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In today's society, consumers are increasingly looking for experiences that are hedonic, positively intense, and intrinsically enjoyable, or what is called an extraordinary experience. There is a general lack of research on how mundane experiences that are inherently part of the daily life of consumers are conceived of as extraordinary when consumed within a non-ordinary context. Therefore, using the context of food in tourism and hospitality, this thesis aims to provide insight into what constitutes an extraordinary experience. Presented in five different papers that draws on empirical materials collected among food tourists, consumers visiting an oyster bar and oyster festival, it offers an alternate way of theorizing extraordinary experiences. In particular, it identifies elements such as profaneness, collaborative and/or limited interactions and conflict-easing situations. Since, these elements are a positive co-existence between the ordinary and non-ordinary, the term synstructure is proposed.

Sandhiya Goolaup, is a researcher and lecturer in Business Administration at the School of Business, Economics and Law at the University of Gothenburg.

On Consumer Experiences and the Extraordinary | Sandhiya Goolaup



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Sandhiya Goolaup



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# On Consumer Experiences and the Extraordinary

Sandhiya Goolaup



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW



Dedicated to my mother for her endless support and love.

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Department of Business Administration  
School of Business, Economics and Law  
University of Gothenburg  
PO Box 610  
405 30 Göteborg  
Sweden  
[www.fek.handels.gu.se](http://www.fek.handels.gu.se)

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# Abstract

In today's society, consumers are increasingly looking for experiences that are hedonic, positively intense, and intrinsically enjoyable, or what is called an extraordinary experience. Although, extraordinary experience as a concept has been gaining importance in consumer research, it still lacks both theoretical and empirical development. Previous work has focused on activities that are high-risk and that occur in environment that are already extraordinary in nature. However, there is a general lack of research on how mundane experiences that are inherently part of the daily life of consumers are conceived of as extraordinary when consumed within a non-ordinary context. Therefore, using the context of food in tourism and hospitality, this thesis aims to provide insight into *what constitutes an extraordinary experience*.

Using qualitative methods such as existential phenomenology and grounded theory, empirical data was collected using interviews and observations of food tourists, consumers visiting an oyster bar and an oyster festival. This resulted in five papers that were framed using a variety of theoretical perspectives, such as Turner's structure and anti-structure model, Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, sharing, and value co-creation.

In contrast to the current literature, this thesis offers an alternate way of theorizing extraordinary experiences. It identified elements such as profaneness, collaborative and/or limited interactions and conflict-easing situations. These elements are representative of both the ordinary and the non-ordinary. In particular, the thesis contributes to the current literature by showing the co-existence of structure (ordinary) and anti-structure (non-ordinary) as being positive and important when considering the extraordinary food experience. Since the co-existence of these elements is perceived as being positive, the term synstructure is proposed to refer to this relationship. In addition, the thesis also goes a step further and contributes to the current literature by showing how consumers with different cultural and social resources also experience the extraordinary differently.

**Keywords:** consumers' lived experience, extraordinary experience, food, value creation, mundane experience, interpretative research

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*Gothenburg, August 2018*

*Sandhiya Goolaup*



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# 1. Introduction

## Background

Experience is a phenomenon deeply embedded in the daily life of the consumer. The origin of experience as a concept can be traced back to as early as the European Romantic period of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Holbrook, 1997). It ranges from the simple pleasure of a mundane experience (e.g. having a cup of tea) to the enjoyment of an extraordinary experience (e.g. meeting your idol for the first time). As a concept, experience has a broad appeal and has its roots in several specialized fields of social science, such as anthropology, economic, marketing, psychology, sociology and ethnology (Caru and Cova 2003). This multidisciplinary application and use of the concept has given rise to a wide-ranging and perplexing set of definitions and theoretical meanings. Within the field of consumer research, experience has emerged as an important topic since the seminal article on '*The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasy, Feelings and Fun*' by Holbrook and Hirschman in 1982. Their conceptualization has mainly been influenced by psychology. Diverging from the information processing perspective, which stresses the utilitarian function and attributes of products and services use value, they define consumer experience as the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience with a product. In short, they appealed for the marketing community to step away from the 'world of products' into the 'world of experience'. At the heart of this experiential perspective is also a focus on hedonism, reflecting the pleasure and enjoyment derived through consumption. Since this article, the literature on consumer experience has also developed significantly and has led to influential conceptualization such as Pine and Gilmore's 'experience economy' (1998) and Schmitt's 'experiential marketing' (1999). Under the experiential perspective postulated by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), consumers are typically perceived as creating meaning during consumption by emphasizing the symbolic and hedonic aspects of consumption (Caru and Cova 2007). In short, consumers are seen as looking for those experiences that can engage them physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

The concept of experience has also gained increased recognition by hospitality and tourism researchers. Practically everything a tourist goes through at a destination is an experience, be it behavioural, perceptual, cognitive, emotional, expressed or implied (Oh et al. 2007). Likewise, due to the multidisciplinary nature and varying contexts of tourism, there is no single theory that defines the meaning and extent of tourist experiences. Cohen (1979), for instance, using a phenomenological approach, conceptualizes tourist experiences as opportunities for differentiation from their everyday life. Uriely (2005) considers experience as an obscure and diverse phenomenon, usually unique to the individual consumer. These different conceptualizations have also led to several streams of research in the field of hospitality and tourism. Ritchie and Hudson (2009), for instance, identified six main streams of research that scholars have sought to provide insight on: (1) the essence of tourism experience; (2) tourists' experience-seeking behaviour; (3) methodologies used in tourism experience research; (4) specific kinds of tourism/attraction experiences; (5) managerial concern in managing the delivery of experience, and (6) an evolutionary perspective focused on changing the foundation of the tourism economy. However, it is important to note that the categorization of Ritchie and Hudson (2009) is neither exhaustive, nor can studies be strictly situated within one specific stream of research. Rather, each stream tends to overlap with others, and at the core remains the type of experience being sought out.

Indeed, nowadays, tourists are increasingly looking for experiences that not only fulfil their functional needs but also have the potential to arouse an emotional response, to touch upon their sense of self and to offer what is called an extraordinary experience (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen 2016; Jantzen et al. 2012). An extraordinary experience is a special class of hedonic experience, which is triggered by special events and characterized by a high level of emotional intensity (Arnould and Price 1993). Although extraordinary experience as a concept within the field of consumer and tourism research has been gaining attention (e.g. Arnould & Price 1993; Lindberg & Eide 2016; Lindberg & Østergaard 2015; Tumbat & Belk 2011), the concept still lacks both theoretical and empirical underpinnings. Hence, building upon the core understanding that consumers are explicitly searching for extraordinary experiences, this thesis provides theoretical, empirical, and methodological developments in the conceptualization of consumers and tourists' extraordinary experiences. The theoretical and empirical contribution is specifically aimed at the consumer experience literature as understood within consumer culture. Consumer culture is a vein of research that views consumer experience in terms of its social and cultural dimensions. These dimensions are seen as offering meanings and structure to the consumers (Arnould and

Thompson 2005; Slater 1997). Research within this area has shown how the lives of consumers are constructed around multiple realities, and various consumption experiences are used to experience fantasies, desires and pleasure that differ significantly from ordinary life (e.g. Arnould & Price 1993; Firat and Ulusoy 2011; Kozinets 2002). In particular, consumers are seen as using various consumption experiences to express their cultural categories and principles, sustain life-styles and construct notions of the self (McCracken, 1986). The methodological contribution is specifically aimed at the hospitality and tourism field. Since, the bulk of studies looking at tourist experiences have primarily used a quantitative approach (e.g. Alderighi et al. 2016; Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Ritchie and Hudson, 2009), this limits the possibility of understanding the tourist experience as it is lived. Hence, existential phenomenology is proposed as a methodology for understanding the tourists' experiences.

The thesis develops the conceptualization of extraordinary experience in a compilation of five papers that draw on interviews and observations, using the empirical setting of food within the context of hospitality and tourism. In contrast to ordinary food experiences, food is an important part of the tourist's experience. Studies have shown that tourists aspire to have food experiences that are unique, bear symbolic meaning and are extraordinary in nature (e.g. Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen 2016; Hanefors and Mossberg 2003). For the purpose of this thesis, the term 'food tourist' is used to describe the connection between food and tourism. According to Hall and Mitchell, food tourism is the *'visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor for travel'* (2001, p. 308). This definition is deemed to be suitable for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is one of the most accepted and widely used definitions. Secondly, it provides a comprehensive and more holistic approach since it encompasses not only restaurants, but also food festivals, food producers and other specific locations where food is at the core of the tourism experience. Thirdly, it captures the full spectrum of behaviours surrounding food experiences. In short, since food tourists are pleasure seekers and their primary goal is the consumption of tourist experiences, they are also considered to be consumers (Dekadt 1979). Hence, the terms 'food tourists' and 'consumers' are used interchangeably in this thesis. Although each individual paper presents its own purpose and findings, taken together, these five papers provide the necessary theoretical and empirical foundations for conceptualizing the extraordinary food experiences of consumers.

## Consumer Experiences as Meanings

Within consumer culture, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) have had a major influence on the study of consumer experience and this has led to it being a core area in the study of consumer culture. Consumer experience is primarily seen as entailing a nexus of lived meanings encountered in a consumption context. The meaning of experience is seen as being situated within the experiential context, which is also coherently linked to the ongoing project of the life-world (Sartre 1962). A review of the literature demonstrates that consumer experience has been studied on: (1) an individual level (e.g. Thompson 1997; Thompson et al. 1994), (2) a sociocultural level (e.g. Kozinets et al. 2004), and (3) with some studies also describing experiences on both the individual and social level (e.g. Thompson & Haytko 1997). As implied by the name, the individual level to experience is focused on the lived experience of the individual consumer, while the sociocultural level provides a micro-social (group level) understanding of the consumer experience. Although there are some distinct differences in these two approaches, what seems to connect them is the notion of meaning. Although meaning occurs at the individual level, how a person interprets his or her experiences is always situated within a network of culturally shared knowledge that acts as a pre-existing background against which the personal meanings of his or her experiences are formed (Thompson et al. 1994). That is, there is an increasing interplay of influences at the individual and social level that ultimately shapes the consumer experience. Therefore, cultural and individual meanings are not separate but rather they are closely related.

The individual level of experience has its roots in cultural studies and to some extent in philosophy. Studies following this perspective apply a micro-individual scale to understand consumer experience. Those micro-individual studies are mainly focused on the individual actor, by looking at his or her emotions, behaviour and understanding. From an epistemological perspective, the individual level of experience is concurrent with the view of existential phenomenology, where a person's life-world is perceived as a socially contextualized totality in which experiences interrelate coherently and meaningfully (Thompson et al. 1989). Context, in particular, is seen as a fundamental ground from which all meanings emerge. In Valle and King's (1978) view, the *Lebenswelt* or life-world is a manifestation of lived experience. Therefore, when experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the individual subject (i.e., the experiencing subject) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built (Scott 1991). Such a perspective also opens up the scope for looking at experience as differences that occur rather than explaining how differences occur. Studies using an individual approach to experience have primarily looked at how consumers use specific possessions

or experiences to build their identities (e.g. Celsi et al. 1993; Jantzen et al. 2006; Ahuvia 2005; Therkelsen and Gram 2008). There are also numerous studies that can conventionally be classified as experiential and / or hedonic that relate to the lived body concept (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Holbrook 2005) and support the individual level. In short, studies using this approach explore visceral and emotional responses to the consumption of products and services, ‘non-rational’ motivations for consumer behaviour such as the desire for play, fantasy or hedonic pleasure, and the sensual dimensions of consumption experiences.

