methods employed in a qualitative study may be more exposed to the researcher's subjectivity and other sources of errors in, e.g., data collection and analysis (Brink, 1993). The analysis process, as well as the results, were discussed with researchers in related fields at a university college in Norway to limit the researcher effects. Involving experts familiar with the topic throughout the research process helped to ensure the truth value and trustworthiness of this study (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Initially, the researcher expected to find more abstract and personal reasons why managers choose to use theming, similarly to the suggested objectives as outlined in the Theoretical perspectives subsection. However, this was not the case, as will be discussed in the next section.

Findings and discussion

When summarizing the findings, based on the interviews, five current and distinct purposes behind theming are revealed: (i) differentiation, (ii) increase sales, (iii) create bonds, (iv) attract, stop, and make visitors stay, and (v) enhance the end-to-end experience. The purposes were mentioned using either explicit or synonymous terms by both the academic and practitioner informants. Selected supportive statements for illustration back the suggested purposes.[1] While the purposes in this study are treated as distinct from one another, their interrelations and how they link to previously suggested purposes will be discussed.

Differentiation

The first purpose is differentiation. The experts refer to differentiation in theming as creating a unique identity for a given space. Two informants [I2, I6] argued that one reason for theming is that it gives businesses (quotation) "uniqueness" as well as asking [I7], "What is this place already about? … How do we raise it to higher definition?" As one informant [I2] said:

> I think there are many purposes … theming offers an opportunity to create a very unique space. To create a space that can be differentiated from another space, and so theming has that opportunity to create uniqueness and attract guests.

Differentiation by creating a specific and separate identity is typical for branding, especially for products. Theming is frequently used in retail stores, brand flagship stores, "brandships," and malls (Borghini et al., 2009; Kozinets, 2008; Kozinets et al., 2002; Openshaw, 2016; Ponsonby-Mccabe & Boyle, 2006; Pospěch, 2017). Interestingly, there is a contrast between uniqueness and the spread of familiar concepts. If one considers Starbucks (more than 24,000 stores in 70 countries), McDonald's (more than 36,000 restaurants in more than 100 countries), and Six Flags (20 branded theme parks in five countries), the veneer of uniqueness grows thin. This lack of uniqueness can in part be why themed places with more than one location adapt their concept to local tastes, such as the Disney parks in France, Japan, and China, or the Dungeons with their European and American sites. A place or a destination can have more than one identity, such as the brand, the local history, the theme, and the company history, which needs to be incorporated into a consistent and unique identity. This new identity is then explicitly tied to that geographical location. Conceptually, it can be transferred to other sites, but will likely lose, as one informant [I3] calls it, "the spirit of the place," and, in effect, it becomes a classic "quantity over quality" issue (Bryman, 2003).

Increased sales (of a brand or product)

As with most businesses, themed businesses are also in it to make money. The informants provided responses that cemented this understanding, such as selling a product, more spending, added value, and higher price points. One informant [I5] stated that "an entirely connected experience that has theming woven into it tends to command a higher price point" and another [I4] that "the idea is to simply sell a product." One informant [I1] argued:

> Although I am not sure whether we have the real … data to support that … I don't have all the authors, all the references with me, but there's a relation between theming and more spending.

It is essential to keep in mind that the term "product" can refer to more than commodities and goods. As Gilmore and Pine (2002) claim, theming is what turns services into experiences. In doing so, it is no longer the physical item or the service that is being sold to the consumer, but the experience itself. Informants suggest users will stay longer in a themed environment, pay a higher price for the offering, and repeat the process (become loyal). Theming changes the offering and adds a unique value – the theme equity. This value is what is created when theming, i.e., it is used when differentiation is the purpose. Additionally, not all themed environments are created to increase sales. For themed cities, public parks and buildings, and nursing homes, theming is about changing the service experience for the better.

