

Aesthetic Experiences and Behaviour in Nature-based Tourism

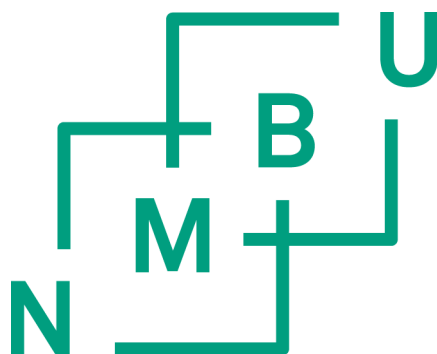
Estetikopplevelser og Atferd i Naturbasert Reiseliv

Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) Thesis

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PREFACE

The dissertation is submitted as a particular fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) at the Department of Ecology and Natural Resource Management, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Norway. The work was funded by the Research Council of Norway [194527/V10], and it is a part of the Strategic Projects-University Colleges (SHP) “Innovation in Tourism industry” and the subproject “Market knowledge and innovation”. The subproject is twofold. In the first part, the objective is to develop research-based knowledge of the experiential market and the increasing emphasis on experiential qualities in the customers’ preferences. The second part of the subproject is a study of the tourism enterprises’ use of marketing knowledge in development and innovation processes. This thesis is within the first part of the subproject. The dissertation consists of four papers and a synopsis that presents the theoretical background, the aim and the research questions, the research setting and method, the results, and finally the contributions and implications for theory and practice.

My personal motivation for researching aesthetics in nature-based tourism is a combination of my master’s thesis where I focused on innovation in a systemic perspective by using National Tourist Routes in Norway as a case study, and working with development and innovation projects within the tourism industry for over 10 years.

LIST OF APPENDED PAPERS

1. Breiby, M.A. (2014). Exploring aesthetic dimensions in a nature-based context. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 20(2), 163–173.
2. Breiby, M.A. (2014). Exploring aesthetic dimensions in nature-based tourist experiences.
1. Review process to: *Tourism Analysis*.
3. Breiby, M.A. (2014). Effects of aesthetic qualities on satisfaction and loyalty: A Case from a scenic road. 2. Review process to: *Journal of Travel Research*.
4. Breiby, M.A., and Slåtten, T. (2014). The effects of aesthetic experiential qualities on tourists’ positive emotions and loyalty: A case of a nature-based context in Norway. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism*. Accepted May 2014.

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During the research process and thesis writing, I have received advice and encouragement from several persons, who I want to acknowledge. To my main supervisor Sjur Baardsen at NMBU, I would like to express my gratitude for your professional advice and encouragement, and for reading and commenting on my writings. I would also like to thank Sjur’s colleagues at INA for valuable comments at the seminars, and the efficient administration at INA.

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Lillehammer, July 3, 2014

Monica A. Breiby

ABSTRACT

With the increasing focus on aesthetic experiences and symbolic values of products and services, this thesis addresses central aesthetic dimensions in nature-based experiences, and how they are linked to tourist behaviour. It empirically investigates the multidisciplinary concept of aesthetics from both key informants' and customers' perspectives. In particular, the thesis extends previous research by focusing on the man-made environments in nature areas.

The overall goal of this thesis is twofold. First, it aims to gain knowledge of central aesthetic dimensions in nature-based tourism. Second, it aims to gain knowledge of how these aesthetic dimensions influence the variables satisfaction, positive emotions, and customer loyalty. To achieve these aims, the concept of aesthetics as a phenomenon is explored in four papers. The methods used for data collection are interviews and a survey in a nature-based context.

The dissertation opens up the research area with regard to aesthetics and behaviour in nature-based tourism. This is one of the first systematic studies, which contributes to develop research-based knowledge of the role aesthetic qualities play in the tourists' preferences. Specifically, the dissertation offers three main contributions to tourism research. First, the thesis presents key informants' and tourists' understandings of central aesthetic dimensions that may influence tourists' satisfaction and positive emotions from nature-based experiences. One of the main findings is that both key informants and tourists mentioned the four aesthetic dimensions "harmony", "variation/contrast", "scenery/viewing", and "genuineness". In addition, key informants emphasized "art/architecture" and tourists emphasized "cleanliness". The findings show that the dimensions "harmony" and "genuineness" are especially important for the man-made environment, while the dimensions "variation/contrast" and "scenery/viewing" are especially important for the natural environment.

The thesis also contributes to furthering our understanding of the effects of aesthetic dimensions on tourists' satisfaction with and loyalty to nature-based experiences. The findings demonstrate that tourists' evaluations of the dimensions "scenery/viewing", "harmony", and "genuineness" affect their satisfaction with the scenic road positively, and that satisfaction has a direct influence on both the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit the scenic road and to visit similar roads. Furthermore, only the aesthetic dimensions "cleanliness" and "genuineness" have a direct effect on the intention to revisit the scenic road.

Finally, this thesis also contributes to expanding our understanding of the relationship between aesthetic dimensions, positive emotions, and loyalty. The findings reveal that tourists' evaluations of the aesthetic dimensions or qualities "scenery/viewing", "cleanliness", and "genuineness" have significant effects on positive emotions towards nature-based experiences. Positive emotions have direct effects on both the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit the scenic road and to visit similar roads. Moreover, the aesthetic dimension "scenery/viewing" has a direct effect on the intention to recommend the scenic road, and "cleanliness" has a direct effect on the intention to visit similar roads.

The findings also have practical implications. For example, they suggest the importance for managers to develop attractive value propositions by emphasizing aesthetic qualities, and thus adding customer value. Furthermore, new market knowledge must be structured, and interpreted into shared understandings among tourist providers and nature-based tourist organizations. This is especially important in development and innovation processes, thus leading to a competitive advantage for nature-based destinations. The thesis also opens up some of the areas for future research on man-made environments in addition to the natural environment in nature-based tourism. When most of the other variables are similar, aesthetic dimensions or qualities can make a difference to a nature-based tourist product's performance, and can therefore provide that competitive edge.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Aesthetics and aesthetic experiences have always been important to people. Some examples are the experience of a beautiful or sublime landscape, and listening to a deeply moving piece of music. Shusterman and Tomlin (2008) state that aesthetics is of fundamental value to human beings. The economic and social development from standardization to more consumer-oriented production in the Western world has also contributed to an increased focus on aesthetic experiences and the symbolic value of products (Charters, 2006). This also appears to be the case in tourism. For example, experiences of nature provide opportunities to discover, express, and perceive aspects of reality that lie at the root of our existence and make life valuable, joyful, and sometimes painful. There is an increasing demand for nature-based tourism experiences, both globally and in the Nordic countries (Mehmetoglu, 2006; Chen et al., 2013). It is reasonable to assume that these nature-based experiences provide tourists with a variety of opportunities to discover and perceive aesthetic qualities.

Aesthetics has often been understood as the “finer” aspect of a product or service. It goes beyond the functional elements of the product, and is offered in addition to the product’s utility. Although literature exists on aesthetics and its meaning and implications, little of importance appears to be written on how it influences behaviour and loyalty intentions in nature-based tourism. Hence, this thesis attempts to make a valuable contribution to nature-based tourism research by systematically looking into the role aesthetic qualities play in the consumers’ preferences.

The thesis primarily deals with understanding aesthetics beyond its artistic association to make it relevant for managers when they formulate their product development and marketing strategies. Although aesthetic dimensions cover all aspects of the service that the five senses can capture, the aesthetic quality differs in its perception from person to person. One person’s aesthetic experiences will not necessarily match with those of others (Bourassa, 1990). Managers will have to understand these perceptions in relation to their target segments in order to exploit aesthetic associations for developing and marketing customized products and services. Previous experiential studies have focused on cultural experiences and, according to Vespestad and Lindberg (2011), there is a need to direct attention towards nature-based experiences in tourism.

Through interviews and a survey, this thesis aims to gain knowledge in order to know what aesthetic dimensions or qualities can be exploited for product development and marketing success. Aesthetics is basically in the eye of the beholder, and the perception formed is based on all the senses of the beholder (Baisya & Das, 2008). Therefore, if a person appreciates the aesthetic value of a nature-based product, he or she will most likely be willing to pay a higher price. Managers have to consider these aspects of consumer behaviour to decide about marketing mix decisions like pricing. The issues addressed in this thesis include tourists' perceptions of aesthetics and the role aesthetic dimensions play in satisfaction, positive emotions, and loyalty intentions.

Understanding aesthetics and the factors associated with it will help tourist companies to a large extent in developing and marketing products and services. Understanding "aesthetics", and using it to create products and services with a subtle understanding of what tourists need (e.g., products with a symbolic value), is perhaps one of the important requirements of tourism day.

Even though nature is the most central aspect in a nature-based holiday, other features may be important for the overall experience. Accommodation, restaurants, and signs may all be central features, and thereby influence satisfaction, positive emotions, and loyalty intentions. There are few empirical studies on how tourism providers and organizations can develop stimulating overall environments including both the natural *and* the man-made environments (Mossberg, 2007). Thus, I focus on the man-made environments in nature. In other words, most of the questions in this thesis evolve around the relationship between aesthetic qualities, satisfaction, positive emotions, and loyalty intentions. Furthermore, this thesis provides more knowledge on how to understand and explain central aesthetic dimensions or qualities, and the relationship between these qualities and the different variables.

1.2 The goal and the structure of the thesis

The overall goal of this thesis is twofold. First, it aims to gain knowledge of central aesthetic dimensions in nature-based tourism. Second, it aims to gain knowledge of how these aesthetic dimensions influence the variables satisfaction, positive emotions, and customer loyalty. To achieve these aims, the concept of aesthetics as a phenomenon is explored in four papers.

The four papers constitute the major part of the thesis, whereas the synopsis constitutes a general framework for the four papers. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework in terms of perspectives of the concept of aesthetics, the link between aesthetics and nature-based tourism, and finally the relationship between aesthetics and the variables satisfaction, positive emotions, and loyalty intentions. Chapter 3 presents the research questions and the theoretical models in light of the theoretical framework. Moreover, the chapter gives an overview of the empirical setting and the research method. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the four appended papers. Finally, Chapter 5 presents and discusses the theoretical contributions and the managerial implications from the thesis, and suggestions for further research.

Paper 1 presents the views of key informants in order to ensure a broad perspective for the multidisciplinary concept of aesthetics. Key informants represent various disciplines that approach aesthetics as a general sense of learning (e.g., environmental psychology, architecture, experiential economy). They are also able to verbalize the ambiguous concept of aesthetics from several aspects that the tourists' might have difficulty in expressing themselves.

In contrast, Paper 2 emphasizes the viewpoints of the consumers or tourists in mapping their subjective experiences.

Paper 3 examines the cognitive assessment of the aesthetic dimensions¹ on tourist behaviour. This assessment has traditionally been used to measure service quality and satisfaction, e.g., the cognitive confirmation (or disconfirmation) of expectations of service compared with perceptions of the actual service.

Paper 4 emphasizes the emotional assessment of the aesthetic dimensions on tourist behaviour. This assessment also has significance in tourism, but there is little empirical research in this area (Liljander & Strandvik, 1997).

¹ The terms "aesthetic dimensions", "aesthetic qualities" and "aesthetic experiential qualities" are used synonymously in the thesis.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents a description of the thesis’s theoretical framework. First, it outlines some perspectives of the multidisciplinary concept of aesthetics based on different disciplines. Second, it links the concept of aesthetics to nature-based tourism. Finally, it examines the relationship between aesthetic qualities and the variables satisfaction, positive emotions, and loyalty intentions. Table 1 depicts an overview of the theoretical framework.

Table 1. Theoretical framework

The concept of aesthetics	Aesthetics and nature-based tourism	Aesthetics and behavioural responses
Perspectives from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philosophy • Psychology/environmental psychology • Sociology Viewpoints from marketing and management literature	Aesthetic dimensions Nature-based tourism experiences Overall environments at nature-based destinations: - natural environments - man-made environments	Cognitive and emotional assessment Aesthetic qualities, <i>satisfaction</i> , and loyalty intentions Aesthetic qualities, <i>positive emotions</i> , and loyalty intentions

2.1 The concept of aesthetics

For all that has been written on the concept of aesthetics, there is surprisingly little agreement on a definition. The literal meaning of “aesthetics” as per the Oxford English Dictionary is “the branch of philosophy which deals with questions of beauty and artistic taste”.² Regarding a psychological approach, the focus on beauty is much debated. What one person considers beautiful, another person might consider ugly or boring. There is no one story common to all aesthetic experiences, although certain themes may be more usual than others, due to shared biology and shared socialization (Averill et al., 1998).

Another definition of aesthetics includes both the beautiful and the sublime: “the study of the feelings, concepts, and judgments arising from our appreciation of the arts or of the wider class of objects considered moving, or beautiful, or sublime” (Blackburn, 1994, p. 8). This general definition echoes one of the first marketing papers on consumer aesthetics. The definition

² <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/aesthetics> (accessed 7 November 2012).

suggests that the core of aesthetics is the “presence or absence of beauty”. The sublime inspires awe through an awareness of what is majestic, fearful, and noble. What is moving is what stirs us when contemplating the beautiful or the sublime (Levy & Czepiel, 1974).

Aesthetics is and always has been important to human beings. To understand the concept, I will go back and look briefly at the evolution of aesthetics from the perspectives of philosophy, psychology, and sociology. Finally, I will present a definition for the concept as used in the thesis.

Different perspectives on the concept of aesthetics

In the eighteenth century, the philosopher Baumgarten ([1750]1983) used the term “aesthetics” for the first time in denoting “the science of the sensory”, that is, the recognition we extract from dealing with the senses. Later, the focus of aesthetics was narrowed to a part of the philosophy of art. Philosophers continue to dispute the nature of art, the scope of the aesthetic experience, and the aesthetic value. Regarding the latter issue, the objectivists view aesthetic value as inherent in the design of the object (Kant, [1790]1987), while the subjectivists argue that aesthetic value lies in the subjects’ response to the design (Hume, [1757]1998).

The philosopher Böhme (2001) characterizes the late stage of the development of capitalism as the “aesthetic economy”. Aesthetics may include art, nature, and “the real environment”, such as design, parts of architecture, and landscape planning. By calling his book “Aisthetik” (the Greek word for sense), Böhme links his work back to Baumgarten. According to Bale and Bø-Rygg (2008), aesthetics is today considered to be a discipline situated between philosophy and art, and conveys a general sense of learning. However, aesthetics and the nature of the aesthetic experience can also be seen as an aspect of psychology and sociology.

Psychologists have examined the aesthetic responses of individuals since the middle of the nineteenth century. One psychological approach emphasizes the subjective and experiential aspects of aesthetic consumption (Charters, 2006). This approach claims that the aesthetic reaction is different from any other emotional event, to the extent that it can be transcendent (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990). This means that by involving concentrated attention, the spectator “loses” himself or herself in the experience. As an adult, it may, for example, be difficult to lose oneself in an ice-cream cone, no matter how pleasurable. Should that happen, the experience could be aesthetic. In contrast, another approach emphasizes that aesthetic experience

is more cognitive than emotional. It is a matter of focused attention, differing from other cognitions (Averill et al., 1998).

Most approaches of environmental psychology emphasize aesthetic experiences as biological. The research shows that nature has a fascinating and stimulating effect on people. The need for green parks in cities and the conservation of nature in the form of national parks supports this proposition. The determinants of aesthetic experiences are similar across cultures and individuals, reflecting the common evolutionary heritage of the humans (Averill et al., 1998).³ The biological explanation is much debated since it excludes a cultural explanation. In an attempt to overcome the conflict between biological and cultural explanations, Bourassa (1990) suggests a tripartite theory, making a distinction between biological, cultural, and personal modes of aesthetic experience. An interesting feature of this contribution is that natural environments should be experienced primarily through a biological mode, implying universal patterns of preference. On the other hand, human-influenced or man-made environments would probably be experienced through the cultural and personal modes and thus be subjected to variability (Strumse, 1996). This theory is supported by several empirical studies.

However, not all environments can be explained by similarities in preferences. According to Kaplan and Kaplan (1989), additional important factors are environmental attributes enhancing the processes of understanding and exploration of the environment. The need to *understand* the environment can, for example, involve how to find a museum or a trail in nature, and how the elements belong to each other. The need to *explore* the environment can for example, relate to the degree of complexity (e.g., boring or chaotic). It can also relate to the degree of mysticism, for example, a trail in an adventure forest or an alley in a picturesque village.

In the second half of the twentieth century, sociology also began to focus on the impact of art and the aesthetic, like the social aspects of artworks (fashion and crafts). It also emphasized the sociological focus on the macro level rather than on the individual's consumption experience. Bourdieu (1986) provided the key sociological perspective. He used his research as part of an attack on the position of the philosopher Kant to show that aesthetic judgments are socially

³ One general approach states that people have a basic need to interact with nature. This is because, during human evolution, chances of survival were greater for individuals who were able to quickly recognize dangers and threats (Wilson, 1984).

determined rather than of an objective nature. Bourdieu's arguments have not received universal acceptance, partly because his analysis had a limited temporal and geographic basis, and avoids the historical and personal context of individuals' taste judgments (de Certeau et al., 1998).

Aesthetics in marketing and management literature

The different perspectives and theories from philosophy, psychology, and sociology have inspired the marketing and management literature on the more practical use of aesthetics regarding consumption. The economy is usually described as a system for the satisfaction of needs. As a result of increasing satisfaction of basic needs, there might be needs in the Western world today that are rising even more than functional needs, for example the desire for visibility. According to Read (1965), the evolution of aesthetics came when man, after making sure that products served their functional purpose, looked for further uses for them, focusing on emotions. Hence, the earlier, quite narrow focus based on the concept of "usability" has been replaced with the concept of "user experience".

Pine and Gilmore (1999) proposed aesthetics as one experiential dimension, along with entertainment, education, and escapism. When customers perceive that they learn something, are being entertained, are becoming immersed by just being there, or are doing something actively, the experience feels meaningful or extraordinary. According to this approach, the individual enjoying an aesthetic experience immerses himself or herself, but remains passive. Examples may be a visit to a museum or experiencing the scenery of Niagara Falls. In contrast, Tordsson (2006) argues that aesthetics not only involve passively receiving, but also actively sensing. In Western societies today, humans use a lot of energy sheltering from the outside world in order to select daily impressions. These efforts might result in "sensory numbness". As a means of countering this condition, Tordsson suggests an orientation on experiences in nature that can enhance the senses.

Most theories in marketing assume a subjectivist stance, focusing on customers' behavioural responses to various products and to the business environment or the "servicescape" (Wagner, 2000). "Servicescape" is here defined as the physical (or man-made) environment in which a service is delivered (Bitner, 1992, p. 58). Regarding aesthetic value, the subject is the customer interacting with the overall servicescape (the object). The aesthetic value of the service environment can be important for three reasons. First, services are intangible products, so customers may depend on the design of the servicescape to provide information on service

quality. Second, customers are often on the premises when services are delivered, so the perception of the service environment itself may be a source of pleasure. Third, aesthetic value may heighten the customers' overall satisfaction with the service experience (Wagner, 2000).

Aesthetic features have helped products to rise in the quality dimension and to have higher perceived values (Baisya & Das, 2008). In marketing research, the focus is increasingly on customer value. The term "value" can be defined as the pleasure derived from perceiving, evaluating, and judging a product or some facet of the product (Holbrook, 1999). A tourist provider cannot create value on behalf of the user, because the value manifests itself only when the service is consumed (Vargo & Lusch, 2008).⁴ The provider can instead offer attractive value propositions, which are configurations of resources that take the form of products and services (Skålén et al., 2014). In a nature-based context, value propositions can be signs and maps for cycling or hiking tours.

Based on the definitions and perspectives outlined above from the relevant disciplines on the concept of aesthetics, the following can be suggested as a definition for this thesis:

The concept of aesthetics is a general sense of learning. The aesthetic experience has both experiential and symbolic dimensions, and provides the consumer with added value. Appreciation of such consumption has both a cognitive and an affective or emotional component. Aesthetic elements can engage both products and business environments (servicescapes).

This is a broad definition that would not gain the agreement of theorists from all the above mentioned disciplines, but is an attempt to extract the concept of aesthetics from the period that is relevant for tourism research. The next chapter links aesthetics and nature-based tourism.

⁴ The user is therefore more or less an active part, and the co-production relationship has therefore been highlighted as a fundamental characteristic of services (Sundbo & Gallouj, 2000). Value creation in this context can be understood as a customer's creation of value-in-use, and can be distinguished from value co-creation, which is when the service provider supports the customer's value creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008; Grönroos, 2011).

2.2 Aesthetics and nature-based tourism

Introduction

Aesthetics is not a commonly used concept in tourism research in general. Instead, one tends to say something like tourist attractions or destinations are “interesting”, “attractive”, “beautiful”, “appealing”, etc. There are several reasons for linking the concept of aesthetics to nature-based tourism. First, there is an obvious historical link between viewing as in sightseeing and tourism (Urry, 2002).⁵ In tourism research, it has been acknowledged that aesthetic characteristics affect tourists’ experience and satisfaction, contributing to their loyalty towards a destination. Hence, destinations’ aesthetic qualities, such as scenery, have been an integral element of many satisfaction scales used in tourism research. Despite the fact that numerous studies have recognized the importance of the aesthetic qualities of a destination, these qualities have so far been largely reduced to a single dimensional variable such as “the place is beautiful” in the destination attribute satisfaction assessment.

The search for the answer to the question of “what we find beautiful” is, as mentioned, much debated from the perspective of philosophy. However, aesthetics in tourism could possess its own characteristics in that a tourism experience involves the full immersion of an individual into an environment that may be distinct from his or her everyday life. The experience may trigger human senses to become more responsive to outside stimuli, and allow more complex, human environmental interactions and exchanges. Thus, how and why tourists perceive a destination as being beautiful could potentially be similar to or distinct from the criteria researchers utilize to assess routine environments. Nevertheless, until now, these areas have been largely neglected in the tourism literature (Kirillova et al., 2014).

Unlike conventional products and services, a nature-based tourism destination is a multifaceted concept and cannot be reduced to only environments, products, or services provided in situ. A destination includes a number of attributes that potential tourists use as input information before they chose the destination. Aesthetic dimensions are one of these attributes, linked to satisfaction with the overall tourism experience, destination loyalty, and intention to return. The importance of aesthetic dimensions varies from one destination to another. Aesthetics may contribute to the formation of the destination image and specifically its functional and common characteristics at

⁵ A substantial body of literature exists on aesthetic notions regarding landscape preferences and the establishment of national parks (e.g. Bourassa, 1990; Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009). However, this is not the focus of this thesis.

the attribute level. Aesthetic judgment, which occurs at tourism destinations, is also part of the overall appraisal of a tourism experience, and therefore deserves close attention from destination management (Kirillova et al., 2014). When the negative aesthetic perceptions of e.g. the landscape have influenced the tourists, they may transfer these perceptions onto the other parts of the trip, then to the whole destination. The aesthetic value can therefore influence both ethical and economic value. Negative feelings can affect the tourist buying and consuming habits thereby weakening economic value (Wang et al., 2010).

Aesthetic dimensions

There are few empirical studies focusing on aesthetics and the man-made environment in nature-based tourism. Existing studies show that “harmony”, “clean environment”, and “viewing” in particular, as well as “design” and “attractive”, are central dimensions. These studies mainly focus on the visual aspect, like “viewing the architecture” and “viewing the ice sculptures”. Most of the studies apply a quantitative approach. The studies are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Aesthetic dimensions from relevant empirical studies in tourism

Authors	Data sources & country	Results related to aesthetics
Albacete-Sáez et al. (2007)	A survey with rural accommodation service users in Spain.	Dimensions: <i>Internal and external decoration is attractive and in harmony with the rural surroundings. Individual and communal areas are clean.</i>
Hazen (2009)	Visitors at natural World Heritage sites in the USA.	Aesthetic values: <i>Viewing/ scenery, beauty and cleanliness.</i>
Haukeland & Midtgard (2000)	Interviews with international tourists in northern Norway.	Valued experiences in nature: <i>Silence and recreation, contrasts in the landscape, unique light, alpine mountain formations in coastal environments, buildings in harmony with nature, authentic surroundings, atmosphere, beautiful buildings.</i>
Hosany & Witham (2009)	A survey with tourists on a cruise ship from Singapore to Hong Kong.	Aesthetic indicators: <i>Attraction, design details, comfort, feeling of harmony.</i>
Kirillova et al. (2014)	Interviews with tourists at both urban destinations and nature-based destinations.	21 aesthetic dimensions that were categorized into nine themes: <i>Scale, Time, Condition, Sound, Balance, Diversity, Novelty, Shape, and Uniqueness</i>
Mehmetoglu & Engen (2011)	A survey with tourists in a festival and a museum in Norway.	Aesthetic indicators: <i>“I experience the surroundings as attractive.” “The surroundings strengthened my overall experience.”</i>
Oh et al. (2007)	A survey with guests at bed-and-breakfasts in the USA.	Aesthetic factors: <i>Harmony, comfort, attraction, design, sensual satisfaction.</i>
Slåtten et al. (2009)	A survey with visitors to a winter park in Norway.	Design: <i>Viewing the ice sculptures, viewing the architecture in the winter park.</i> Ambience: <i>the sound, the smell, the lighting in the winter park.</i>

Nature-based tourism experiences

The empirical experiential studies have focused on cultural experiences and, according to Vespestad and Lindberg (2011), there is a need to direct attention towards nature-based experiences in tourism. It appears as if every review article about nature-based tourism and nature-based experiences introduces a different definition. How the literature defines nature-based tourism, nature tourists, and nature-based experiences is of relevance for this thesis. Thus, I will present the most important viewpoints according to the definitions.

Nature-based tourism is frequently used synonymously with terms such as ecotourism, sustainable tourism, green tourism, alternative tourism, and responsible tourism (Weaver, 2002; Weiler & Hall, 1992). This phenomenon represents a relatively new market in the tourism industry, one that has captured the interest of destination marketers and planners, particularly in the past decade. The reason for this attention is the increasing demand for travel to areas of the world perceived as having “unspoilt nature”.

Based on a review, Fredman and Tyrväinen (2010) have concluded that most scholars interpret nature-based tourism as being associated with “leisure activities that take place in nature, and that the key components are tourists, nature, and the experiences in nature” (p.180). This study employs this broad definition. Furthermore, the nature-based tourism industry represents those activities in different sectors that are aimed at meeting the demand of nature tourists. Fredman et al. (2009) have identified four recurrent themes in nature-based tourism: visitors to natural areas, experiences of a natural environment, participation in an activity, and normative components related to sustainable development and local impacts. This study focuses mainly on the first theme, and in particular will emphasize man-made environments in nature.

According to Mehmetoglu (2006, 2007), nature-based tourists are not a homogeneous group, but can include people from various market segments based on factors such as trip activities or travel mode choice. This thesis focuses mainly on independent tourists who are likely to value nature-based activities such as short hiking tours or cycling. Regardless of the nature-based tourist activity, some infrastructure is required to complement the natural attraction. Examples are transport, accommodation, and specific visitor facilities. Accommodation varies between “hard” and “soft” dimensions (Laarman & Durst, 1987). At the “soft” end of the spectrum, nature-based tourists prefer comfort, and this may include hotels and motels. Those at the “hard” end choose to rough it by camping in the wilderness. Creating an inventory of accommodation and

other supporting infrastructure is an essential component of resource assessment. It is also central in marketing to different types of nature-based tourists (Priskin, 2001).

The attention given to nature-based experiences by both the media and the general public seems to be rising. This is also evident in the growing number of research articles related to experiences (e.g., Ladwein, 2007; Mehmetoglu, 2007). Moreover, as nature-based experiences are part of daily life, the distinction between nature-based tourism and recreation is blurred. Leisure experiences are understood as “an emerging state of mind resulting from interactions between the leisure participant and his/her surroundings” (Lee & Shafer, 2002, p. 291). Non-commercial nature-based leisure is a part of many people’s lives, but at the same time it can to some extent be a part of tourism. When on holiday, people often take part in nature-based experiences, including those that are not packaged as commercial experiences. Nevertheless, nature-based experiences become part of tourism, as they are intertwined in the total tourism experience, and might be the very reason that tourism consumption takes place. A nature-based tourism experience must involve or be associated with some sort of commercial interest. Commercialization of nature-based experiences then refers to an “added value” that should be communicated from the presenter to the consumer so that the benefits are clear (Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011).

Several authors suggest that tourists seek experiences that contribute to their personal identity (e.g., Holt, 2002; Selstad, 2007). An experience hence becomes another form of expressive culture, and consumption obtains a symbolic value as well as meaning through the expression of self. This can be identified among participants in activities such as surfing, where the participants clearly identify themselves with a group or tribe (Preston-Whyte, 2002). Nature-based experiences can be part of a lifestyle where one chooses activities and experiences that reflect the common interests of the lifestyle and have the desired symbolic value within a certain group or culture (Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994). Therefore, lifestyles and social belonging could be central aspects of nature-based tourism experiences.

Nature-based tourism experiences within the experience economy are not perceptions of a purely natural phenomenon, but rather the experiences are somehow staged (e.g., Bærenholdt & Sundbo, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). In adventure tourism experiences, for example, the activity is arguably the core of the experience, and consequently nature becomes a setting. Nature is an important part of the experience, but activity in nature creates meaning, and the provider’s

presentation adds value. One could argue that nature is somehow interpreted by both the provider and the tourist, hence the organization of the experience is vital for the outcome. The concept of aesthetics generally refers to consumers' interpretation of their physical or man-made environment (Wagner, 2000). Bitner (1992) classifies the physical environment (servicescape) into "ambient conditions", "space/function", and "signs, symbols, and artefacts". Ambient conditions affect the five senses and include background characteristics of the environment such as temperature, lighting, noise, music, and odour. An attractive servicescape may heighten overall customer satisfaction with the service and differentiate the business from its competitors (Wagner, 2000). This is supported by empirical studies in the tourism literature (e.g., hotels and restaurants) indicating a relationship between the aesthetic qualities of "design" and "architecture" and atmosphere at tourism businesses and consumer satisfaction, well-being, and future intentions (e.g., Albacete-Sáez et al., 2007). Figure 1 illustrates the tourists' overall experience, including the natural environment and the man-made environment, at a nature-based destination.