Within consumer culture, consumer experience has also been studied on a sociocultural level, influenced by sociology and anthropology. Studies within this stream are focused on the cultural meanings and social dynamics that shape consumer experiences. Studies using the sociocultural level are positioned on the micro-social scale, since it emphasizes on the interaction that occurs between the individual actors, whether face-to-face or in large gatherings. This includes perceiving the consuming individual as a tribe member by looking at the life of small groups and the interactions that take place between them (Cova and Cova 2002). Unlike the individual level to experience, the sociocultural provides a broader understanding of experience by considering the culturally constituted world, the consumer good as well as the individual consumer (McCracken 1986). Research situated on the micro-social scale portrays consumers as belonging to specific social groups who share networks of meanings, values, outlooks and lifestyles (Thornton, 1997). Therefore, experience is seen as being embedded in a web of culturally based relations where meanings are seen as involving conformity to or deviance from the social group or community (Lindberg et al. 2014). Schouten and McAlexander (1995), for instance, demonstrated how the use of certain connotations, core values and meanings created in social groups facilitated Harley Davidson’s brand experience. In short, research situated under the sociocultural level has largely focused on understanding consumer experiences by providing insights into how consumers bring their own socio-culturally based and embodied understanding to the marketplace, as well as how the marketplace influences consumer experiences and meanings (e.g. Holt 1995; Joy and Sherry 2003; McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz et al. 2001; Scott and Uncles 2018; Sherry 2006; Thompson and Hirschman 1995).

However, research has not only focused exclusively on either the individual or sociocultural level, but there are also studies that have looked at consumer experience using both perspectives (e.g. Arnould & Price 1993; Thompson and Haytko 1997). For example, Thompson and Haytko (1997) show how fashion aids young consumers in their striving to belong to a certain social group, as well as in their urge to be “unique”, hence focusing on both the individual as



well as the social level. Therefore, in giving a review of the field, it can be argued that how researchers have conceptualized consumer experience has varied a lot.

### **Extraordinary Experiences as Activity Meanings**

Extraordinary experience as a concept can be traced back to as early as 1986 in the work of the anthropologist Roger Abrahams. It gained popularity because it was based on the notion that people fear boredom and that their obsession with novelty drives them to engage in behaviours that provoke strong emotions and extraordinary experience. As a result, extraordinary experience has mainly been defined as a special case of hedonic experience existing outside the realm of ordinary and yielding feelings of personal growth (Abrahams 1986; Arnould & Price 2003; Mossberg 2007). Extraordinary experience, in particular, represents a form of magic that provides distance from the ordinary world, which is perceived as an 'iron cage' filled with rationality and a deep sense of longing and desire (Belk et al. 2003). To some extent, the concept of extraordinary experience can also be linked with ideas pertaining to enchantment. Enchantment as a concept is theoretically linked with experiences of magic, wonderment, spontaneity and transformative feelings of mystery and awe that seem to be lacking in commodified consumption experiences, or what Ritzer (1999) called the disenchanting world.

Likewise, consumer culture researchers have traditionally framed and analyzed extraordinary experiences as an escape from the mundane (e.g. Arnould & Price 1993; Kozinets 2002). Hence, much of the existing research on extraordinary experience has focused on the production and consumption of market-based experiential offerings, such as river rafting, mountain climbing expeditions, wilderness canoeing and adventurous outdoor activities in the Arctic (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993; Tumbat and Belk 2011; Lindberg and Østergaard 2015; Lindberg and Eide 2016). These high-risk market-based experiences are believed to offer much greater gratification compared to daily life and routine experiences (Caru and Cova 2003). Therefore, in studying extraordinary experience, the existing literature has mainly echoed Turner's (1974) structure and anti-structure dichotomy. In Turner's (1974) view, structure reflects the ordinary everyday experiences while anti-structure is representative of the non-ordinary experiences.

A review of the literature on extraordinary experience shows that earlier studies have mostly conceptualized extraordinary experience as consisting of anti-structural elements (e.g. Arnould & Price 1993; Celsi et al. 1993; Kozinets 2002). That is, extraordinary experience is seen as consisting of: collaborative

interactions by bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and creating a bond, shared and common goals that often create feelings of oneness among participants, *communitas*, few social differences between people, and the experience being perceived as being special and sacred, and transcending qualities of the liminal. In short, Turner's antistructural model has portrayed extraordinary experience as being romantic, celebratory and transcending the commercial nature to a liminal antistructure of sacred *communitas*. For Lanier and Rader (2015), this reflects a form of liberatory experiences that directly address anti-structural relations and promote further functional consequences, such as developing new skills, camaraderie, and a rediscovered sense of self, and that are found across contexts that are more homogenous than heterogeneous.

However, recent studies have demonstrated that extraordinary experience does not always provide an escape from the structure. Tumbat and Belk (2011), for instance, demonstrated how consumers participating in Everest climbing expeditions encounter conflicting and individualized goals and foster competitive and individualistic mindsets rather than focusing on the communal goals and the authentic experience. The experience is also perceived as being commercialized in nature. These elements highlight the structural aspects that prevail in the pursuit of extraordinary consumption experiences. In Lanier and Rader's (2015) view, this perspective reflects a form of performance experience that is primarily individualistic in nature, with a strong focus on social hierarchy, direct competition and cultural capital. More recent studies have also demonstrated that extraordinary experiences consist of both structural and anti-structural elements (e.g. Husemann et al. 2016; Lindberg and Eide 2016; Lindberg and Østergaard 2016). However, the co-existence of structure and anti-structure in the creation of extraordinary experiences are seen as creating conflict. These researchers have highlighted the various challenges faced by consumers, such as lack of skills, role conflicts, unrealistic expectations, and problems in connecting with others that do not always allow them to escape from the structure. Husemann et al. (2016) described these as tensions that arise either due to an excess of antistructure, an excess of structure, a lack of structure or a lack of antistructure. This tension, in Husemann et al.'s (2016) view, is a form of *anastructure*, a transient state created by high levels of antistructural and structural characteristics within the same consumer experience. The *anastructure* is mainly characterized by coercion, obligation and disturbance and it is perceived as being conflict-laden and stressful. In the *anastructure* phase, the consumers are also perceived as employing various resolution strategies to reduce conflict and enhance the experience. Depending on the circumstances, different strategies are employed, such as emphasizing antistructure (e.g. performing group rituals),

reorganizing antistructure and structure (e.g. accepting reality in sacredness), transforming structure (e.g. decommodifying the commercial) or increasing structure (e.g. maintaining standards).

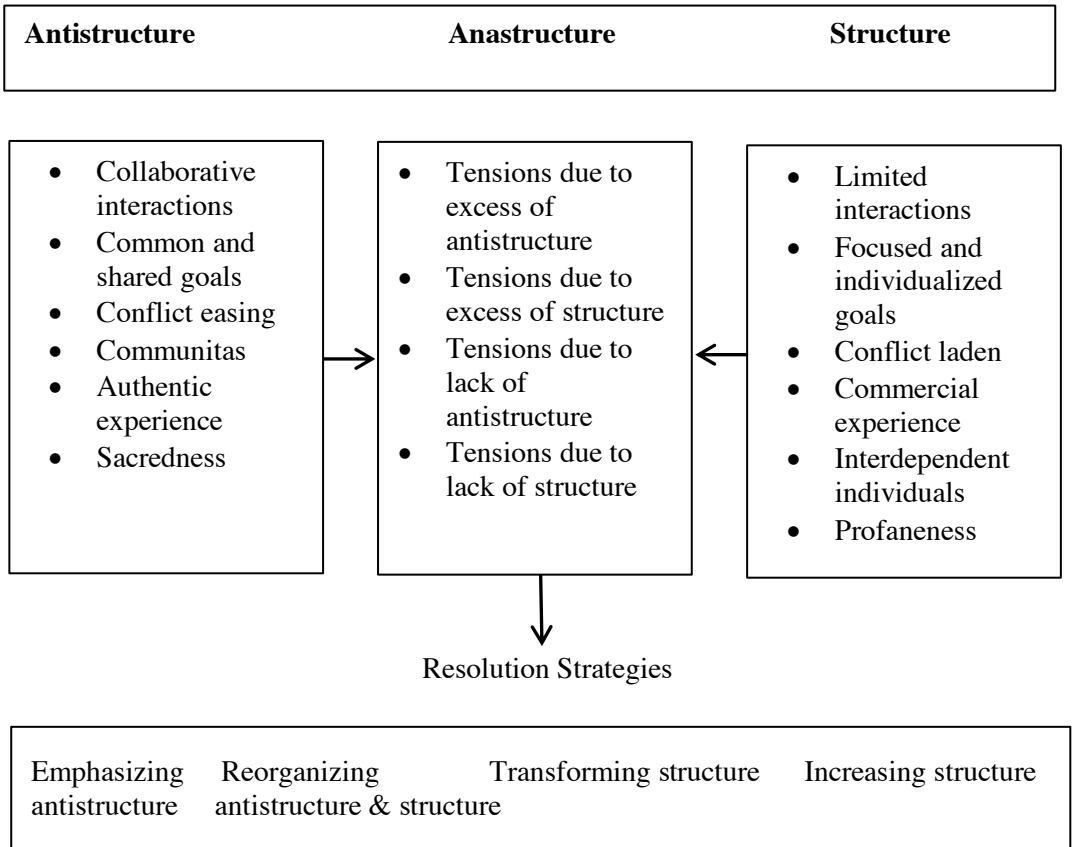


Figure 1: The dynamic interplay between structure, anastructure and antistructure in extraordinary experience (adapted<sup>1</sup> from Husemann et al. 2016, p.3364)

<sup>1</sup> The model was adapted by removing examples from the resolution strategies, which were specifically related to the pilgrimage context.

Figure 1 illustrates the different characteristics that are typical of antistructure, anastructure and structure in the study of extraordinary experience. Based on a synopsis of this stream of research, it can be argued that, regardless of how extraordinary experience has been conceptualized, there are also some common elements. For instance, they all occur in non-ordinary contexts. They are ultimately communal in nature since they require broad participation in mainstream values, norms and meanings that enhance participants' current identities (Lanier and Rader 2015). They are perceived as being emotional experiences, since feelings of escapism, challenge and adventure are elicited. The acquisition of new skills and interpersonal relationship are also embraced in the concept of extraordinary experience. A further aspect of the conceptualization of extraordinary experience is its classification as a valuable experience containing elements of surprise and it is positioned as a type of experience which cannot be planned or predicted (Hansen and Mossberg 2013).

### **Working out the purpose**

A general critique against the conceptualization of extraordinary experience is that current research has largely focused on studying activities that are nature-based, high risk and thrill-offering such as river rafting (Arnould and Price 1993), a mountain climbing expedition (Tumbat and Belk 2011), adventurous Arctic activities (Lindberg and Eide 2016), a wilderness canoeing experience (Lindberg and Østergaard 2015) or a religious pilgrimage (Husemann 2016), thereby ignoring activities that are mundane in nature. Mundane reflects the ordinary experiences that are part of everyday life. Hence, it is not surprising that by using Turner's structural theory, studies have found extraordinary experiences to be either anti-structural or structural, or challenging due to the tensions that arise when the anti-structural and the structural clash.