Create bonds between guests and theme/brand/product

The experts refer to creating bonds between guests and the theme (or brand or product) as adding value to the experience that makes guests feel like they are connected to the place. Part of this added value comes from the bonds that the themed business can create and offer. Several informants pointed out how themed environments connect with their guests and how this enhances the experience. These associations are the building blocks of theme equity. One informant [I5] suggested that theming was about creating a "marketability advertising concept" that people could "latch onto," and that in the example of different cruise companies, "one cruise versus another, one that has a story to tell, a theme, that has a higher value associated with it." Another informant [I2] said, "[t]hese associations of values are certain things that the designers or creators of the brand or space want us to understand." Furthermore, another informant [I9] suggested that theming was about a "famous surplus" where "basic products, such as rollercoaster rides," become "more than just a rollercoaster ride." One informant [I1] suggested this bond between the themed place and the experience is quite profound:

> But I feel connected to the place … plunge into … the themed, immersive world. And what we call the placeness, and related and connected, that is what I experience by a theme.

Several informants compared theming with branding, which is a widespread occurrence (e.g., Bryman, 2003; Chatterton & Hollands, 2002; Hollands & Chatterton, 2003; Olson, 2004; Strömberg, 2015). One similarity that branding shares with theming is the added surplus value that may increase visitors' willingness to buy. Themed environments can be a way of embodying a brand by adding sensory experiences, tether it to a physical location, and envelop visitors in a brand atmosphere through which the physical product becomes the memorabilia of the experience rather than the goal. Nespresso is a brand that through their distinct and carefully positioned boutiques seek to increase their physical presence and make an espresso maker into a memorable and desirable bodily experience. Their boutiques emphasize bold colors that relate to their assortment of coffee pods, they use brown lacquered wooden surfaces that relate to high-end luxury and coffee, and they offer free samples and limited-edition pods, which connects the space to the experience. These relations are the bonds that connect guests with the themed environment.

Attract, stop, and make visitors stay (influence and modify behaviors)

The experts assert that one purpose of themed spaces is about influencing and modifying behaviors. Logically, creating an experience is not necessarily the sole purpose of why, e.g., a themed store is designed, built, and run. Profitable transactions are still required for the long-term survival of any business. Asserting these concerns, informants commented on how these environments also seek to influence and modify visitor behavior. The modification of behavior is similar to the purpose suggested by Pearce and Wu (2016). Indeed, informants suggested theming places was about [I2] "attracting guests," and [I6] "having a 'stop effect' and good products to sell." One informant [I8] argued:

> You try and create circumstances where certain behaviors seem natural. And people flock to those places because they wanna behave that way. They wanna feel that way. And that is a place where you could do it.

A themed environment needs to have a "stop effect" in the pre-phase of the experience, which is something that draws attention, motivates, and attracts the visitor. In the tourism customer journey, this could be achieved by using websites, advertising, iconic structures, brands, and entrances, which all are experiential means, clues, and motifs, or "dazzling" wow factors (Getz, 2012; Shaw & Williams, 2009; Trischler & Zehrer, 2012). Furthermore, theming should motivate the visitor to stay in the environment, influence the likelihood of increased spending or willingness to pay, and reduce price sensitivity. Behavior modification in this way is how this purpose relates to the

purpose of increased sales. However, this time is also, as informants suggested, an opportunity to make guests connect with the space, in the order and timeframe that best suits the theme and the theming. Therefore, this is how time is used in themed environments to create bonds between the guests and the product or the brand by using the environment itself. Consequently, one informant [I4] reiterates that the goal of theming is to create a "very controlled space."