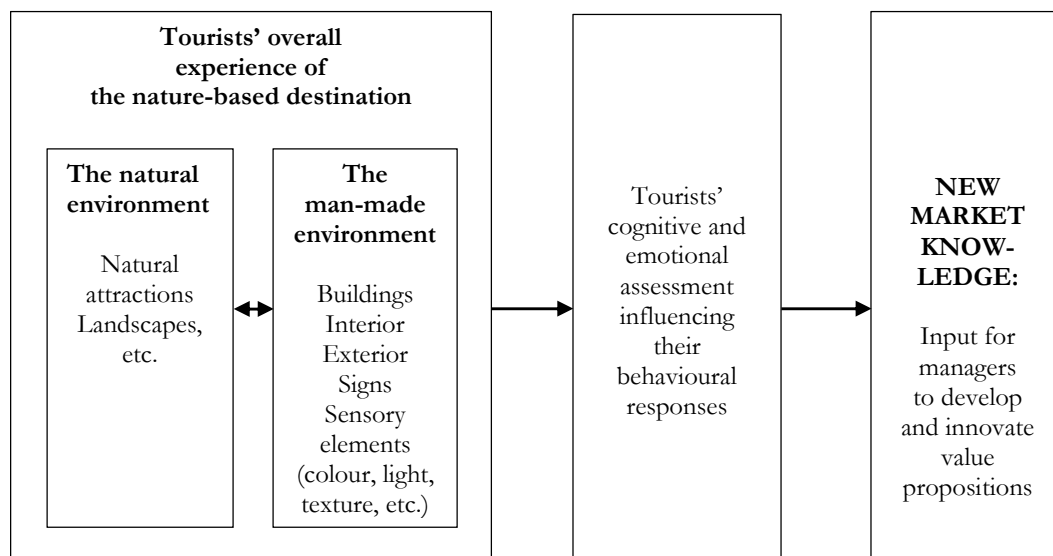


Figure 1. The nature-based tourists' overall experience

In the first stage, the tourists experience the destination and its products and services. This stage is made up of a series of activities, which helps consumers to give meaning and to convey symbolic value to their choices. This includes both the natural environment and the man-made environment. Consumer experience is subjective, and to a large extent is based on emotions and social interaction. This stage also includes experiential dimensions (e.g. aesthetic dimensions), and value creation in experiential production. In the second stage, the tourists evaluate their experiences by matching the outcomes from various sources such as media and relatives with

their own expectations (Pizam et al., 1978). Their evaluation typically results in feelings of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction, which has ramifications in terms of intentions to either return or switch to other destinations and tell others about favourable or unfavourable aspects of their experiences (Baker & Crompton, 2000). The evaluation is a combination of cognitive and emotional assessment. Cognitive assessment has traditionally been used to measure service quality and satisfaction, e.g., the cognitive confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations of service compared with perceptions of the actual service performance. Emotional or affected assessment also has significance in tourism. This is a research area about which the tourism industry needs more knowledge for further development and for innovation processes (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007).

Development and innovation processes are central to many firms and organizations, as well as in nature-based tourism. In the last fifty years, innovation has become a huge research area, and this thesis considers it (in the four papers) with regard to the implications of the aesthetic dimensions on customers' experiences and values. There is no consensus in the literature about how to define innovation, but the concept is usually understood to refer to two processes: (1) creating something new, and (2) developing this into goods or services that have economic and societal value or impact (Fuglsang & Rønning, 2014, p. 2).

The case examined in this thesis takes place in an experiential context including both public and private providers. In public service sectors, the impact factor of innovation is complex. Work practices can often differ in terms of the way in which organizations describe work in manuals, and so on (Brown & Duguid, 1991). This may also be the case for destination organizations in nature-based tourism, and can blind the organizations' core to the actual and usually valuable practices of its members. Closing that gap can help reorganize organizations to improve working, learning, and innovating. Thus, Fuglsang and Rønning (2014) call for contextualization of research or case studies. This thesis does not explore how public and private actors deal with situational and contextual elements in practice. Rather, the focus is on gaining knowledge of aesthetic dimensions as a valuable input to better facilitate customers' value creation in a nature-based destination.

2.3 Qualities and behavioural responses

The following two sections focus on the relationships between service qualities, *satisfaction*, and loyalty intentions and those between experiential qualities, *positive emotions* and loyalty intentions.

Service qualities, satisfaction, and loyalty intentions

Destination marketing strategies based on positive word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations from past visitors and creating repeat visitors can play a major role in helping tourist destinations to survive in an increasingly competitive global market. The relationship between service quality in general, satisfaction, and loyalty is therefore well recognized in studies of tourists' behaviour (e.g., Baker & Crompton, 2000; Chen et al., 2011). The results indicate that service quality has both direct and indirect effects on different aspects of loyalty mediated by overall satisfaction. Recommendations to other people and repeated purchases are typically referred to as consumer loyalty in the marketing literature.

Satisfaction is a multifaceted concept and becomes more complex when the setting is a destination including multiple service providers. Phillips et al. (2013) define overall satisfaction as the individual's subjective consumption evaluation based on all the elements associated with the experience. This thesis focuses on the aesthetic dimensions or qualities in this respect. The concept of satisfaction is defined by marketers as post-purchase behaviour, and this is of strategic importance to businesses due to its influence on repeated purchases and word-of-mouth recommendations (Heung & Quf, 2000). Among others, Soutar (2001) has concluded that satisfied customers are much more likely to show positive post-purchase behaviours, such as taking part in repeat visits, remaining loyal, and providing positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Revisiting has generally been regarded as desirable, both because the marketing costs are lower than those required to obtain first-time tourists and because it is a positive indicator of satisfaction. Findings from empirical studies show that service quality has both direct and indirect effects on loyalty mediated by overall satisfaction. The study of Cole and Illum (2006), for example, indicates that service quality did not affect loyalty directly, but only indirectly through satisfaction. By contrast, other studies within a nature-based context found that service quality had a significant and direct effect on loyalty. A few studies also indicate that service quality has both a direct effect as well as an indirect effect on loyalty mediated by satisfaction. However,

these studies show that the effects of quality and satisfaction on the intention to revisit are not necessarily similar to their effects on the willingness to make a recommendation to others. The results from the studies are illustrated in Figure 2.

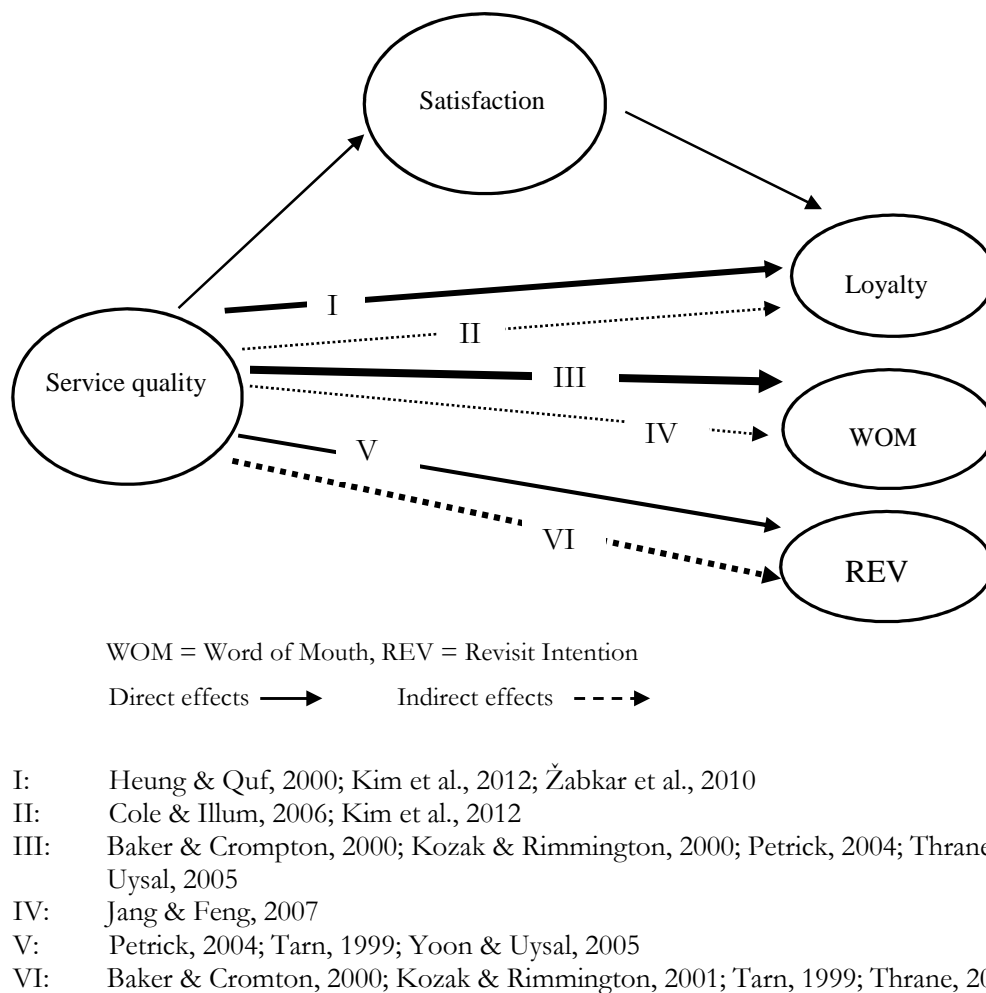


Figure 2. A model showing the relationship between service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty intentions from empirical studies

Experiential qualities, positive emotions and loyalty intentions

Many functional products have gained competitive advantage by satisfying aesthetic as well as utilitarian needs, which are both functional and non-functional (Holbrook & Schindler, 1994). There are two qualities of aesthetic response. The first, which is called “hedonic value”, refers to the diffuse sense of pleasure or generalized enjoyment that one feels looking at a beautiful or attractive element in nature (e.g., a waterfall). The second is the profound experience, which deals with the feeling of being deeply moved. This points to the fact that aesthetics can be broadly

looked upon as the sense of pleasure one achieves by mere physical attraction related to any of the faculties. This means that the aesthetics of a product affects us completely, not only in the visual sense (Baisya & Das, 2008).

Considering that tourists' experiences can be termed "pleasure-driven" or "hedonic", it is reasonable to assume that positive emotions are what most tourists seek or expect from their experiences. Thus, positive emotions can be described as a core product of tourist services. Accordingly, it is important to understand what contributes to this category of emotions within the framework of tourism. In line with this reasoning, emotion is related to a person's (positive) emotional state, which arises from experiences. Several researchers indicate a significant relationship and direct effects between experiential qualities and positive emotions (e.g., Kim & Moon, 2009; Pullmann, 2004).

This thesis also suggests a relationship between positive emotions and loyalty. This notion is based on the belief that emotions can elicit a range of response types. These loyalty responses can be divided into two main groups: (1) behavioural responses, and (2) non-behavioural responses. Negative emotions as a result of a negative appraisal of a tourism experience may lead to consequences such as deciding to avoid the experience in the future (a behavioural response) as well as failing to recommend the experience to others (non-behavioural response). On the other hand, positive emotions may lead to decisions to revisit the attraction or place in the future (behavioural response) and recommendations to others to do the same (non-behavioural response). The point is that emotions, linked to appraisal of experiences, often result in mental notes, or are stored in our memories (Johnston & Clark, 2001).

Consequently, emotions function as a key stimulus for future activities (Izard, 1977). This thesis links such activities to loyalty responses based on positive emotions. Following this line of reasoning, there are good reasons to assume that positive emotions are related to loyalty responses. Results from studies indicate a positive relationship between positive emotions and loyalty responses (e.g., Bigné et al., 2005; Yu & Dean, 2001). Table 3 summarizes the results from selected empirical studies.

Table 3. Selected empirical studies with regard to the relationship between positive emotions and loyalty intentions

Author	Study context and method	Independent variables	Dependent variable(s)	Results
Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth (2005)	Theme park (Spain)	Positive emotions	Loyalty intentions	Positive emotions have direct and indirect effects on loyalty.
Bigné, Mattila, & Andreu (2008)	Museum and theme park	Positive emotions	Loyalty intentions	Positive emotions have direct and indirect effects on loyalty.
Bloemer & Ruyter (1999)	Railway, restaurants, etc.	Positive emotions	Loyalty	Positive emotions have effect on loyalty.
Brunner-Sperdin & Peters (2009)	Hotel (alpine & spa)	Experiential qualities	Emotional state	Experiential qualities affect emotional state.
Huang, Scott, Ding, & Cheng (2012)	Culture	Emotions Satisfaction	Loyalty	Emotions have effect on loyalty.
Kim & Moon (2009)	Restaurant	Aesthetic qualities Emotions	REV	Service quality has indirect effect on REV. Emotions have direct effect on REV.
Kuenzel & Yassim (2007)	Cricket	Emotions Satisfaction	Loyalty	Emotions have indirect effect on loyalty (WOM & REV).
Lee, Lee, Lee, & Babin (2008)	Festival	Service quality Emotions	Loyalty	Service quality and emotions have effect on loyalty.
Lee, Back, & Kim (2009)	Restaurant	Positive emotions Satisfaction	Loyalty	Positive emotions have direct and indirect effects on loyalty.
Lee, Lee, & Choi (2011)	Festival	Functional and emotional value Satisfaction	Behavioural intentions	Emotions have direct effect on behavioural intentions.
Pullmann (2004)	VIP tent Touring circus	Experiential design elements Emotions	Loyalty – WOM	Experiential qualities and emotions have effect on loyalty, and indirect effect on WOM.
Slåtten, Mehmetoglu, Svensson, & Sværi (2009)	Winter park	Design Emotions	Loyalty intentions – WOM	Design and emotions have effect on WOM.
White & Yu (2005)	Private institution (Switzerland)	Satisfaction Emotions	Behavioural intentions	Emotions have effect on loyalty (WOM).
Yu & Dean (2001)	Destinations in Austria	Positive emotions	Loyalty – WOM	Positive emotions have effect on WOM.

WOM = Word of Mouth, REV = Revisit Intention

3. THE PROJECT AND THE RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter presents the goal of the thesis, the research questions, and the theoretical models based on the theoretical framework. Furthermore, it presents the research method.

3.1 The research questions and the theoretical models

Based on the theoretical framework, the overall goal of this thesis is twofold. First, it aims to gain knowledge of central aesthetic dimensions in nature-based tourism. Second, it aims to gain knowledge of how these aesthetic dimensions influence the variables satisfaction, positive emotions, and customer loyalty. To achieve these aims, the concept of aesthetics as a phenomenon is explored in four papers. The methods used for data collection were qualitative interviews and a survey in a nature-based context.

The four appended papers raise the following research questions (RQs):

Research questions		Paper
RQ 1:	How can we understand the concept of aesthetics in nature-based tourism experiences, and what are the central aesthetic dimensions in such a context?	1 & 2
RQ 2:	How do aesthetic qualities influence tourists' overall <i>satisfaction</i> and loyalty intentions?	3
RQ 3:	How do aesthetic qualities affect tourists' <i>positive emotions</i> and loyalty intentions?	4

Research Question 1 seeks to identify central aesthetic dimensions from both key informants' and tourists' perspectives. Research Questions 2 and 3 relate to tourists' perspectives. The loyalty intentions are (1) the intention to recommend the road to others, (2) the intention to revisit, and (3) the intention to visit other similar scenic roads.

Figure 3 is a theoretical model based on the theoretical framework, illustrating the relationship between aesthetic qualities on one side and loyalty intentions on the other, mediated for satisfaction (RQ 3).

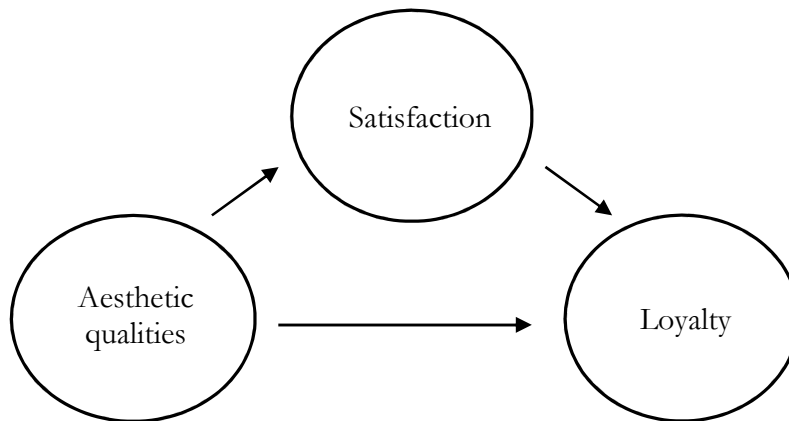


Figure 3. The theoretical model showing the relationship between aesthetic qualities, satisfaction, and loyalty

Traditional cognitive assessment is used for Research Question 3 to measure service quality and satisfaction, e.g., the cognitive confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations of service compared with perceptions of the actual service performance.

Emotional or affected assessment also has significance in tourism, and this is emphasized in Research Question 4. Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between aesthetic qualities on one side and loyalty intentions on the other, mediated for positive emotions (RQ 4).

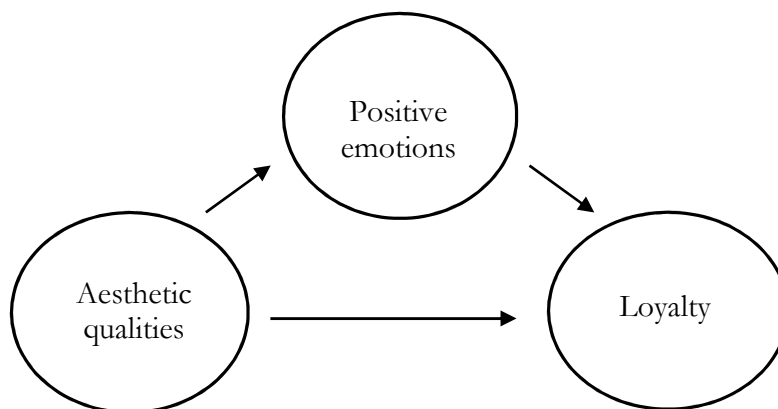


Figure 4. The theoretical model showing the relationship between aesthetic qualities, positive emotions, and loyalty

3.2 The research method

The following sections provide a description of the research setting and the methods applied in this thesis. First, it presents the project “National Tourist Routes”, and the chosen case “National Tourist Route Geiranger–Trollstigen”.⁶ Then, it describes the methods, data collection, and analysis.

Case description

A case study approach was chosen for this research. The objective of a case study is “sense-making” in terms of understanding a phenomenon under investigation and the process through which this phenomenon and the context influence each other. The intention of case study research is to gain an “in-depth” understanding of a phenomenon in a “real-life” setting. A case study is valuable for revealing the uniqueness of a setting, and for illuminating both the historical background and the internal contextual characteristics of the case (Stake, 2000).

The chosen case is that of the “National Tourist Routes” in Norway, more precisely “The National Tourist Route Geiranger–Trollstigen”. Before I describe the specific route, I will provide a description of the “Tourist Route” project. The project started with the Travel Industry Project in 1994. Between 1999 and 2004, several individual attractions were selected to be incorporated into a new national tourist attraction. The result of this work was published in the Road Director’s project directive for the investment sphere National Tourist Routes 2002–2015 and the Project Plan 2006–2015 for the Tourist Route project. Eighteen National Tourist Routes were to be developed by 2015 (later changed to 2020). Commissioned by the Storting (Norwegian parliament) and the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the project involves long-term plans and budgets. Its objective is increased economic activity and enhanced opportunities for local residents, particularly in rural regions (Norwegian Public Roads Administration, 2006, p. 3).

“The National Tourist Routes will be stretches of road along which tourists are presented with the best of Norwegian scenery... Their experiences of the scenery and cultural landscape are intended to be genuine and unique, where the original scenery is embellished with traces of our own time

⁶ <http://www.nasjonaleturistveger.no/en/geiranger-trollstigen>

through innovative architecture, art and design, characterised by quality from the initial idea to the last shovelful, nail and coat of paint” (Berre & Lysholm, 2008, p.10).

The target segment is the individual round-trip tourist, and the project is marketing the routes as memorable journeys. The project is the largest public tourism project in Norway so far, with a budget of more than 258 million euros for the period 2002–2015. The money has been allocated to improving journeys, developing rest areas, providing parking for activities and experiences, providing information, and more. The elements the project expects other actors to provide include activities and experiences, as well as food, accommodation, and hospitality that meet the same quality requirements that apply to the project’s own initiatives. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration is responsible for project management, in co-operation with two architecture committees comprising architects, landscape architects, and artists.

The chosen route in this thesis is the “National Tourist Route Geiranger–Trollstigen” (County Road 63). The route qualified for Tourist Route status in 2012. The route has a total length of 106 kilometres, and runs from Langevatn on the Strynefjell plateau to Sogge bridge in the county of Møre og Romsdal. The route includes a ferry across the Nordalsfjord from Eidsdal to Linge. The Trollstigen road and the stretch from Geiranger to Langvatn are closed during the winter season. Activity involving art and design installations started in 2000, and was completed between 2006 and 2011. The installations include Gudbrandsjuvet, Flydalsjuvet, Trollstigplatået, Ørnesvingen, and Linge Ferry Quay.

The “National Tourist Route Geiranger–Trollstigen” was chosen for the following reasons: (1) It combines nature, architecture, design, and art at the viewpoints and at the tourism businesses (e.g., cafeterias and accommodation). Both the cafeteria and the viewpoint on the Trollstigen plateau have received much international attention. The architectural design is adapted to the landscape. One of the hotels along the route, “Juvet Landscape Hotel”⁷, has won a number of awards because of its distinctive architecture and location. (2) This route is an example of co-operation between public and private actors in the development and innovation processes. (3) The Trollstigen route, is the second most visited nature-based attraction in Norway, drawing about 600 000 visitors during the summer season. The historic “Trollstigen road”, with its 11 hairpin bends, was opened in 1936, and in 2005 the Geirangerfjord was included on UNESCO’s

⁷ www.juvet.com (accessed on 5 March 2013).

World Heritage List. The route attracts both international and domestic visitors, and the market segments are a combination of independent and individual round-trip tourists, mountain tourists, and organized-cruise tourists.

Mixed methods

This study is of an exploratory nature, as little previous empirical research exists on the topic. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods proved valuable for the research. The empirical material comprises qualitative interviews in phase I and a quantitative survey in phase II, the design of the latter being based on the results of the interviews in phase I. Figure 5 shows an overview of the links between the papers.

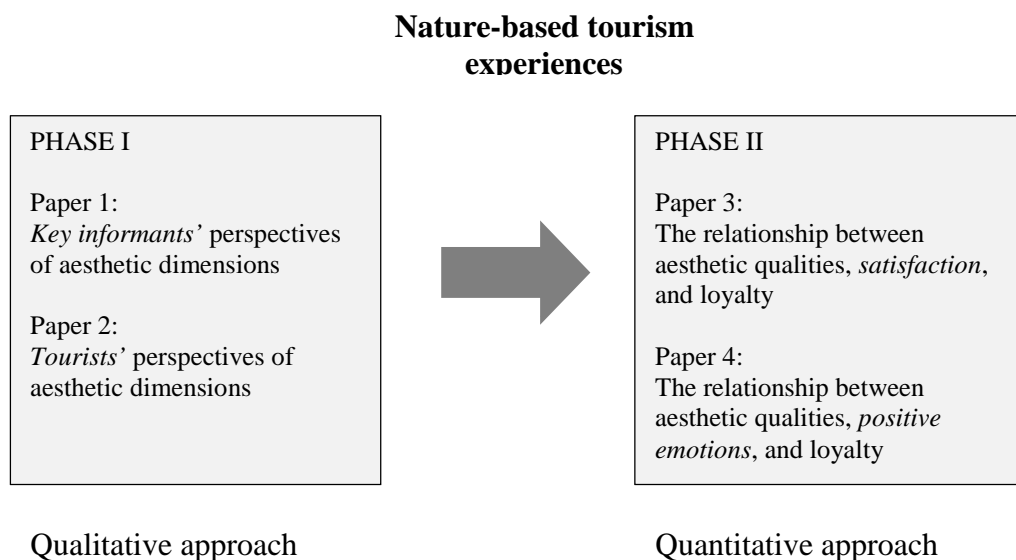


Figure 5. An overview of the links between the papers

Mixed methods can answer a broader and more complete range of research questions because the researcher is not confined to a single method or approach (Bryman, 2006).

Data collection

Interviews

The study aims to reveal aesthetic dimensions by using personal semi-structured interviews. Four main criteria were adopted in the process of selecting key informants for the interviews (Paper 1). First, the sample of informants was designed to reflect the depth and complexity of the topic by

representing various disciplines. This approach included both positive and contradictory instances that could challenge assumptions and ideas. Second, the informants were to provide useful and meaningful empirical contexts and examples in order to develop a theoretical argument about the different aesthetic dimensions in the chosen context. Third, the number of informants was large enough to make meaningful comparisons and to obtain satisfactory information in order to reach the degree of saturation (Mason, 2002). Finally, several of the informants had experience with product development of nature-based experiences in tourism, including the “National Tourist Routes” in Norway.

The sample includes 14 informants, with backgrounds in academia and industry. To achieve diversity in the sample, the academics were carefully selected from seven universities in Norway and Sweden, and one was from a university college. They represented relevant disciplines that deal with aesthetics as a general sense of learning (i.e., environmental psychology, architecture, musicology, psychology, health, nature, and environment) and disciplines within tourism such as marketing, experiential economy, and nature-based tourism. The industry managers represented the fields of economic geography, architecture, experiential economy, attraction development, and nature-based attraction. Together they represented a very broad knowledge base regarding the concept of aesthetics.

The interview guide was tested on a group of colleagues, and was modified after these pilot interviews (see Appendix 1). The interviews were individual face-to-face interviews. Each interview lasted for about one to one and a half hours, and began with a short presentation. In the main part of the interview, the informants gave their views and examples of the concept of aesthetics and aesthetic dimensions that in their opinion may affect tourists’ satisfaction in a nature-based tourism context. Twelve of the interviews took place at various universities and businesses. For practical reasons, one interview was conducted via Skype and another by telephone.

In addition, I undertook qualitative interviews with ten tourists while they were visiting the “National Tourist Route Geiranger–Trollstigen” (Paper 2). The primary segment for the tourist route is the individual round-trip tourist. A purposeful sampling from this segment was therefore conducted. Most of the interviews took place at a cafeteria at the viewpoint for Trollstigen, while one was conducted at a ferry pier and others were conducted at camping sites. Other sample-selection criteria were variations in nationality, travel partner, and transport. The ten tourists each

gave rich and varied information that pointed to relevant aesthetic dimensions in the tourist experience. For seven of the tourists, it was natural that both they and their travel partners participated in the interview. This resulted in valuable discussions and reflections on the topic. The sample provided sufficient information for making meaningful comparisons and the reaching of saturation (Mason, 2002). The interviews were semi-structured, and an interview guide (in Norwegian and English) was used for data collection (see Appendix 2). The interviews began by informing the tourists about the purpose of the study and explaining the theme of the questions. The tourists then gave a short summary of where they had come from, their travel companion, and the type of transport they were using. In the main part of the interview, the participants specified how they would describe an aesthetic nature experience and gave views and examples of important conditions while travelling along the route. The interviews lasted for between 40 minutes and one hour, and the recordings were transcribed verbatim. Occupying tourists' vacation time can be perceived as disturbing, and five tourists who were approached did not want to be interviewed, three stating that they did not have time, while the other two gave no further explanation.

Quantitative survey

Prior to the quantitative data collection, a pilot test was conducted to refine the survey questionnaire. Twenty individual tourists who visited the tourist route at the end of June 2012 participated in the pilot test (11 international and nine domestic travellers). Based on the results of this test, the survey questionnaire was refined and finalized.

The sample for this thesis is composed of individual travellers on holiday along the National Tourist Route Geiranger–Trollstigen. A total of 1030 questionnaires were randomly distributed to individual tourists along the road in July 2012. The primary market segment for the route is the individual round-trip tourist, and most of the questionnaires (63.3%) were therefore distributed at two of the most visited nature attractions (Trollstigen and Gudbrandsjuvet), where the project has combined nature, architecture, and design. The other sampling points were at the ferries Linge and Eidsdal, located approximately in the middle of the National Tourist Route. Tourists answered the questionnaire themselves, and four project assistants collected the questionnaires directly afterwards.

The questionnaire was available in Norwegian, English, and German, and included mostly closed questions with a number of defined response choices. The respondents were asked to mark their

responses using a cross for each statement, condition, aspect, or feeling. Ten questionnaires were unusable, and another ten questionnaires were answered by respondents who were less than 18 years old. Of the 1030 questionnaires distributed, 1010 were available for use.

Data analysis

Qualitative analysis

In order to analyse central aesthetic dimensions in nature-based tourism experiences, I employed a “thematic analysis” to analyse patterns of themes within data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The raw data were analysed using a coding process inspired by Corbin and Strauss (2008). This procedure provides a basis for making comparisons or connections within the data. The analytic process involved the following steps for both the data from key informants and that from tourists (Papers 1 and 2). First, I carefully listened to all the interviews and read them several times in order to get a general sense of the entire body of data. Next, the written information was coded into words and phrases from the interviews based on the research question. The analysis of the codes then took place in order to find relationships between them that could identify different themes or categories. The coded answers sometimes addressed more than one category at a time. Some of them were therefore revised in the process and new ones were added to reflect the informants’ opinions. The criteria for selecting the number of categories were that they both should mirror what the majority of the respondents highlighted and should reflect the depth and complexity of the concept. Finally, they should provide a sensible number for analytical purposes (Mason, 2002).

Some dimensions were revised in the process, and new ones were added to reflect the informants’ opinions. The coded answers, from the open to the selective coding, sometimes overlapped each other. This occurred especially in relation to the experiences in nature with the data from key informants. Examples were the dimensions of “harmony” and “genuineness”. Despite this overlapping, they were categorized as separate aesthetic dimensions because they did not overlap regarding the man-made environment in nature. Feeling harmony at a tourism business may not depend on the local traditions, but on the overall theme or design, for example.