However, there is a lack of research on mundane experience such as food, which people consume on a daily basis and which is inherently part of their everyday life. The mundane experience reflects what Belk et al. (1989) refer to as 'profane'. In comparison with previous studies, which have mostly focused on high-risk activities that require specific skills and are challenging in nature, food is one of those experiences that do not involve any particular skill or challenge. Hence, this makes it an interesting topic to explore as an extraordinary experience. Within the context of tourism and hospitality, there are an increasing number of consumers who are travelling exclusively for or are primarily motivated by food experiences. As demonstrated by various scholars, these consumers are explicit searching for extraordinary food

experiences that are unique and have the power to arouse an emotional response (e.g. Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen 2016; Hanefors & Mossberg 2003). For these consumers, food plays an important role in their destination choice. Therefore, food in the tourism and hospitality context is deemed to be suitable for providing insights into the consumers' experience of the extraordinary. The use of Turner's structural theory in the study of extraordinary experience also has some limitations. One major criticism often directed towards Turner's structural theory is that society is perceived as being objective and as having an unchanging structure (Foucault 1980). Hence, it does not take into account the multiple, conflicting and changing structures that take place in practice. Further, the structural framework does not account for how different individuals who are in possession of, for instance, different social and cultural resources experience the extraordinary food experience.

To sum up, this thesis asks how the consumer extraordinary experience can be conceptualized. An attempt is made to use various theoretical frameworks that provide a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the consumer extraordinary experience. Therefore, various theoretical approaches such as structure and anti-structure, consumer resource, consumer value and sharing are used. In particular, Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital is used to provide insights into how consumers in possession of different cultural resources experience the extraordinary. Likewise, given that inter-personal interaction is at the core of extraordinary experience, a value co-creation approach is used to show how consumers engage in the co-creation of value. Further, the concept of sharing a core element of extraordinary experience, which has not received much attention, is further theorized. The methodological approaches falling under the interpretative paradigms of existential phenomenology and grounded theory are also used. **The overall purpose of this thesis is to provide insights into what constitutes an extraordinary experience in the context of food in tourism and hospitality.**

## **Thesis Structure**

This thesis investigates these issues through five papers. Together, these papers provide an overview of what encompasses an extraordinary experience. Each article uses different theoretical abstractions, empirical specifications and methods to provide insight into the phenomenon.

Paper 1 explores the dimensions of an extraordinary nature-based food experience using the case of an oyster bar. Using a grounded theory approach and theoretically framed in Turner's structure and anti-structural model, it provides insight into the food tourists' or consumers' experience of the

extraordinary. Essentially, it is argued that elements such as the consumption context (non-ordinary), the social aspect (togetherness), the learning experience (insightful), the role of the personnel/guide (hospitality), the experience of an exclusive product (luxurious), and the location of the experience (genuine and peripheral) play an important role in creating the extraordinary food experience. Paper 1 is co-authored with Lena Mossberg and is published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*.

Paper 2 describes the extraordinary experience of food tourists and presents the dimensions of surprise in relation to the typology of cultural capital. It draws on phenomenological interviews with 16 food tourists. Theoretically, the paper is framed in terms of Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. At the core of this strand of research is also the element of surprise in the experience of the extraordinary. This dimension has not gained much attention in the literature, nor has previous research demonstrated how consumers with different cultural resources experience the extraordinary. Hence, encased in an existential-phenomenology methodological approach, this paper offers theorization on how food tourists with different cultural resources experience surprise. It is argued that food tourists possessing the highest cultural capital are most likely to be surprised by the simplicity or complexity of the experience. On the other hand, those possessing lower cultural capital are surprised by the authenticity of the experience. This paper is co-authored with Cecilia Soler and Robin Nunkoo and is published in the *Journal of Travel Research*.

Paper 3 investigates how consumers engage in the sharing of extraordinary experiences. Even though sharing is at the core of extraordinary experience, it has not received sufficient attention in the literature. Methodologically, it draws on 19 phenomenological interviews with food tourists. Encased in the theoretical framework of sharing and the methodological approach of existential phenomenology, the paper shows that consumers conceive sharing in three different ways: sharing to enjoy and learn, sharing to connect, and sharing to nurture temporal friendship. The study also sheds light on how consumers' sharing is highly dependent on the social group taking part in the food experience. This paper is single-authored and has been submitted for review in the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*.

Paper 4 is a conceptual book chapter that focuses on exploring the process of consumer creation of value by using a sociocultural perspective. In this paper, it is argued that an experience is of value since it is perceived as meaningful for the consumers/ food tourists. It elaborates on three holistic way of talking about social, semiotic and economic value. It also uses an illustrative case to demonstrate how consumers co-create value during an oyster festival. By using

the value co-creation lens it provides a deeper understanding of how consumers interact while creating the experience. This paper is co-authored with Lena Mossberg and has been published in the book *The value of Events* by Routledge.

Paper 5 is a book chapter that takes a methodological stance and explores the use of phenomenology in tourism research. In particular, it contests the distinction made between Husserlian and Heideggerian, which is used in tourism research, and instead suggests a merger between those two, known as existential phenomenology. This chapter adds value to the previous articles (especially papers 2 and 3) since it illustrates an in-depth understanding of the philosophical aspects underpinning phenomenological research and their usefulness in addressing phenomenon such as food experiences. This chapter is co-authored with Cecilia Soler and featured in the book *Handbook of Research Methods for Tourism and Hospitality Management* by Edward Elgar Publishing.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### **An account of consumer extraordinary experience literature**

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework of the overall dissertation by focusing on how consumer extraordinary experience has been theorized within the field of consumer culture. Extraordinary experience as a concept first gained recognition in 1993 by Arnould and Price in their seminal article '*River magic: extraordinary experience and the extended service encounter*'. Since then there have been numerous studies that have provided insight on consumers' extraordinary experiences (e.g. Kozinets 2002; Tumbat and Belk 2011; Husemann 2016). Whilst, in the study of consumer extraordinary experience, most studies have focused on studying meanings on the micro-social level, there seems to be a shortage of studies that have approached the consumer extraordinary experience on an individual level as lived experience (that is, on a micro-individual level). Indeed, those positioned on the micro-social level have portrayed the consumer extraordinary experience as occurring due to the interaction that occurs between the individual actors, who are perceived as being members of a tribe. The micro-individual level of extraordinary experience, on the other hand, focuses on the individual consumer by ascribing meanings to his or her experiences. However, in this thesis an attempt is made to bridge those two different levels.

Whilst these two approaches are perceived as being conceptually separated, they are also connected to each other. The meaning derived by an individual is often expressed as a nexus of personal meanings that are formed in a complex field of social and historical relationships (Thompson 1997). Arguing in a similar line, Penaloza and Venkatesh (2006) also argued that meaning is captured by both the phenomenological interpretation as well as the cultural context. In particular, the cultural context provides the shared understanding that provides the '*prescriptive and rules for social conduct and meaning ascription*' (Deighton and Grayson 1995: 661). In short, the cultural background provides the social categories, common sense beliefs, and interpretive frames of reference from which personalized meanings and conceptions are constructed. Hence, the micro-social and micro-individual levels are not separated, rather they are closely related. The next section



provides a deeper elaboration of the different theoretical levels at which the consumer extraordinary experience can be studied.

### **Studying extraordinary consumer experience on the individual level as lived experience**

One approach particularly suitable to study the consumer extraordinary experience as meaning is based on lived experience. This is based on the notion of embodiment, which collapses the dualities between mind and body and focuses on the lived experience of a person's body as well as the experience of life mediated through the body (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Appadurai 1996). In this approach, what people experience are the outcomes of what goes into the body (including the mind) and the environment (connecting avenues between the social, material, body and the world). In particular, the approach stresses the interactive processes between the human body and its physical and social environments. The capacity to perceive also involves a set of 'acquired, cultural, habit-based forms of conduct' (Simonsen 2007: 171). Thus the lived experience of the individual consumer reflects the sociocultural context within which the experience takes place. In other words, how things appear to us is dependent upon our embodied skills, to which Merleau-Ponty (1962) refers an 'intentional arc' that describes how the active body acquires skills to respond to different situations in the world. This implies that what we are able to experience is largely dependent upon the cultural context, prior experience and learning, which are ingrained in the body in the form of implicit, practical knowledge. The notion of embodiment also embraces how humans experience their physical and social environment through various sensorial forms (such as aural, olfactory, visual and haptic).

An embodied food experience is also reflective of the un-thought, tacit and bodily skill that guides an individual's practices (Yakhlef 2015). Thus, building up on the concept of Merleau-Ponty's, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1999) further elaborated on notion of 'intentional arc' by arguing that bodily skills acquisition for a beginner relies on using rules and facts, but with talent and a great deal of experience the beginner develops into an expert who depends mostly on intuition. Thus, this implies that what an individual experiences is a result of prior experience, learning and cultural origin, which is deeply ingrained in the body.

## **Studying consumer extraordinary experiences on the socio-cultural level as structure and taste**

Another approach particularly suitable to study the consumer extraordinary experience is at the social-cultural level. This section will provide an overview of theories, such as Bourdieu's theory of capital and habitus, Graeber's theory of value and Belk's theory of sharing. These theories are mainly used to interpret the social world and how actors at a group level reproduce social situations and structures (Edvarsson et al. 2011). These different theories primarily have their roots in the interpretative social science paradigm and their philosophical roots in hermeneutics and phenomenology (Boland 1985).

### ***Turner's structural theory***

Turner's structural theory, particularly his concept of structure and anti-structure, underlines much of current consumer extraordinary experience theory. Within Turner's framework, society is perceived as a product of an ongoing dialectic between structure and anti-structure. Structure is conceptualized as the ordinary everyday experiences. It is marked with the ordered arrangement of hierarchical positions, differentiations between individuals, and sets of rules and regulations that govern behaviours (Turner 1969). Individuals are expected to conform to certain customary norms and ethical standards in relation to their social positions. These comprised of the unobservable sets of rules, norms and resources that generally interact to generate the society (Sewell 1992). Hence, structure is basically perceived to relate to the ordinary, everyday experiences and comprises events that occur on a regular basis, such as going to work. Some of the characteristics distinctive of structure are; mundane, limited interactions, conflict laden and hierarchical in nature. However, once individuals are out of the structural or ordinary context of society, they go through a three-stage ritual process that consists of: (1) separation, where they are physically and symbolically removed from their ordinary life and social group, (2) liminal zone (reflecting the anti-structure), and (3) re-integration to the ordinary life.

On the other hand, antistructure, theorized as being in direct opposition to structure, is considered as inherently sacred and liberates individuals from their daily constraints and profane social structures (Turner 1969). Unlike structure, anti-structure is perceived as being positive. In antistructure, individuals are likely to experience ambiguous social positions (liminality), undifferentiated community (communitas) and the transcendence of categorical frames (i.e. sacredness). In principle, communitas is the human interrelatedness that occurs when individuals from various backgrounds share a specific ritual experience

and create social bonds, while liminality, also known as the *'rites de passage'*, is representative of the transition phase, where the secular distinctions of rank and status are homogenized. Turner defined liminality as being *'betwixt and between the positions arranged or assigned by law and customs'* (1969:95). Liminality, as demonstrated by Thomassen (2009), works on several scales, ranging from the individual to macro-structures. For instance, it can range from single individuals to social groups (like cohorts and minorities) and whole societies (e.g. entire populations) in different temporal dimensions (moments, periods and epochs) and different spatial dimensions. Hence, the degree of liminality experience is likely to vary depending on the subject, time and spatial scale of the phenomenon in question. In short, characteristics that prevail in the anti-structure consist of sacredness, comradeship and brotherhood-like relationships, egalitarianism, shared ritualistic experiences, and transcendental goals.