Enhance the end-to-end experience

The experts believed one purpose of themed spaces is to enhance the end-to-end experience. Enhancing the experience echoes the purpose suggested by Ellis and Rossman (2008). Connected to the tourism or customer journey is the many suggested dimensions that enhance the end-to-end experience. Examples of these are storytelling, interaction, and use of multisensory stimuli (Åstrøm, 2018; Moscardo, 2010). An end-to-end experience is a customer perspective that starts with the first contact between the customer and the organization, including all touch points until the customer returns home, with any follow up (Voss, 2004). Informants emphasized storytelling where the themed environment can act as a communicator to place the visitor "in media res," thus immersing them in a memorable story experience. One informant [I4] affirmed how "immersion is the goal of theming," which allows, as another informant [I5] argued, "the consumer, the guest, to come in and immediately understand the story that they're jumping into." The informant continued:

> [T]heming ... helps give your place a sense of purpose. So, a thing is not in a particular spot just because it was placed haphazardly – there is an intentional design that helps every element of that place come together to tell a story. And, by intentionally deciding where to put something, how something should look and how your people should behave, there's a subconscious effort for your guest – and everything makes sense in a time and place, even if they don't exactly understand why, they still come away from it thinking "Wow, this was awesome! Maybe I can't put my finger on it, but I know that this is better than just a, you know, a standard facility that I might find that's not themed."

Additionally, theming was suggested to enhance the experience through sensory input. At the same time, the goal appears not only to stimulate physical, emotional, and behavioral responses, but also to influence visitors on a more abstract level. Consistent impressions can be made and communicated from the very beginning of the experience to the end, and in many cases, even after. The goal is to create a total experience – one that has the power to create the desire for and the memories of the themed space.

The purposes of theming are summarized in Table 2 with critical insights from the informants.

Table 2. Purposes of theming.

Differentiation	Increase sales	Create bonds	Attract, stop and make visitors stay	Enhance the end-to-end experience
• A way to separate experiences from each other.	• The theme adds value to product or brand.	• A version of branding.	• Manipulate behavior and feelings.	• Integrate an attractive sensory output.
• A way to become a visitor destination.	• Creates experience out of product or service.	• Adds associations to existing brand space.	• Control the space.	• Makes sense of a "world" through the story.
• Displays the "spirit of the place."	• Makes visitors want to repeat visit.	• Associations are values the creators of the space want to convey.	• Connects guests with brand identity through space.	• Immerse guests in identifiable world.
• Creates an attractive place.	• Demand higher prices.	• Makes people feel they are consuming the atmosphere.	• Makes people want to stay in the space longer.	• Themed experiences start before the physical experience.

Conclusions and implications

This study aimed to identify the different purposes of theming in tourism, thus providing essential objectives for managers considering theming their products and services. The reasons why businesses theme their market offerings have rarely been explored empirically and this study takes a qualitative research approach to address this lack. Based on interviews with expert informants, this article identified five primary purposes of theming: (i) differentiation, (ii) increase sales, (iii) create bonds, (iv) attract, stop, and make visitors stay, and (v) enhance the end-to-end experience. As the findings and discussion show, the purposes are not necessarily conceptually mutually exclusive and therefore interrelated. The interrelations can be explained as follows. Theming provides businesses with the opportunity to differentiate their offerings from others by creating unique experiential value. This unique value can add to the price of the offering and increase sales.

Furthermore, by creating a unique, attractive themed space where visitors will spend time, a business can create bonds between their values (the added values of their products or brands) and visitors. Finally, theming connects and elevates the entire process using different environmental stimuli, thus resulting in an enhanced end-to-end experience. While the previous literature has proposed numerous purposes behind theming, the purposes presented in this

article are related to business and marketing objectives. As theming spreads out of the tourism sector and into many other aspects of business, both public and private, clarifying the objectives of this marketing tool becomes urgent. Creating memorable experiences out of services is crucial as businesses seek new ways to compete in increasingly crowded markets.