The criteria for selecting the number of categories were that they should mirror what the majority of the respondents highlighted, and should also reflect the depth and complexity of the concept. Finally, they should provide a sensible number for analytical purposes (Mason, 2002).

The analysis with the key informants (Paper 1) resulted in five categories or dimensions as a preliminary framework that represented the aesthetic dimensions in a nature-based tourism context: “harmony”, “genuineness”, “variation/contrast”, “scenery/viewing”, and “art and architecture”. Six of the 14 informants highlighted all five dimensions, and most of them referred to several dimensions. The analysis with the tourists (Paper 2) also resulted in five categories or dimensions: “variation/contrast”, “harmony”, “scenery/viewing”, “genuineness”, and “cleanliness”. Six of the ten tourists highlighted all five dimensions, and most of them referred to several dimensions.

The data from the interviews were created as a result of co-operation between the respondents and the interviewer (me). Another interviewer might have produced other results, because dialogues are complex and multi-layered, and can lead to different but equally valid interpretations. As a means of meeting the requirement of credibility (Lincoln & Gobi, 1985), the results were discussed in a workshop with researchers at a university college in Norway.

Quantitative analyses – measures and scale items

To test the proposed model, I used items based on information revealed in the interviews with key informants and tourists, and the results from previous empirical research, instead of conducting a factor analysis to reduce the data.

The aesthetic experiential qualities, the overall satisfaction with the scenic road (in Paper 3), the positive emotions (in Paper 4), and the loyalty intentions were measured on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree (see Appendix 3). It was also possible to answer “not relevant” (8). “Not relevant” was re-coded as “4” in order not to lose too many cases for the multivariate analyses.

Satisfaction (Paper 3) was measured with the item “How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements when you think back on what you have experienced along the Geiranger–Trollstigen road?” (Place one cross for each statement). One of the statements was “On the whole, I am happy with the experiences I have had along the road.”

Cognitive assessments have traditionally been used to measure service quality and satisfaction. They argue that emotional assessments also have significance, and emphasize that there is little

empirical research in this area. In this thesis, I wanted to measure both emotional and cognitive assessments. For example, “harmony” was used as both an emotional item (emotional assessment) and as an aesthetic quality item (cognitive assessment). In Paper 4, I selected four positive emotions that were revealed in the interviews with key informants and tourists, and supported by the experiential and nature-based literature. These were “excitement”, “joy”, “inspiration”, and “harmony”. In the questionnaire, I asked: “To what degree have the feelings below been aroused when you think back on what you have seen and experienced in general along the Geiranger–Trollstigen road?” One of the emotion items was: “I have felt harmony.” I am aware that harmony is a diffuse and abstract concept that nature-based tourists may have difficulty in explaining. Nevertheless, results from previous studies and interviews with experts show that harmony is a relevant feeling regarding nature-based experiences. Some informants also mentioned the words “balance” and “coherence” in relation to the concept of harmony. In the analysis, the four emotions were combined into one variable: positive emotions.

The two revisit intentions were divided into (1) intention to revisit the specific Geiranger–Trollstigen National Tourist Route and (2) intention to visit similar routes. In the questionnaire, tourists were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: “I am going to drive on this road again” (revisit the route) and “I am going to drive on similar roads again” (visit similar routes).⁸

I used Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (CA) for the analysis of reliability. The analysis indicated that the CAs were sufficiently high for five of the aesthetic qualities; that is, they were approximately the minimum value of 0.50, which is considered acceptable as an indication of reliability for short scales, such as those with fewer than 10 items (Pallant, 2004). For the aesthetic quality of “variation/contrast”, the CA was 0.32, and was therefore excluded from further analyses.

Regression analyses

To test the proposed model in Papers 3 and 4, with multiple items for the independent variables and only one item for the dependent variable, a series of OLS (ordinary least squares) regression

⁸ Intention to visit similar routes cannot help the Geiranger–Trollstigen route to build loyalty, but it can indicate that the tourists might be loyal to similar nature-based routes in the future. In Norway, for example, there are 17 National Tourist Routes.

analyses was conducted. The chosen method is based on the principle of parsimony, compared with more complicated methods, such as structural equation modelling.

Overall satisfaction was considered as a mediator in Paper 3. First, the independent variables explaining the dependent variable of satisfaction were aesthetic qualities. In the second step of the analyses, satisfaction was considered as an independent variable together with aesthetic qualities, which explains the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit.

The results were controlled for the variables nationality, previous visits, age, number of stops, travel companion, type of visits, education, and income. First-time visitors were coded 1 and repeaters 0. Likewise, international visitors were coded 1 and Norwegians 0, and finally, travel companions with children were coded 1 and companions without children were coded 0. The variables explained little of the variance in the dependent variables (the three loyalty intentions). Furthermore, the results from the regression analysis did not distinguish any difference when all the variables in the equation were controlled for simultaneously. Aesthetic qualities and satisfaction predicted the same outcome regarding the effects on loyalty intentions.

Positive emotions were considered as a mediator in Paper 4. I used the same procedure for the regression analyses in Paper 4 as for those in Paper 3. Again, the results were controlled for the variables nationality, previous visits, age, number of stops, travel companion, type of visits, education, and income. The results from the regression analysis did not distinguish any difference when all the variables in the equation were controlled for simultaneously. Aesthetic qualities and positive emotions predicted the same outcome regarding the effects on loyalty intentions.

The regression models in Papers 3 and 4 were checked for multicollinearity by means of the variance inflation factors (VIF), and no evidence was detected (no scores exceeded 1.89).

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the links between the research questions and the research papers, followed by a summary of each of the four papers.

4.1 Papers 1 and 2: Exploring aesthetic dimensions in nature-based tourists' experiences (Research Question 1)

The purpose of Paper 1 is to add to the understanding of the concept of aesthetics in the context of nature-based tourism. Specifically, aesthetic dimensions were investigated based on qualitative interviews with key informants and experts from different fields. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The purpose of Paper 2 is also to add to the understanding of the concept of aesthetics in the context of nature-based tourism. However, in contrast to Paper 1, the perspective in Paper 2 is that of tourists. The empirical context was a specific tourist route in Norway. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with travellers on holiday along the route to explore how they expressed central aesthetic dimensions in such a context.

The results from the interviews with key informants and tourists revealed six aesthetic dimensions: (1) "harmony", (2) "variation/contrast", (3) "scenery/viewing", (4) "genuineness", (5) "art/architecture", and (6) "cleanliness". "Harmony" represents the desire to experience silence and to spend the night close to nature (e.g., by a river); the man-made environment must not compete with nature, but must harmonize, both inside and outside the tourism businesses, with an overall theme (e.g., fishing and spending the night in simple fishermen's housing).

"Variation/contrast" signifies the desire to experience large contrasts in nature (e.g., "dramatic" huge mountains and "beautiful" small plants). It also represents colours and variation in the landscape (e.g., white mountains and blue fjords), overwhelming nature, small/silent places to stay the night, and experiencing both silence and natural sounds, e.g., from waterfalls. The dimension also signifies contrasts in nature in terms of weather, seasons, and daylight and moonlight.

"Scenery/viewing" reflects the desire to view beautiful landscapes from the road, facilitated view- and photo-points along the road, and seeing natural attractions (e.g., Trollveggen). The dimension also includes viewing cultural landscapes (e.g., small farms, old towns, and churches) and experiencing a feeling of fascination. "Genuineness" reflects an interest in tasting local and

traditional food, smelling and hearing nature, and experiencing unpolluted nature, fresh air, and clean water. This dimension also reflects an interest in experiencing tourism businesses and friendly hosts that reflect local traditions and history, and in sensing the atmosphere of places.

The findings indicate that “art/architecture” was emphasized especially by key informants, and “cleanliness” especially by tourists. “Art/architecture” reflects the desire that art might provide a new experience of nature, and that the architecture might challenge but not compete with nature. This dimension also reflects the desire for architecture that makes routine activities, for example, a toilet visit, an experience, supports sustainable development, and offers unexpected design features at the tourism businesses (rooms, etc.). “Cleanliness” includes the desire to experience unspoiled nature (e.g., unpolluted water), breathing fresh and clean air, cleanliness and tidiness at the tourism businesses, and clean, well-maintained walking paths.

4.2 Paper 3: Effects of aesthetic qualities on satisfaction and loyalty: a case from a scenic road (Research Question 2)

Paper 3 examines the effects of aesthetic qualities on tourists’ satisfaction and loyalty in nature-based tourism. The results indicate that service quality has both direct and indirect effects on different aspects of loyalty mediated by overall satisfaction, and it may be valuable to treat, for example, the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit separately. To my knowledge, the relationship between aesthetic qualities, satisfaction, and loyalty has not been explored in a nature-based setting. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to add knowledge to the influence of aesthetic qualities on overall satisfaction and both the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit the destination. Specifically, it examines the relationship between (1) five aesthetic qualities⁹ (“scenery/viewing”, “cleanliness”, “harmony”, “art/architecture”, and “genuineness”) and satisfaction, and (2) the same five aesthetic qualities, satisfaction, and three loyalty intentions (to recommend, to revisit, and to visit similar routes).

A total of 1030 questionnaires were randomly distributed to individual tourists along the road in July 2012. The target segment for the scenic road is the individual round-trip tourist, and most of the questionnaires (63.3%) were therefore distributed at two of the most visited nature attractions (Trollstigen and Gudbrandsjuvet), where the project has combined nature, architecture, and design.

⁹ For the aesthetic quality “variation/contrast”, the CA was 0.32, and was therefore excluded from further analyses.

The analysis reveals that tourists' evaluations of the aesthetic qualities of "scenery", "harmony", and "genuineness" affected their satisfaction with the scenic road positively, and that satisfaction had a direct influence on the intention to recommend, the intention to revisit the road, and the intention to visit similar roads. By contrast, the aesthetic qualities "cleanliness" and "genuineness" only had a direct effect on the intention to revisit the scenic road, and indicated a more complex explanatory pattern for the other loyalty intentions.

4.3 Paper 4: The effects of aesthetic experiential qualities on tourists' positive emotions and loyalty: a case of a nature-based context in Norway (Research Question 3)

Paper 4 focuses on the effects of aesthetic experiential qualities on tourists' positive emotions and three loyalty intentions. This thesis links aesthetic experiential qualities to positive emotions. Similar to Paper 3, the empirical context was The National Tourist Route Geiranger-Trollstigen in Norway.

The findings reveal that tourists' evaluations of the aesthetic qualities of "scenery", "cleanliness", and "genuineness" have significant effects on positive emotions towards nature-based experiences. Positive emotions have direct effects on all three loyalty intentions. While some of the aesthetic qualities have both direct and indirect effects on travellers' intentions to recommend the route and to visit similar routes, only indirect effects on the intention to revisit the route were mediated by positive emotions.

4.4 An overview of the links between the appended papers

Table 4 summarizes the findings and illustrates the relationship between the four papers. Papers 1 and 2 answer Research Question 1 regarding the different aesthetic dimensions. In addition, the dimensions "harmony" and "genuineness" are especially important for the man-made environment, while the dimensions "variation/contrast" and "scenery/viewing" are especially important for the natural environment. Paper 3 answers Research Question 2, and Paper 4 contributes to Research Question 3.

Table 4. The relationship between the four appended papers

PAPERS	AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS					
	Harmony	Variation/ contrast	Scenery/ viewing	Genuine- ness	Art/ architecture	Clean- liness
<i>Paper 1: (RQ 1)</i> Key informants	X	X	X	X	X	
<i>Paper 2: (RQ 2)</i> Tourists	X	X	X	X		X
<i>Paper 3: (RQ 3)</i> Satisfaction Loyalty: Recommend <i>Satisfaction</i> Revisit the road <i>Satisfaction</i> Visit similar roads <i>Satisfaction</i>	*		***	*		
			***			*
				**		*
			*	*		*

<i>Paper 4: (RQ 4)</i> Positive emotions Loyalty: Recommend <i>Positive emotions</i> Revisit the road <i>Positive emotions</i> Visit similar roads <i>Positive emotions</i>			***	**		**
			***			*
			*			*
				**		*
			*			***

X = Suggested aesthetic dimension

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

5. CONTRIBUTIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This chapter concludes this doctoral thesis. First, it introduces a conceptual model describing the contributions. This is followed by a discussion of the managerial implications. Finally, the chapter presents some suggestions for further research.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

The overall goal of this thesis was twofold. First, it was to gain knowledge of aesthetic dimensions in nature-based tourism. Second, it was to gain knowledge of how these aesthetic dimensions influence the variables satisfaction, positive emotions, and customer loyalty.

There has been limited focus on aesthetics in tourism research with regard to nature-based experiences. Instead, the tourists' preferences for landscapes and the establishment of national parks have been emphasized (e.g., Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Hazen, 2009; Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010). This dissertation has opened up the research area regarding aesthetic qualities and behaviour in nature-based tourism. It represents one of the first systematic studies, which contributes to develop research-based knowledge of the role aesthetic qualities play in the consumers' preferences.

The thesis has contributed to deepening and broadening existing research on the concept of aesthetics in nature-based experiences by revealing key informants' and tourists' understandings of central aesthetic dimensions. These dimensions, in turn, influence tourists' satisfaction with and positive emotions regarding nature-based experiences (RQ 1). In particular, the results extend the previous research by including the man-made environment in nature areas. One of the main findings is that the four aesthetic dimensions "harmony", "variation/contrast", "scenery/viewing", and "genuineness" were central for both key informants and tourists. In addition, key informants emphasized "art/architecture", whereas tourists emphasized "cleanliness". The findings show that the dimensions "harmony" and "genuineness" are especially important for the man-made environment, while the dimensions "variation/contrast" and "scenery/viewing" are especially important for the natural environment.

This thesis has also contributed to broadening the understanding of the effects of aesthetic dimensions on customers' satisfaction with and loyalty to nature-based experiences (RQ 2). The findings demonstrate that tourists' evaluations of the aesthetic dimensions "scenery/viewing",

“harmony”, and “genuineness” affect their satisfaction with the scenic road positively, and that satisfaction has a direct influence on both the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit. However, only the aesthetic dimensions “cleanliness” and “genuineness” have a direct effect on the intention to revisit the scenic road, and indicate a more complex explanatory pattern for the other loyalty intentions.

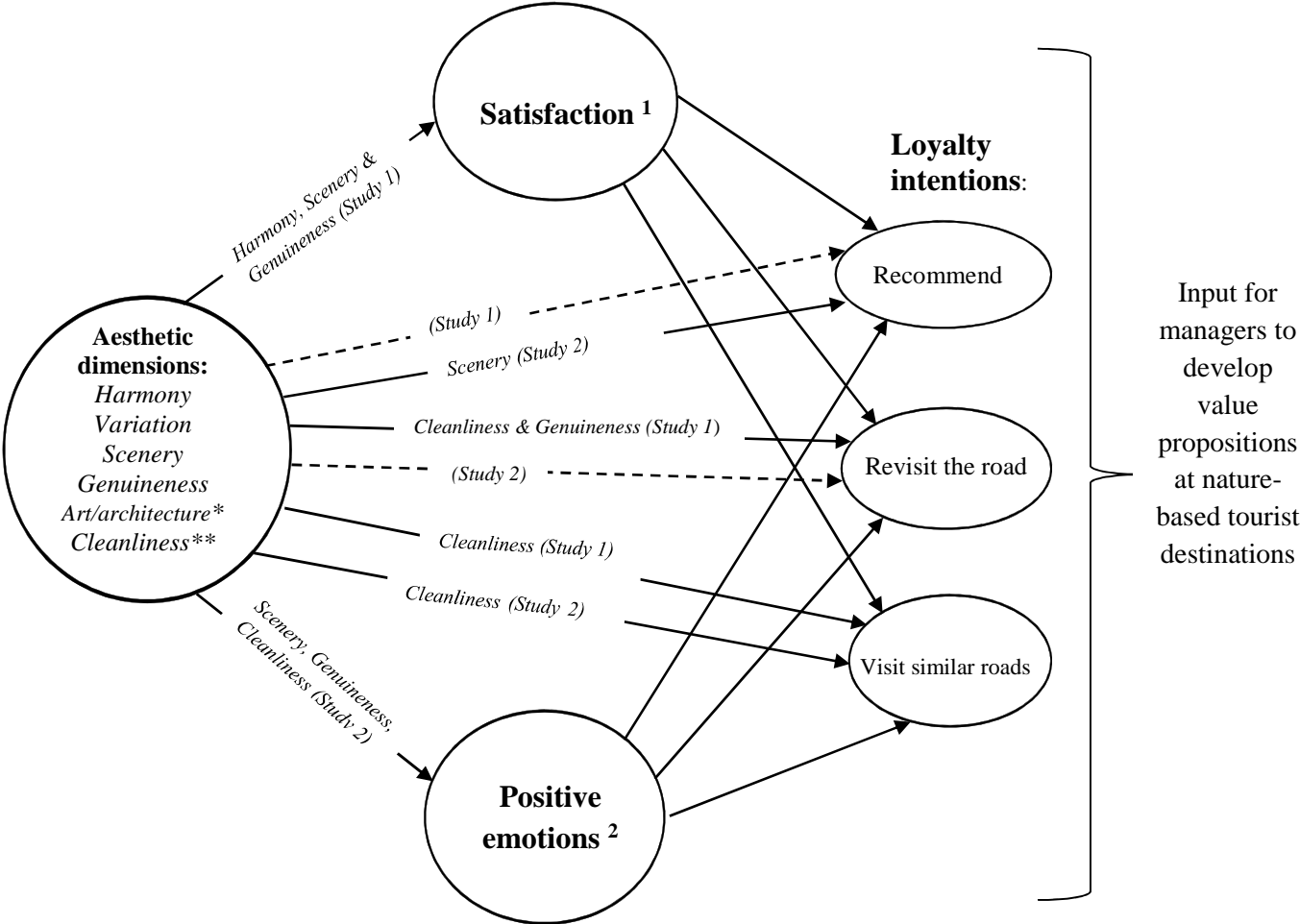
Finally, the thesis has expanded our understanding of the relationship between aesthetic dimensions, positive emotions, and loyalty (RQ 3). The findings reveal that tourists’ evaluations of the aesthetic dimensions or qualities “scenery/viewing”, “cleanliness”, and “genuineness” have a significant effect on positive emotions towards nature-based experiences. Positive emotions have direct effects on all three loyalty intentions. While some of the aesthetic qualities have both direct and indirect effects on travellers’ intentions to recommend the route and to visit similar routes, only indirect effects on the intention to revisit the route were mediated by positive emotions.

A theoretical implication of these findings is that the three loyalty indicators should not be treated as one “loyalty” construct, as has been typical in previous studies. On the contrary, it is more fruitful to separate them. Many tourists have positive experiences at a destination or a specific nature-based business and recommend it to others without intending to revisit it themselves. There may be many reasons for this. The destination can, for example, be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and they may instead visit other similar destinations. Separating intentions can therefore reveal information relevant to increasing both the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit the same destination or to visit other similar destinations.

Based on the finding that positive emotions have a greater influence on future intentions than aesthetic qualities, another approach to aesthetic qualities may be to relate them to other service qualities. Other qualities may include the hospitality and expertise of employees of tourist businesses, interactions with other guests, information, or price (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009; Heide & Grønhaug, 2009).

Figure 6 provides one way of illustrating the overall contributions of this thesis. The figure illustrates the six aesthetic dimensions that were revealed by the two groups of informants; key informants and tourists. Moreover, Figure 6 shows how the aesthetic dimensions affect loyalty

intentions, mediated by satisfaction and positive emotions, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 5. The right side of the figure illustrates how the contributions can provide valuable input for managers.



*Revealed by key informants, **Revealed by tourists

Direct effects ———>
 Indirect effects - - - - ->

1. How aesthetic dimensions can affect loyalty intentions (Recommend the road to others, revisit the road, and visit similar roads again) directly and indirectly mediated by *satisfaction* (RQ 2). Study 1.
2. How aesthetic dimensions can affect loyalty intentions (Recommend the road to others, revisit the road, and visit similar roads again) directly and indirectly mediated by *positive emotions* (RQ 3). Study 2.

Figure 6. The overall relationships in the project

The findings indicate that the aesthetic qualities of “scenery/viewing”, “cleanliness”, and “genuineness” are important factors influencing tourists’ satisfaction and positive emotions. Tourists’ satisfaction and positive emotions are important for all three loyalty intentions and their outcomes. This may result in outcomes such as added value for tourists’ experiences, and hence greater competitiveness and revenue through increased market share for the destination.

5.2 Managerial implications

The main managerial implication from this thesis is that it is important to take aesthetic qualities in nature-based experiences seriously. Based on the thesis, three managerial implications can be emphasized.

First, it is important that managers take aesthetic dimensions into consideration when measuring customers’ experiences with different nature-based services. Managers can benefit from this information because aesthetic dimensions affect tourist behaviour. Specifically, the findings indicate that aesthetic dimensions are linked to decision-making processes regarding loyalty. This information can help managers to predict customers’ willingness to recommend nature-based services to other people or to revisit the destination. For the dimension “scenery/viewing”, it is, for example, worthwhile making it possible to view spectacular and beautiful landscapes from the road. Private and public actors can, for instance, both offer facilitated viewpoints along the roads and also maintain clear viewpoints and walking paths that give tourists the opportunity to experience nature on their own.

Second, another lesson to be learned is the importance of understanding how the aesthetic dimensions in nature-based tourism are able to affect the customers’ emotions in both positive and negative ways. This implication is particularly relevant for managers in tourism, where satisfaction and positive emotions are at the core of their product and service. For example, the feeling of “harmony” for the nature-based tourist can be achieved by focusing on a man-made environment that does not compete with nature, being true to an overall theme, and emphasizing the atmosphere inside the tourism businesses.

When negative aesthetic perceptions influence tourists, they may transfer this to other parts of their trip, and even the whole destination (Wang et al., 2010). The thesis especially emphasizes the aesthetic dimension “cleanliness” in relation to the intention to revisit the destination. If the

hotel room or the public toilet is not clean, or there are overfilled rubbish skips along a scenic road, this may leave a negative impression. Thus, the tourist may not be satisfied with the overall experience at the nature-based destination. The result may be that the tourist will not return or recommend the destination to others. The tourism company should therefore have a prepared strategy for this (Wilson et al., 2012). For example, front-line employees should be trained to recognize problems and take responsibility for reducing the frequency and intensity of negative emotions, thereby encouraging positive word of mouth and increasing the likelihood of travellers revisiting the destination. In addition, the tourism organization at the destination level can offer courses for the tourism businesses to increase the hospitality and expertise of the employees. They can also develop a destination strategy to avoid creating unrealistic expectations that might stimulate emotions of disappointment and anger (White & Yu, 2005).

Third, the findings have implications for practice by suggesting the importance for managers of developing value propositions in networks with other providers at the tourism destination. This can be done, for example, by emphasizing aesthetic qualities and thus adding customer value. Tourism products can be characterized as a “value-added chain of different service components, forming a service network” (Zhang et al., 2009). The research findings demonstrate the importance of knowledge about tourists’ aesthetic experiences of the services as the framework for experiential development. For example, a tourist travelling along a scenic road may use different public and private services in the natural and the man-made environments for their overall nature-based experiences and values (i.e., accommodation, nature attractions, and restaurants). Furthermore, this market information must be structured, elaborated, and interpreted into shared understandings between individual tourist providers and nature-based tourist organizations in terms of development and innovation processes. Hence, it can be a source of competitive advantage for nature-based tourism destinations.

5.3 Further research

Research on aesthetic dimensions in nature-based tourism remains in its early stages. Hence, this research is valuable because it is an exploratory attempt to measure the effects of aesthetic qualities by using a scale with five aspects developed from previous research and interviews in a specific nature-based context (see Papers 1 and 2). Several other aspects and items of aesthetic quality may contribute to overall satisfaction, positive emotions, and loyalty intentions within a nature-based context, thereby explaining more of the variance. Future research may address this more thoroughly by examining several indicators of other aesthetic qualities to develop a more

robust and stable scale for these aspects. Even if the analysis did not reveal any significant differences in the control variables, future research may emphasize differences across, for example, cultures and age groups. The findings also suggest that it might be fruitful to include several senses, not just the traditional one of sight.

The study setting was only one particular scenic road, and the potential for generalization to other scenic roads and nature-based tourism products is limited. An application of the scales developed here to other settings is therefore welcomed in future research.

This thesis has demonstrated that aesthetic dimensions, positive emotions, and satisfaction are closely linked to behavioural responses in a nature-based tourism context (see Papers 3 and 4). The results indicate that the aesthetic dimension “scenery/viewing”, which is the most important one for the natural environment, affects the intention to recommend the route directly. By contrast, the dimensions “cleanliness” and “genuineness” have direct effects on the intention to revisit the road. These dimensions are most important for the man-made environment. Does this indicate that “scenery/viewing” and other natural landscape qualities are especially important for the marketing of the scenic road, but not so much for the intention to revisit where the man-made environment is more important? These results indicate the importance of also including the man-made environment when focusing on aesthetic dimensions and their effect on satisfaction, positive emotions, and loyalty intentions.

More research is also needed on customers’ dissatisfaction and negative emotions with aesthetic dimensions. The thesis used four positive emotions (“excitement”, “joy”, “inspiration”, and “harmony”) from previous studies and the interviews, which were combined into one positive emotion construct. Future research could examine the influence of each of the four positive emotions, and analyse whether the relationship between aesthetic qualities, positive emotions, and loyalty is altered as a result.

The results from this study suggest that there are different explanatory patterns for overall satisfaction and the three different aspects of loyalty. Future research should take these results into account by not treating the three loyalty intentions as indicators of a more general construct of loyalty, as has been typical in previous studies (e.g., Cole & Illum, 2006; Kim et al., 2012). Based on the finding that overall satisfaction with and positive emotions regarding the tourist route appear to have more influence on future intentions of loyalty than aesthetic qualities, the

managers of tourist routes also need to invest effort in other strategies that will enhance tourists' overall satisfaction and, especially, their intention to recommend. One relevant strategy may be to utilize the concept of the "servicescape", thereby entailing a thorough consideration of the tourist route from the point of view of the tourists' overall experience.

The study's findings are valuable for the producers. For example, they will enable them to improve or innovate their various propositions, and thereby influence tourists' overall satisfaction and positive emotions. Although nature-based tourism destinations are producers of aesthetic experiences through complex combinations of private and public actors, tourists as participants in the product development and innovation processes have received little attention. One possible area of further research could therefore be a detailed analysis of the dynamic process by which the tourist interacts with the individual producer. How firms successfully co-create value with customers and what constitutes unsuccessful value co-creation has not been studied in systematic empirical research. Furthermore, how firms either develop new value propositions or modify existing ones internally based on value co-creation with customers by re-integrating existing resources or by acquiring new resources has only been addressed sparingly in service research (Skálén et al., 2014).

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Paper 1

Exploring aesthetic dimensions in a nature-based tourism context

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Abstract

Given the historical relationship between viewing or ‘gazing’ and tourism, it is rather incongruous that the concept of aesthetics has received little attention in tourism marketing and nature-based tourism research. Although a substantial body of literature exists on aesthetic notions with regard to landscape preferences and the establishment of national parks, the literature is limited on the concept as it relates to man-made environments in nature-based tourism. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to add to the understanding of the concept of aesthetics in the context of nature-based tourism. This study’s main results from qualitative interviews with key informants reveal five aesthetic dimensions that may influence the tourists’ satisfaction in a nature-based tourism context: ‘harmony’, ‘variation/contrast’, ‘scenery/viewing’, ‘genuineness’, and ‘art/architecture’. The study closes with suggestions for further research.

Keywords

Aesthetic dimensions, aesthetics, man-made environments, nature-based tourism, tourism marketing

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to add to the understanding of the concept of aesthetics in the context of nature-based tourism. The focus is mainly on the man-made environment in nature. In particular, the aim is to take a first step toward developing an instrument for measuring the effects of aesthetics on tourist satisfaction. The study provides in-depth data of relevant aesthetic dimensions, which may be essential for both tourism marketing research and theoretical development.

A platform of knowledge about the concept of aesthetics in terms of tourism marketing may be important for finding out ways to influence the tourist’s overall satisfaction and thereby affect, for example, the intention to revisit or recommend the destination. This can result in greater revenue and increased market share for the local producers at a destination. Results from other service industries indicate that design, for instance, is a source of competitive advantage

(Baisya and Ganesh Das, 2008). In other words, if we don’t understand or operationalize the concept of aesthetics in nature-based tourism, it will be difficult to measure the effects on tourists’ satisfaction. For public and private actors, it can also be difficult to deal with an ambiguous concept like aesthetics in marketing and product-development processes because they may understand or define the concept differently and consequently operate in contrasting ways. If the tourists are not satisfied with the tourism businesses at a nature-based destination, this can result in lesser revenue and reduced market share (which we can see in the closure of mountain hotels in Scandinavia in recent years, for example).

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There are several reasons for studying the concept of aesthetics in the context of nature-based tourism. First, there is an obvious historical link between viewing and tourism related to sightseeing and 'the tourist gaze' (Urry, 2002). A substantial body of literature exists on aesthetic notions regarding landscape preferences and the establishment of national parks (e.g., Bourassa, 1990; Coghlan and Prideaux, 2009; Hazen, 2009; Wang et al., 2008). This approach also includes Nordic landscape (e.g., Fredman and Tyrväinen, 2010; Haukeland et al., 2010; Raadik et al., 2010). However, there are few empirical studies on the concept of aesthetics and the man-made environments in nature-based tourism (O'Neill et al., 2010). Second, an 'aestheticizing' of the businesses in general took place in the 20th century on the basis of the shift from standardization to more consumer-oriented production. Accordingly, the experience economy has received considerable attention in recent years whereby aesthetics has become central. Individual tourism producers cannot produce or deliver experiences because they are subjective and perceived by the person who senses the features (Löfgren, 2001). Thus, increased customer knowledge is valuable for the producers to improve or innovate the different features and thereby influence the overall satisfaction (Johnson and Gustafsson, 2000). Previous empirical studies in tourism have mainly focused on cultural experiences, and there is a need to direct attention toward nature-based experiences in this context (Vespestad and Lindberg, 2011).