### ***Turner's structural theory as applied within the context of food experiences***

Within the context of food experiences, the structure is conceptualized as the ordinary and everyday food experiences that consumers have in their daily lives. Basically, ordinary meals are defined as the everyday meals that are often consumed during the working week, usually involving immediate family members (Cappellini and Parsons 2012). As demonstrated by various scholars, the sharing of a mundane and ordinary meal is a social activity that provides an opportunity for a family gathering. Indeed, an increasing number of studies have also shown that the ordinary meal is a way of reinforcing the collective family identity (e.g. Moisio et al. 2004; Gutierrez et al. 2008). Family meals also imply a deeper level of inclusion, like being part of the family, socializing and as a form of bonding. The ordinary meal is also often perceived as being mostly traditional and simple in nature (Cappellini and Parsons, 2012). Traditional food is likely to differ from culture to culture. For instance, traditional Swedish food is seen as being energy-rich and cheap and comprises mostly pork, fish, cereals and root vegetables (Nationalencyklopedin 2018). At the core, ordinary food is seen as being comforting and convenient in nature. Carrigan et al. (2006) defined convenience food as food that can be served with minimal time spent preparing, cooking and cleaning up. The homemade family meal is symbolic of care-giving, love and altruism (Moisio et al. 2004). Nevertheless, recent research has shown that the family meal is disappearing due to pressure on family time and changes in traditional family structure. The family meal now rarely consists of homemade food shared with the family around the table. As noted by scholars, there are fewer sit-down family meals

everyday, more eating alone and more fast-food consumption (e.g. Gardyn 2002; Yin 2003).

On the other hand, the anti-structure reflects the non-ordinary food experience of the consumers. Current studies looking at non-ordinary food experiences have mostly conceptualized them as being extraordinary in nature. Within consumer research, non-ordinary food is positioned as an interruption to weekday mealtime practices, mostly comprising extravagant meals with guests and family celebrations occurring within the ordinary home context (e.g. Cappellini and Parson 2012). The extraordinary meal is perceived as being a gift to the entire family and usually more effort is put into cooking complex and expensive dishes. On the other hand, within the context of food tourism, the non-ordinary experience is perceived as occurring in a different experiencescape and out of the consumer's ordinary environment. The non-ordinary experiencescape is seen as providing consumers with the opportunity to 'act out' and forget their everyday concerns (Mossberg and Eide 2017). When food consumption in tourism is the major motivation for travelling or it is the peak experience, then food is seen as a sharp contrast to the daily experience. Consumers are then seen as looking for novelty either in the form of novel ingredients, which make it enjoyable, or novelty in the form in which food is delivered or consumed (Quan and Wang, 2004). Hanefors and Mossberg (2003) identified characteristics such as perceived secrecy, interaction with personnel and the integration of various elements such as surprise and learning aspects as endowing the extraordinary meal experience.

### ***Bourdieu's structures and habitus***

For Bourdieu (1984), structures act as rules and determine the condition of an individual's thoughts and behaviours. Bourdieu's notion of capital and habitus in particular sees an individual's taste as being socially and culturally rather than individually constructed. In particular, he uses a macro-social perspective by looking at how different types of capital (cultural, social and economic) shape an individual's taste. The resources possessed by the individual play an important role in orchestrating how that individual acts. It generates the social practices and social systems in place. Those resources also serve as a source of power in social interaction. Given that each individual has different resources, they are also indicative of different classes and are a reflection of social inequalities. In particular, Bourdieu sees consumption behaviour as an expression of class position and fervently believes that individuals learn appropriate tastes and behaviours by being immersed in a particular social milieu (Warde 1997). To explain this mechanism, the concept of habitus,

defined as the sets of dispositions and tendencies to do things in a particular way, has been used. The habitus is not only seen as a structuring structure, organizing practices and the perception of practices, but also as a structured structure (Bourdieu 1977). This means that it consists of the division into logical classes that organizes the perception of the social world, which in itself is the product of the internalization of the divisions into social classes. Habitus is generally acquired through primary and secondary socialization. Closely related to habitus is the notion of capital. Depending on the types of capital (cultural, social and economic) available to an individual in a social space, habitus is also likely to vary (Bourdieu 1984).

Cultural capital exists in three different forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalized. The embodied cultural resources are long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body (Bourdieu 1986) that are mainly acquired through hereditary transmission or previous experience, while the objectified state is in the form of cultural goods (e.g. materials object) and/or media that the consumers possessed. The institutionalized state is used to reflect the cultural competence acquired through academic qualifications that are possessed by an individual at a given moment in time. Social capital, on the other hand, relates to the networks of relationships consumers have with others, and can be in the form of family, brand communities, consumer tribes or friendship groups (Arnould et al. 2006). In the words of Bourdieu (1986), it is reflective of the network and volume of relationships possessed by the networked individuals. Hence, social resources are usually perceived as a product of investment, which are useable in the short or long term. Finally, economic capital is considered as being at the root of the other forms of capital (cultural and social) and is convertible in nature.

In his empirical study, Bourdieu distinguished between industrial and commercial employers and teachers and professionals in the way they express their tastes in relation to their spending patterns. He argued that those with high economic but relatively lower cultural capital (industrial and commercial employers) have a taste for food rich in calories and mostly for dishes containing rare and expensive ingredients. Those with high cultural but lower economic capital (teachers) have a taste for ascetic consumption, originality and exotic cuisine. Individuals possessing medium economic and medium cultural capital, such as professionals, have a taste for light, refined, delicate food and traditional cuisine. And lastly, those with low economic and low cultural capital have a taste for cheap, high calorie, high fat and heavy cuisine. In short, he demonstrated how the taste for particular dishes is inextricably linked to the lifestyles of a particular habitus.

### ***Bourdieu's structure and habitus as applied within the food experience context***

In the study of food experience, Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital and habitus has been used by both consumer and tourism scholars (e.g. Ahmad 2014; Holt 1998; Turner and Edmunds 2002; Warde et al. 1999; Tui Wright et al. 2001). These studies have mainly showed how various aspects of cultural capital impact upon the 'construction of taste' within the realm of consumer consumption and how individuals with different resources are likely to engage in different consumption practices. For instance, applying Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital within the context of United States, Holt (1998) found that there are distinct differences in the food preferences and choices of consumers with low cultural capital (they prefer food they are familiar with) compared with those having high cultural capital (they prefer cuisine from other countries). Similarly, Chang et al. (2010) found intergroup disparities in the dining behaviour of Mainland Chinese, Hong-Kong and Taiwanese participants. They conclude that the Hong-Kong participants who have the most travelling experiences and previous exposure to foreign cuisine perceive the dining experience as a means to further enrich their repertoires of culinary knowledge, whereas the Mainland Chinese regarded it as a form of conspicuous consumption to assert their prestige and status. Such embodied habitus, as Bourdieu (1990) called it, also plays an important role in the food preferences of tourists and reflects what is considered as 'palatable' in a particular group.

Likewise, many studies within the field of tourism and hospitality have used Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital to develop typologies based on the food experiences of tourists. For instance, using a phenomenological approach, Hjalager (2003) argued that there are four categories of food tourists: existential, experimental, recreational and diversionary. Whilst recreational and diversionary tourists do not travel explicitly for food experiences and are pretty much conservative in their food choices and preferences, food experience is an important aspect of travel for existential and experimental gastronomy tourists. Hjalager (2003) further emphasized that existential gastronomy tourists prefer to eat where local people do, and perceive their food experiences as a way to foster gastronomic learning. On the other hand, experimental gastronomy tourists prefer visiting restaurants which serve innovative menus and chic service and perceive such types of experiences as part of the staging of their personality. However, Hjalager's approach was conceptual in nature and not supported by empirical evidence. Similarly, Ahmad (2014) developed a typology of tourists under the labels of travelers, tourists and virtuosos. The 'travelers', who possess high cultural capital (highly educated and have high annual income), and who are mostly from

Israel and Australia, prefer to eat local cuisine with a local family. The 'virtuoso', who have equally high cultural capital and are primarily British and American, have a preference for a la carte menus in high end restaurants. Finally, the 'tourists', who in comparison possess less cultural capital, indicated an interest in learning about the taste of the local cuisine.

### ***Value co-creation***

The link between social structures and value has been acknowledged in work by Edvardsson et al. (2011). They portrayed value co-creation as being positioned in the social discourse and as taking place within specific social systems. Value co-creation is at the core of consumer experience. An experience usually occurs when consumers bring their own resources and co-create a staged act (Deighton 1992). The co-creative role of the consumers generally plays an important role in the production of memorable experience (Caru and Cova 2003) or in providing experiences that stand out as special and memorable moments (Abrahams 1986). Penaloza and Mish (2011), viewed value co-creation as a process that involves a complex and inter-related nexus of value that occurs on three different levels: macro (cosmological), mezzo (social norms and standard) and micro level (individual judgements and interpretations). However, regardless of the perspective used to study value, it always occurs in relation to the consumers' interactions, activities and resource integration. These interactions are usually facilitated by the social situations that are created by consumers. Indeed, these social interactions are learned and are reproduced in social structures, hence influencing how they interact in the co-creation of their experience. In short, as posited by Edvardsson et al. (2011), consumers are influenced by societal norms and values, which are then produced and reproduced through their interactions.

In this thesis, the value co-creation process is developed using Graeber's theorization of value. Graeber describes value as being subjectively determined on a shared level and as occurring when different consumers interact. Graeber's notion of value is positioned as an outcome of the socio-cultural processes and contexts that an individual has been exposed to. Those socio-cultural processes are seen as structuring the sociocultural life that produces meanings for individuals (Slater 2002). Likewise, extraordinary experience that involves a high degree of consumer involvement and co-creation requires that consumers combine on-site resources of the experiencescape. In particular, as revealed by the majority of recent studies, it is co-creative acts that enable the experience of the extraordinary (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993; Kozinets 2002; Tumbat and Belk 2011). These interactions are usually capable of creating meaningful differences. In the process of value co-creation, consumers usually integrate different resources that have shaped their

experiences. However, depending on the resources of the consumers (e.g. skills, personal history and knowledge), this is likely to influence how they engage in co-creating their experience. Lindberg and Østergaard (2015), for instance, argued that those lacking adequate resources experience difficulties in co-creating their experiences, whilst those with adequate resources are easily immersed and experience the extraordinary.

### **Sharing**

Sharing is defined as a communal act that links an individual to others. Given that it is based on interaction that occurs between individuals (an interpersonal act), the majority of current studies have taken a micro-social perspective in the study of sharing. Research has shown that, what and how an individual engages in sharing depends on the social and cultural consequences perceived (Belk, 2010). Within the literature on extraordinary experience, the notion of sharing is a core element (e.g. Arnould & Price 1993; Celsi et al. 1993; Kozinets 2002) and has been described in terms of the communal aspect of the experience. In particular, the literature has demonstrated how certain exchange practices or sharing of experiences instil a sense of caring, feelings of communion and linkage, belonging and group devotion (e.g. Kozinets 2002). In short, the sharing of extraordinary experience can also lead to camaraderie or a feeling of *communitas*. On the other hand, a group of scholars have also argued that the sharing of experience is not always communal in nature due to individualist goals (Tumbat & Belk 2011) and consumers' lack of skills (Lindberg & Østergaard 2015). Instead, it can lead to conflicting and challenging situations in the experience of the extraordinary.

Similarly, within the context of food, sharing is a core concept that has commonly been described as 'commensality', which literally means 'sharing the table' or 'eating with other people' (Fischler 2011; Mennell et al. 1992). Terms such as 'conviviality' have also been used to express the pleasure of eating together (Brillat-Savarin 1994). Whilst, in most societies, the sharing of food has been used to demonstrate closeness, the refusal to share is a sign of hostility and distance (Bloch 1999). Various researchers have shown that the sharing of food provides the grounds for socializing (e.g. Fischler 2011; Symons 1994). In particular, the act of sharing food helps with the development of functional and personal relationships between individuals and facilitates the maintenance of desired forms of social integration (Symons 1994). The act of sharing food has been shown to facilitate bonding and to create intimacy between people. There are also studies that have focused on the context of eating out while on holiday. Warde and Martens (2000), for instance, highlighted how the sharing of food with others during travel was more important than the quality of the food. Kim et al. (2009) also found that



the sharing of food experiences during holidays provides travellers with the opportunity to share their preferences with other people, while the chance to eat together increases the pleasure of travelling. Whilst the sharing of food experiences has generally been perceived as a good way of creating good social relationships, a range of studies have demonstrated that eating together can sometimes be problematic (e.g. Bove et al. 2003; Von Der Borch 2009).