Managerial implications

Clear business objectives are essential to managers in tourism (e.g., transportation, accommodation, dining, and leisure activities), as well as other linked and related industries such as entertainment, retail, and advertising. This study sheds new light on these objectives. Developing new marketing strategies using theming as a marketing tool may thus be related to differentiation, increasing sales, or enhancing the experience. Theming can create a new or more evident identity for a space, which makes the offering stand out from its competition. Several academics and writers who connect theming and branding (such as Borghini et al., 2009; Bryman, 2003; Kozinets et al., 2002; Schmitt & Simonson, 1997) state that theming can be understood as a form of branding, or a brandscape (Ponsonby-Mccabe & Boyle, 2006). Theming provides an opportunity to materialize a brand, make it tangible, and turn it into an experiential space; i.e., theming adds both concrete and abstract value to the business and opens up novel ways of creating strong and lasting bonds with guests.

Furthermore, theming can make the entire experience attractive in the sense that it cohesively and fully immerses a guest as much as possible from the very beginning to the end in an identifiable, sensible, and sensory world. A library may no longer be a place that offers free reading material, but a place where people will want to stop by, stay, and even spend some money because of its pleasant and attractive atmosphere. The themed environment may become a tourist attraction and interest local and other types of visitors. A library themed as a magical forest at twilight or a café as a 1950s vision of the future is a step toward the experience economy. It is vital that a themed concept not remain stagnant. Managers must be willing to adapt, update, or even abandon and retheme their spaces to stay relevant (Davis, 1996; Kozinets et al., 2002; Schmitt & Simonson, 1997).

Theoretical implications

This empirical study supplements and widens the scope of thematic research in tourism. Whereas the objectives proposed in the introduction of this study are only weakly substantiated empirically, the objectives presented here add theoretically to the growing discourse on theming. Stimulating and directing consumption (Young & Riley, 2002) can be considered analogous to

modifying behavior to increase sales. Creating brand tangibility (Kozinets et al., 2002) creates bonds between guests and a theme (or a brand). Enhancing the end-to-end experience is a way of improving the quality of a guest experience (Ellis & Rossman, 2008).

Additionally, the purposes are tied to both regular business key performance indicators as well as more abstract dimensions of theming (Åstrøm, 2018; Moscardo, 2010). Treating theming more in line with other business-related studies such as branding and marketing has gained some momentum. Kozinets (2008) suggested developing a scale to measure "attitude toward the theme," inspired by the construct "attitude toward the ad" (Edell & Burke, 1984). Milman (2001) attempted to predict future themes for theme parks. Tsang, Lee, Wong, and Chong (2012) adapted the SERVQUAL model into a modified THEMEQUAL model to measure the context specifics of theme park settings. Thus, measuring theming more directly to provide insights into theming both as a phenomenon and a scientific field has received some attention. This article is a step in the same direction.

Furthermore, this study contributes to legitimizing theming as a phenomenon worthy of thoughtful analysis. Studies have rarely examined the intrinsic nature of theming. It is instead treated very briefly as it pertains to a particular tourist product instead of being the focus of many studies; what it is, what it does, why and for what purposes businesses theme their offerings. This paper suggests there are clear and distinct purposes that tourism managers may pay attention to when considering using theming as part of their development strategy.

Suggestions for future research

A general limitation of this study is that the study design provides a broader answer to the research question rather than a delimited one. Further research should focus on assessing the performance of the purposes of theming from this study, as well as the purposes from previous studies concerning themed environments using, e.g., cross-sectional surveys. Some purposes may be more important in different contexts (e.g., nature-based tourism versus human-made environments, such as a cruise environment). The purposes of theming may be studied from a consumer's point of view.

Furthermore, the many elements that make themed environments unique should be explored further, through both qualitative and quantitative research. Knowledge about the purposes of theming is necessary for developing tourism products. Offering something that truly stands out and creates experiences that lead to positive memories is essential in an increasingly tourist-oriented global market where millions of tourists have the chance to visit any destination on a map. Theming invites businesses and destinations to do just that.

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Note

1. Which statement belongs to which informant is annotated with "[Ix]" referring to the number codes given to the informants in Table 1.