The decision to conduct interviews with key informants was made in order to ensure a broad perspective for the multidisciplinary concept of aesthetics. The academics represent various disciplines that approach aesthetics as a general sense of learning (e.g., environmental psychology, architecture, and musicology) and such disciplines within tourism as marketing, experiential economy, and nature-based tourism. The industry managers represent economic geography, experiential economy, and nature-based tourism. Together they represent a broad range of knowledge of the concept of aesthetics. The key informants are also able to verbalize the ambiguous concept of aesthetics. For example, the concept has latent aspects that nature-based tourists possibly have difficulty in expressing, such as the feeling of harmony from the theory of environmental psychology. This study's author expects that the results from the interviews will give a basis of knowledge and a

conceptual framework for further research, for instance, by mapping the tourists' understanding of aesthetic aspects and by providing a comparison of the key informants' and the tourists' understandings.

This study explores the following research questions. (1) How can the concept of aesthetics be understood in a context of nature-based tourism? (2) What kinds of aesthetic dimensions are central for the man-made environments in nature? The study begins with theoretical perspectives based on the concept of aesthetics, nature-based tourism, and the experience-economy literature. Next, it presents the chosen method for this study and the findings that came to light from the interviews before discussing the possible implications for managing aesthetics in the process of marketing and product development of tourist experiences. This study concludes with suggestions for further research.

Theoretical perspectives

The concept of aesthetics

The Oxford English Dictionary (2012) defines the term 'aesthetics' as 'the branch of philosophy which deals with questions of beauty and artistic taste'. Wittgenstein (1970) claims that it is impossible to define the concept of aesthetics with logical language. Despite this lack of precision, the concept has been the focus in many debates in the media on tourism in recent years. Often it is narrowed to the visual aspect, referring to, for example, buildings, wilderness camping, signs, and art in nature. The concept is widely used in political documents that often focus on the visual qualities of buildings and the environment based mainly on the knowledge from architects and landscape architects. Both World Heritage Sites (2012) and National Geographic Society (2012) relate aesthetics to sustainable tourism development and the impacts of tourism on the environment.

In the 18th century, Baumgarten (1983) used the term aesthetics for the first time for denoting 'the science of the sensory', that is, the recognition we extract from dealing with the senses. Later the focus of aesthetics was narrowed to a part of the philosophy of art. Today aesthetics is considered to be a discipline situated between philosophy and art and conveys a general sense of learning (Bale and Bø-Rygg, 2008).

According to Shusterman and Tomlin (2008) aesthetics is of fundamental value to human

beings. Experiences of nature provide one the opportunities to discover, express, and perceive aspects of reality that lie at the root of our existence and make life valuable, joyful, and sometimes painful. This reflects in the extensive research on tourists' preferences for nature and different types of landscapes. Results from empirical studies show that central dimensions are 'scenery/view' (Hazen, 2009; Jacobsen, 2011; Raadik et al., 2010), 'clean environment' (Coghlan and Prideaux, 2009; Haukeland et al., 2010; Hazen, 2009), 'interesting/beautiful/dramatic landscape' (Haukeland et al., 2010; Jacobsen, 2011; Raadik et al., 2010), and 'silence/tranquillity/peacefulness' (Raadik et al., 2010). The studies mainly focus on the visual aspects, and most of them apply a quantitative approach.

There are few studies focusing on aesthetics and the man-made environments in nature-based tourism. The studies show that not only 'harmony' (Hosany and Witham, 2009; Oh et al., 2007) but also 'design' (Hosany and Witham, 2009; Oh et al., 2007; Slåtten et al., 2009) and 'attractive' (Hosany and Witham, 2009; Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011; Oh et al., 2007) are central dimensions. These studies also mainly focus on the visual aspect like 'viewing the architecture' and 'viewing the ice sculptures' (Slåtten et al., 2009).

To sum up, the concept of aesthetics is included in theories and public plans for developing tourism products, and it appears frequently in media debates. However, there are few empirical studies addressing the concept of aesthetics and the man-made environments in nature-based tourism. The existing studies mainly focus on the visual aspect and the passive receiving of stimuli and they use fixed dimensions. An explorative study may therefore add valuable knowledge to how the diffuse concept of aesthetics can be understood in a context of nature-based tourism.

The experience economy and nature-based tourism

The shift from standardization to more consumer-oriented production has contributed to an increased focus on aesthetics and the symbolic value of products in general. According to Langdalen (2003), one recognizes that the essential resources for companies no longer are only labor, organization, and technology but include increasingly aesthetic values. The experience economy, where aesthetics plays a central role, has therefore received considerable attention in recent years (Addis and Holbrook, 2001; Boswijk et al.,

2008; Carù and Cova, 2003; Chang and Chieng, 2006; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 2003). Pine and Gilmore (1999) bring together entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism and define them as the four 'realms' of an experience. They argue that the individual in an aesthetic experience immerses himself or herself in the experience but remains passive (e.g., standing on the rim of Grand Canyon or visiting an art gallery).

The emergence of the experience economy and aesthetics has more recently been a theme in tourism research in relation to the understanding of consumer experiences (Geissler and Rucks, 2011; Hosany and Witham, 2009; Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011; Oh et al., 2007; Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2003). These studies indicate that aesthetics can have effects on customers' satisfaction in various tourism contexts. Mehmetoglu and Engen's (2011) study of an ice festival found that both escapism and aesthetics affect the visitors' level of satisfaction. Similarly, for a museum, both education and aesthetics had strong effects on the same variable. The results from Hosany and Witham's study (2009) of cruise tourists' experiences and satisfaction show that aesthetics is the main determinant of various experiential outcomes, such as predicting arousal, memory, overall perceived quality, satisfaction, and intention to recommend. These studies have used the same approach to the concept of aesthetics as Pine and Gilmore have. They have also focused on cultural experiences and, according to Vespstad and Lindberg (2011), there is a need to direct attention toward nature-based experiences in tourism.

There is no research-based or universal definition of nature-based tourism. Fredman and Tyrväinen (2010) have concluded that most scholars interpret nature-based tourism to be associated with leisure activities that take place in nature and that the key components are the tourists, nature, and the experiences in nature. This study employs this broad definition. Furthermore, the nature-based tourism industry represents those activities in different sectors directed to meet the demand of the nature tourists. Fredman et al. (2009) have identified four recurrent themes in nature-based tourism: visitors to natural areas, experiences of a natural environment, participation in an activity, and normative components related to sustainable development and local impacts. This study's author focuses mainly on the first theme in this study, and in particular, it will lay stress on the man-made environment in nature.

Table 1. A brief presentation of the informants.

Informant	Discipline	University/business	Field	Gender
I1	Economic geography	Business 1	Practical	Female
I2	Architecture	Business 2	Practical	Male
I3	Psychology	University 1	Academia	Male
I4	Environmental psychology	University college 1	Academia	Male
I5	Experiential economy/tourism	Business 3	Practical	Male
I6	Architecture/attraction	Business 4	Practical	Female
I7	Architecture	University 2	Academia	Female
I8	Marketing/tourism	University 3	Academia	Male
I9	Musicology	University 4	Academia	Male
I10	Health and environment	University 5	Academia	Female
I11	Nature and environment	University 5	Academia	Male
I12	Nature-based tourism attraction	Business 5	Practical	Male
I13	Nature-based tourism	University 6	Academia	Male
I14	Experiential economy	University 7	Academia	Female

In short, previous studies in tourism show that the concept of aesthetics is limited mainly to the visual aspect and the passive receiving from the experience-economy approach. The 'passive receiving' means the absorption of visual stimuli, such as when one is viewing from a sightseeing bus or is visiting an art gallery (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). The opposite is actively sensing, for example, walking in the mountains or bathing in the sea. An aesthetic experience is a result of the *interaction* between nature and the individual (Dewey, 1934). The tourist is creating his or her own aesthetic experiences in order to use the senses more fully. The concept of aesthetics has a multidisciplinary nature. The next two sections present the methodology and the findings from the interviews with informants from various key disciplines.

Methods

The study aims at capturing the concept of aesthetics by using personal semi-structured interviews. Four main criteria are adopted in the process of selecting the informants for the interviews. First, the sample of informants is to reflect the depth and complexity for the topic by representing various disciplines. This approach includes both positive and contradictory instances that can challenge the assumptions and ideas (Mason, 2002). Second, the informants are to provide useful and meaningful empirical contexts and examples in order to develop a theoretical argument about the different aesthetic dimensions in the chosen context. Third, the number of informants has to be large enough to make meaningful comparisons and to get satisfactory information in order to reach the degree of saturation (Mason, 2002). Finally, several of the informants are to

have experience with the product development of nature-based experiences in tourism, including the National Tourist Routes (NTR) in Norway. By 2015, 18 tourist routes will be finally prepared as new tourist attractions. The original scenery will be embellished with innovative architecture, art, and design (Berre and Lysholm, 2008).

The sample includes 14 informants, comprising both academics and industry managers. To achieve diversity in the sample, the academics are carefully selected from seven universities in Norway and Sweden and one academic from a university college. They represent relevant disciplines that deal with aesthetics as a general sense of learning (i.e., environmental psychology, architecture, musicology, psychology, health, nature, and environment) and disciplines within tourism as marketing, experiential economy, and nature-based tourism. The industry managers represent the fields of economic geography, architecture, experiential economy, attraction development, and nature-based attraction. Together they represent a very broad knowledge on the concept of aesthetics. The interview guide was tested on a group of colleagues and was modified after these pilot interviews. Twelve of the interviews took place at various universities and businesses. Owing to practical reasons, one interview had to be carried out via Skype and another by telephone. Table 1 presents the relevant information of the informants.

This study's author uses a thematic analysis for analyzing patterns of themes within data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and employs an 'abductive research strategy' (Blaikie, 2000). This strategy involves the researcher's moving back and forth between the primary data and broader concepts (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). First, the written information is coded into words

and phrases from the interviews (open and axial coding). Then the codes are categorized systematically, in line with the selective coding described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Indexing is done manually.

Each interview lasts about one to one and a half hour and begins with a short presentation. In the main part of the interview, the informants give their views and examples of the concept of aesthetics and aesthetic dimensions that in their opinion may affect the tourists' satisfaction in a nature-based tourism context. Several of the informants first express that they find the concept difficult to define. However, in the course of the conversation, it turns out that the informants have clear opinions of the concept in the context of nature-based tourism. Some dimensions are revised in the process, and new ones are added to reflect the informants' opinions. The coded answers, from the open to the selective coding, sometimes overlap each other. This occurs especially in relation to the experiences in nature, for example, the dimensions of harmony and 'genuineness'. Despite this overlapping, they are categorized as separate aesthetic dimensions because they do not overlap with regard to the man-made environment in nature. Feeling harmony at a tourism business may not depend on the local traditions but on the overall theme or design, for example.

The criteria for selecting the number of categories are that they should mirror what the majority of the respondents highlight and also reflect the depth and complexity of the concept. Finally, they should give a sensible number for the analytical purpose (Mason, 2002). The analysis result in five categories or dimensions as a preliminary framework that represents the aesthetic dimensions in a nature-based tourism context: harmony, genuineness, variation/contrast, scenery/viewing, and 'art and architecture'. In all, 6 to 14 informants highlight all five dimensions, and most of them refer to several dimensions.

After a summary, the informants finally suggest other central topics related to the concept. All interviews are recorded and transcribed. The next section presents the findings. To ensure confidentiality, names of businesses, destinations, and countries mentioned in the examples are removed in the quotations.

Findings and discussion

First, this section presents the participants' definition of the concept of aesthetics in a nature-

based tourism context, and second, it presents different aesthetic dimensions.

The concept of aesthetics

One of the informants defines the concept like this:

I would define aesthetics first of all ... as being related to a visual experience ... maybe in the first place a kind of expected harmony ... and that aesthetics is a contextual concept that is about ... an expectation of an understanding of the space you are in.

This definition points out both the visual aspect and the expected harmony. The informant describes the importance of giving the 'correct visual impression' of a destination in the marketing in order to ensure there is some match between the tourists' expectations and the experiences on-site. Another informant says that aesthetics is the same as the word *perception* and expresses it like this:

... aesthetics is much more basic than we used to think in the 20th century ... In fact it means the same as the word 'perception' originally ... a very basic theme, that is. So it is not only ... decoration. It is something that has great significance for people ... aesthetics was a mind-set that lay beyond an instrumental way of thinking. It was an aesthetic experience because it was not useful.

The informant questions whether it is appropriate to operationalize the concept, and whether it is right to make aesthetics into a tool for achieving things, like earning more money. This reflects Wittgenstein's (1970) view. However, the results from previous studies show that it has been useful to operationalize the concept in different contexts (Hosany and Witham, 2009; Oh et al., 2007).

When defining the concept of aesthetics, one of the informants mentions the interaction between the senses:

... human beings do not only use one sense at a time, but there is always an interaction between the senses. This is called 'synesthesia', a combination of synergy and aesthesia ... Separating the senses is an old-fashioned way of thinking.

The quotation supports Baumgarten's (1983) original definition of aesthetics as a general sense of learning. Engaging all five senses is also

one of the design principles for experiential settings (Boswijk et al., 2008). This indicates the importance of emphasizing the active element of sensing in the product development process in a nature-based tourism context. Several of the informants mention the word *structure* in relation to aesthetics, and as one who focuses on the tourism industry puts it:

There must be a kind of structure ... measuring aesthetics by what attracts people, then it is where people want to be or stay; it is in people's heads ... And there is someone who has that code. People say 'it is a nice place, let's go over there', right? ... like (Café 1). Often it looks a bit like ... not so tidy; it is not necessarily very beautiful ... but there are some elements like flowers ... sunny, no garbage ... In contrast to what you might see at (Café 2), where the buildings also have an internationally top aesthetic quality ... but where are the people?

The informant argues that there may be differences between aesthetic quality from the architect's point of view and the attractiveness for the tourist. Hence, from a tourists' view, it can be valuable to focus on the total structure inside and outside the building. Results from previous studies focusing on 'beautiful and clean', 'clean public toilets', and 'unpolluted environment' support this focus (Haukeland et al., 2010; Hazen, 2009; Jacobsen, 2011). The informant illustrates the tourists' aesthetic quality or value on a scale from the *not too personal* to the *not too sterile* and proposed that the code is somewhere in between.

Another informant suggests measuring aesthetics as a preference on a scale from *pleasant* to *unpleasant*, where the service experience (good or bad) from the personnel (e.g., at a hotel reception) can be called an aesthetic factor. 'It is about the feeling you have afterward'. This opinion emphasizes the importance of both the physical and the social environment for the tourists' satisfaction. This is supported in the study by Hosany and Witham (2009), where 'pleasant to be there' is one of the items of aesthetic measurement.

On the basis of the interviews, we may conclude both that aesthetics in a context of nature-based tourism is associated with how the individual tourist senses nature and the man-made environment in nature and that the central key words are 'perception', 'structure', 'senses', 'beauty', and 'pleasant'. These conclusions

substantiate the philosophical approach of aesthetics as a general sense of learning. The results indicate that aesthetics is a multifaceted concept and may therefore be divided into different dimensions that are presented in the next section.

Aesthetic dimensions

All informants mention the feeling of harmony when they suggest aesthetic dimensions that may influence the tourists' satisfaction in nature-based tourism. Some informants use the words 'balance' and 'coherence'. Previous studies that place harmony as a central dimension (Hosany and Witham, 2009; Oh et al., 2007) support this observation. One of the informants describes the coherence between nature and the man-made environments as follows:

... in nature the landscape is really a great part of the experience context. And then the question is ... whether to compete with that context ... When the natural and the cultural landscapes are such a dominant part of it, you might have less tolerance with things that break with it ... The old mountain hotels in (Place 1) ... actually compete with the experience of landscape when you are standing watching them ... Staying the night in a 'rorbu' [fishing hut] in (Place 2) ... there is an interaction between the environments; by standing in my 'rorbu' looking over the bay at the other 'rorbus' over there, and I know that I'm staying the night at such a 'rorbu' myself, right?

This quotation illustrates Dewey's (1934) statement that an aesthetic experience is a result of the interaction between nature and the individual. The informant claims that if the primary motive is, for example, nature and silence in nature, the tourist does not want to be too surprised and stimulated all the time. The physical environment is the secondary motive and should therefore reflect the natural environment. The tourist expects to experience the harmony and coherence with the overall theme, like fishing and staying the night at a local fishing hut ('rorbu' in Norwegian). Other conditions that illustrate the feeling of harmony were 'The atmosphere inside the tourism businesses', 'seeing and hearing animals in nature', and 'experiencing plants in nature'.

The majority of the informants state that it is important to experience 'variation or contrast' during a nature-based holiday. Some examples related to nature are to experience 'variation in landscape' (e.g., mountains, fjords), 'silence and

the sound of a waterfall', 'big contrasts as huge mountains and small plants', 'different seasons and changing weather', and 'daylight compared to moonlight'. Results from previous studies support this dimension of contrast, especially silence and peacefulness and interesting/beautiful/dramatic landscape in nature (Jacobsen, 2011; Raadik et al., 2010). One informant expresses the importance of the contrast between nature and especially the accommodation:

After the holiday, the tourists will talk about the amazing glaciers, beautiful mountains and fjords, etc. And they also want the small, nice experiences, which we are very bad at offering them, like stories and a nice place to stay the night . . . They ask for this overall experience . . . We have capitalized on the overwhelming, and I think we need to demonstrate peace and silence more. You have especially the motor-home tourists . . . you can see where they are staying the night. In a valley, by the water, along a private road; they want to be there in peace and quiet. And then they drive and view this overwhelming landscape. They like this combination.

The informant claims that many overwhelming nature experiences for the tourists during the day can lead to a demand for accommodation that offers peace and silence in the evening. Some examples of this are offering the tourists their own balcony or other places outside to enjoy nature.

Several informants highlight scenery or viewing as a central dimension. Previous studies related to nature support this finding (Hazen, 2009; Jacobsen, 2011; Raadik et al., 2010). As one of the informants puts it:

. . . most of the people like certain types of natural environments, such as an open environment, a wide view of nature, not too dense vegetation, water, etc . . .

The informant refers to Bourassa's theory (1990), and the biological mode of aesthetic experience from an evolutionary perspective. This is supported from previous studies that point out that in contrast to urban landscapes the aesthetic values of natural landscapes generally have similar effect on different people (Johannesdottir, 2010; Wang et al., 2008). One of the informants highlights the viewpoints and installations along scenic routes in Norway (NTR):

. . . the installations give you the opportunity to see the beauty in nature, the dramatic, the whole; you

can see down on the water and hills; you can see trees from above; you can see heaven; and you can see the great spaces of landscapes with the fjords.

The opposite is also mentioned, like 'viewing nature on your own'. One of the informants says that earlier the tourists used to send postcards with pictures and stories from the holidays, whereas today they carry their phones and take pictures everywhere. The informant proposes that the tourism businesses ought to help the tourists to take good pictures for telling stories to relatives and friends after the holiday.

Several informants brought up the dimension of genuineness. Conditions illustrating this were 'experiencing unpolluted nature with fresh air and clean water' and 'smelling and hearing nature'. One of the informants illustrated the authentic or genuine:

I think there is a trend that tourists want something they experience as authentic, genuine, historical, and territorially anchored. The small motels along the state roads have trouble with the competition because they [*the tourists*] experience them as international and modern and not territorially anchored. But travelling to Norwegian farms, that kind of thing . . . might be experienced as much more meaningful and aesthetically satisfying.

Authenticity in tourism remains a debated concept.

The art and architecture in nature is especially underlined as a dimension related to the NTR. One of the informants states that:

Land art helps the tourist to see the landscape from new angles. The installations help the eye to experience three-dimensionality. The tourists experience it unconsciously.

The informant stresses that the experiences can happen unconsciously, and consequently it can be difficult to detect through a survey. Focusing on architecture, one of the informants gives the following example:

And you have this place in the mountain, where they have a toilet where the house is set as an angle like a big rock, which hides the toilets. The architecture makes the toilet visit as an experience . . . And then you have something to talk about.

The last informant commends the NTR for being good at making experiences out of places that most of the tourists might visit during their

Table 2. Aesthetic dimensions with subcategories.

Harmony	Variation/Contrast	Scenery/viewing	Genuineness	Art and architecture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The man-made environment must not compete with nature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing big contrasts in nature (huge mountains and small plants). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing beautiful landscapes from the road. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasting traditional food. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art that might give a new experience of nature.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing harmony with an overall theme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience variation in landscape (mountains, fjords, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated viewpoints along the roads. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smelling and hearing nature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The architecture might challenge but not compete with nature.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The atmosphere inside the tourism businesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing overwhelming nature and small/silent places to stay the night. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonfacilitated viewpoints (experiencing nature alone). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing unpolluted nature, fresh air, clean water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Architecture for toilets, etc., that makes the visit an experience.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing and hearing animals in nature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing both silence and sound from waterfalls, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing open environment and elements in nature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing the authentic environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Architecture that supports sustainable development.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing plants in nature and at the tourism businesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing contrasts in nature with weather, seasons, and day-/moonlight. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated photo points at the tourism businesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism businesses reflecting the local tradition and history. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unexpected design at the tourism businesses (rooms, etc.).

travels along the tourist routes. The focus on art and architecture is supported in the study of Slåtten et al. (2009), where viewing the architecture and viewing the ice sculptures in a winter park are central dimensions.

Another informant also claims that an unexpected design, for example, the hotel rooms, can be valuable in combination with a good restaurant and experiences of nature. The focus on architecture and sustainable tourism development is expressed by one of the informants as follows:

... we have been working on two camps in (*Country* 3), and there we have made it as natural as possible; we are not digging at all. [The buildings] only stand on stilts, because we one day might remove it all and then it [the vegetation] will regrow after a while. And here we have been working with ecology and how we can express it in the architecture. We are making a model placed in the landscape to find out how it will fit in without removing the vegetation and the topography.

This example of focusing on sustainable development supports one of the key principles of the National Geographic Society (2012) for protecting the integrity of the site and its natural and aesthetic character.

To summarize, most of the informants suggest harmony and variation/contrast as aesthetic dimensions that can influence the tourists' satisfaction in a nature-based tourism context. Several of the informants highlight the dimensions of scenery/viewing and genuineness from their conceptual value. This is also supported by previous studies, where especially harmony and scenery/viewing are central. Related to the 'NTR', the dimension of art and architecture may be included with respect to the informants acquainted with this nature-based attraction. Table 2 summarizes the aesthetic dimensions with the subcategories.

The subcategories indicate that harmony is the most important aesthetic dimension for the man-made environment, wherein genuineness is also relevant. For the natural environment, variation/contrast is central, together with scenery/viewing. The next section discusses these aspects further.

Conclusion and implications

On the basis of the interviews with the informants, we may conclude that the concept of aesthetics in a context of nature-based tourism is more than the visual and passive receiving of stimuli. The concept can be understood as how the individual tourist experiences nature and the

man-made environments in nature through an active interplay of senses. The central key words from the interviews are perception, structure, senses, beauty, and pleasant. The results support both Baumgarten's (1983) definition of the concept of aesthetics as the science of the sensory, and Bale and Bø-Rygg's (2008) same approach today as a 'general sense of learning'.

The study's results indicate that aesthetics is a multifaceted concept that can be divided into different dimensions in a context of nature-based tourism. From the qualitative interviews, five aesthetic dimensions are revealed: harmony, variation/contrast, scenery/viewing, genuineness, and art/architecture. Among these, most of the informants point out harmony and variation/contrast as the central dimensions. Several informants also highlight scenery/viewing and genuineness. These findings confirm previous studies that emphasize harmony (Hosany and Witham, 2009; Oh et al., 2007), and scenery/viewing (Hazen, 2009; Jacobsen, 2011; Raadik et al., 2010). All of the informants who had knowledge about the nature-based attraction, NTR in Norway, emphasize the dimension of art and architecture. The subcategories indicate that harmony is especially the most important dimension for the man-made environment. Genuineness is also germane. For the natural environment, variation/contrast is central together with scenery/viewing.

For the discussion of practical implications for tourism businesses at a destination, the feeling of harmony for the nature-based tourist can be achieved by focusing on a man-made environment that does not compete with nature, being true to an overall theme, and emphasizing the atmosphere inside the tourism businesses. For example, Juvet Landscape Hotel (2013) (www.juvet.com) along with one of the NTR, offers accommodation close to nature, near a river, that gives possibilities for sensing nature by hearing and seeing the river, and experiencing plants and animals in nature. They have also developed buildings with respect to the natural environments. Other examples are the eco-certified Kicheche Safari Camp (2013) in Kenya (www.kicheche.com) and the Hidden Valley Cabins (2013) in Australia (www.hiddenvalleycabins.com/au/), especially for hikers. One of the informants advises against 'the pressure to create surprise elements or wow elements' if the tourists' feelings of joy and harmony are primarily related to the experience of nature.

Marketing and offering overwhelming experiences of nature during the day (e.g., mountains,

ivers, and waterfalls), and peaceful and quiet accommodation in the evening, can give the tourist 'variation/contrast'. Marketing product packages with guided tours for experiencing nature in different weather conditions or in daylight in contrast with moonlight can contribute to variation and actively sensing experiences. Tordsson (2006) confirms that the concept of aesthetics is about actively sensing. People who expend a lot of energy blocking out the overwhelming stimuli from the outside world might eventually be subjected to 'sensory numbness'. An orientation toward experiences in nature might enhance the senses.

For the dimension scenery/viewing, it is valuable to offer the tourists possibilities for viewing spectacular and beautiful landscapes from the road. Private and public actors can, for instance, offer both facilitated viewpoints along the roads, like the 'Ørnesvingen' along one of the NTR (www.nasjonaleturistveger.no/en/geiranger-trollstigen/ornesvingen), and maintain clear viewpoints and walking paths that give tourists the opportunity to experience nature on their own. Also for this dimension, guided tours are relevant for experiencing extraordinary viewpoints and photo points at some distance from the road but still together with a group. This leads to the dimension of genuineness and the possibilities of smelling and hearing nature and experiencing unpolluted nature, fresh air, and clean water. The informants underline the importance of offering locally produced food and drinks, telling stories of local historical significance, and staying the night at tourism businesses that reflect the local tradition and history. These remarks indicate the importance for nature-based tourists to feel that they are integrated into the local or territorially anchored environment. One example is the Hastings House (2013) at Salt Spring Island in Canada (www.hastingshouse.com), where the tourists can stay at a country house by the sea, joining the local fishermen and having their own fish prepared for dinner.

As a source of competitive advantage, new combinations of art and architecture with nature can, for example, help the tourists to experience the landscapes in a new way, and may even attract new market segments into becoming interested in natural experiences. Innovative architecture for the public toilets, for example, can make an otherwise ordinary visit to a memorable experience, which the rest area 'Hereiane' (2013) along one of the NTR does (www.nasjonaleturistveger.no/en/hardanger/hereiane).

The findings can give a platform of knowledge for further research, for instance, by mapping the tourists' understanding of aesthetic aspects and by providing a comparison of the key informants' and the tourists' understandings. Each of the five dimensions and the subcategories may be further elaborated for various contexts in nature-based tourism in studies that aim to measure their significance for customers' satisfaction. This can increase the knowledge of the concept of aesthetics as an overall theory, including nature, art, and architecture. The informants interviewed in this study also point out that the emotions are significant and emphasize that this can be an interesting focus for further research. The previous studies from different tourism-experience contexts have focused especially on customers' satisfaction. Other variables of interest that the informants highlight are the intention to recommend, to revisit the destination, and to stay longer at the tourism destination. This study's author hopes that the findings further contribute to developing measures of aesthetics in nature-based tourism.

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Paper 2

EXPLORING AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS IN NATURE-BASED TOURIST EXPERIENCES

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EXPLORING AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS IN NATURE-BASED TOURIST EXPERIENCES

Abstract

There are few empirical studies linking nature-based tourist experiences to the increasing focus on the concept of aesthetics in the tourism literature to date. Although tourism scholars have studied aesthetic notions with regard to landscape preferences in the last two decades, the literature is limited on the concept of aesthetics as it relates to man-made environments in nature-based tourism. For example, accommodation, food, and signs may all be central features in a nature-based holiday, and thereby influence the tourists` experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain knowledge to the influence of central aesthetic dimensions on the tourists` experiences in a nature-based setting. Specifically, it will extend the previous research by including the man-made environments in nature. The empirical context was a specific tourist route in Norway. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with travelers on holiday along the route to explore how they express central aesthetic dimensions in such a context. The findings reveal five aesthetic dimensions: (1) “harmony”, (2) “scenery/viewing”, (3) “cleanliness”, (4) “genuineness” and (5) “variation/contrast”.

Based on the results, the study suggests that future tourism research should include aesthetic dimensions for both the man-made and the natural environment, to better understand the tourists` overall “exerperiensescape” at nature-based destinations. It also emphasize the importance for managers to focus on the role of aesthetic dimensions for tourists` satisfaction. Especially, it is important to understand how to manage aesthetic dimensions in such a way it both add customer value and can be a source to competitive advantage for service businesses at nature-based destinations. The research is limited to five aesthetic dimensions and one specific tourist route.

Key words: Aesthetic dimensions, nature-based tourism, experiences, man-made environment

Introduction

International competition in tourism markets constitutes a major challenge for destinations and individual producers (Gooroochurn & Sugiyarto, 2005). As services in nature-based areas are largely provided by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) whose capital is invested in specific locations, Morgan, Elbe, and Curiel (2009) stress that they are particularly vulnerable to changes in the market. The concept of aesthetics have received increasing attention in the service literature over the last quarter century, especially with regard to the focus on experiential and symbolic aspects of products and services (Charters, 2006). A number of services studies recognize the role of aesthetics in consumer behavior (e.g., Baisya & Ganesh Das, 2008; Brady & Cronin, 2001; Charters, 2006; Das, Baisya, Chandra, 2003; Turley & Milliam, 2000), and aesthetics is a central concept in the experience economy literature (e.g. Addis and Holbrook, 2001; Boswijk, Thijssen, Peelen, 2008; Carù & Cova, 2003; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). This role has only recently become a theme in tourism research directed towards consumer experiences (e.g., Bonn, Joseph-Mathews, Dai, Hayes, Cave, 2007; Hosany & Witham, 2009; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). However, it seems that previous tourism research to a large extent has been limited to a focus on cultural tourist experiences. Vespestad and Lindberg (2011) therefore suggest a need to direct attention towards nature-based tourist experiences.