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter provides the underlying methodological considerations of this thesis as a whole. In particular, it focuses on issues that could not have been elaborated within the restrictions of the five papers. During this PhD journey, the thesis has not only been framed by the overall aim of the project but also by the different courses I have taken part in, such as ‘consumption, markets and culture’, ‘consumer experience’, ‘innovation and value creation in tourism’, ‘consumption theory’, ‘cannons of classic’ and methodologically oriented courses such as ‘interpretative research methods’. These courses were particularly helpful in introducing me to the consumer culture stream of research and in shaping my theoretical perspective. Aside from the theoretical and methodological training of the researcher, the personal research story, paradigmatic affiliations are all elements aiding in the construction of the perspective laid down on the topic (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000). Hence, all these combined together have helped to generate the kinds of knowledge this thesis presents. Given that the methodology for each single study is elaborated in the individual papers, the focus of this chapter will be on the underlying methodological considerations of the thesis taken as a whole. It begins by providing an overview of the methods chosen, followed by the collection of empirical material, and the analysis and interpretation of the data, as well as how trustworthiness was ensured in the dissertation. In short, it discusses how the different choices made helped in the construction of knowledge.

#### **Choice of Method**

This thesis adheres to the epistemological premises of the interpretive turn, where knowledge is approached from the lived experiences of the informants and social reality is seen to be inter-subjectively composed (Tadajewski 2006). The primary focus of the interpretive research tradition is the individuals’ and groups’ lived experience of their reality (Sandberg 2005). Following this premise, reality is perceived as being socially constructed, multiple, holistic and contextual. Hence, the concepts, theories or models are developed from the socially constructed knowledge of the participants. Since this dissertation is grounded in the interpretivist methodological paradigm, inspiration was drawn from Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) grounded theory and Thompson et

al.'s (1989, 1990) existential phenomenology. These two methods are useful since they are both intended for the study of behaviour, meaning and experience (Goulding 1999).

Grounded theory as a method has its origin in symbolic interactionism (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000). The paradigm of symbolic interactionism is an area of inquiry which focuses on individual and social reflexive interaction (Goulding 2005). Since it is based on meaningful interaction, it aims to construct what individual or groups see as social reality and how specific objects of consumer experience contribute to the construction of reality (Goulding 1999). Individuals are considered to act according to the meanings that the object or experience under question holds for them. In short, grounded theory is rooted in the reality of the experience and is focused on meaning and interpretive understanding (Charmaz 2000). Hence, grounded theory has established itself as a suitable method for the study of experiential consumer behaviour (Goulding 1998). Grounded theory was the exclusive method used in paper 1 since it allowed the researcher to construct what food tourists perceive as an extraordinary experience.

Phenomenology is essentially concerned with the life world or the human experience as it is lived (Manen, 1997). Phenomenology as a method has explicitly taken two main directions: (1) the phenomenology of Husserl and (2) hermeneutic phenomenology through Heidegger and Gadamer. This dissertation, specifically papers 2, 3 and 5, follows Heidegger's hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology, also known as existential phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is basically focused on creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding in an individual experience (Wilson and Hutchinson 1991). A fundamental concept of phenomenology is that meaning is portrayed as the 'individual signification or the internal symbolization, representation and conceptualization of the external world' (Gergren 1994: 19). Focused on the question of 'what is the meaning of being?', Heidegger viewed human experience as being formed through our understanding of the life world. Heidegger views people and the world as being interrelated through cultural, social and historical contexts. Hence, every encounter involves an interpretation, which is influenced by the individual's background or historicity (Lavery 2003). Polkinghorne (1989) describes this interpretative process as having a cumulative effect on the individual and social levels. Hence, given that both papers 2 and 3 of this dissertation have the underlying purpose of describing the meaning of extraordinary food experience, the phenomenological approach was used. Paper 5 of this dissertation provides a deeper understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic or existential phenomenology.

## **Research Contexts**

The selection of an appropriate research context is vital to facilitate the generation of theoretical insights (Arnould, Price and Moisio 2006). Research context can be used either as a foreground or as a background to understanding variations in consumers or across spatial or temporal circumstances (ibid). Since the research context for this dissertation was already pre-defined, being focused on shellfish related activity (specifically locally produced shellfish such as European flat oysters) situated on the West Coast of Sweden, this to a certain extent limits the choice. Therefore, two contexts focusing on oyster related activities were deemed to be suitable: (1) Karingo Oyster Bar at Kåringön and (2) the Oyster Festival at Grebbestad. To gain further insights into consumers' extraordinary food experience, individuals travelling for food, i.e., food tourists were also considered. In short, this study has considered multiple contexts in order to investigate the variety of meanings derived from consumers' or food tourists' experience of the extraordinary.

### ***Guests Visiting Karingo Oyster Bar***

The decision to consider the guests visiting the Karingo Oyster Bar as a research context was motivated by numerous factors. Firstly, the oyster bar is exclusive and different from other similar bars and, in the words of Siggelkow (2007), this is what makes a study context interesting and worthy of further investigation. Secondly, the owner of the oyster bar was willing to assist in terms of data delivery by introducing the researcher to his customers and providing access to the study setting, hence providing 'sufficient access to the potential data' (Yin 2003: 26). Thirdly, most of the guests visiting the oyster bar could be classified as food tourists, and this fits with the requirement of the project, which asked for the consideration of people's experiences of European flat oysters on the West Coast of Sweden. Lastly, the oyster bar has also been described as being unique and a life experience for the majority of the respondents (a posteriori knowledge). Hence, the Karingo Oyster Bar represents an appropriate study context to conceptualize extraordinary experience. Paper 1 uses this study context to understand how tourists experience the extraordinary in an uncontrollable and less physically demanding and challenging environment, compared to other studies that have focused on risky activities. In the terms of Arnould et al. (2006), the Karingo Oyster Bar acts as a representative of a novel spatial-temporal context aiding in the generation of new theoretical insights.

### ***Guests Visiting Oyster Festival***

Another research context chosen for this study is the guests visiting the Oyster Festival at Grebbestad. Aside from meeting the requirement of the project, that is, in terms of being focused around oyster activities and situated on the West Coast of Sweden, it was also deemed suitable in giving insights into how consumers engage in co-creating value. The festival offers a range of activities, such as learning how to open oysters, that require the active engagement and interaction of the visitors. Likewise, unlike other study contexts, the seating arrangements (for the guests to enjoy the oysters and champagne) at the festival is also organized in such a way that it both encourages and facilitates interaction with other participants sharing the experience. The study context thus provides the opportunity to observe how the participants interact and co-create their experiences. Nevertheless, given the nature of paper 3, data gathered in this particular context was only used as an illustrative example and as a starting point to explore the consumer value co-creation process.

### ***Food Tourists***

Food tourists were chosen as another research context since they provide a much broader understanding of the consumer extraordinary experience than specifically oyster-related activities. In particular, the study of food tourists also facilitates understanding variations in how consumers experience the extraordinary. For instance, as demonstrated in paper 2, sampling consumers across levels of cultural capital to understand how they are surprised helped in the generation of theoretical contributions. Hence, in the terms of Arnould et al. (2006), the food tourists act as a foreground for looking at variations. In addition, this research context was also used as part of a method paper (paper 5) in the form of an empirical illustration. In this case, the context does not help in generating theoretical contributions, rather it merely provides an illustrative example.

In this thesis, two research contexts were also combined, i.e. the food tourists and visitors to Karingo Oyster bar. In Paper 3, which aimed to explore how consumers engage in the sharing of extraordinary food experiences, these contexts were used as a foreground in a novel spatial-temporal context to generate new theoretical insights.

## **Selection of participants**

In this study, all participants were selected on the basis that they were travelling exclusively for food experiences or with food being their main motivation for travel, and that they were explicitly searching for extraordinary food experiences. Given that such participants, commonly denoted as food tourists, are not easy to find, referrals were used from existing participants. This approach was found to be advantageous since trust was already established from the outset, as referrals were made by acquaintances or peers rather than using a more formal method of selection. Overall this resulted in 31 people taking part. Although a relative small sample is typical of qualitative studies and cannot be considered statistically representative, this sample does demonstrate that the identified meanings and life issues are based on a common set of life-world conditions rather than on the idiosyncrasies of specific individuals (Levy 1981; McCracken 1986). The sample size was deemed sufficient as new interviews did not add new information, and, in the terms of Strauss and Corbin (1990), this reflected the point of saturation.

Most of the participants in this study were Swedish (21 of the 31 participants), aged from 28 to 69 and having occupations spanning from Chief Executive Officer to PhD students. An overview of the interview participants is provided in Appendix 1. The sample is mostly representative of participants from a high socio-economic profile. Hence, one limitation associated with the sample in this study is that it does not provide insights into how other individuals with a lower socio-economic profile might experience an extraordinary food. Further, since the use of snowball sampling is based on a series of referrals, within a circle of people who know each other, it is more likely that participants share similar traits and characteristics. As such, this excludes some individuals and groups and creates specific and ‘non-representational’ samples. It is worthwhile to note that the sample was also formed in relation to my position (a foreign doctoral student residing in Gothenburg) and my social network. Therefore, most of the participants in this study reside within the vicinity of Gothenburg, with some of them (6 participants) being either PhD students or researchers.

## **Data Collection Methods**

The overall strategy of data collection was to gain access to lived experience through the use of tools such as interviews, observations and photography. The use of multiple data collection techniques was beneficial since it provided multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon, thereby providing what Arnould (1998) called a richer body of data ‘text’. In particular, the use of a

variety of data collection methods was useful in identifying themes that summarize the participants' emic experiences and understandings.

### ***Interviews***

Interviews, being one of the most common forms of data collection methods, were conducted with 31 tourists who classified themselves as having an interest in food. Out of the 31 participants, 20 interviews were conducted face-to-face whilst the other 11 were through Skype. The interviews were conducted on the basis of traditional semi-structured research interviews using broad questioning techniques and informed by the stream of interpretative methodology in consumer research (e.g. Thompson et al. 1989).

### ***Face-to-Face Interviews***

Given the various advantages associated with face-to-face interviews, these were chosen as the most desired method. Within the context of Karingo Oyster Bar, a total of 9 interviews were conducted face-to-face. Out of the 9 interviews, 3 of them were conducted at the oyster bar after the experience, while the 6 other interviews took place either at the participants' homes or at their places of work. Given that most of the tourists visiting the oyster bar have to take the ferry, a ride of around 35 to 40 minutes from Kåringön Island to the mainland (Tuvesvik), the researcher used this opportunity to further build a good rapport and talk about their experiences at the oyster bar. On two occasions this resulted in the researcher being invited to the participants' homes for the interviews. All interviews conducted at the Karingo Oyster Bar took place within a maximum span of 1 month after the experience. The 11 other participants in the study were tourists who were travelling exclusively for food experiences (data used for papers 2 and 5). All of the participants were interviewed at the University, with the exception of one participant who was interviewed at her home. Conducting face-to-face interviews proved to be advantageous since it provided the interviewer with the possibility to create a good environment that helped the interviewees to feel comfortable and allowed the interviewer to develop a better rapport with them. It also allowed the researcher to capture any non-verbal cues such as excitement, or any other emotional reactions.