A substantial body of literature exists on aesthetic notions regarding landscape preferences and the establishment of national parks (e.g., Bourassa, 1990; Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Hazen, 2009; Wang et al., 2008). This approach also includes Nordic landscape (e.g., Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010; Haukeland, Grue, Veisten, 2010; Raadik Cottrell, Fredman, Ritter, Newman, 2010). However, there are few empirical studies on aesthetic dimensions and the man-made environments in nature-based tourism (O'Neill, Riscinto-Kozub, & Hyfte, 2010). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain knowledge to the influence of central aesthetic dimensions on the tourists' experiences in a nature-based setting. Specifically, it will emphasize the man-made environment in nature e.g. accommodation, food, and signs that may all be central features in a nature-based holiday and thereby influence the tourists' satisfaction. The study seeks to explore

the following research question: “How do tourists express central aesthetic dimensions in the context of nature-based experiences”? The results will contribute to the tourism literature by the possible links between aesthetic dimensions and increased satisfaction and thereby greater revenue. It will also provide relevant data to destination managers to develop appropriate tourism strategies by including aesthetic dimensions as an important aspect in the marketing and product-development processes.

The empirical context is one of the “National Tourist Routes” in Norway with regard to the purpose of the study focusing on aesthetic dimensions in a nature-based setting. The route combines nature, architecture, design, and art, and includes actors from both public and private sectors in the marketing and product-development processes. Tourist travel companions were interviewed as they travelled along the selected tourist route during the summer. This study begins with theoretical perspectives. Next, it presents the aesthetic dimensions that came to light from the interviews, and discusses theoretical and practical implications. The study concludes with suggestions for further research.

Literature Review

The concept of aesthetics in the nature-based experience

The Oxford English Dictionary (2012) defines the term “aesthetics” as “the branch of philosophy which deals with questions of beauty and artistic taste”. The concept is widely used in policy documents, including guidelines for the visual qualities of buildings and the man-made environment that are mainly formulated on the basis of knowledge from architects and landscape architects. Both the World Heritage Site (2011) and The National Geographic Society (2012) relate aesthetics to sustainable tourism development and the impacts of tourism on the environment.

In the 18th century, Baumgarten used the term “aesthetics” for the first time for denoting “the science of the sensory”, that is, the recognition we extract from dealing with the

senses. Later the focus of aesthetics was narrowed to a part of the philosophy of art. Today aesthetics is considered to be a discipline situated between philosophy and art, and it conveys a general sense of learning (Bale & Bø-Rygg, 2008). Recently, service research has supported this definition and has concluded that experience is an important component for appreciating aesthetics and a result of using all the senses rather than merely one or two (Baisya & Ganesh Das, 2008). The concept of “experiencescape” can be used in an aesthetic context to focus on the tourists’ experiences at a destination, including both the natural and the man-made environment, for example, accommodation, restaurants, and signs in nature (Mossberg, 2007; O’Dell & Billing, 2005; Pan & Ryan; 2009). The term “scape” can be relevant for emphasizing several senses in the experience environment (Boswijk et al., 2007; MacCannel, 1976; Quan & Wang, 2004; Urry, 2002).

Pine and Gilmore (1999) have linked entertainment, education, aesthetics (esthetic), and escapism and have defined them as the four “realms” of an experience. According to Pine and Gilmore, an individual in an aesthetic experience, say, standing on the rim of Grand Canyon or visiting an art gallery, immerses him- or herself but remains passive. By contrast, Tordsson (2008) argues that aesthetics not only involves the passively receiving but also the actively sensing. In the Western societies today, we use a lot of energy sheltering ourselves from the outside world in order to select our daily impressions. These efforts might result in “sensory numbness”. As a means of countering this condition, Tordsson suggests an orientation on experiences in nature that can enhance the senses. This approach supports Dewey’s (1934) statement that an aesthetic experience is a result of the *interaction* between nature and the individual. The spectator has to create his or her own aesthetic experiences in order to use the senses more fully. This study employs this broad definition of aesthetics as a general sense of learning, and emphasizes nature-based experiences which have aesthetic purpose as a substantial goal, rather than products which use aesthetic elements (such as styling) as a marketing promotional goal.

There is an increasing demand for nature-based tourism experiences, including activities in nature, both globally (Mehmetoglu, 2006; Nyaupane, Morais, & Graefe, 2004) and in the Nordic countries, including Norway (e.g. Chen, Prebensen, Chen, & Kim, 2013; Rideng & Grue, 2008; Thrane & Farstad, 2012). Today there are segments of the population that prefer using and exploring landscape and nature more actively than simply consuming passively visual experiences (e.g., Mehmetoglu, 2006; Nyaupane et al., 2004). This supports the view that humans need to understand and explore the natural environment (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). This study employs a broad definition of nature-based tourism from Fredman and Tyrväinen (2010), that nature-based tourism should be associated with leisure activities in nature, whereas key components are the tourists, nature, and the experiences in nature. Furthermore, the nature-based tourism industry represents activities in different sectors directed to meet the demand of the nature tourists. The study extends the previous research, by specifically considering the physical or man-made environment in nature to influence on the tourists` experiences. The next section presents aesthetic dimensions in the natural and in the man-made environment identified by previous research.

Aesthetic dimensions in the natural and man-made environment

The creation of romantic interpretations of landscape was a phenomenon that developed in Europe between 16th and 18th centuries, including the Nordic landscapes. A gradual shift of the travelers` motive took place: the journey as an opportunity for vital educational experiences abroad (i.e., The Grand Tour) began to fade and was replaced by a growing enthusiasm for the journey as ‘eyewitness’ observation, which emphasized the visual sense (Pan & Ryan, 2009). Prospects from travelling through alpine scenery became embodied in landscape paintings. The approach sees the landscape as postcards and pictures, and extensive research is based on this view. Results from empirical studies on tourists’ preferences for nature and different types of landscapes show that the central qualities are “scenery/view”(Hazen, 2009; Jacobsen, 2011; Raadik et al., 2010), “clean environment” (Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Haukeland et al., 2010; Hazen, 2009), “interesting/beautiful/dramatic landscape” (Haukeland et al., 2010; Jacobsen, 2011;

Raadik et al., 2010), and “silence/peacefulness” (Haukeland & Midtgard, 2000; Raadik et al., 2010). These studies indicate a relation between the aesthetic dimensions and the choice of nature-based tourism destinations. The focus is mainly on the visual aspect as viewing and “gazing” the landscape. Most of the studies apply a quantitative approach along with fixed categories. Research on environmental psychology show that “landscape”, “scenery”, and “harmony” in nature is critical preferences for well-being (Bourassa, 1990; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Strumse, 2001, 2002). Nature has a fascinating and stimulating effect on people (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). The need for green parks in cities and the conservation of nature in the form of national parks supports this proposition.

There are few studies that have focused on aesthetic dimensions and the man-made environment in nature-based tourism experiences. Relevant empirical studies show that especially “harmony” (Haukeland & Midtgard, 2000; Hosany & Witham, 2009; Oh et al., 2007), and also “design” (Hosany & Witham, 2009; Oh et al., 2007; Slåtten, Mehmetoglu, Svensson, & Sværi, 2009) and “attractive” (Hosany & Witham, 2009; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Oh et al., 2007) have effects on customers’ satisfaction. These studies also mainly focus on the visual aspect, like “viewing the architecture” (Slåtten et al., 2009). In a broader tourism perspective, the effect of the physical environment or the “servicescapes” for tourists’ satisfaction with tourism businesses in general has been recognized for many years (Albacete-Sáez, Mar Fuentes-Fuentes, Lloréns-Montes, 2007; Heide & Grønhaug, 2009; Pikkemaat & Weiermaier 2004; Weaver 2009). Servicescapes refer to the physical facility in which a service is delivered (enterprise or organization) and in which the service provider and the customer interact (Bitner, 1992; Hall, 2008). Results from these empirical studies indicate that there is a relation between the dimensions of “design” and “atmosphere” at tourism businesses and consumer satisfaction, well-being, and sales. The next two sections present the method and the findings from the interviews with tourists.

Method

This study is of an exploratory nature, as little previous empirical research exists on the topic. The research question is how the tourists` express central aesthetic dimensions for nature-based experiences, where a qualitative approach is suitable (Pratt, 2009). An instrumental case study has been chosen, where the main focus was to add knowledge to the concept of aesthetics in nature-based tourist experiences in general (Stake, 2000).

The case

The chosen case is the “National Tourist Route (NTR) Geiranger/Trollstigen” (2012) in Norway. By 2015, 18 routes will be finally prepared as new nature-based tourist attractions, of which “Geiranger/Trollstigen” is one. In addition to the driving experience and the natural environment, an enhancement of the experience is at centre stage, which the project description underlines: “The tourists’ experiences of the scenery and cultural landscape are intended to be genuine and unique, where the original scenery is embellished with traces of our time through innovative architecture, art and design” (Berre & Lysholm, 2008, p. 10). The project is the largest public tourism project in Norway so far, with a budget of more than 258 million euros for the period of 2002-2015. The money is allocated for improving journeys, developing rest areas, parking places with activities and experiences, and more. The elements that the project expects other actors to provide include activities and experiences, as well as food, accommodation, and hospitality. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration has the responsibility for the project management in cooperation with two architectural committees comprising architects, landscape architects, and artists.

The “National tourist route Geiranger/Trollstigen” was chosen for the following three reasons: (1) It combines nature, architecture, design, and art at the viewpoints and at the tourism businesses (e.g., cafeterias and accommodation). Both the cafeteria and the viewpoint at Trollstigen have received much international attention. One of the hotels along the route, “Juvet Landscape Hotel” (www.juvet.com), has won a number of awards because of the distinctive architecture and location. (2) This route is an example

of cooperation between public and private actors in the marketing and innovational processes. (3) The route with Trollstigen, a natural attraction, is the second-most visited nature-based attraction in Norway that draws about 600 000 visitors during the summer season. This route attracts both international and domestic visitors, and the segments are composed of a combination of independent and individual round-trip tourists, mountain tourists, and organized cruise tourists.

Data collection

This study conducted interviews with ten tourist travel companions while they were visiting the “National Tourist route Geiranger-Trollstigen”. The purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007) of individual round-trip tourists, which are the route’s primary market, was conducted. Most of the interviews took place therefore at a cafeteria at the viewpoint for Trollstigen, one at a ferry pier, and the others at camping sites. Other sample-selection criteria were a variation between nationalities, travel companion, and transport, as is described in table 1:

Table 1. A brief presentation of the participants

No.	Travel companions	People interviewed	Nationality	Transport	Gender
T1	Couple	2	Norway	Car	Males
T2	Family	1	Spain	Car	Male
T3	Couple	2	Norway	Car	Female/male
T4	Friends	1	Finland	Motorcycle	Male
T5	Couple	2	The Netherlands	Car	Female/male
T6	Org. group	1	The Czech Republic	Bus	Female
T7	Couple	2	Norway	Car	Female/male
T8	Couple	2	The Netherlands	Car	Males
T9	Friends	2	Italy	Motorcycle	Female/male
T10	Friends	2	Germany	Motorcycle	Males

The ten tourist travel companions gave rich and varied information that pointed to relevant aesthetic dimensions in the tourist experience. For seven of the travel companions, it was natural that both participants attended the interview. This resulted in valuable discussions and reflections over the topic. In all, 17 tourists were involved in the interviews. The sample provided sufficient information that made possible meaningful comparisons and the reaching of saturation (Mason, 2002). The interviews were semi-structured and an interview guide (in Norwegian and English), was used for the data collection. The interviews began with informing the interviewees about the purpose of the study and the questions' theme. The participants then gave a short summary of where they had come from, their travel companion, and the type of transport. In the main part of the interview, the participants specified how they would describe an aesthetic nature experience and gave views and examples of important conditions while travelling along the route (associated with nature, activities/attractions in nature, places they were visiting and/or businesses where they eat or stay the night). The interviews lasted for about 40 minutes to one hour, and this researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim.

The semi-structured interview is an effective way for a researcher to obtain knowledge concerning tourists' personal experiences (Mason, 2002). Yet occupying the tourists' vacation time can be perceived as disturbing. Five travel companions did not want to be interviewed, of which three of them said they did not have time and two gave no further explanation.

Data analysis

In order to analyse central aesthetic dimensions in tourism experiences, this study employed a "thematic analysis" for analyzing patterns of themes within data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The raw data were analyzed using a coding process inspired by Corbin and Strauss (2008). This procedure provides a basis for making comparisons or connections within the data. The analytic process involved the following steps. First, this

researcher carefully listened to all the interviews and read them several times in order to get a general sense of the entire data material. Next, the written information was coded into words and phrases from the interviews on the basis of the research question. The analysis of the codes then took place in order to find relationships between them that could identify different themes or categories. The coded answers sometimes addressed more than one category at a time. Some of them were therefore revised in the process and new ones were added. The criteria for selecting the number of categories were that they both should mirror what the majority of the respondents highlighted and should reflect the depth and complexity of the concept. Finally, they should give a sensible number for the analytical purpose (Mason, 2002). The analysis resulted in five categories or dimensions as a preliminary framework that represents the aesthetic dimensions in the nature-based experience (with the number of tourist travel companions in parenthesis): “variation/contrast” (10), “harmony” (7), “scenery/viewing” (7), “genuineness” (8), and “cleanliness” (6). Six to ten of the tourist travel companions highlighted the five dimensions, and most of the companions referred to several categories. The indexing was done manually.

It is important to note that the data were created in cooperation between interviewee and interviewer. Another interviewer might have reached other results, because dialogues are complex and multi-layered, and can lead to different but valid interpretations. As a means of meeting the requirement of credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the results were discussed at a workshop with researchers at a university college in Norway. The next section presents the findings.

Results and Discussion

When the interviews with the tourists were analyzed, five categories or dimensions became apparent: “Variation/contrast”, “harmony”, “scenery/viewing”, “genuineness” and “cleanliness”. The results confirmed several of the aesthetic dimensions that were identified in the theoretical perspectives. Each of the dimensions are discussed and presented regard to the natural and the man-made environments.

Variation/contrast

All of the travel companions stated that it is important to experience “variation or contrast” during the holiday. The examples were related only to the natural environment, which included their experience of variation in landscapes (e.g., mountains, fjords, waterfalls and rivers), their exposure to many different hues in nature, their witnessing of contrasts of sunshine and rain, and their encounters of nature as both harsh and beautiful. Several of the informants expressed the importance of experiencing nature in great contrast with how they experience nature at home. As one travel companion from the Netherlands said:

We have been walking from hut to hut; we have not been visiting big cities... we can find that in Holland. We are here for nature, for the mountains, for the rivers, for the fjords....

A couple from Norway also emphasized this point:

... most of nature is in contrast compared with what we are used to at home. It is hilly there too, but completely different to this...so it is a big experience compared with what we are used to...the roads surrounded with nature...and colors. There are a lot of colors in Western Norway.

Results from previous studies regarding landscape preferences support this dimension (Haukeland et al., 2010; Jacobsen, 2011; Raadik et al., 2010). Emotional aspects were highlighted with respect to variation of experiences, e.g. not feeling monotonous or boring, feeling both scared and delighted in nature, and having variations in nature that give a feeling of well-being. During the stay in the field, this author observed, for example, that going out to the viewpoint at Trollstigen was a scary experience for many of the tourists. Several were quite happy afterwards when they expressed how they handled this challenge.

Harmony

Seven of the tourist travel companions mentioned “harmony”. For the natural environment they regarded it as being close to nature, the sound from a river, silence in nature (away from traffic and people), seeing birds and animals, and getting out in nature. For the man-made environment three of the travel companions mentioned accommodation in nature (e.g., by a river). One of the travel companions from Spain explained it like this:

... we always stay the night in camping or in cabins like here, because we want to stay near nature, instead of a hotel near the city center. That is why we are here... there are no cars, no noise, just the sound of nature...

Some informants also suggested the importance of buildings that respect the natural surroundings for the nature-based experience. One of the travel companions from Norway spoke of an example where there was no harmony with the buildings and nature:

In general, I think in Norway...the nice places famous for their mountain passes, it is very accidental how the places to eat are. It looks like they just have been dumped down many places... they are not in proportion with the nature they are surrounded in.

The travel companions also mentioned certain emotional aspects, like the feeling of freedom, feeling good, the feeling of happiness when being close to nature, and the feeling of belonging in nature. The dimension of harmony is also confirmed in previous research on environmental psychology (Bourassa, 1990; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Strumse, 2001, 2002) and empirical studies in tourism (Haukeland & Midtgard, 2000; Hosany & Witham, 2009; Oh et al., 2007). The new insight from this study might be the feeling of harmony when *combining* both the natural and the man-made environment in nature. An example is the feeling of being “one with nature” when staying the night at a place where the tourist experiences coming close to nature, and where the businesses’ architecture (especially the buildings) harmonize well with the landscape.

Scenery/viewing

“Scenery or viewing” was highlighted by seven of the tourist travel companions as a central dimension. Examples from the natural environment were viewing spectacular, fantastic, and overwhelming nature, high and beautiful mountains, and seeing natural attractions. As one from the Czech Republic said:

I prefer mountains, lakes, water... Norway is a place of forest and fjords... In our republic we also have nice mountains, but not so high... and beautiful

Two of the Norwegian travel companions highlighted the man-made environment as views of the cultural landscape, including small farms, old town, churches, and old stone bridges along the road. They also emphasized the importance of maintaining clear viewpoints along the road in order to prevent overgrowth. One of them expressed this point as follows:

... it is very nice to drive in Western Norway, because of the old roads surrounded by nature.... They [the roads] are in nature... then the driving is an experience too. ... we start thinking about how they can live up there [in the hillside]. For a holiday it is ok, but living here? It is unimaginable....

The emotional aspects were expressed in various ways. Some said that viewing nature gives a feeling of fascination, and that driving and viewing along the narrow roads was charming. Previous studies support the significance of the dimension of “scenery/viewing” (Hazen, 2009; Jacobsen, 2011; Raadik et al., 2010). Viewing landscapes is also a relevant preference for well-being (Bourassa 1990; Kaplan & Kaplan 1989; Strumse, 2001, 2002), and viewing architecture is a central dimension in previous studies (Slåtten et al., 2009).

Genuineness

Eight of the tourist travel companions brought up the dimension of “genuineness” regarding the man-made environment. Central conditions mentioned were tasting traditional and local food (fish, whale, etc.), experiencing the cultural heritage, having access to ambient accommodation, sensing the places’ atmospheres, meeting friendly

hosts and nice people, and being free of too large crowds of other tourists. One of the travel companions from Finland expressed this aspect in this manner:

We want to eat whale, but we haven't found it. We can eat hamburgers every day, but we want to taste local food.

A couple from the Netherlands emphasized the buildings' architecture:

I am amazed that some hotels outside look quite like eastern European. The architecture is not always [like that]... but it also might depend on the age [of the building].

Examples of the emotional aspects mentioned by the tourists included that the place felt different from other places, the feeling of relaxing while being able to hear the sounds of nature at the accommodation, the feeling of being surprised, and the feeling of just being there. Haukeland and Midtgard (2000) have found that "authentic surroundings" were important for tourists' experiences in their study. Still authenticity in tourism remains a debated concept. The results from this study revealed that it might be more appropriate to use the word "genuineness" like the word "uniqueness", instead of "authentic" regard to the man-made environment. The feeling of the "genuineness" at a tourism business may not depend on e.g., the local traditions, but on the overall theme, design or art that makes it different from other businesses.

Cleanliness

A recurrent theme of the interviews was the dimension of "cleanliness", both in the natural and the man-made environment. Six travel companions mentioned this, which they expressed by the possibility of breathing fresh and clean air, experiencing unspoilt nature (e.g., unpolluted water), nature looking fresh and verdant, cleanliness and tidiness at the tourism businesses (e.g., toilets, etc.), and nice and clean walking paths. One of the travel companions expressed it as follows:

Here, there is clean air, clean nature. In our country, there is industry, so it is spoilt. I prefer the mountains and the lakes.

An opposite experience from the man-made environment illustrated the challenge of offering a clean environment for the holistic "experiencescape":

... when we were walking yesterday ... it could have been a fairly nice walk, but half way, there was a farmer who made a great mess of the farming, and all the stuff around... here they could have improved this walk into a very nice walk, halfway you found a lot of stuff; it was just a mess...

Results from previous studies focusing on “beautiful and clean”, “clean environment”, “clean public toilets”, and “unpolluted environment” support this dimension (Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Haukeland et al., 2010; Hazen, 2009; Jacobsen, 2006; 2011). The dimension of cleanliness matches how the World Heritage Sites (2011) and National Geographic Society (2012) link aesthetics to sustainable tourism development and the impacts of tourism on the environment. Key principles in this context involve protecting the integrity of the site and its natural and aesthetic character. Both dimensions of “genuineness” and of “cleanliness” are also central in the research of designing experiences (Boswijk et al., 2007) by eliminating negative cues and making the concept natural and authentic. The emotional aspects were expressed like the feeling of experience clean nature, and especially the feeling of breathing clean air.

To summarize, the qualitative interviews with the tourists revealed five aesthetic dimensions: “harmony”, “scenery/viewing”, “cleanliness”, “variation/contrast” “genuineness”. The dimension of “variation/contrast” stood out as being important for all the travel companions, while the other dimensions were relevant for many (six to eight) of the tourist travel companions but not all of them. The five dimensions are supported by previous studies, where especially four of them, “harmony”, “variation/contrast”, “scenery/viewing”, and “cleanliness”, are central for well-being and choice of nature-based tourism destinations. Previous research has not included the dimension of “genuineness” as an aesthetic dimension, but is pointed out as important for tourists’ experiences in general, linked to the “authentic surroundings”. Yet if we define the concept of aesthetics as a general sense of learning, then “genuineness”, including tasting the local food, drinking the local water, and sensing the places atmosphere, is certainly relevant. The deeper analysis shows that the international travel companions highlighted the dimension of “*cleanliness*” for both the natural and the man-made environment, and the domestic travel companions emphasized the dimension

“genuineness”, especially for the man-made environment. For the other dimensions, there were no greater differences between the nationalities. Table 2 summarizes the aesthetic dimensions with the subcategories.

Table 2. Aesthetic dimensions with subcategories

Variation/ contrast	Harmony	Scenery/ viewing	Genuineness	Cleanliness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience variations in landscape (mountains, fjords, waterfalls etc.) • Experiencing a lot of colors in nature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing silence in nature (away from traffic and people). • Being close to nature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing spectacular, fantastic and overwhelming nature. • Seeing natural attractions (e.g. Trollveggen) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasting local food (fish, whale etc.). • Experiencing the cultural heritage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing unspoilt nature (e.g. unpolluted water). • Breathing fresh and clean air.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing contrasts in nature with both sunshine and rain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodation in nature (e.g. by a river). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing the cultural landscape (e.g. small farms, old towns). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting friendly hosts and nice people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing nature looking fresh and verdant.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing nature as both harsh and beautiful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmony with the buildings and nature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewpoints along the road 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensing the places` atmosphere. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleanliness and tidiness at the tourism businesses.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing variation, not feeling monotonous or boring. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling of freedom and happiness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing nature gives a feeling of fascination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling of being surprised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nice and clean walking paths.

The dimensions of “harmony”, “scenery/viewing”, and “cleanliness” are all central for both the natural and the man-made environment. Furthermore, “genuineness” was only important regard to the man-made environment, and “variation/contrast” only to the natural environment.

Conclusions

Aesthetic dimensions have received increasing attention in the service literature over the last quarter century, especially with regard to the focus on experiential and symbolic aspects of products and services. The tourism literature has only recently turned their

attention to the role of aesthetics for the tourist experience as a source for obtaining competitive advantages for service businesses and destinations. A central topic to explore for tourism strategies is how the tourists express central aesthetic dimensions in the context of nature-based experiences. The findings in the research to date, show that aesthetic dimensions are mostly linked to landscape preferences and the natural environment (e.g., Coghlan and Prideaux, 2009; Fredman and Tyrväinen, 2010; Haukeland et al., 2010; Hazen, 2009; Raadik et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2008).

The findings from this study support these results, and extend the research by also including central aesthetic dimensions for the man-made environment. The analysis revealed five aesthetic dimensions; “variation/contrast”, “harmony”, “scenery/viewing”, “genuineness”, and “cleanliness”. The first three dimensions are all central for both the natural and the man-made environment. Furthermore, “genuineness” was only important regard to the man-made environment, and “variation/contrast” only to the natural environment. Except “genuineness”, the other four dimensions are supported by previous studies as central for well-being and choice of nature-based tourism destinations. “Genuineness” has not been included as an aesthetic quality in previous research, but has been pointed to as important for tourists’ experiences in general, linked to the “authentic surroundings”. The results from this study revealed that it might be more appropriate to use the word “genuineness” instead of “authentic” regard to the man-made environment. The feeling of the “genuineness” or “uniqueness” at a tourism business may not depend on e.g., the local traditions, but on the overall theme, design or art that makes it different from other businesses. Emotional aspects were also mentioned for all the five dimensions (e.g., feeling both scared and delighted, and feeling of belonging in nature), and this finding supports the conceptual studies of active and emotional participation in the nature-based “experiencescape”.

The results indicated that aesthetic dimensions have influence on the natural and the man-made environment in tourists’ nature-based experiences. Future research should emphasize this by including the overall or holistic environments, and not separate the man-made and the natural environment, which is typical in tourism studies (e.g.,

Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Hazen, 2009; Raadik et al., 2010). Previous research show that satisfaction is important for loyalty intentions, and by including the overall environment, it might be easier to reveal features the tourists` are not satisfied with at a nature-based destination. The findings also suggested that it might be fruitful in future research, to include several senses, and not the traditional viewing or gazing.

The study`s findings are valuable for the producers, to improve or innovate the different features, and thereby influence the tourists` overall satisfaction. Marketing campaigns for different market segments can for example focus on “*variation/contrast*” in nature by using pictures of, say, mountains, rivers, or waterfalls. They can show multiple colors in nature, and visualize nature as both beautiful and brutal in order to trigger emotions like being scared, excited, and happy. Offering product packages with guided tours for experiencing nature in different weather conditions, or in daylight in contrast with moonlight, can contribute to variation and the active sensing of nature-based experiences. As a contrast with everyday life and the possibilities of sensing nature, “the slow journey”, like driving an old car or a cabriolet, cycling, horseback riding, and walking, can be used as a part of a destination`s image.

The feeling of “*harmony*” for the nature-based tourist can be achieved by offering accommodation close to nature (e.g., by a river) that offers possibilities for sensing nature, by showing pictures of animals, for example. Developing buildings that respect the natural environment might also support this dimension. It may also be critical to offer possibilities of experiencing silence in nature, away from cars and other tourists. This contributes to the feelings of freedom and relaxation that comes from being in nature. Courses for hosts might be relevant for tourism businesses in order to ensure that guests have the feeling of being taken care of. For the dimension “*scenery/viewing*”, it is important to offer possibilities for the tourists to view spectacular and beautiful nature, special nature attractions, and cultural landscapes. Maintaining clear viewpoints and walking paths along the scenic routes to prevent overgrowth are important local efforts. Pictures in marketing campaigns might reflect the possibilities of viewing both the

natural and the man-made environment. The results from this study also indicate that experiences that trigger emotions of awe and fascination are central for this dimension.

In order to develop competitive products and services in the future, the destinations and producers might offer experiences based on the “*genuineness*” of the destination, emphasizing aspects like the local nature and culture and the inhabitants’ shared values. As a way of highlighting a destination’s uniqueness, the SMEs might focus on nature and the local history, not only for the single firm, but also for the entire destination. The experience concepts might be overtly linked to the spirit of the place and its people, like the destination’s history, along with its legends and stories. As a source of competitive advantage, the genuineness might also be combined with new elements. Combining art and architecture with nature might, for example, help tourists to experience the landscape in a new way. It may even attract new market segments to become interested in natural experiences. This strategy supports the statement, “Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it”. It might avoid predictable and unvarying experience products and services found in many other destinations. Regard to the dimension “*cleanliness*”, both public and private actors are responsible for keeping the environment clean at a nature-based destination. Even an otherwise beautiful environment might leave a negative impression. The sight of overfilled rubbish skips and wrecked cars in nature are examples of negative cues for the visitors. The destination may also offer possibilities where the tourists can take active part in such nature-based activities as drinking water from the stream or swimming in the river or any other sense-enhancing experience.

The aim of this study is limited, which means that the results should be seen as a basis for future research, for example, a larger-scale testing of aesthetic dimensions in other nature-based contexts. The aesthetic dimensions can be seen in the context of different products, based on different tourists’ needs and preferring different elements in the aesthetic experience depending on, for example, travel motive, nationality, the travel companion, age, type of transport and travel, earlier visits, and education. These aspects should be investigated further. Though emotional aspects were mentioned for the five dimensions, which supports the conceptual studies of active and emotional participation

in the nature-based experience, further research might be valuable. Although nature-based tourism destinations are producers of aesthetic experiences through complex practices of private and public actors, tourists as participants in the marketing and product-development processes have received little attention. One possible area of further research could therefore be a close analysis of the dynamic process by which the tourist interacts with the individual producer. With respect to alternative aesthetic dimensions, the findings can hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the concept of aesthetics in nature-based tourist experiences.

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Paper 3

Effects of Aesthetic Qualities on Satisfaction and Loyalty: A Case from a Scenic Road

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Effects of Aesthetic Qualities on Satisfaction and Loyalty: A Case from a Scenic Road

With a basis in the increasing focus on aesthetic qualities in tourism experiences, this study examines the effects of aesthetic qualities on tourists' satisfaction and loyalty in a nature-based tourism context. The analysis reveals that tourists' evaluation of the aesthetic qualities of *scenery*, *harmony* and *genuineness* affected the satisfaction with the scenic road positively, and that satisfaction had a direct influence on both the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit the road and to visit similar roads. By contrast, the aesthetic qualities *cleanliness* and *genuineness* only had a direct effect on the intention to revisit the scenic road, and indicated a more complex explanatory pattern for the other loyalty intentions.

Keywords: Aesthetic qualities; satisfaction; loyalty; nature-based tourism; scenic road

INTRODUCTION

Aesthetic qualities have received increasing attention in the marketing literature over the last quarter century, especially with regard to the focus on experiential and symbolic aspects of products and services. A number of services studies recognize the role of aesthetics in consumer behaviour (e.g., Baisya and Das 2008; Brady and Cronin 2001; Charters 2006; Das, Baisya, and Chandra 2003; Turley and Milliam 2000). This role has only recently become a theme in tourism research directed towards consumer experiences (e.g., Bonn, Joseph-Mathews, Dai, Hayes, and Cave 2007; Hosany and Witham 2009; Oh, Fiore, and Jeoung 2007). However, it seems that previous tourism research to a large extent has been limited to a focus on cultural touristic experiences. Vespestad and Lindberg (2011) therefore suggest a need to direct scholarly attention towards nature-based experiences.

Destination marketing strategies based on positive word of mouth from past visitors and creating repeat visitors from a wider market can play a major role in helping tourist destinations to survive in an increasingly competitive global market (Phillips, Wolfe Hodur, and Leistriz 2013). The relationship between service quality in general, satisfaction, and loyalty are therefore well recognized in studies of tourists' behaviour (Baker and Crompton 2000; Chen, Lee, Chen, and Huang 2011; Kim, Holland, and Han 2012; Kozak and Rimmington 2000; Petrick 2004; Thrane 2002; Žabkar, Brenčič, and Dmitrović 2010). The results indicate that service quality has both direct and indirect effects on different aspects of loyalty mediated by overall satisfaction, and it may be valuable to treat, for example, the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit separately. To this authors' knowledge, the relationship between aesthetic qualities, satisfaction, and loyalty have not been applied in a nature-based setting. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to add knowledge to the influence of aesthetic qualities on overall satisfaction and both the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit the destination. Specifically, it will examine the relationship

between (1) five aesthetic qualities (*scenery, cleanliness, harmony, art/architecture* and *genuineness*) and satisfaction, and (2) five aesthetic qualities, satisfaction and three loyalty intentions (to recommend, to revisit and to visit similar routes). The focus on different aesthetic qualities is pioneering work. The results of the study are a significant contribution to the marketing literature on the possible links between service quality (aesthetic qualities) and its outcomes (e.g., greater revenue through increased market share). It will also provide relevant data to destination marketers for the development of appropriate marketing strategies in order to add value and increase the tourists' satisfaction through aesthetic qualities as an important aspect in nature-based experiences. This may increase the tourists' likelihood of recommending and revisiting the destination, and may be a source of competitive advantage.

This study employs a broad definition of nature-based tourism from Fredman and Tyrväinen (2010) that states that nature-based tourism should be associated with leisure activities in nature, where the key components are the tourists, nature, and the experiences in nature. Furthermore, the nature-based tourism industry represents facilities to meet the demands of the nature-based market segments, such as trip activities or travel mode choice (Mehmetoglu 2006, 2007). The present study extends the previous research by specifically considering the physical or man-made environments in nature (e.g. accommodation, food, and signs) that may be central in a nature-based holiday, and thereby influence the overall satisfaction and loyalty intentions. The empirical context is one of the *National Tourist Routes* in Norway. These routes combine nature, architecture, design, and art and include actors from both the public and private sectors in the marketing and value-creation processes. The paper is divided into five parts. Following this introduction, part two provides the conceptual framework that emphasizes aesthetic qualities, satisfaction, and loyalty intentions. Part three presents the method and part four presents the findings. The final part concludes this article and draws the theoretical and practical implications for marketing purposes.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Aesthetic qualities in nature-based experiences

Since Baumgarten defined the concept of aesthetics for the first time in the eighteenth century for denoting *the science of the sensory*, that is, the recognition we extract from dealing with the senses, and later, the narrower focus of the concept as a part of the philosophy of art, aesthetics is today considered to be a discipline situated between philosophy and art, and conveys a general sense of learning (Bale and Bø-Rygg 2008). Much of the consideration within marketing has focused on products with a visual dimension, like advertising and designing websites, rather than on the aesthetic experience itself, such as music or architecture (Charters 2006). Furthermore, in tourism literature, the visual aspect, such as *the tourist gaze*, beauty, design, and style, has been emphasized (Pikkemaat and Weiermair 2004; Urry 2002; Weaver 2009). However, recent research highlights the importance of using multiple senses in the marketing and experiential development (Mossberg 2007; Wang, Xia and Chen 2008). This study employs this broad definition, and emphasizes nature-based experiences, which have an aesthetic purpose as a substantial goal, rather than products which use aesthetic elements (such as styling) as a marketing promotional goal.

Individual tourism producers cannot produce experiences because they are subjective and perceived by the person who senses the features, but they can offer prerequisites for the experience product (Löfgren 2001). According to Wang et al. (2008), nature-based experiences are preferences based on personal aesthetic concepts derived from an individual's own experience, and *shape, colour, sound* and *natural change* are aesthetic values that refer to nature landscape. The results from empirical studies in tourism on aesthetic notions with regard to landscape preferences and the establishment of national parks, note that central

aesthetic qualities are; *scenery/viewing* (Hazen 2009; Jacobsen 2011; Raadik, Cottrell, Fredman, Ritter, and Newman 2010), *clean environment* (Coghlan and Prideaux 2009; Haukeland, Grue, and Veisten 2010; Hazen 2009), *beautiful/dramatic landscape* (Haukeland et al. 2010; Jacobsen 2011; Raadik et al. 2010), and *silence/tranquillity/peacefulness* (Raadik et al. 2010). In the service literature in general, the concept of aesthetics mostly refers to the consumers' interpretation of the physical environment (servicescape) that may heighten their overall satisfaction and differentiate the business from its competitors (e.g., Bitner 1992; Wagner 2000). The literature that has focused on aesthetic qualities and the physical environment in nature-based tourism experiences is scarce. This is surprising with regard to the fact that, say, accommodation, food, and signs might all be central features in a nature-based holiday and thereby influence the overall satisfaction and the loyalty intentions. Relevant studies from various experiential contexts (e.g., heritage attractions, cruise, and bed-and-breakfast accommodation) show that *harmony, design, and attractive surroundings* (Bonn et al. 2007; Hosany and Witham 2009; Kwornik 2008; Oh et al. 2007) have effects on customers' overall satisfaction and future intentions, like the willingness to recommend. Moreover, *genuineness* or unique experiences are emphasized in several experiential studies related to the senses of touch, smell and taste, for example, enjoying unique lodging or tasting local food and drinks (e.g., Chi and Qu 2008; Jang and Feng 2007; Kim and Moon 2009).

There is no research-based or universal definition of nature-based tourism. Fredman and Tyrväinen (2010) concluded that most scholars associate nature-based tourism with leisure activities that take place in natural surroundings, and that the key components are tourists, nature and their experiences of nature. This study employs this broad definition. Fredman, Wall-Reinius & Lundberg (2009) have identified four recurrent themes in nature-based tourism: visitors to natural areas, experiences of a natural environment, participation in an activity and normative components related to sustainable development and local impact. In

this study, we focus mainly on the first theme, and in particular, we stress man-made environments in natural surroundings. According to Mehmetoglu (2006, 2007), nature-based tourists are not a homogeneous group, but can include those from various market segments based on factors such as trip activities or travel mode choice. This study focuses mainly on the independent tourists who are likely to value nature-based activities such as short hiking tours (car walks) or cycling.

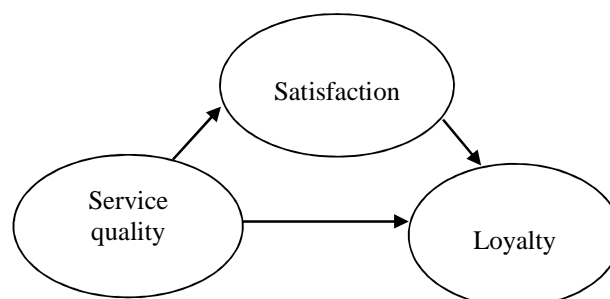
Tourist satisfaction and loyalty

Satisfaction is a multifaceted concept and becomes more complex when the setting is a destination (which potentially is the site of multiple service providers) rather than an individual service provider. Phillips et al. (2013) define overall satisfaction as the individual's subjective consumption evaluation that is based on all the elements associated with the experiences, such as the accommodation, the attractions and activities, the food, and so on. The concept of satisfaction is defined by marketers as post-purchase behaviour and this is of strategic importance to businesses due to its influence on repeat purchases and word-of-mouth recommendations (Heung and Quf 2000). Among others, Soutar (2001) has concluded that satisfied customers are much more likely to show positive post-purchase behaviours, such as taking part in repeat visits, remaining loyal, and providing positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Hence, to measure customer satisfaction, tourism authorities need to anticipate which attributes of the service the customers are using in their overall quality assessment (Pizam and Ellis 1999). This study focuses on the aesthetic attributes or qualities in this respect.

Recommendations to other people and repeat purchases are typically referred to as *consumer loyalty* in the marketing literature. Revisiting has generally been regarded as

desirable both because the marketing costs are lower than those required obtaining from first-time tourists, and because it is a positive indicator of satisfaction (Oppermann 2000). The relationship between service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty are therefore well recognized in the study of tourists' behaviour. Earlier findings show that service quality has both direct and indirect effects on loyalty mediated by overall satisfaction. The study of Cole and Illum (2006), for example, indicate that service quality did not affect loyalty directly, but only indirectly through satisfaction. By contrast, the studies by Petrick (2004), Mounthino et al. (2012), and Žabkar et al. (2010) found within a nature-based context that service quality had a significant and direct effect on loyalty. A few studies also indicate that service quality has both a direct effect as well as an indirect effect on loyalty mediated by satisfaction (Baker and Crompton 2000; Kozak and Rimmington 2000; Thrane 2002). However, these studies also show that the effects of quality and satisfaction on the intention to revisit are not necessarily similar to the effects on the willingness to make a recommendation to others. Based on the findings from these studies, Figure 1 illustrates the different ways in which service qualities can affect loyalty.

FIGURE 1
RELATIONSHIPS AMONG SERVICE QUALITY, SATISFACTION
AND LOYALTY



Note: Adapted from Baker and Crompton, 2000, p.791.

In light of Figure 1, aesthetic qualities might appear to affect loyalty in one of three ways: directly, indirectly as mediated by tourist satisfaction, or both. This study, set within a context of tourists visiting scenic roads, examines the effects of aesthetic qualities on both the intention to recommend the road to others and the intention to revisit. Of those who visit the *National tourist route Geiranger-Trollstigen*, 50% are international travellers, and for many tourists this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The intention to revisit, thus, may therefore be divided into (1) revisiting this specific road and (2) revisiting other similar roads. This *decomposition* is supported by Oppermann (2000), who argued that due to time- and cost-constraints or simply the existence of too many appealing destinations around the world, many tourists are unable to revisit the destination even though they are 100% satisfied with their experience. The analysis will also include a number of control variables, which in previous research have been known to affect loyalty (e.g., nationality, previous visits, age, travelling company, and type of tour).

METHOD AND DATA

The case

By 2015, 18 tourist routes will have been prepared as new tourist attractions, of which *Geiranger-Trollstigen* is one of them. In addition to the driving experience and the natural environment, an enhancement of the experience is at centre stage, which the project description underlines: “*The tourists` experiences of the scenery and cultural landscape are intended to be genuine and unique, where the original scenery is embellished with traces of our time through innovative architecture, art and design*” (Berre and Lysholm 2008, p. 10). The project is the largest public tourism project in Norway so far, with a budget of more than 258 million Euros for the period of 2002-2015. The money is allocated for improving

journeys, developing rest areas, parking places with activities and experiences, and more. The elements that the project expects other actors to provide include activities and experiences, as well as food, accommodation, and hospitality. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration has the responsibility for the project management in cooperation with two architectural committees comprising architects, landscape architects, and artists.

The *National tourist route Geiranger/Trollstigen* was chosen for the following reasons. (1) It combines nature, architecture, design, and art at the viewpoints and at the tourism businesses (e.g., cafeterias and accommodation). Both the cafeteria and the viewpoint at Trollstigen have received much international attention. One of the hotels along the route, *Juvet Landscape Hotel*, has won a number of awards because of the distinctive architecture and location. (2) This route is an example of cooperation between public and private actors in the marketing and innovational processes. (3) The route with Trollstigen, a natural attraction, is the second-most visited nature-based attraction in Norway that draws about 600 000 visitors during the summer season. This route attracts both international and domestic visitors, and the segments are composed of a combination of independent and individual round-trip tourists, mountain tourists, and organized cruise tourists.

Data collection

The population for this survey is composed of individual travellers on holiday along the *National Tourist Route Geiranger-Trollstigen*. A total of 1030 questionnaires were randomly distributed to individual tourist travel companions along the road in July 2012. The primary market for the route is the individual round-trip tourist, and most of the questionnaires (63.3%) were therefore distributed at two of the most visited nature attractions (Trollstigen and Gudbrandsjuvet), where the project has combined nature, architecture, and design. The other sampling points were at the ferries Linge and Eidsdal, located

approximately at the middle of the National Tourist Route. The tourists answered the questionnaire themselves, and four project assistants collected the questionnaires directly afterwards. The questionnaire was available in Norwegian, English, and German. Letting the tourists answer the questionnaire in their own language, strengthens the surveys reliability. Ten questionnaires were not usable and ten were answered by respondents who were less than 18 years old. Of the 1030 questionnaires distributed, 1010 were able to be used in this study.

Measures and scale items

With the lack of previous research on the effects of aesthetic qualities on satisfaction and loyalty intentions in a nature-based tourism setting, this project involved the development of a new survey instrument from previous research results and interviews with experts (14 interviews) and tourists (10 interviews). To ensure a broad perspective for the multidisciplinary concept of aesthetics, experts from academia were chosen to represent the various disciplines that regard and approach aesthetics as a general sense of learning (e.g., environmental psychology, architecture, and musicology) and such disciplines within tourism as marketing, experiential economy, and nature-based tourism. The practical experts were producers of the staging value, representing economic geography, experiential economy, and nature-based tourism. The experts were able to verbalize the diffuse concept of aesthetics, like the latent aspects that nature-based tourists might have difficulty in explaining themselves. The results from the interviews gave the opportunity to provide a comparison of the experts' and the tourists' understandings.

The interviews were a valuable supplement on this first attempt to develop a scale to measure the effects of aesthetic qualities on satisfaction and loyalty intentions in a nature-based setting. The measurement of six aesthetic qualities (*cleanliness, variation/contrast,*

scenery/viewing, harmony, art/architecture, and genuineness) were developed and assessed for content validity. Prior to data collection, a pilot test was conducted to refine the survey questionnaire. Twenty individual tourists who visited the tourist route at the end of June 2012 participated in the pilot test (11 international and 9 domestic travelers). Based on the results of this test, the survey questionnaire was refined and finalized. On the basis the results from this test, this author refined and finalized the survey questionnaire. The final survey items are shown in table 1.

TABLE 1
SCALE WITH THE FINAL ITEMS

Aesthetic qualities	Scale Item
Cleanliness	Pure natural environment along the route
	Minimum of litter along the route
	Cleanliness of the businesses
	Good opportunities for drinking clean water
Scenery/viewing	Good viewpoints of the natural landscape
	Arranged viewpoints along the route
	Good view of the cultural landscape
Harmony	Places to experience silence and calm
	Accommodation close to nature
	Businesses` architecture harmonize with landscape
	Businesses` interior harmonize with the surroundings outdoors
Art/Architecture	Architecture enhances experience of nature
	Signage in the natural surroundings
	The artworks at viewpoints enhance experiences of nature
	Businesses are artistically conscious
Genuineness	Encountering flora in the natural surroundings
	Good opportunities to eat local dishes
	Businesses reflect traditions
	Good opportunities to observe wildlife

The analysis of reliability indicated that the Cronbach's alpha (CA) coefficients were sufficiently high for five of the aesthetic qualities; that is, they were about the minimum value of 0.50, which has been considered acceptable as an indication of reliability for short scales, like those with less than ten items (Pallant 2004). For the aesthetic quality *Scenery/viewing* one of the items (*Viewpoints to be by myself*) had a higher CA when the item was deleted (0.67) compared with all the four items together (0.57). This item was therefore removed. For the aesthetic quality *Variation/contrast*, the CA was 0.32, and it was therefore excluded from further analysis.

The five aesthetic qualities were measured on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. It was also possible to answer *not relevant* (8). *Not relevant* was re-coded into 4 in order to not lose too many cases for the multivariate analyses. The overall satisfaction with the tourist route and the three aspects of loyalty were also measured on the same seven-point scale. Satisfaction was measured with the item: *How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements when you think back on what you have experienced along the Geiranger–Trollstigen road? (Place one cross for each statement)*. One of the statements was: *On the whole, I am happy with the experiences I have had along the road*. The two revisit intentions were divided into: (1) intention to revisit the specific Geiranger–Trollstigen National Tourist Route and (2) intention to visit similar routes (other than the Geiranger–Trollstigen route). In the questionnaire, the tourists were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: *I am going to drive on this road again* (revisit the route) and *I am going to drive on similar roads again* (visit similar routes). Intention to visit similar routes can't help the Geiranger-Trollstigen route to build loyalty, but it can indicate that the tourists` might be loyal to similar nature-based routes in the future. In Norway, there are for example 17 similar national tourist routes.

The analysis includes the following control variables, which in existing research have been found to affect loyalty: nationality, previous visits, age, travel companions and type of tour. First-time visitors were coded as 1 and repeaters 0. Likewise, international visitors were coded 1 and Norwegians 0, and finally, travel companions with children were coded 1 and companions without children were coded 0. Descriptive statistics for the variables are shown in table 2.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE STUDY VARIABLES
(NOT RELEVANT = 4)

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
<i>Aesthetic qualities:</i>			
Scenery/viewing (N=907) (Alpha=0.67)	5.81	0.942	1-7
Cleanliness (N=863) (Alpha=0.46)	5.55	0.812	1-7
Harmony (N=882) (Alpha=0.62)	4.81	0.948	1-7
Art/architecture (N=862) (Alpha=0.66)	4.81	0.991	1-7
Genuineness (N=872) (Alpha=0.58)	4.58	0.957	1-7
<i>Satisfaction and loyalty:</i>			
Satisfaction (N=895)	6.10	1.072	1-7
Recommend to friends and family (N=890)	6.39	1.005	1-7
Revisit the road (N=883)	5.83	1.531	1-7
Revisit similar roads (N=892)	6.19	1.137	1-7
<i>Control variables:</i>			
International travellers (N=1010) (yes=1)	0.53	0.499	0-1
First time visit (N=1004) (yes=1)	0.51	0.500	0-1
Age (N=963)	46.56	13.638	18-90
Number of stops (N=975)	3.86	3.845	0-50
Travelling with children (N=986) (yes=1)	0.31	0.463	0-1

Analysis

To test the proposed model, with multiple items for the independent variables and only one item for the dependent variable, a series of OLS (ordinary least squares) regression analyses were conducted. The chosen method is based on the principle of parsimony, compared with more complicated methods, such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The overall satisfaction was considered as a mediator. First, the independent variables explaining the dependent variable of satisfaction were aesthetic qualities. In the second step of the analyses, satisfaction was considered as an independent variable together with aesthetic qualities, which explains the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit. The results were controlled for the variables nationality, previous visits, age, number of stops, travel companion, type of visits, education, and income. The variables explained little of the variance in the dependent variables (the three loyalty intentions). Furthermore, the results from the regression analysis did not distinguish any difference when all the variables in the equation were controlled for simultaneously. The aesthetic qualities and the satisfaction predicted the same outcome with regard to the effects on the loyalty intentions. Thus, the control variables are not included in Tables 4–7. The regression models were checked for multicollinearity by means of the variance inflation factors (VIF), and no evidence was detected (no scores exceeded 1.89).

Profile of respondents

The descriptive statistics on the sample respondents' nationality, previous visits, type of tour and vehicle, travel companion, and age are presented in table 3.

TABLE 3
PROFILE OF TOURIST TRAVELLERS

Frequency	N	%
<i>Nationality (n=1010)</i>		
International travelers*	536	53.3
Domestic travelers (3.5% local residents)	474	46.7
<i>First time visit (N=1004)</i>		
First time visit	516	51.4
Earlier visits	488	48.6
<i>The type of tour (N=1008)</i>		
Day trip	310	30.8
Round trip	373	37.0
Shorter stay	184	18.2
Longer stay	120	11.9
Other	21	2.1
<i>The type of vehicle (N=1003)</i>		
Car	770	76.8
Motorcycle	62	6.2
Camper/RV	108	10.7
Other vehicles	63	6.3
<i>Travel companion (N=986)</i>		
Adults with children under 16 years	307	31.1
Adults without children under 16 years	679	68.9
<i>Age (N=973)</i>		
30 years and younger	300	30.8
40-49 years	251	25.8
50-59 years	246	25.3
60 years and older	176	18.1

* i.e. Sweden 9.3%, Rest of Scandinavia 5%, Germany 12.5%, Benelux 8.7%, Rest of Western Europe 7.8%, Eastern Europe 5.6%.

International travellers constituted 53.3% and domestic travellers 46.7%. Half of the sample had been on a vacation trip along the road before ('repeaters'), including most domestic visitors (65.6%). The other half comprised first-time visitors, dominated by international visitors (72.8%). Most respondents were on a day trip or round trip (67.8%), while 30.1% where staying for a minimum of one night in the area. Nearly half of the sample had been one day or more on the road when they were interviewed (52.7%). The majority of the sample was driving a car (76.8%), and there were on average three persons travelling in company. The

average age was 46 years, and half of the sample was in the range 40 to 59 years. The majority was travelling without children (68.9%).

RESULTS

In table 4, satisfaction (the dependent variable) is regressed on the five aesthetic qualities (the independent variables). The table reveals that *scenery* has a positive and strong effect on satisfaction ($p < 0.001$). *Harmony* and *genuineness* also have effects on the overall satisfaction with the experiences along the tourist route (significant at 0.05 level).

TABLE 4
EFFECTS OF AESTHETIC QUALITIES ON SATISFACTION

Independent variable	Satisfaction a)
	N=700
Scenery	0.242*** [0.214] (0.051)
Cleanliness	0.076 [0.057] (0.060)
Harmony	0.153* [0.133] (0.053)
Art/architecture	0.020 [0.018] (0.051)
Genuineness	0.123*[0.112] (0.047)
Constant	2.888*** (0.284)
R ²	0.177

a) Unstandardized regression coefficients. Standardized regression coefficients in brackets. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$

Note: The analyses control for the variables nationality, previous visits, age, number of stops, travel companion, type of tour, income, and education.

Approximately 18% of the variation of the visitors overall satisfaction was explained by the five aesthetic qualities. The data fit the model in predicting the variance of the visitors' overall satisfaction level. A general comparison with prior service-quality studies showed that these results appeared trustworthy (e.g., Chen et al. 2011, Heung and Quf 2000, Kozak and Rimmington 2000).

In table 5, the intention to recommend (dependent variable) is first regressed on the five aesthetic qualities (left column). The left column reveals that *scenery* has a significant influence on the intention to recommend. *Cleanliness* has also a positive effect. In the second step of the analysis, overall satisfaction is considered as a new independent variable together with the aesthetic qualities on the intention to recommend (right column). The results show that the effect of the two aesthetic qualities on the intention to recommend is insignificant.

TABLE 5
EFFECTS OF AESTHETIC QUALITIES, SATISFACTION,
AND INTENTION TO RECOMMEND

Independent variable	Intention to recommend a)	
	N=697	N=690
Scenery	0.175*** [0.171] (0.047)	0.062 [0.061] (0.042)
Cleanliness	0.128* [0.108] (0.054)	0.088 [0.074] (0.048)
Harmony	0.075 [0.074] (0.048)	0.011 [0.011] (0.042)
Art/architecture	0.070 [0.074] (0.046)	0.052 [0.055] (0.041)
Genuineness	0.070 [0.071] (0.043)	0.030 [0.031] (0.038)
Satisfaction	----	0.445*** [0.490] (0.031)
Constant	3.664*** (0.259)	2.398*** (0.244)
R ²	0.150	0.349

a) Unstandardized regression coefficients. Standardized regression coefficients in brackets. Standard errors in parentheses. *p<0.05. **p<0.01. ***p<0.001

Note: The analyses control for the variables nationality, previous visits, age, number of stops, travel companion, type of tour, income, and education.

Combined, the analyses in Table 5 show that overall satisfaction with the experiences along the road has a positive effect on the intention to recommend (p<0.001), whereas the effect of two of the aesthetic qualities appears to be only indirect. These findings are at odds with the results from a festival context, where service quality (e.g., music quality) has a direct effect on the intention to recommend (Baker and Crompton 2000; Tarn 1999; Thrane 2002). However, as said earlier, several studies from a nature-based setting show that loyalty intentions have

both direct and indirect effects, without separating the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit (e.g., Kim et al. 2012; Moutinho et al. 2012; Žabkar et al. 2010).

Table 6 displays the same kind of information as Table 5, but for the intention to revisit the road. In contrast to the intention to recommend (Table 5), *cleanliness* and *genuineness* also have significant direct effects when overall satisfaction is controlled for. *Cleanliness* has also a direct effect ($p < 0.001$) on visiting similar roads when satisfaction is controlled for, whereas *scenery* has only an indirect effect (table 7).

TABLE 6
EFFECTS OF AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS AND SATISFACTION ON THE INTENTION TO REVISIT

Independent variable	Revisit the road a)	
	N=695	N=688
Scenery	0.002 [0.001] (0.078)	-0.071 [-0.043] (0.077)
Cleanliness	0.234* [0.123] (0.091)	0.192* [0.100] (0.089)
Harmony	- 0.077 [-0.047] (0.080)	- 0.132 [-0.081] (0.079)
Art/architecture	0.094 [0.062] (0.077)	0.085 [0.056] (0.075)
Genuineness	0.245** [0.158] (0.072)	0.199* [0.128] (0.071)
Satisfaction	----	0.344*** [0.243] (0.057)
Constant	3.310*** (0.440)	2.397*** (0.457)
R ²	0.065	0.111

a) Unstandardized regression coefficients. Standardized regression coefficients in brackets. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Note: The analyses control for the variables nationality, previous visits, age, number of stops, travel companion, type of tour, income, and education.

Taken together, the analyses in table 6 and 7 again show that overall satisfaction has a clear and positive effect on the intention to revisit the route and to visit similar routes. The effect of aesthetic qualities has a more complex explanatory pattern; they appeared to have direct effect on the intention to revisit the route, and both direct and indirect effects on the intentions to visit similar routes. The effect of aesthetic qualities on the intention to revisit is supported of Petrick's study (2004) from a cruise context. By contrast, the studies from a

festival context show that service quality only has an indirect effect on the intention to revisit (Baker and Crompton 2000; Tarn 1999, Thrane 2002).

TABLE 7
EFFECTS OF AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS AND SATISFACTION ON THE INTENTION TO VISIT SIMILAR ROADS

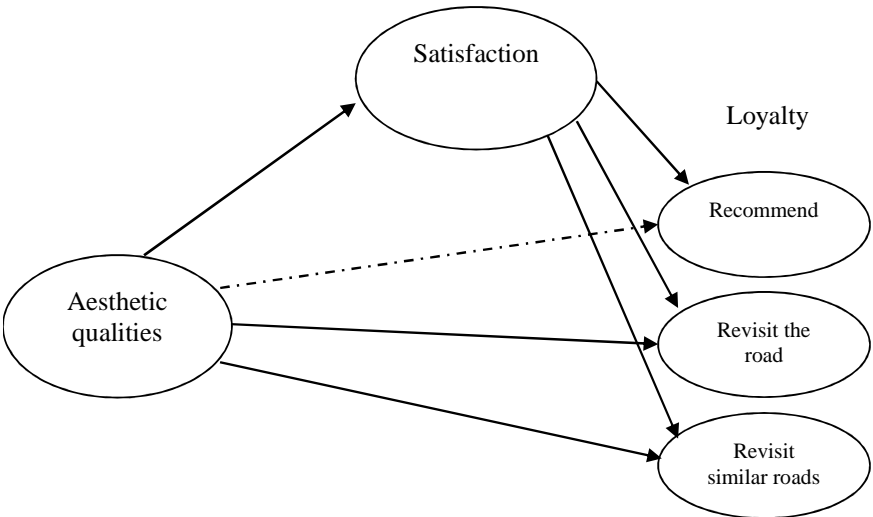
Independent variable	Visit similar roads a)	
	N=698	N=690
Scenery	0.141* [0.118] (0.056)	0.070 [0.059] (0.056)
Cleanliness	0.314*** [0.224] (0.066)	0.300*** [0.214] (0.064)
Harmony	- 0.028 [-0.023] (0.059)	-0.077 [-0.063] (0.057)
Art/architecture	- 0.017 [-0.015] (0.056)	-0.024 [-0.021] (0.055)
Genuineness	0.053 [0.046] (0.053)	0.016 [0.014] (0.052)
Satisfaction	----	0.291*** [0.274] (0.041)
Constant	3.607*** (0.315)	2.745*** (0.329)
R ²	0.097	0.160

a) Unstandardized regression coefficients. Standardized regression coefficients in brackets. Standard errors in parentheses. *p<0.05. **p<0.01. ***p<0.001.

Note: The analyses control for the variables nationality, previous visits, age, number of stops, travel companion, type of tour, income, and education.

Figure 2 provides a portrayal of this study’s findings.

FIGURE 2
HOW AESTHETIC QUALITIES CAN AFFECT LOYALTY DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY MEDIATED BY SATISFACTION.



CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The tourism marketing literature has only recently turned its attention to the role of aesthetic qualities in the tourist experience as a source for obtaining competitive advantages for destinations and businesses. A central topic that needs to be examined for these marketing strategies is the effects of aesthetic qualities on satisfaction and loyalty. The findings in the research to date show that aesthetic qualities have effects on satisfaction and the intention to recommend (Bonn et al. 2007; Hosany and Witham 2009; Kwornik 2008; Oh et al. 2007). Prior tourism research shows that service quality can affect loyalty in one of three ways: directly (Petrick 2004; Mounthino et al. 2012; Žabkar et al. 2010), indirectly (Cole and Illum 2006; Tarn 1999) or both (Baker and Crompton 2000; Kozak and Rimmington 2000; Thrane 2002).

The findings from this study support the latter and more complex explanatory pattern, that service quality can affect loyalty both directly and indirectly. The analysis revealed that the tourist's evaluation of the aesthetic qualities *scenery*, *harmony* and *genuineness* affected the satisfaction with the scenic road (destination) positively, and that satisfaction had both a direct influence on the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit the road and other similar roads. By contrast, the tourists' evaluation of the aesthetic qualities *cleanliness* and *genuineness* only had a direct effect on the intention to revisit the road. For the intention to recommend the road to others, the aesthetic qualities *scenery* and *cleanliness* only had an indirect effect mediated by overall satisfaction. Aesthetic qualities had both direct (*cleanliness*) and indirect effects (*scenery*) on the intention to revisit similar roads. Even if the aesthetic qualities explained a relatively low variation of the tourists' overall satisfaction, the results from this study revealed that superior aesthetic qualities were important for the tourists' satisfaction with the road and that satisfaction, in turn, was a key factor for positive word of mouth and the intention to revisit.

Theoretical and practical implications

The results from this study suggest that there are different explanatory patterns for overall satisfaction and the three different aspects of loyalty. Future research should take these results into account by not treating the three loyalty intentions as indicators of a more general construct of *loyalty*, which is typical in previous studies (e.g., Cole and Illum 2006; Kim et al. 2012; Mountinho et al. 2012; Žabkar et al. 2010). Many tourists can be satisfied with a destination or a specific business and recommend it to others although they do not intend to revisit it for themselves. The destination can be an once-in-a-lifetime experience, but they may visit similar destinations, as this study indicated.

Due to increasing competition, destination marketers are under great pressure to understand consumers' experiences and the resulting influence on post-consumption evaluations. The findings reveal that the relationship between aesthetic qualities and loyalty intentions are complex, because the effect also works through overall satisfaction. Hence, destination marketers should continue to focus on aesthetic qualities in their marketing efforts. To increase the overall satisfaction, this study identifies three aesthetic qualities that can be highlighted in marketing campaigns: (1) *scenery*, with good viewpoints of the natural and cultural landscape, including arranged viewpoints along the road; (2) *harmony*, with places to experience silence and calm, accommodations close to nature, the businesses' architecture harmonizing with the landscape and the businesses' interior harmonizing with the surroundings outdoors; (3) *genuineness*, with ample opportunities to encounter plants in their natural surroundings, multiple possibilities for eating local dishes, the presence of businesses that reflect or preserve traditions and good chances to experience animals in nature. To increase the intention to recommend, *scenery* and *cleanliness* was emphasized, where the latter focuses on pure nature and possibilities for drinking clean water, a minimum of litter along the road, and cleanness at the businesses.

On the basis of the finding that overall satisfaction with the tourist route appears to have more influence on the future intentions of loyalty than the aesthetic qualities, the marketers of the tourist route also need to invest efforts on other strategies that will enhance tourists' overall satisfaction and especially the intention to recommend. One relevant strategy may be to focus on push motivations like emotions. The study by Yoon and Usyal (2005) indicate that emotions have a positively direct relationship with destination loyalty. Another strategy may involve the concept of servicescape, and this would entail a thorough consideration of the tourist route from the point of view of the tourist's experiences. As Kworntnik (2008) conceptualized the *shipscape* as a context-specific type of servicescape, including the man-made physical, social, and natural environment, it may be fruitful to use the concept of *roadscape* to visualize an overall marketing strategy for the tourist routes, including the social environment (i.e., host service and other guests).

Limitations

There were two major limitations to this study. First, this study is an exploratory attempt to measure the effects of aesthetic qualities by using a scale with five aspects developed from previous research and interviews from a specific nature-based context. Several other aspects and items of aesthetic quality may contribute to overall satisfaction and loyalty intentions within a nature-based context. Future research may address this more thoroughly by examining several indicators of other service qualities simultaneously. Secondly, because the study setting was only one particular scenic road, the potential for generalization to other scenic roads and nature-based tourism products in general may be limited. To overcome this, an application of the scales to other settings will help to produce more reliable indicators and to validate the constructs further. This study's results clearly

support the conclusion that aesthetic qualities are important factors for obtaining satisfied tourists and that satisfied tourists are important for the industry's development along a scenic road and a nature-based destination.

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Paper 4

The Effects of Aesthetic Experiential Qualities on Tourists' Positive Emotions and Loyalty: A Case of a Nature-based Context in Norway

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The Effects of Aesthetic Experiential Qualities on Tourists' Positive Emotions and Loyalty: A Case of a Nature-based Context in Norway

With the increasing focus on aesthetic qualities in tourism experiences, this study examines the effects of aesthetic experiential qualities on tourists' positive emotions and three loyalty intentions. The findings reveal that tourists' evaluation of the aesthetic qualities of "scenery", "cleanliness" and "genuineness" had significant effects on positive emotions towards nature-based experiences. Positive emotions had direct effects on all three loyalty intentions. While only some of the aesthetic qualities had both direct and indirect effects on travellers' intentions to recommend the route and visit similar routes, only indirect effects on the intention to revisit the route were mediated by positive emotions.

KEYWORDS aesthetic qualities, positive emotions, loyalty intentions, nature-based tourism

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a shift from standardization to more consumer-oriented product offerings. This shift has contributed to an increased focus on both aesthetic qualities and the symbolic value of products and services in creating experiences intended to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Hence, aesthetic qualities appear to be a particularly important aspect of customer experiences, and thereby contribute to tourism destinations in ways such as greater competitiveness and revenue through increased market share. For example, Langdalen (2003) stresses the importance and significance of aesthetic qualities. According to Langdalen, the critical resources for companies are no longer only labour, organization and technology, but should include a focus on aesthetic qualities. As a natural result of this shift, practitioners in the so-called “experience economy” now focus increasingly on the role of aesthetic qualities in customer experiences. Pine and Gilmore (1999) define an experience economy as a staged economy that creates a memorable consumption experience, in which entertainment, education, aesthetics and escapism constitute the four *realms* of the experience. Tourism has been at the forefront of staging experience, and visiting a particular tourist destination is typically motivated by a powerful mental and emotional image or “pre-experience” the tourist has of the expected experience at the destination (Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007). Hence, the experience economy is relevant to this study, the purpose of which is to examine the effects of aesthetic experiential qualities on tourists’ positive emotions and loyalty towards a nature-based tourist destination. Not surprisingly, this shift in emphasis on aesthetics has been accompanied in recent years by increasing interest in and attention to aesthetic qualities by researchers (e.g., see Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Boswijk, Thijssen & Peelen, 2008; Carù & Cova, 2003).

As indicated above, empirical studies show that aesthetic experiences affect customer satisfaction and loyalty in tourism contexts in general. However, it seems that previous studies have to a large extent been limited to cultural tourism experiences. Observing this previous narrow focus, Vespestad and Lindberg (2011) suggest directing the attention of tourism research towards nature-based experiences. There is no research-based or universal definition of nature-based tourism. Fredman and Tyrväinen (2010) concluded that most scholars associate nature-based tourism with leisure activities that take place in natural surroundings, and that the key components are tourists, nature and their experiences of nature. This study employs this broad definition. Fredman, Wall-Reinius & Lundberg (2009) have identified four recurrent themes in nature-based tourism: visitors to natural areas, experiences of a natural environment,

participation in an activity and normative components related to sustainable development and local impact. In this study, we focus mainly on the first theme, and in particular, we stress man-made environments in natural settings. Furthermore, the nature-based tourism industry represents those activities in various sectors dedicated to meeting the demand of nature tourists. According to Mehmetoglu (2006, 2007), nature-based tourists are not a homogeneous group, but can include those from various market segments based on factors such as trip activities or travel mode choice. This study focuses mainly on the independent tourists who are likely to value nature-based activities such as short hiking tours (car walks) or cycling. Despite the shift to aesthetics and its role in the experience economy in general, remarkably little empirical research has been undertaken in this area. Only recently has this become a theme in tourism research on consumer experiences (e.g., Hosany & Witham, 2009; Kim & Moon, 2009; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Pullmann & Gross, 2004; Slåtten, Mehmetoglu, Svensson & Sværi, 2009). Consequently, aesthetic qualities in nature-based tourism can be characterized as an area that offers considerable scope for future research.

Shusterman and Tomlin (2008) state that aesthetics is of fundamental value to people. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that these experiences within the area of nature-based tourism provide tourists with a variety of opportunities to discover and perceive aesthetic qualities. Moreover, such experiences should evoke emotions similar to customer quality experiences in general (e.g., food appreciation). Emotions are highly relevant when studying tourist experiences. Otto and Ritchie (1996) support this view, and state that “perhaps more than any other service industry, tourism holds the potential to elicit strong emotional ... reactions” (p. 168). Naturally, these emotional reactions may vary from highly positive emotions, such as joy and happiness, to highly negative emotions, such as frustration and pain. It is reasonable to assume that tourist appraisals of nature-based aesthetic qualities and the emotions that they elicit affect their decisions about whether they will revisit a tourist destination in the future or recommend it to others. The latter aspect concerns the causes of tourist loyalty. Consequently, it is important to examine the effect of aesthetic experiential qualities on tourists’ positive emotions and loyalty. The present study focuses on this topic.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of aesthetic experiential qualities on tourists’ positive emotions and loyalty. It will describe and explain the relationship between:

- five aesthetic experiential qualities (“scenery”, “cleanliness”, “harmony”, “art/architecture” and “genuineness”) and positive emotions;

- five aesthetic experiential qualities, positive emotions and three loyalty intentions (to recommend, to revisit and to visit similar routes).

To our knowledge, no previous studies have focused on the effect of aesthetic qualities on positive emotions and loyalty in nature-based tourism. Hence, this paper contributes knowledge on such effects to the literature. The conceptual model, which incorporates the relationships into a framework, is illustrated in Figure 1.

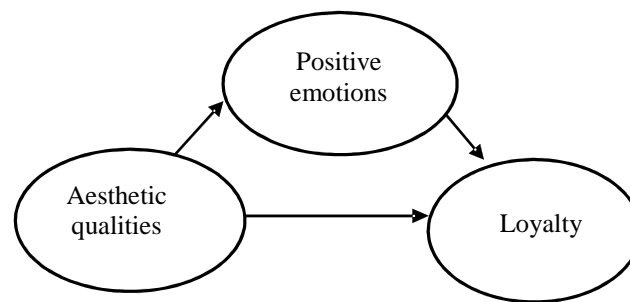


FIGURE 1 The conceptual model of the study.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section presents a review of the literature on the aesthetic experiential qualities that may affect positive emotions and loyalty in a nature-based tourism context. Second, we describe the methods of the study and present findings. The paper concludes with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications and suggestions for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aesthetic Experiential Qualities

In service literature in general, the concept of aesthetics generally refers to consumers' interpretation of their physical environment (Wagner, 2000). Bitner (1992) classifies the physical environment ("servicescape") into "ambient conditions", "space/function" and "signs, symbols and artifacts". Ambient conditions affect the five senses and include background characteristics of the environment such as temperature, lighting, noise, music and odour. An attractive servicescape may heighten overall customer satisfaction with the service and differentiate the business from its competitors (Wagner, 2000). This is supported by empirical

studies in the tourism literature (e.g., hotels and restaurants) indicating a relation between the aesthetic qualities of “design” and “architecture” and atmosphere at tourism businesses, consumer satisfaction, well-being and future intentions (e.g., Albacete-Sáez, Mar Fuentes-Fuentes & Lloréns-Montes, 2007; Heide & Grønhaug, 2009; Kim & Moon, 2009; Pikkemaat & Weiermaier, 2004).

The importance of affecting the senses goes back to Baumgarten’s (1983) original eighteenth-century definition of the concept of aesthetics, denoting “the science of the sensory”, that is, the recognition we extract from our senses. Later, the narrower focus of the concept was part of the philosophy of art. Today, aesthetics is considered a discipline situated between philosophy and art, and the term conveys a general sense of learning (Bale & Bø-Rygg, 2008). This view is supported by both the general service literature (e.g., Baisya & Ganesh Das, 2008; Bitner, 1992) and the tourism literature (Wang, Xia & Chen, 2008). This conceptual framework is primarily concerned with tourist experiences with a substantial aesthetic component (e.g., involving several senses), rather than products that use aesthetic elements (e.g., focusing on visual aspects such as styling websites) as a marketing promotional goal (Charters, 2006). Focusing on nature-based tourism experiences, this study employs this broad definition of the concept of aesthetics, and operationalizes it as six experiential qualities: “harmony”, “variation/contrast”, “cleanliness”, “scenery/views”, “architecture” and “genuineness”. Furthermore, this section points to experiential and tourism literature that highlights these six aesthetic qualities.

The experience economy literature emphasizes aesthetics as one experience dimension, together with escapism, entertainment and education (e.g., Boswijk et al., 2008; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). This study focuses only on the aesthetic dimension, to contribute to a broader understanding of the multidisciplinary concept of aesthetics. In the experience economy approach, the concept is also limited mainly to the visual aspect and “passive receiving”, such as viewing scenery from a sightseeing bus or visiting an art gallery (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Dewey (1934) argues that an aesthetic experience is a result of the *interaction* between nature and the individual, for example when walking in the mountains. The opposite of passive receiving may therefore be “actively sensing” by which tourists create their own aesthetic experiences in order to use their senses more fully.

Empirical studies from various experiential contexts show that aesthetic qualities affect overall customer satisfaction and future intentions such as willingness to recommend or revisit

(e.g., Bonn, Joseph-Mathews, Dai, Hayes & Cave, 2007; Hosany & Witham, 2009; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Oh et al., 2007; Slåtten et al., 2009). Bonn et al. (2007) indicate that the physical environment of heritage attractions plays an important role in determining visitors' future intentions and willingness to recommend, and thereby creates a competitive advantage. The results from Hosany and Witham's study (2009) of cruise tourists' experiences and satisfaction show that aesthetics is the main determinant of various experiential outcomes, such as overall perceived quality, satisfaction and intention to recommend. Central aesthetic experiential qualities from these studies are "harmony" and "architecture". Moreover, "genuineness" or unique experiences are emphasized in several experiential studies related to the senses of touch, smell and taste, for example, enjoying unique lodging or tasting local food and drinks (e.g., Chi & Qu, 2008; Jang & Feng, 2007; Kim & Moon, 2009).

Results from empirical tourism studies on aesthetic notions concerning activities in nature and landscape preferences note that central aesthetic qualities are "scenery/views" (e.g., Arnould & Price, 1993; Chetri, Arrowsmith & Jackson, 2004; Chi & Qu, 2008), "clean environment" (e.g., Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Haukeland, Grue & Veisten, 2010; Hazen, 2009), "variation/contrast" (e.g., Chi & Qu, 2008; Haukeland et al., 2010; Jang & Feng, 2007), and "harmony" with nature (e.g., Arnould & Price, 1993; Hazen, 2009; Raadik, Cottrell, Fredman, Ritter & Newman, 2010). Although a substantial body of literature exists on aesthetic notions with regard to landscape preferences and the establishment of national parks, the literature on the concept is limited because it relates to man-made environments in nature-based tourism. This is surprising in view of the fact that accommodation, food and signs may all be central features of a nature-based holiday, and thereby influence positive emotions and loyalty intentions. The present study extends previous research by specifically focusing on the physical or man-made environment at a nature-based tourism destination to increase tourists' positive emotions and loyalty intentions.

The Direct Effects of Aesthetic Experiential Qualities on Positive Emotion

This study links aesthetic experiential qualities to positive emotions. There are two reasons for the inclusion of emotions in the conceptual model shown in Figure 1. First, previous research has indicated that tourist experiences can elicit a person's emotions (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). Second, there has been a call for more research on emotions within the framework of tourism (Bigné, Andreu & Gnoth., 2005; Duman & Mattila, 2005). Consequently, there are good reasons for focusing on emotions.

Emotions in this study are defined as “a reflection of a person’s appraisal of their environment” (Lazarus, 1991). This definition is within what is termed the cognitive perspective on emotions (Bagozzi, 1992), which Johnson and Stewart (2005) have described as “an especially relevant approach for understanding emotional responses” (p. 3). Emotions are most often categorized into two groups, positive and negative (Bagozzi, Gopinath & Nyer, 1999). In both groups, there is a variety of discrete types of emotions that should be included under general umbrella concepts of positive and negative emotions. For example, positive emotions may include joy, pleasure, harmony, inspiration and excitement. In contrast, negative emotions may include such discrete emotions as anger, fear and frustration. Although there is some agreement in the literature that emotions should be categorized into two groups, there seems to be little agreement on the nature of emotions, such as their definitions or exact dimensions (Tronvoll, 2011). Although both negative and positive emotions are relevant to this study as outcomes of tourist experiences, the focus of the present study is limited to positive emotions.

Considering that tourists’ experiences can be termed “pleasure-driven” or “hedonic”, it is reasonable to assume that positive emotions are what most tourists seek or expect from their experiences. Thus, positive emotions can be described as the core product of tourist services. Accordingly, it is important to understand what contributes to this category of emotions within the framework of tourism. In line with this reasoning, emotion is related to a person’s mental (positive) state, which arises from experiences.

On the basis of Johnson and Stewart’s (2005) discussion, we assume that a person’s appraisal of a tourism environment, which in this context is related to appraisal of aesthetic experiential qualities, can elicit positive emotions. Several researchers indicate a significant relationship and direct effects between aesthetic qualities and positive emotions (e.g., Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009; Chetri et al., 2004; Hosany & Witham, 2009).

The Direct and Indirect Effects of Aesthetic Experiential Qualities on Loyalty and Positive Emotions

The present study suggests that aesthetic experiential qualities have both direct and indirect effects on loyalty, mediated by positive emotions. This is justified by existing research, which indicates that aesthetic qualities can affect loyalty in one of three ways: directly (Lee et al., 2011; Ryu & Jang, 2007; White & Yu, 2005), indirectly mediated by positive emotions (Kim

& Moon, 2009) or both (Pullmann & Gross, 2004; Ryu & Han, 2011). Each of these relationships is discussed in the following sections.

This study links aesthetic qualities to loyalty, following findings from several research studies (e.g., Lee et al., 2011; Ryu & Jang, 2007; White & Yu, 2005). In the service literature, consumer loyalty is typically discussed as divided into two intentions: (i) recommendations to other people, or word of mouth and (ii) repeat purchase (Chi & Qu, 2008; Oppermann, 2000; Pullmann & Gross, 2004). Loyal customers are more likely to act as free advertising agents that recommend a product or service to friends, relatives and other potential consumers (Chi & Qu, 2008). According to Oppermann (2000), revisiting has generally been regarded as desirable, because marketing costs are lower than those required to attract first-time tourists, and it is a positive indicator of satisfaction. The return of loyal customers has been key to the success of many services, particularly those in the hospitality, insurance and financial sectors (Pullmann & Gross, 2004). A small increase in the percentage of loyal customers can amount to a much greater increase in profits and overall value to the firm (Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997). In studies of service quality in general and loyalty, mediated by satisfaction, it has been common to merge these two intentions into one loyalty construct. Findings from a few studies indicate that the effects of service quality on intention to revisit are not necessarily similar to its effects on willingness to recommend an experience to others (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Kozak, 2001; Thrane, 2002). Because of time and cost constraints, or simply too many appealing destinations around the world, many tourists are unable to revisit the destination (Oppermann, 2000). The destination may be an once-in-a-lifetime experience, and it may therefore be valuable to divide the revisit intention into two components: intention to revisit the destination and intention to visit similar destinations. Additionally, in this study we include intention to recommend as a third loyalty intention.

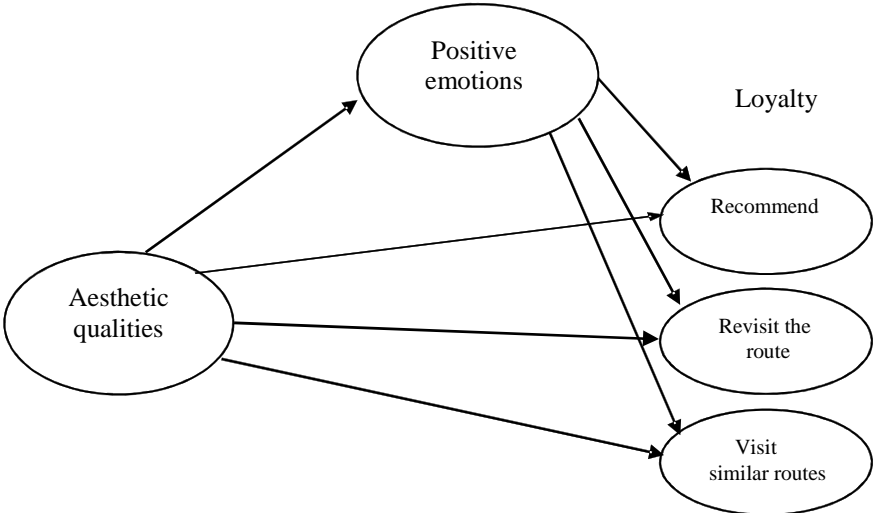
This study also suggests a relationship between positive emotions and loyalty. This is based on the belief that emotions can elicit a range of response types. However, loyalty responses can be divided into two main groups: (i) behavioural responses and (ii) non-behavioural responses. Depending on the type of emotions elicited, they may be followed by one or both types. Negative emotions as a result of a negative appraisal of a tourism experience may lead to consequences such as deciding to avoid the experience in the future (a behavioural response) as well as recommending that others, such as friends and family, avoid a specific attraction, place or tour during their holiday (non-behavioural responses). On the other hand, positive emotions may lead to decisions to revisit the attraction or place in the future

(behavioural responses) and recommend that others do the same (non-behavioural responses). The point is that emotions, linked to appraisal of experiences, often result in a mental note, or are stored in our memories (Johnston & Clark, 2001). Consequently, emotions function as a key stimulus for activities (Izard, 1977). This study links such activities to loyalty responses on the basis of positive emotions. Following this line of reasoning, there are good reasons to assume that positive emotions are related to loyalty responses. Findings from empirical studies indicate a positive relationship between positive emotions and loyalty responses (e.g., Slåtten et al., 2009; Yi-Ting & Dean, 2001).

This study also links aesthetic qualities to loyalty, mediated by positive emotions. This is because research findings indicate that aesthetic experiential qualities can affect loyalty directly, indirectly mediated by positive emotions (Kim & Moon, 2009) or both directly and indirectly (Pullmann & Gross, 2004; Ryu & Han, 2011).

The Research Model

Figure 2 summarizes the findings discussed in the literature review and the purpose of the study, illustrating the various ways in which aesthetic experiential qualities can affect loyalty.



In light of Figure 2, the aesthetic experiential qualities may affect loyalty in one of three ways: directly, indirectly mediated by positive emotions or both.

FIGURE 2 The research model of the study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Empirical Context

This paper focuses on the effects of aesthetic experiential qualities on positive emotions and loyalty. The empirical context was chosen with regard to the purpose of the study and its focus on man-made environments in nature-based tourism. The National Tourist Route Geiranger-Trollstigen in Norway was selected for the following reasons. (1) It combines nature, architecture, design and art in both its scenic viewpoints and its tourism businesses (e.g., restaurants and accommodation). Both the restaurants and the viewpoints have received considerable international attention. One of the hotels along the route, the Juvet Landscape Hotel, has won a number of awards for its distinctive architecture and location. (2) The route is an example of co-operation between public and private actors in the marketing and innovation processes. (3) The Trollstigen route is the second-most visited nature-based attraction in Norway, with approximately 600,000 visitors during the summer season. This route attracts both international and domestic visitors, and the market segments are independent and individual round-trip tourists, mountain tourists and organized cruise tourists.

Data Collection

The population for this survey is composed of individual travellers on holiday along the Geiranger–Trollstigen National Tourist Route. A total of 1030 questionnaires were randomly distributed to individual travellers along the road in July 2012. The period of data collection was three weeks. The primary market for the route is individual round-trip tourists, and most of the questionnaires (63.3%) were therefore distributed at two of the most frequently visited natural attractions (Trollstigen and Gudbrandsjuvet), where the project has combined nature, architecture and design, both at the viewpoints and at the restaurants. The other sampling places were at the Linge and Eidsdal ferries, located approximately in the middle of the National Tourist Route. The tourists completed the questionnaire themselves, and four project assistants collected the questionnaires immediately afterwards. The questionnaire was available in Norwegian, English and German. Allowing the tourists to answer the questionnaire in their own language strengthens its reliability. The questionnaire included mostly closed questions with a number of defined response choices. The respondents were asked to mark their responses using a cross for each statement, condition, aspect or feeling. Because we used closed questions, we

decided not to back-translate the responses into the original language, which would be necessary for texts such as responses to open-ended questions or raw data from focus groups. Ten questionnaires were unusable, and 10 were completed by respondents who were under 18 years of age. Of the 1030 questionnaires distributed, 1010 could be used in the study.

Measures and Scale Items

Because of the lack of research on the effects of aesthetic qualities on positive emotions and loyalty intentions in nature-based tourism settings, a survey instrument was developed from previous research results and interviews with key informants (14 interviews) and tourists (10 interviews). To ensure a broad perspective for the multidisciplinary concept of aesthetics, key informants or “experts” from academia were chosen to represent various disciplines that approach aesthetics as a general sense of learning (e.g., environmental psychology, architecture and musicology) and disciplines within tourism such as marketing, the experiential economy and nature-based tourism. The practical key informants or experts (public and private actors) represent economic geography, the experiential economy and nature-based tourism. The key informants were able to express the diffuse concept of aesthetics, for example, latent aspects that nature-based tourists may have difficulty in explaining themselves. The tourists were chosen among travellers to the National Tourist Route Geiranger-Trollstigen in the summer of 2011, and asked to identify survey items specific to a nature-based context.

The interviews were a valuable supplement to this first attempt to develop a scale to measure the effects of aesthetic experiential qualities on positive emotions and loyalty intentions in a nature-based setting. The measurement of six aesthetic qualities (cleanliness, variation/contrast, scenery/views, harmony, art/architecture and genuineness) were developed and assessed for content validity. Each of the aesthetic qualities or dimensions was further specified according to meaningful subdimensions for a cognitive assessment.

Prior to data collection, a pilot test was conducted to refine the survey questionnaire. Twenty individual tourists who visited the tourist route at the end of June 2012 participated in the pilot test (11 international and nine domestic travellers). Based on the results of this test, the survey questionnaire was refined and finalized. The final items are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Scale with the Final Items

Aesthetic qualities	Items
CLEANLINESS (four items)	Pure natural environment along the route
	Minimum of litter along the route
	Cleanliness of the businesses
	Good opportunities for drinking clean water
SCENERY/VIEWS (three items)	Good viewpoints of the natural landscape
	Arranged viewpoints along the route
	Good views of the cultural landscape
HARMONY (four items)	Places to experience silence and calm
	Accommodation close to nature
	Businesses' architecture harmonized with landscape
	Businesses' interior harmonized with outdoor surroundings
ART/ARCHITECTURE (four items)	Architecture enhances experience of nature
	Signage in the natural surroundings
	The artworks at viewpoints enhance experiences of nature
	Businesses are artistically conscious
GENUINENESS (four items)	Encountering flora in the natural surroundings
	Good opportunities to eat local dishes
	Businesses reflect traditions
	Good opportunities to observe wildlife

Examples of the measure items in the questionnaire were: *There were places to stay the night where I experienced coming close to nature; I found that the businesses along the road reflected the traditions of the place; The architecture along the arranged viewpoints enhanced my experiences of nature; I found that it was clean in and around the businesses.*

According to Liljander and Strandvik (1997), cognitive assessments have traditionally been used to measure service quality and satisfaction. They argue that emotional assessments also have significance, and emphasize that there is little empirical research in this area. In this study, we wish to measure both emotional and cognitive assessments. For example, “harmony” was used as both an emotional item (emotional assessment) and an aesthetic quality item (cognitive assessment). There are many positive emotion items from previous empirical studies that indicate a significant relationship and direct effects between aesthetic qualities and positive emotions in different contexts (e.g., Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009; Chetri et al., 2004). Focusing on a nature-based tourism context, we selected four positive emotions for this study, which were revealed in the interviews with experts and tourists and supported by the

experiential and nature-based literature. These were: “excitement” (e.g., Kim & Moon, 2009), “joy” (e.g., Loureiro, 2010; Slåtten et al., 2009), “inspiration” (e.g., Hosany, 2012) and “harmony” (e.g., Arnould & Price, 1993; Hazen, 2009). In the questionnaire, we asked: “To what degree have the feelings below been aroused when you think back on what you have seen and experienced in general along the Geiranger–Trollstigen road?” One of the emotion items was worded “I have felt harmony”. We are aware that harmony is a diffuse and abstract concept that nature-based tourists may have difficulty in explaining. Nevertheless, results from previous studies and interviews with experts show that harmony is a relevant feeling with regard to nature-based experiences. Some informants also mentioned the words “balance” and “coherence” in relation to the concept of harmony. In the analysis, the four emotions were combined into one variable: positive emotions.