### **Skype Interviews**

Owing to the difficulties involved in conducting all the interviews face-to-face, Skype was chosen as another viable option. Basically, participants who were interviewed via Skype were located either in different countries or in different regions and did not have time to be interviewed after their food experiences at Karingo. Given that tourists visiting the Karingo Oyster Bar spend around 3 hours on site, it was not always possible to interview them on the spot, hence 6 out of the 15 participants chose to be interviewed over Skype instead. For participants from the oyster bar, since they were already acquainted with the researcher, the use of Skype was not an issue as a good rapport was already established. On the other hand, for those who were not acquainted with the researcher, attempts were made to create a good rapport before the interview. For instance, the numerous exchanges of emails where the researcher shared information regarding her project were useful in evoking an interest. Besides, to surmount issues related to spatiality and physical interaction, video calls through skype were used to provide more or less the same face-to face effects. There are also several advantages associated with Skype that are well-recognized in the literature, such as flexibility in terms of organizing the interview time, and being cost and time effective (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013).

### **Observations**

Prior to the interviews, observation was used, since it is useful to learn about the activities of the people under study in their natural setting with the researcher being either a participant or non-participant observer. In this dissertation, both participant and non-participant observations were used. With reference to the Karingo Oyster Bar (empirical material used for both papers 1 and 3), non-participant observation was found useful to have a preliminary understanding of the food tourists' experience at the bar, while participant observation was used as a method to have an understanding of the Oyster Festival in Grebbestad, Sweden (empirical material for paper 4). In both study settings, the researcher introduced herself as someone working on a dissertation related to understanding consumers' experience of oysters. Most of the time, this evoked an interest and served well to get into a conversation with potential participants.

Both participant and non-participant observation was mainly conducted with the general question of 'what is going on?' As part of the non-participant observation at the oyster bar, audiotaping, photography and field notes were used. The field notes were mainly focused on three aspects: (1) the study



setting; (2) the guide; and (3) the tourists and their interactions. In particular, notes were made pertaining to description of the oyster bar, the different activities engaged in by the tourists, their reactions in different situations, how they interact, where different activities were held and how much time was spent on each of the different activities. Together with the field notes, audiotaping and photography were also used. The audiotaping was useful to record the presentation given by the guide on oysters, while pictures were taken of the different activities that the tourists were involved in. The pictures provided a visual account of the participants' experience and were useful when interviewing them. Within the context of Karingo Oyster Bar, non-participant observation also facilitated the observation of events that the informants might not have shared and provided an opportunity to start an initial conversation with the guests. This also ended up being a useful method in building rapport and trust before the interviews, which further increased the willingness of the tourists to participate in the study and made them feel more comfortable about sharing their experiences.

On the other hand, participant observation during the Oyster Festival provided the researcher with a lived experience of the events. To have an understanding of the Oyster Festival, pictures and field notes were taken. The field notes were mainly focused on providing a description of: (1) the festival setting; (2) the different activities at the festival; and (3) people and their interactions. Similar to the non-participant observation, the researcher had the objective of understanding 'what is going on here? Pictures taken during the festival enabled the researcher to create a visual account of how the event unfolded. During the participant observation, the researcher also engaged in casual conversation (such as asking the participants what they think of the festival and the different activities) with the participants. To a certain extent, this allowed the researcher to hear the participants' stories and understand how they experienced the festival. The objective of these casual conversations was mainly to get what Geertz (1973) called as 'experience-near' as possible.

In short, the various tools used during both participant and the non-participant observation enabled the researcher to have an understanding of the experience. They were also useful in providing real-time interpretive insights of the cultural context and behavioural details of the consumption activity (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Nevertheless, it is important to note that, as an observer, the degree to which the researcher is involved in participation determines the amount and quality of data collected. Since non-participant observation was carried out at the oyster bar, this had certain consequences. For instance, it didn't allow the researcher to gain as much information as participant observation because it limits the possibility of being immersed in the group being observed. Secondly, there is also a lesser degree of empathy, limiting the

researcher's capacity to understand or feel what the participant was experiencing. Indeed, had participant observation been conducted this would have provided the researcher with a better understanding of what participants meant when they related certain events or feelings. Although the researcher was aware of these limitations, participant observation was not possible at the Karingo Oyster Bar due to the cost, time and the fact that a minimum of 6 persons are required to be part of the experience. Finally, as part of the agreement, participation in activities was allowed only if the participants provided their consent and it didn't interfere with the tourist experience. Likewise, although participant observation was conducted during the Oyster Festival, the data generated was only to illustrate how values were co-created at the festival. Table 1 provides an overview of the different empirical materials collected for each papers.

<b>Article</b>	<b>Data Collection Strategies</b>	<b>Research Context</b>	<b>Data Collection Tools &amp; Specification</b>
1	Non-participant observations & interviews	Guests visiting Karingo Oyster Bar in Kåringön	Observation - 30 hours Field notes Informal conversation Skype interviews - 6 participants Face to face interviews - 9 participants Duration - between 50 to 55 minutes Pictures - over 100 images Audiotaping (presentation on oysters) – 30 minutes
2	Interviews	Food Tourists	Skype interviews - 5 participants Face to face interviews – 11 participants Duration - between 60 and 90 minutes
3	Interviews	- Guests visiting Karingo Oyster Bar in Kåringön - Guests visiting Oyster Festival in Grebbestad	Skype interviews – 7 participants Face to face interviews – 12 participants Duration - between 50 to 90 minutes
4	Participant observations	Guests visiting Oyster Festival in Grebbestad	Observation - around 24 hours Field notes Informal conversations Pictures - over 200 images

*Table 1: Overview of empirical materials by papers*

## **Analysis and Interpretation of Empirical Materials**

Even though analysis and interpretation are often used interchangeably, to some extent they also reflect two distinct procedures that tend to overlap with each other. While analysis is focused on the division of complex constituent parts by dissecting, reducing, sorting and reconstituting the data, interpretation is the process used to make sense of the data by looking at what it means (Spiggle, 1994). Principally, analysis and interpretation comprise the dynamic process in which the knowledge constructed emerges by relating meanings in parts of the transcripts to the meanings of the whole of the transcripts (Goulding 2005). Despite each paper having different objectives and different empirical materials, the common goal was to find emerging themes and patterns. At the core of grounded theory and existential phenomenology is the focus on the lived experience, which is important to understand the personal meanings that emerge for consumers in their social circumstances, meanings that could not be identified through a generic knowledge of the social setting. The life-world reflects the subjects' experience of reality. The process of interpreting consumer meanings by means of their life-world categories is an iterative one in which the goal is to arrive at a sense of the whole, that is the interrelationships among the various facets of the life-world (Giorgi 1986). Given the small and manageable number of participants who took part in this study, all data analysis was done manually.

In both approaches, the analysis started with reading the participants' narratives to get a feeling of their experiences and to extract significant statements, forming categories that would allow for theorization. However, the two methods also deviate with regards to the episodic data analysis. For the grounded theory method, data collection and analysis is a simultaneous process. The coding is an on-going process that moves from open to more abstract conceptual codes. The analysis is mainly conducted by following the open, axial and selective coding process. A detailed description of the analysis is provided in paper 1. In contrast, existential phenomenology is based on self-reflexivity, actively constructing interpretations of the experience and questioning how those interpretations came about. For papers 2, 3 & 5, the data analysis procedures outlined by Thompson (1997) were used. The analysis is mainly conducted by scrutinizing the text for meanings or narratives that describe the central aspect of the experience. In particular, the analysis uses an interactive process by relating meanings in parts of the transcripts to the meanings of the whole transcripts. The analysis was conducted by scrutinizing the text for 'meaning' units and describing the central aspects of the experience. The strategy used for the interpretations is to gain a holistic understanding that arises from the interpretive interaction between these core life-world categories and the developing understanding of consumers' life

narratives (Thompson 1989). More detailed descriptions of the analysis are provided in the relevant papers.

## **Ensuring Trustworthiness in Interpretative Research**

All research is concerned with producing reliable and valid knowledge in an ethical way. Similarly, this study has ensured its trustworthiness by employing various strategies as suggested by Sandberg (2005) and Guba and Lincoln (1981). Strategies such as communicative validity, pragmatic validity, transgressive validity and reliability as interpretive awareness were used. Those strategies were particularly useful to establish that the interpretations are truthful to the lived experience of the consumers within the theoretical and methodological perspectives taken.

Communicative validity as a strategy was used to check for coherence in the interpretation of the empirical data. Various strategies were implemented during data collection as well as during the analysis and interpretation phase. Observation at the oyster bar, being part of the different activities and engaging in informal chat with the food tourists are example of activities undertaken by the researcher in order to ensure coherence in the participants' narratives. Through observation the researcher was also able to validate her interpretations by observing the consumers during the experience. This, according to Sandberg (2005), reflects a form of pragmatic validity that allows a researcher to check for discrepancies between what the research participants say they do and what they actually do.

To further ensure validity, at the beginning of each interview, the researcher reminded the interviewees of the purpose of the study, which was to discuss their extraordinary food experiences. Such clarifications, according to Sandberg (2005), are useful because they contribute to establishing a fruitful community of interpretation for the subsequent interviews. Given that the interviews were conducted in the form of dialogue, it conveys openness towards the research object. In this dissertation, an understanding of the consumers' extraordinary experience was developed by posing questions in response to the participant's answers (Gadamer 1994). In the interviews with the food tourists, one principle open-ended interview question was asked together with follow-up questions. In particular, what and how questions are useful since they directs the individuals to the research object and what it means to them. Following Sandberg's (2005) suggestions, follow-up questions were asked that constantly embed the statements in concrete situations. This enables the researcher to constantly focus on the participants' lived experience throughout the interviews, thus achieving high communicative validity.

Likewise, communicative validity was also used when analyzing interview transcripts, and was achieved by striving for coherent interpretations (Karlsson 1993). This was done by striving for coherence by interpreting the consumers' statements regarding their experience of the extraordinary, and of the transcript as a whole. When the researcher had analyzed how each consumer understood their extraordinary food experience, the analysis was shifted from the single consumer and compared the different ways of understanding extraordinary food experiences across consumers. Firstly, the researcher grouped the consumers who had understood their extraordinary food experiences in a similar way. Comparisons were then made both within and between groups. This process enabled the researcher to refine the coherence of the interpretations, thereby achieving high communicative validity. Finally, the findings were discussed with other researchers, co-authors and supervisors, and further refined in communications with reviewers and editors during the review process. The main strength of communicative validity is that it allows the researcher to focus on meaning coherence, stipulating that interpretations should be coherent with the empirical material investigated. The truth criteria were achieved by focusing on the ways that consumers understand extraordinary experience. The researcher tried to maintain focus by holding back her own prior understanding of extraordinary experience and continually checking if her interpretations were grounded in the consumers' descriptions of their experience. I strove to treat all interview statements as equally important, in combination with asking follow-up questions that required the consumers to elaborate on and be more specific about what they meant by their statements.

Transgressive validity is seen as one appropriate criterion for judging the extent to which truth as indeterminate fulfillment has been achieved. This can be done by searching for differences and contradictions rather than for coherence in lived experience. For example, in this dissertation, the researcher deliberately searched for differences and contradictions by cross-checking the interpretation for each understanding of the extraordinary food experience. This was done by reading through the transcript while expressing a particular interpretation, and assessing it against the sense of an alternative perspective. The cross-checking was done until I believed that I had found the most truthful interpretation of each consumer's way of understanding the extraordinary food experience. This cross-checking also led to clearer and more precise formulations of my interpretations. Eventually this reached a point at which, despite further cross-checking, each understanding of extraordinary experience remained stable.