The aesthetic experiential qualities, the positive emotions and the loyalty intentions were measured on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree. It was also possible to answer “not relevant” (8). The two revisit intentions were divided into: (i) intention to revisit the specific Geiranger–Trollstigen National Tourist Route and (ii) intention to visit similar routes (other than the Geiranger–Trollstigen route). In the questionnaire, the tourists were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: “I am going to drive on this road again” (revisit the route) and “I am going to drive on similar roads again” (visit similar routes). Intention to visit similar routes can’t help the Geiranger-Trollstigen route to build loyalty, but it can indicate that the tourists` might be loyal to similar nature-based routes in the future. In Norway, there are for example 17 similar national tourist routes. For the aesthetic qualities, “not relevant” was recoded as 4 to avoid the loss of too many cases in the multivariate analyses. Satisfaction was also measured on a seven-point scale with the item: “How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements when you think back on what you have experienced along the Geiranger–Trollstigen road?” (Place one cross for each statement). One of the statements was: “On the whole, I am happy with the experiences I have had along the road”.

The analysis includes the following control variables, which in existing research have been found to affect loyalty: nationality, previous visits, age, travel companions and type of tour. Descriptive statistics for all variables are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2 Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables ('Not relevant' = 4)

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
<i>Aesthetic qualities</i> (Not relevant = 4)			
Scenery (N = 907) (Alpha = 0.67)	5.81	0.942	1–7
Cleanliness (N = 863) (Alpha = 0.46)	5.55	0.812	1–7
Harmony (N = 882) (Alpha = 0.62)	4.81	0.948	1–7
Art/architecture (N = 862) (Alpha = 0.66)	4.81	0.991	1–7
Genuineness (N = 872) (Alpha = 0.58)	4.58	0.957	1–7
<i>Positive emotions</i> (N = 870)(Alpha = 0.77)*	5.70	0.999	1–7
<i>Loyalty</i> (Alpha = 0.69)			
Recommend to friends and family (N = 890)	6.39	1.005	1–7
Revisit the route (N = 883)	5.83	1.531	1–7
Visit similar routes (N = 892)	6.19	1.137	1–7
<i>Satisfaction</i> (N = 895)	6.10	1.072	1–7
<i>Control variables</i>			
International travellers (N = 1010) (yes = 1)	0.53	0.499	0–1
First-time visit (N = 1004) (yes = 1)	0.51	0.500	0–1
Age (N = 963)	46.56	13.638	18–90
Number of stops (N = 975)	3.86	3.845	0–50
Travelling with children (N = 986) (yes = 1)	0.31	0.463	0–1

* Positive emotions: excitement, inspiration, joy and harmony.

Profile of Respondents

International travellers constituted 53.3% and domestic travellers 46.7% of the sample. Half of the overall travellers had been on a vacation trip along the road before (“repeaters”), including 65.6% of domestic travellers. The other half comprised first-time visitors, dominated by international visitors (72.8%). Most respondents were on a day-trip or a round trip (67.8%), while 30.1% were staying for a minimum of one night in the area. Nearly half of the respondents had spent one or more days on the road when they were interviewed (52.7%). The majority of the respondents were driving a car (76.8%), and an average of three people travelled in each party. The average age was 46 years, and half of the respondents were in the 40–59 age range. The majority were travelling without children (68.9%).

The descriptive statistics for the sample respondents’ nationality, previous visits, type of tour and vehicle, travel companions and age are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Profile of Tourist Travellers

Frequency	N	%
<i>Nationality (N = 1010)</i>		
International travellers*	536	53.3
Domestic travellers (3.5% local residents)	474	46.7
<i>First-time visit (N = 1004)</i>		
First-time visit	516	51.4
Earlier visits	488	48.6
<i>Type of tour (N = 1008)</i>		
Day-trip	310	30.8
Round trip	373	37.0
Shorter stay	184	18.2
Longer stay	120	11.9
Other	21	2.1
<i>Type of vehicle (N = 1003)</i>		
Car	770	76.8
Motorcycle	62	6.2
Camper/RV	108	10.7
Other vehicles	63	6.3
<i>Travel companion (N = 986)</i>		
Adults with children under 16 years	307	31.1
Adults without children under 16 years	679	68.9
<i>Age (N = 973)</i>		
30 years and younger	300	30.8
40–49 years	251	25.8
50–59 years	246	25.3
60 years and older	176	18.1

* Sweden 9.3%, rest of Scandinavia 5%, Germany 12.5%, Benelux 8.7%, rest of Western Europe 7.8%, Eastern Europe 5.6%

ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

Analysis of Reliability

To test the proposed model, we used items based on information revealed in the interviews with the experts and the tourists, and the results from previous empirical research, instead of conducting a factor analysis to reduce the data. We used Cronbach's alpha coefficient (CA) for the analysis of reliability. The analysis indicated that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were

sufficiently high for five of the aesthetic qualities; that is, they were approximately the minimum value of 0.50, which is considered acceptable as an indication of reliability for short scales, such as those with fewer than 10 items (Pallant, 2004). For the aesthetic quality of “scenery/views”, one of the items (“viewpoints to be by myself”) had a higher CA when the item was deleted (0.67) compared with all four items combined (0.57). This item was therefore removed. For the aesthetic quality of “variation/contrast”, the CA was 0.32 and was therefore excluded from further analyses.

Regression Analysis

To test the proposed model, with multiple items for the independent variables and only one item for the dependent variable, a series of OLS (ordinary least squares) regression analyses were conducted. The chosen method is based on the principle of parsimony, compared with more complicated methods, such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Positive emotions were considered a mediator. In the first step of the analyses, the loyalty variables (intention to recommend and intention to revisit) were regressed on only the aesthetic qualities (and the control variables). In the second step, the positive emotion variable was added to the model as an independent variable. Positive emotions were thus considered to be potential mediators of the aesthetics–loyalty relationship. The analysis was controlled for variables such as nationality, previous visits, age, number of stops, travel companions, type of visit and levels of education and income. The variables explained little of the variance in the dependent variables (the three loyalty intentions). Furthermore, the results from the regression analysis did not distinguish any difference when all the variables in the equation were controlled for simultaneously. The aesthetic qualities and the positive emotions predicted the same outcome with regard to the effects on the loyalty intentions. Thus, the control variables are not included in Tables 4–6. The regression models were checked for multicollinearity by means of variance inflation factors (VIF), and no evidence was detected (no scores exceeded 1.89, as shown in Tables 4–6).

Findings

In Table 4, intention to recommend (dependent variable) is first regressed on the five aesthetic qualities (left column). The left column reveals that “scenery” has a significant influence on intention to recommend. “Cleanliness” also has a positive effect.

TABLE 4 Results of Regression Analyses: Effects of Aesthetic Qualities and Positive Emotions on the Intention to Recommend

Variables	Intention to recommend (n = 697)				Intention to recommend (n = 671)			
	Beta	B	Standard error	VIF	Beta	B	Standard error	VIF
<i>Aesthetic Qualities</i>								
<i>Scenery</i>	0.171	0.175 ***	0.047	1.690	0.108	0.109 *	0.045	1.757
<i>Cleanliness</i>	0.108	0.128 *	0.054	1.687	0.061	0.071	0.052	1.713
<i>Harmony</i>	0.074	0.075	0.048	1.789	0.060	0.061	0.046	1.782
<i>Art/architecture</i>	0.074	0.070	0.046	1.902	0.058	0.055	0.044	1.866
<i>Genuineness</i>	0.071	0.070	0.043	1.574	0.043	0.043	0.042	1.554
<i>Emotions</i>								
<i>Positive emotions</i>					0.335	0.328 ***	0.036	1.214
<i>Constant</i>		3.664				2.751		
<i>R²</i>		0.150				0.248		
<i>F</i>		24.476				36.454		

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Note: The analyses control for the variables of nationality, previous visits, age, number of stops, travel companions, type of tour, income and education.

VIF = variance inflation factor

In the second step of the analysis, both positive emotions and aesthetic qualities are independent variables predicting intention to recommend (right column). The results show that positive emotions in response to experiences along the route have a positive effect on intention to recommend ($p < 0.001$). “Scenery” remains significant for intention to recommend when we control for positive emotions. “Cleanliness” appears insignificant. This indicates that the effect of only two of the aesthetic qualities appears to be both direct (“scenery”) and indirect (“cleanliness”).

Table 5 displays the same kind of information as Table 4, but is concerned with intention to revisit the route. In contrast to intention to recommend (Table 4), none of the aesthetic qualities has a direct effect on intention to revisit the route when we control for positive emotions. Both “cleanliness” and “genuineness” have indirect effects. However, for the tourists’ intention to visit similar routes (Table 6), “cleanliness” has a positive and direct effect ($p < 0.001$) when we control for positive emotions, whereas “scenery” has only an indirect effect.

The analyses presented in Tables 4–6 indicate that positive emotions have a clear and positive effect on all the three loyalty intentions. The effect of aesthetic qualities shows a more complex pattern. Only two of the aesthetic qualities have both direct and indirect effects on intention to recommend. They appear to have an indirect effect on intention to revisit the route, and both direct and indirect effects on the intention to visit similar routes. The aesthetic qualities of “harmony” and “art/architecture” had no effect on the positive emotions and the three loyalty intentions in this study.

TABLE 5 Results of Regression Analyses: Effects of Aesthetic Qualities and Positive Emotions on the Intention to Revisit the Route.

Variables	Intention to revisit the route (N = 695)				Intention to revisit the route (N = 668)			
	Beta	B	Standard error	VIF	Beta	B	Standard error	VIF
<i>Aesthetic Qualities</i>								
<i>Scenery</i>	0.001	0.002	0.078	1.650	-0.037	-0.061	0.079	1.721
<i>Cleanliness</i>	0.123	0.234 *	0.091	1.657	0.078	0.149	0.091	1.690
<i>Harmony</i>	-0.047	-0.077	0.080	1.788	-0.064	-0.103	0.080	1.784
<i>Art/architecture</i>	0.062	0.094	0.077	1.883	0.059	0.089	0.076	1.846
<i>Genuineness</i>	0.158	0.245 **	0.072	1.571	0.121	0.192	0.072	1.548
<i>Emotions</i>								
<i>Positive emotions</i>					0.240	0.373 ***	0.064	1.239
<i>Constant</i>		3.310				2.415		
<i>R²</i>		0.065				0.107		
<i>F</i>		9.524				13.232		

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Note: The analyses control for the variables of nationality, previous visits, age, number of stops, travel companions, type of tour, income and education.

VIF = variance inflation factor

TABLE 6 Results of Regression Analyses: Effects of Aesthetic Qualities and Positive Emotions on the Intention to Visit similar Routes.

Variables	Intention to revisit similar routes (N = 698)				Intention to revisit similar routes (N = 672)			
	Beta	B	Standard error	VIF	Beta	B	Standard error	VIF
<i>Aesthetic Qualities</i>								
<i>Scenery</i>	0.118	0.141 *	0.056	1.705	0.085	0.099	0.056	1.759
<i>Cleanliness</i>	0.224	0.314 ***	0.066	1.685	0.199	0.274 ***	0.065	1.710
<i>Harmony</i>	-0.023	-0.028	0.059	1.773	-0.052	-0.062	0.058	1.772
<i>Art/architecture</i>	-0.015	-0.017	0.056	1.892	-0.016	-0.018	0.055	1.859
<i>Genuineness</i>	0.046	0.053	0.053	1.583	0.009	0.010	0.052	1.559
<i>Emotions</i>								
<i>Positive emotions</i>					0.203	0.232 ***	0.046	1.215
<i>Constant</i>		2.989						3.103
<i>R²</i>		0.097						0.129
<i>F</i>		14.904						16.347

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Note: The analyses control for the variables of nationality, previous visits, age, number of stops, travel companions, type of tour, income and education.

VIF = variance inflation factor

The findings are summarized in Figure 3.

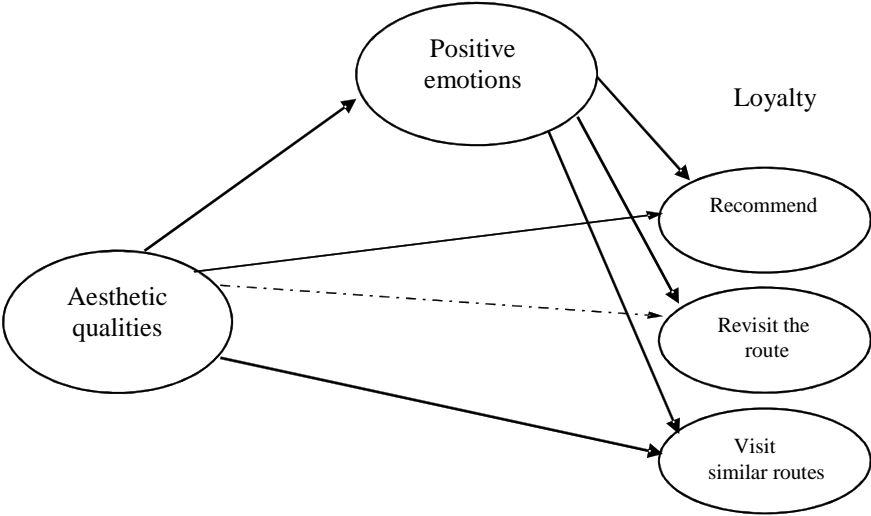


FIGURE 3 How aesthetic qualities can affect loyalty directly and indirectly mediated by positive emotions.

DISCUSSION

Despite the shift of focus to aesthetics and its role in the experience economy in general, little empirical research has been undertaken in this area. Only recently has this become a theme in tourism research in relation to consumer experiences. The relationship between service quality in general and loyalty is well recognized in studies of tourist behaviour (e.g., Baker & Crompton, 2000; Kozak, 2001). Positive emotions are relevant when studying aesthetic qualities and tourist loyalty. This study contributes knowledge regarding the influence of aesthetic experiential qualities on positive emotions and loyalty.

Previous research indicates a significant relationship between both aesthetic qualities and positive emotions (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009; Chetri et al., 2004; Hosany & Witham, 2009) and positive emotions and loyalty responses (e.g., Slåtten et al., 2009; Yi-Ting & Dean, 2001). A central topic of destination tourism strategies that is important to examine is the effects of aesthetic qualities on loyalty, mediated by positive emotions.

A number of research findings indicate that aesthetic qualities can affect loyalty in one of three ways: directly (Lee et al., 2011; Ryu & Jang, 2007; White & Yu, 2005), indirectly (Kim & Moon, 2009) or both (Pullmann & Gross, 2004; Ryu & Han, 2011). The results of our study support the latter view, and indicate the complex pattern of effects by which some aesthetic experiential qualities influence loyalty both directly and indirectly. The analysis reveals that tourists' evaluation of the aesthetic qualities of "scenery", "cleanliness" and "genuineness" significantly affected their positive emotions towards nature-based experiences along a route. These results are consistent with prior quality experience studies and appear trustworthy (e.g., Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009; Chetri et al., 2004; Hosany & Witham, 2009; Slåtten et al., 2009). Positive emotions had a direct influence on both intention to recommend, intention to revisit the route and intention to visit similar routes. By contrast, tourists' evaluation of some of the aesthetic qualities had both direct ("scenery") and indirect effects ("cleanliness") on intention to recommend. These findings are similar to those from an experiential context (a VIP hospitality tent for a touring circus), where design elements had both direct and indirect effects on intention to recommend, mediated by emotions (Pullmann & Gross, 2004). A study from a winter park also confirms the indirect relation between aesthetic quality (design) and intention to recommend, mediated by a positive emotion, "joy" (Slåtten et al., 2009). Concerning intention to revisit the route, aesthetic qualities ("cleanliness" and "genuineness") had only an indirect effect, mediated by positive emotions. This is supported by Kim & Moon's study (2009) in a restaurant context. They found that service quality ("servicescape") had an indirect effect on the revisit intention, mediated by emotional state. Intention to visit similar routes had both direct ("cleanliness") and indirect effects ("scenery").

Even if only three of the five aesthetic qualities ("scenery", "cleanliness" and "genuineness") have an effect on the three aspects of loyalty, this study supports different explanatory patterns of the effects of aesthetic experiential qualities on loyalty, mediated by positive emotions. These patterns appear useful for a better understanding of customers' and tourists' loyalty intentions in a nature-based tourism context. A theoretical implication of these findings is that the three loyalty indicators should not be treated as one "loyalty" construct, which is typical of previous studies, but rather as three separate intentions. Many tourists have positive experiences at a destination or a specific nature-based business and recommend it to others without intending to revisit it themselves. The destination can be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and they may instead visit similar destinations, as the study findings indicate. Separating intentions can therefore reveal information relevant to increasing both intention to

recommend and intention to revisit the same destination or visit similar destinations. On the basis of the finding that positive emotions have more influence on future intentions than aesthetic qualities, another theoretical approach to aesthetic qualities is to relate them to other service qualities. Other qualities may include hospitality and expertise from employees of tourist businesses, interactions with other guests, information or price (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009; Heide & Grønhaug, 2009).

In the present study, the aesthetic qualities of “scenery”, “cleanliness” and “genuineness” are shown to have significant effects on tourists’ positive emotions and loyalty intentions. We therefore suggest that an evaluation of the aesthetic qualities of nature-based experiences may be appropriate. Hence, there are practical managerial implications for the factors that organizations and individual producers at a nature-based tourist destination should consider to create and develop their products and services. The findings reveal that the relationship between some of the aesthetic qualities and loyalty intentions is complex, because the effect also works through positive emotions. To stimulate tourists’ positive emotions of “joy”, “inspiration”, “excitement” and “harmony”, it is important to create nature-based experiences that capture the aesthetic qualities of “scenery”, “cleanliness” and “genuineness” in the product development and innovation processes at the destination. This study identifies several aspects that can be emphasized with regard to these three qualities: (1) “scenery”, with good viewpoints of the natural and cultural landscape, including arranged viewpoints along the route; (2) “cleanliness”, with a pure natural environment and a minimum of litter along the route, cleanliness at the tourist businesses and the availability of clean drinking water; and (3) “genuineness”, with ample opportunities to encounter flora in natural surroundings, multiple opportunities to eat local dishes, the presence of businesses that reflect or preserve traditions, and good opportunities to observe wildlife.

To increase the intention to revisit the route, “cleanliness” and “genuineness” were especially emphasized, and these qualities need to be understood and managed. For example, accommodation may be offered along a scenic route, focusing on the genuineness of the natural environment at the destination, such as opportunities to experience flora inside and outside buildings that are in harmony with the natural surroundings, and to see, hear and taste clean water from a nearby river. This may stimulate tourists’ feelings of “joy” and “harmony”. This added value can be a source of competitive advantage and result in increased profit for individual producers through increased sales.

As mentioned above, a nature-based destination also needs to invest effort in service qualities other than aesthetics to enhance tourists' positive emotions, especially their intention to revisit. From a managerial perspective, a tourism organization at the destination level can offer courses and seminars for the tourism businesses to increase the hospitality and expertise of the employees. They can also examine and develop the destination strategy so as not to over-promise or create unrealistic expectations that stimulate the emotions of disappointment and anger (White & Yu, 2005). Front-line employees should also be trained to recognize and take responsibility for reducing the frequency and intensity of these emotions, so as to encourage positive word of mouth and increase the likelihood of travellers revisiting the destination.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Four major limitations of this study need to be addressed. First, the study is an attempt to explore and measure the effects of aesthetic qualities using a scale with five aspects developed from previous research and interviews conducted in a specific nature-based context. In particular, the two aesthetic qualities of "art/architecture" and "harmony" may be tested in other nature-based contexts to see if they affect positive emotions and loyalty intentions. Several aesthetic qualities other than the five in the study, and other quality aspects, may also contribute to positive emotions and loyalty intentions in such a context to explain more of the variance. Future research may therefore examine several aesthetic qualities and other service qualities simultaneously to deepen understanding and develop a more robust and stable scale for these aspects.

Second, the present study used four positive emotions from previous studies and the interviews, which were merged into one positive emotion construct. Future research could examine the influence of each of the four positive emotions, and analyse whether the relationship between aesthetic qualities, positive emotions and loyalty alter as a result. Third, because the study setting was only one particular tourist route, the potential for generalization to other tourist routes or scenic roads and nature-based tourism destinations may in general be limited. Application of the scale to other nature-based settings in further research would produce indicators that are more reliable and further validate the constructs.

Finally, even if the analysis did not reveal any significant differences in the control variables, it is not currently known whether the same types of aesthetic qualities, positive emotions and loyalty intentions are always consistent, for example, across cultures and different age groups. Further investigation of these issues would therefore make an interesting extension to this study. Our findings support the conclusion that the aesthetic experiential qualities of “scenery”, “cleanliness” and “genuineness” are important factors that influence tourists’ positive emotions, and that tourists’ positive emotions are important for all three loyalty intentions and their outcomes. This may result in outcomes such as added value for the tourists’ experiences and thereby greater competitiveness and revenue through increased market share for the destination.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide for the interviews with key informants

(Translated to English)

Empirical base for Paper 1

Aesthetics in nature-based tourism

Interview guide for the interviews with key informants

Spring 2011

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

1. Introduction

- Please start by introducing yourself and your profession.
- How will you define the term aesthetics in your field?
- In which context have you used the concept? How have you been working with it?

2. Aesthetics in nature-based tourism

2.1 *The concept of aesthetics*

- Do you think aesthetics can be relevant within tourism, why?
- Do you think aesthetics can be relevant within a nature-based tourism and nature-based experiences, why?
- How do you think *other people* will define the concept of aesthetics in such a context?
- How will *you* define the concept of aesthetics in such a context?
- How will you describe an aesthetic experience? Please give examples.
- What kind of aesthetic elements do you think a tourist will highlight after a nature-based holiday and why?
- What kind of stories do you think a tourist will talk about to friends and family after a nature-based holiday, and why do you think these stories will be emphasized? Please give examples.

2.2 *Aesthetic dimensions*

- What kind of specific aesthetic dimensions do you think will influence the tourists' satisfaction with nature-based experiences?
- What kind of aesthetic dimensions can touch the tourists' feelings or emotions, and contribute to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a nature-based holiday? They can be associated with nature, activities/attractions in nature, places they are visiting and/or businesses where they eat or stay the night. Please give examples.
- What kind of aesthetic dimensions do you miss from previous research?

3. **Emotions**

- What kind of emotions/feelings are relevant with regard to aesthetics in a nature-based tourism context? Please mention both positive and negative emotions.
- If a tourist expresses "This was a nice place to stay" – what kind of aesthetic conditions or dimensions do you think will influence in such a setting?

4. **Conclusion**

Is there anything else you would like to add or elaborate, as you consider important in this context?

Appendix 2

Interview guide for the interviews with tourists along

The National Tourist Route Geiranger-Trollstigen

(Empirical base for Paper 2)

Aesthetics in nature-based tourism

Interview-guide for the interviews with tourists along the National Tourist Route Geiranger – Trollstigen Summer 2011

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

1. Introduction

- Please start by telling where you come from, your age, whom you are travelling with and what kind of vacation you are having in this area.

2. Aesthetics in nature-based tourism

2.1. The concept of aesthetics

- How would you define the term aesthetics?
- Do you think it is important to focus on aesthetics in the tourism development along the national tourist route/scenic road? Why?
- How will you describe an aesthetic experience in a nature-based tourism context? Please give examples.

2.2. *Aesthetic dimensions*

- What kind of specific aesthetic dimensions are important to you in connection with your travel along the tourist route/scenic road? (Associated with nature, activities/attractions in nature, places you are visiting and/or businesses where you eat or stay the night). Please give examples.
- Have any of these dimensions been critical of your choice to travel along the scenic road?

3. **Emotions**

- What kind of experiences are you primarily looking for along the tourist route/scenic road? What kind of feelings do you want from these experiences?

Have you so far experienced any of this?

- If you are visiting a tourism business (accommodation/restaurant etc.), and get the feeling of well-being, what conditions do you think contributes to this?
- How satisfied are you so far with the conditions you mentioned that are important to you along the scenic road? Please explain why/why not you are satisfied.

3. **Conclusion**

Is there anything else you want to add or elaborate as you consider important in this context?

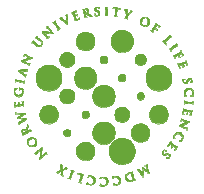
Appendix 3

**Questionnaire used for the survey with tourists along
The National Tourist Route Geiranger-Trollstigen
(Empirical base for Paper 3 & 4)**

Date:/..... 2012 Place:



Lillehammer University College
Høgskolen i Lillehammer • hil.no



Weather: ☀️ ☁️ ☁️ ☔️ ☔️ ☁️ ↗️ ↗️ ↗️ ↗️

Lillehammer University College and the Norwegian University for Life Sciences in Ås are conducting a study along the stretch of the road between Geiranger and Trollstigen (between Langevatn in Strynefjellet and the Sogge bridge in Romsdalen, Fv 63 – see the attached map). The objective is to gain better understanding of how you have experienced the nature and the surroundings along the road, as well as around the tourist businesses where you have had a meal, stayed overnight, etc. ('business' in the questionnaire refers to businesses aimed primarily at tourists). It takes about 10 minutes to fill out the questionnaire. All information will be treated confidentially. Thank you in advance for your valuable assistance.

1). How important to you are the following conditions for a nature-based vacation experience in general?
(Make one cross for each condition).

	Not important					Very important	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To experience 'being one with nature' (harmony with nature).							
To learn something new (for example, guiding in nature).							
To experience variations in nature (for example, mountains, fjords, waterfalls).							
To be entertained (for example, an outdoor concert).							
To experience architecture in nature.							
To experience contrasts from the everyday.							
To do activities in nature (for example, walking, cycling).							
To experience nice views of landscapes in nature.							
To have experiences of businesses that reflect the traditions of the place.							
To experience pure nature.							
To experience art in nature.							
To experience the feeling of accomplishing something.							
To be totally absorbed in a natural activity ('forgetting time and place').							

2). What type of tour/trip are you on along the Geiranger-Trollstigen road?

- Day trip Shorter stay (1-2 nights) Longer stay (at least 3 nights)
 Round trip/passing through Other

3). Which road/direction are you coming from now?

- From Åndalsnes or Sogge bru (Fv 63) From Ålesund or Molde (Fv 650)
 From Geiranger (Fv 63) From Stranda (Fv 60)

4). How long have you been on the Geiranger-Trollstigen road?dayshours

5). How many stops have you taken along the Geiranger-Trollstigen road? Approximate number:

6). Have you been on a vacation trip along the Geiranger-Trollstigen road before? No Yestimes.

7). How many of you are travelling together?adultschildren (under 16 years)

8). What kind of vehicle did you use to get here?

- Car Camper/RV Car with camping trailer
 Motorcycle Bus Other:

9). How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements when you think on what you have experienced in general along the Geiranger-Trollstigen road? (Place one cross for each statement).

	Completely disagree				Completely agree			Not relevant
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
There were places to stay the night where I experienced coming close to nature.								
I experienced nature as being pure along the road.								
There was a good number of arranged viewpoints along the road.								
I found that the businesses along the road reflected the traditions of the place.								
There were large variations in the landscape (mountains, fjords, waterfalls, etc.).								
The architecture along the arranged viewpoints enhanced my experiences of nature.								
The businesses' interior harmonized well with the surroundings outdoors.								
The litter along the road was minimal.								
There was a good view of the cultural landscape (human-affected landscape) from the road.								
There were good possibilities to see/hear animals in natural surroundings.								
The nature along the road was in great contrast to the nature at home.								
I found that the signs by the natural attractions fitted in well with the natural surroundings.								
There were places to stay the night where I experienced silence and calm.								
I found that it was clean in and around the businesses.								
There were good viewpoints of the natural landscape (untouched landscape) from the road.								
There were good possibilities for eating local dishes along the road.								
The weather conditions were quite variable.								
I found that the businesses were artistically conscious.								
The businesses' architecture (specifically the buildings) harmonized well with the landscape.								
There were good possibilities for drinking clean water in the natural surroundings (from a stream).								
The businesses' architecture (specifically the buildings) provided an exciting contrast with the natural surroundings.								
There were viewpoints along the road where I could be by myself.								
There were good possibilities of encountering plants in the natural surroundings.								
The art at the arranged viewpoints enhanced my experiences of nature.								

10). To which degree have the following aspects had some affect on your positive experiences of the tourist businesses along the Geiranger/Trollstigen road? (Place one cross for each aspect).

	Very small degree				Very large degree			Don't know
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Smell								
View of nature								
Conditions of light								
Sound (music etc.)								
Colours								
Art								
Contact with the staff at the businesses								
Interior/design								
Plants								
Architecture								
Contact with other guests								

11). To which degree have the feelings below been aroused when you think back on what you have seen and experienced in general along the Geiranger-Trollstigen road? (Place one cross for each feeling).

	Very small degree				Very large degree		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have felt:							
• frustration							
• excitement							
• boredom							
• inspiration							
• fear							
• felt myself taken care of							
• felt provoked							
• joy							
• disappointment							
• anger							
• tension							
• irritation							
• harmony							
• accomplishment							
• surprise							

12). How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements when you think back on what you have experienced along the Geiranger-Trollstigen road? (Place one cross for each statement).

	Totally disagree					Totally agree	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am happy with the offer of places to stay the night.							
I am happy with the service offers.							
I am happy with the choice of souvenirs.							
I am happy with the service-mindedness at the businesses.							
I am happy with the possibilities for taking pictures along the road.							
I am happy with the offerings for activities.							
On the whole, I am happy with the experiences I have had along the road.							
On the whole, I am happy with the experiences I have had with the tourist businesses.							
I am going to recommend this road to friends and family.							
I am going to drive on this road again.							
The road was a 'once-in-a-lifetime' experience.							
I am going to drive on similar roads again.							
The experiences I have had along the road have surpassed my expectations.							
My time along this road was longer than first planned.							

13). Do you know about the 'National Tourist Routes' in Norway? No Yes

14). Do you work with aesthetics in your line of work? No Yes, what kind of work

15). BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- **Gender:** Female Male
- **Age:** years
- **Education:** Primary/Elementary school Higher education (college/university)
 Secondary/High school Other
- **Personal income:** Under 12 499 EUR 37 500 – 49 999 EUR
 12 500 – 24 999 EUR 50 000 – 62 499 EUR
 25 000 – 37 499 EUR 62 500 EUR or more
- **Nationality:** Sweden United Kingdom Switzerland
 Denmark France Austria
 Finland Spain USA
 Germany Italy Japan
 The Netherlands
 Other country:.....

Thank you for your help!