In short, the validity and reliability of the study was ensured by demonstrating how I controlled and checked the interpretations throughout the

research process: from formulating the research questions, selecting individuals to be studied, obtaining data from those individuals, analyzing the data obtained and reporting the results. For the interpretative research approach, the multiple stages of interpretation that allow patterns to emerge, the discussion of how interpretations arise from the data and the interpretative process are useful to ensure the reliability and validity of the research.

## **Ethical Issues**

The nature of the topic in this dissertation does not constitute what can be considered to be a sensitive research area. Nevertheless, ethical concerns were present during the data collection phase, analysis and representation of the empirical result. For the interviews, all participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. Prior to that, they were informed about the nature of the research subject, the purpose, procedures and the use of the material for academic purposes, including conference presentations, research articles, and dissertation writing. They were also given the option to opt out if they did not want to participate. Since all of them agreed to participate, they were offered anonymity and pseudonyms.

Likewise, during the observation at the Karingo Oyster Bar, the participants were informed of the researcher's presence and her interest in understanding their experiences at the bar. Since the owner of the bar was the person involved in getting their consent to have the researcher present during their experience, most of the participants agreed. During the observation, care was taken that the researcher did not intrude in their experiences. Permission was also sought from both the participants and the owner before taking pictures and for using them during conference presentations and in the dissertation. On the other hand, for the observations at the Oyster Festival in Grebbestad, consent was only asked from the organizer, since it was difficult to reveal my role as a researcher to all of the participants. However, whenever I chatted with people informally and told them about my dissertation it evoked their interest and helped to start a conversation. Permissions were also sought before taking any of the festival participants' pictures.

It is vital to note that none of the participating organizations (Karingo Oyster Bar and Oyster Festival in Grebbestads) chose to be anonymous. Rather, they were happy for the name of the place to be mentioned in research papers and presented during conferences. It was perceived as a positive thing. Ultimately, during the data collection phase, the aim was to ensure that informed consent had been gained, and to protect the privacy and confidentiality of those who participated in the study. The researcher's university student card was also

carried as proof of affiliation and identity in case it was needed. During the data analysis, care was taken that true representations of the consumers' narratives were provided by using various strategies such as communicative, pragmatic and transgressive validity as detailed above.





## 4. Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide insights into what constitute an extraordinary experience. This section offers an analysis of the findings and a discussion of the individual papers taken as a whole. Considering all five papers together, it provides a deeper understanding that allows theorization of the concept of extraordinary experience. In particular, by using various theoretical perspectives it offers a different conceptualization of the concept compared to what the current literature has highlighted. Previous literature has developed an understanding of the concept of extraordinary experience by positioning it as being structure (e.g. Tumbat and Belk 2011), antistructure (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993) or anastructure (e.g. Husemann et al. 2016). Anastructure is a form of tension that occurs due to the presence of both structural and antistructural elements. Previous studies on extraordinary experience have focused mainly on contexts such as pilgrimages (Husemann et al. 2016), river rafting (Arnould & Price 1993), mountaineering (Tumbat and Belk 2011) and adventurous Arctic activity (Lindberg and Eide 2016), which are all prototypical examples of anti-structure. These experiences create a sense of separation from the mundane world. However, by considering the context of food experiences, which are structural (ordinary) in nature, this study found that the consumers' extraordinary experience contains both structure and anti-structure. Rather than causing tension, the presence of both structure and anti-structure is perceived as being positive and creates the extraordinary experience. The synchronization between structure and anti-structure is thus labelled as synstructure. As a recap, the five papers of this dissertation can be summarized as follows.

Paper 1 explores the different elements that make up an extraordinary nature-based food experience. It highlights elements such as togetherness, hospitality, insightfulness, luxury, genuineness, peripheral environment and non-ordinary environment. The findings show that an extraordinary food experience is a complex phenomenon consisting of functional and human interactions and relational aspects that occur outside the consumers' ordinary environment. This study in particular is in line with studies such as Arnould and Price (1993), which provide supports for the anti-structural aspect embracing the extraordinary experience.

Paper 2 explores the meanings of surprise in extraordinary experiences and presents the dimensions of surprise in relation to a typology of food cultural capital based on Bourdieu (1986). The study identifies three types of food tourists: cultivated (possessing high levels of food cultural capital), enthusiast (possessing a relatively lower level of food cultural capital than the cultivated food tourists), and cultural food tourists (with low levels of food cultural capital). It demonstrates that the resources consumers possessed conditioned the ways they conceived extraordinary experiences. Consumers possessing high cultural capital were surprised by the simplicity or complexity of the food experience. On the other hand, those possessing low cultural capital were surprised by the genuineness of the experience. Also highlighted is the social influences on the food tourists' experience of the extraordinary. Unlike previous studies, this paper contributes to the current literature by providing a deeper understanding of how consumers with different cultural capital conceive the extraordinary food experience. The element of surprise, which is a key aspect in the conceptualization of extraordinary experience, is also further elaborated on.

Paper 3 explores the concept of sharing by asking how consumers engage in sharing within the context of an extraordinary food experience. The findings suggest that consumers conceive of sharing within the context of extraordinary food experiences in three different ways: (1) enjoyment and learning, (2) spending quality time with close friends, and (3) nurturing temporal friendship with those sharing similar experiences. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes by providing a more thorough understanding of the concept of sharing in extraordinary experience in comparison to what the current literature offers. It also contributes further to the current state of research, by demonstrating that how the consumers engage in sharing is dependent on their social resources.

Paper 4 is a conceptual paper that illustrates how consumers engage in the co-creation of value within the context of a food festival. It primarily offers insight on three holistic types of value that consumers co-create: social, semiotic and economic value. This paper specifically contributes to the literature by demonstrating how consumers interact and co-create their experiences. It primarily highlights the complexity and intricate interactions that are involved when consumers co-create their experiences.

Paper 5 explores the use of phenomenology in tourism research. Contesting the phenomenological distinction between Husserlian and Heideggerian that are prominent in tourism research, it suggests a merger between these two, known as existential phenomenology. The paper is specifically focused on providing an overview of how existential phenomenology can be used in

tourism research. Particular emphasis is placed on how the use of existential phenomenology can provide deeper insights into how individuals differ in experiencing a particular phenomenon. It is worthwhile to note that this contribution is directed towards the field of tourism and hospitality research rather than consumer research.

## **A reconceptualization of the concept of extraordinary experience**

Extraordinary experience has been perceived as being ‘totally different’ from the known and familiar and from one’s everyday life and is also comparably stronger than memorable experience (Knobloch, Robertson and Aitken 2014). Extraordinary experiences are basically seen as occurring outside of the individual consumer’s ordinary life. Hence, it is not surprising that numerous studies have found that extraordinary experience is comprised of non-ordinary elements such as *communitas*, positive and collaborative interactions, shared goals and being transformative in nature (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993). There is also a range of studies that are situated at the other extreme of the continuum, having found extraordinary experience to consist of more ordinary elements such as limited interactions, focused and individualized goals, and conflict. However, in this study it has been demonstrated that extraordinary experience also contains elements that are not completely unfamiliar or totally different from the unknown but that there are also numerous aspects that are representative of the ordinariness. In particular, this thesis identified elements such as profaneness, collaborative and/or limited interactions, and conflict easing situation as being elements that are representative of consumers’ extraordinary food experiences. In relation to Turner’s structural model, these elements are representative of both the structural and anti-structural. The section below provides an overview of the different elements that encompass an extraordinary food experience. Even though these elements are mutually inclusive, for the sake of clarity, they will be discussed separately. Figure 2 illustrates the dynamic interplay between structure, synstructure and anti-structure.

### ***Profaneness***

The profaneness or ordinariness associated with an experience has primarily been theorized as a structural element and part of the everyday life of the consumers. As argued in previous research, the profaneness of the daily life is what makes consumers engage in behaviours provoking strong emotions and extraordinary experience (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993; Tumbat and Belk

2011). However, in this study it has been demonstrated that it is the profaneness of the experience that plays an important role in the extraordinary food experience. In particular, the profaneness of the extraordinary food experience has been described in terms of: (1) simplicity of the environment, and (2) simplicity of the dish. Both of these elements are defined as occurring in a different experiencescape or outside of the consumer's ordinary and daily routine.

As demonstrated in papers 1 and 2, an important part of the extraordinary experience is the *simplicity of the environment*. In paper 1, this aspect is highlighted when the participants describe the experience environment as being small, simple, basic and cozy, which provides them with feelings of genuineness and authenticity. Likewise, in paper 2, a number of participants relate to the simplicity of the environment by describing the restaurant as having very simple décor and layout, or even with descriptions like having the feeling of *'being in someone's living room'*, *'being in the real world'* or *'I was out of the tourism things to a local kitchen'*. Even though the experience occurs in a different experiencescape, the ordinariness associated with the physical environment, décor and layout is what provides the feeling of being in an ordinary environment. Similarly, as demonstrated in papers 2 and 5, the profaneness of the extraordinary experience was also conceived in terms of the *simplicity of the dish*. This aspect is mainly defined in terms of dishes that are cooked using simple and few ingredients as well as easy cooking procedures. Those dishes tend to be foods that are considered to be convenient and comforting in nature, as well as foods that are part of the consumers' daily experiences. For instance, as elaborated in paper 5, simple dishes in terms of having just *'grilled fish and served without any kind of garnishing or side dish'* or the surprise associated with having a *'simple pasta dish with three or four ingredients'* are elements that help to create the extraordinary experience.

Whilst previous research has conceptualized food occurring in non-ordinary contexts as being expensive, extravagant, complex or having some elements of novelty (e.g. Quan and Wang 2004; Hanefors and Mossberg 2003), the findings of this study reveal that, within the touristic extraordinary food settings, the simplicity or ordinariness that are found in people's ordinary lives can become extraordinary. However, as demonstrated in paper 2, the profaneness of the extraordinary food experience was not conceived by all of the food tourists but primarily by those possessing high levels of food cultural capital (i.e., denoted as cultivated food tourists), as well as by those possessing a relatively lower level of food cultural capital (enthusiast food tourists). In particular, for those food tourists who perceive the profaneness of the experience, it is a reflection of the genuineness and authenticity of the experience. It connotes well with what Sharpley (2008) described as engaging

with the ordinariness that are perceived as real, unique, basic and original. Further, unlike previous research that has conceptualized the authenticity in extraordinary experience as encompassing their non-ordinary aspects, this study highlights how the ordinariness of the experience is reflective of the authentic experience. This is in line with Wang's (1999) notion that tourists are in search of what is called existential authenticity. Thus, this finding contradicts the importance of the non-ordinariness of the experiencescape emphasized by previous research (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993; Mossberg 2007). Rather, this study illustrates how the ordinariness (such as familiarity, homely feeling, simplicity) associated with the non-ordinary experiencescape provides the extraordinary food experience.

### ***Collaborative and/or limited interactions***

The extraordinary experience has mainly been conceptualized as consisting of either collaborative (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993; Kozinets 2002) or limited interactions between the participating individuals (e.g. Tumbat and Belk 2011). As illustrated in papers 1, 2 and 3, the food experience was perceived as extraordinary because it provided the consumers with the opportunity to interact and bond with their loved ones, friends or relatives. The experiencescape in this context acts as a liminal space that facilitates the interactions and the opportunity to re-connect with their loved ones, since the ordinary or structural environment is perceived as being hectic, time-pressed and overwhelmed with responsibilities. To illustrate this aspect of collaborative interaction, the term 'togetherness' was used in paper 1 to describe how participants bond and socialize with their companions. The collaborative interaction was largely facilitated by the shared goals of the participants. As illustrated in paper 1, since all the participants acknowledged liking or having some interest in oysters, this provided a feeling of oneness, facilitated the collaborative interaction and made the experience more joyful. The sharing of meaningful consumption experiences also strengthens interpersonal ties.

Likewise, the collaborative aspect was highlighted in both papers 2 and 3, with the majority of the consumers/participants emphasizing how having similar or shared interest, like, for instance, being equally enthusiastic about discussing about food and sharing knowledge, leads to more positive interactions. However, this phenomenon was observed not only when participants were among their companions but also with strangers who were sharing the same experience. As illustrated in paper 3, the shared food experience leads to the emergence of some form of temporal communitas. These findings resonate with the majority of the current research, which argues that extraordinary experiences incorporate collaborative interaction (e.g.

Arnould and Price 1993; Kozinets 2002) between consumers. Indeed, this also provides support for previous food tourism related studies, which emphasized how food facilitates socialization and creates a sense of belonging among consumers (e.g. Kim, Eves and Scarles 2009; Mynttinen et al. 2015)

The findings in papers 2 and 3 also enable us to understand how consumers' resources play an important role in their conception of extraordinary food experience and influence the way they interact. In paper 3, for instance, one of the participants highlighted how when travelling with his son (who does not share his interest in food) the liminal space provides him with the opportunity to interact and bond, since the ordinary or structured world is perceived as being hectic, time-pressed and overwhelmed with responsibilities. Likewise, his conception of extraordinary experience differs when he travels with his wife, who shares his interest in food. The sharing of extraordinary food experiences then encompasses engaging in meaningful discussion about the food experience and also consists of interaction with the staff and other consumers sharing the experience. Hence, the same consumers can interact differently depending on with whom they are sharing the food experiences. Even though the consumers interact differently based on their social group or companions, the food experience still encompasses collaborative interactions.

However, as demonstrated in paper 2, by using a cultural resource perspective, the consumers are likely to interact differently. For instance, those possessing high cultural capital are more likely to interact by discussing their food experiences and sharing knowledge, compared to consumers with low resources, who interact by spending quality time together. Nevertheless, it has also been shown that those who have high cultural capital limit interactions with those who do not have similar resources, and instead engage in a solitary experience. To some extent this finding resonates with Tumbat and Belk's (2011) study, which highlighted limited interaction between individuals who do not share similar resources or have divergent goals.

Hence, in this study it is argued that whether the consumers engage in collaborative or limited interactions is dependent on the resources that the consumers possess. Hence, consumers' resources to some extent explain how and with whom they interact.

### ***Conflict Easing***

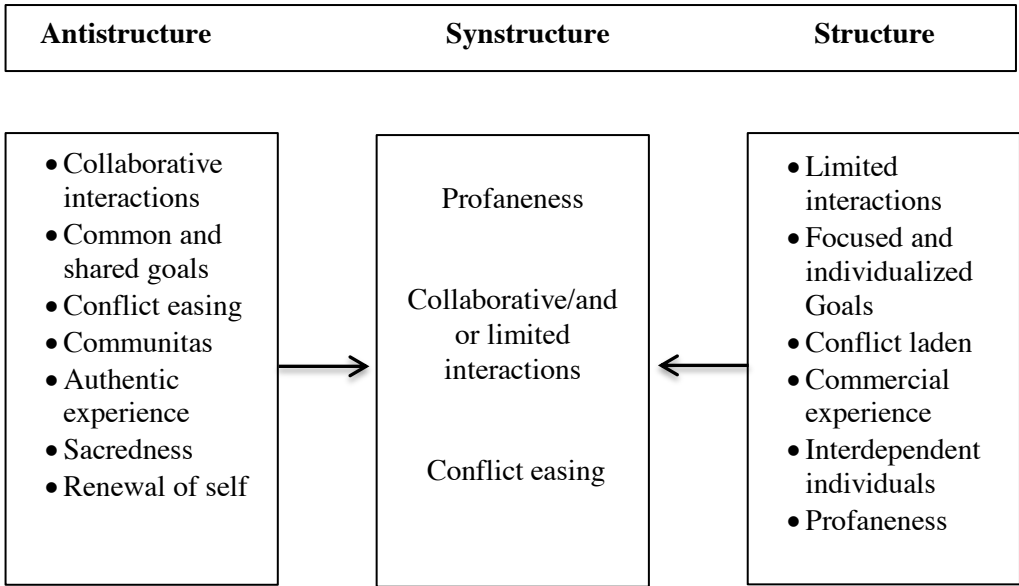
Previous studies have conceptualized consumer extraordinary experiences as being either conflict easing (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993; Kozinets 2002) or conflict laden (e.g. Tumbat and Belk 2011). In this study, it has been found that the extraordinary food experience consists of mainly conflict easing situations. That is, at the core of the extraordinary experience is the smoothing

of differences between participants. This can be explained by the fact that all participants have a shared interest in food. For instance, in paper 1, this was indicative since they all had the shared objective of engaging in oyster related activities such as learning about and tasting oysters. Consequently, this shared objective also meant that they are less likely to engage in situations of conflict.

Further, by using a resource perspective, papers 2 and 3 have shown how consumers with different social and cultural resources also engage in conflict easing situation. This was clearly demonstrated in paper 3 (using the social resource perspective), when the more knowledgeable consumers interacted with the less knowledgeable ones and their relationships harmonized. For instance, this aspect was illustrated by participants when they related how the service staff or their companions provided them with knowledge regarding the dish, wine or detailed information about the region. In particular, in this study it is shown that the most resourceful consumer acts as a knowledge dispenser to the least resourceful consumers by providing knowledge, information and skills, whilst the least resourceful consumers used it as an opportunity to improve their operant skills. For those who are very skillful, it also represents an opportunity to show off their skills or knowledge, thus further confirming their identities as highly cultured food tourists or what Hjalager (2003) has labelled as 'experimental gastronomy tourists'. Similarly, as shown in paper 2, conflict-laden situations are usually avoided by choosing to travel with those who have similar cultural capital. In situations where individuals are less likely to find companions that share their interests, these people choose to travel on their own, hence avoiding situations of conflict. It is worthwhile to note that this harmonization was observed mostly among the cultivated food tourists, who travelled with people who had more or less same resources. For instance, this is exemplified in paper 2, when the participants relate that travelling with others who share their interests and resources leads them to participate in meaningful discussions as well as to further enhance their cultural capital.

However, this finding is in contrast with previous research that has shown how consumers with different skills and goals tend to avoid other individuals who do not share their skills, and interacting with them leads to conflicting relationships (e.g. Tumbat and Belk 2011). However, this can be explained by the fact that previous studies have focused on challenging and risky activities, where appropriate skills are highly valued and not having the relevant resources can be life-threatening. However, the food context is a much more mundane activity that does not require any specific skills, hence the consumers are more likely to engage in non-conflicting situations.





*Figure 2: An illustration of the dynamic between anti-structure, structure and synstructure in extraordinary experience*

## Synstructure

As described above, the consumer extraordinary food experience consists of both structural (profaneness, limited interaction) and anti-structural (collaborative interaction, conflict easing) elements. To refer to this positive co-existence between structure and anti-structure, this thesis uses the term ‘synstructure’. ‘Syn’ is a prefix that is used to express ‘with, together’ or a fusion between different elements. Therefore, the word synstructure is deemed to be suitable since it echoes a form of synchronization between structure and anti-structure. In this thesis, the term synstructure is defined as a transient state that occurs due to the positive co-existence and interrelatedness of both structure and anti-structure. Unlike Husemann et al.’s (2016) concept of anastructure, which portrayed the co-existence between structure and anti-structure as having a negative effect on the consumer extraordinary experience and as being likely to create tensions, synstructure is conceptualized as having a harmonizing and positive effect on the consumer experience of the extraordinary. Indeed, this study shows that the structural elements lead to and foster benefits that are atypical of anti-structure. This co-existence is reflected in Turner’s (1974) structure and anti-structure conceptualization, since he argues that both can co-exist and constantly modify one another over time and it is the processes that relate the two of them. Indeed, as he stated, the ‘anti-

*structure is periodically transformed into structure and structure into antistructure*' (1974: 284).

Although previous studies on extraordinary experience have acknowledged the existence of both structural and anti-structural elements, this coexistence was also seen as the two being in opposition to each other (e.g. Kozinets 2002; Weinberger and Wallendorf 2012). Kozinets's (2002) study of the Burning Man Festival, for instance, did acknowledge the existence of both structural (entry fees represent a form of commercialization) and anti-structural (sharing, *communitas*) elements, but saw them as being in opposition to each other. Therefore, this study makes an important theoretical contribution by showing that rather than conceptualizing structure and antistructure as existing at opposite ends of the continuum or seeing the co-existence of structure and antistructure as being conflicting, the dynamic process between them is seen as co-existing and they are seen as being interrelated to each other in a positive way. In short, this study contributes to general research on extraordinary experience by moving beyond the notion that extraordinary experiences are 'beyond the everyday life' (Megehee et al. 2016:1) or that they are 'more intense, framed and stylized than the ordinary experience' (Abrahams 1986). The findings of this study indeed make us question whether extraordinary experience is purely structural or anti-structural as suggested by previous research. Rather, based on the findings on this study, it can be argued that extraordinary experience is the positive co-existence of both the ordinary and the non-ordinary. Nevertheless, there are also some similarities noted with other extraordinary experience related studies. In line with other previous research, it is further affirmed that an extraordinary experience is an emotionally positive experience, is intrinsically enjoyable, encompasses personal growth and is transformative in nature. Although the degree of personal growth or transformation among individuals is likely to differ and depends on the experiential context, it always seems to encompass new skills or knowledge gained that leads to personal growth.



## 5. Concluding Remarks

This thesis has the aim of understanding what constitutes an extraordinary experience, using the context of food in tourism and hospitality. In particular, it provides insights into how mundane experiences such as food, which are inherently part of the daily lives of consumers, are conceived as extraordinary when consumed within the non-ordinary context. Hence, drawing on five different papers, it identifies elements such as profaneness, collaborative and/or limited interactions and conflict easing situation as being pervasive in the consumer extraordinary food experience. These elements are representative of both the structural and anti-structural. Unlike previous studies, which have positioned the extraordinary experience as being either structural, anti-structural or seeing the co-existence between structure and anti-structure as creating some form of tension, this thesis contributes to the current literature by showing the co-existence between structure (ordinary) and anti-structure (non-ordinary) as being positive and important in conceiving the extraordinary food experience. Since the co-existence of these elements is perceived as being positive, the term synstructure is proposed to illustrate this relationship. Indeed, it also contributes to the current literature by showing how consumers with different cultural and social resources also experience the extraordinary differently. However, it is worthwhile to note that since this study has focused on mundane food experiences, in comparison to others where the context has been extraordinary in nature (e.g. river rafting, mountaineering), the generalization of the study to other non-ordinary contexts cannot be made. As demonstrated in previous studies, consumers in those non-extraordinary contexts need special skills, they are in challenging situations and in some cases, the lack of skills can also be life threatening. The food experience context is different since it does not require any special skills, and this might explain the positive co-existence between the structure and anti-structure. It is recommended that future research consider other mundane experience such as singing, dancing or watching movies and football and explore how these are conceived as extraordinary when experienced within the non-ordinary context. Since this thesis has focused only on the consumer extraordinary experience at the post-consumption phase, future research should provide an understanding of how consumers experience the extraordinary at different phases of their experience (pre-, during and post- consumption).



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