

Norwegian University of Life Sciences  
Faculty of Environmental Science and Technology  
Department of Ecology  
and Natural Resource Management

Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)  
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# Nature-based tourism and the role of aesthetic dimensions

Naturbasert Reiseliv og  
estetikkdimensjoners rolle

Monica A. Breiby



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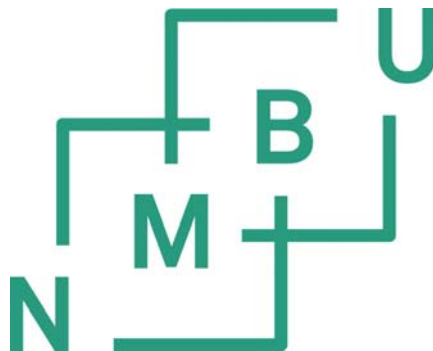
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Department of Ecology and Natural Resource Management  
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# PREFACE

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

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2. Breiby, M.A. (2014). Exploring aesthetic dimensions in nature-based tourist experiences. *Tourism Analysis*. Accepted August 2014.
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*.
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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, February 2015



## ABSTRACT

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

The dissertation opens up the research area with regard to nature-based tourism and the influence of aesthetic dimensions. This is one of the first systematic studies, which contributes to developing research-based knowledge of the role aesthetic dimensions play in nature-based tourists' behaviour. Specifically, the dissertation offers three main contributions to nature-based tourism research. First, the thesis presents the concept of aesthetics from different theoretical perspectives, and empirical data from key informants' and tourists' understandings of central aesthetic dimensions. One of the main findings is that aesthetic qualities of nature-based destinations go beyond the visual aspects and engage all the senses. Tourists are actively sensing the overall environment, including the man-made and natural environment. Furthermore, 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 reveal that the dimensions "harmony" and "genuineness" are especially important for the man-made environment in nature, while the dimensions "variation/contrast" and "scenery/viewing" are important for the natural environment.

The findings confirm universal patterns of aesthetics from theoretical perspectives on how "scenery" contributes to understanding the environment, and how "variation" relates to the degree of complexity (e.g., boring or chaotic). The findings also confirm previous empirical studies in tourism that emphasize "harmony", "scenery", and "cleanliness". "Genuineness" is an interesting finding with regard to the man-made environment in nature.

Second, the thesis 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, the intention to revisit the scenic road and to visit similar roads. However, only the aesthetic dimensions “genuineness” and “cleanliness” have a direct effect on the intention to revisit the scenic road, and indicate a more complex explanatory pattern for the intention to recommend.

Finally, the 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 “scenery/viewing”, “cleanliness”, and “genuineness” have significant effects on positive emotions towards the scenic road. Positive emotions have direct effects on both the intention to recommend, 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, and “cleanliness” has a direct effect on the intention to visit similar roads.

The main contribution of the thesis is thus not to the depth of the century-long aesthetic discussion and research in general, nor is it to aesthetic notions regarding landscape preferences, where a substantial body of literature exists. Rather, it is first of all about the role different aesthetic dimensions play in tourists’ satisfaction, positive emotions, and loyalty intentions with regard to the overall environment at a nature-based destination.

The findings have practical implications for nature-based destination management, and marketing and development processes. One example is the importance for managers to develop attractive value propositions (in networks with other providers at the destination) by emphasizing the six aesthetic qualities that go beyond the visual aspect and engage all the senses, and thus adding customer value. This can maximize the tourists’ opportunities to enjoy pleasurable experiences within the overall environment at a nature-based destination, e.g., a scenic road. Furthermore, new market knowledge about aesthetic qualities must continuously 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 the role of aesthetics in 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 may make a difference to a nature-based tourist product’s performance, and thus provide that competitive edge.

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*“Sjodals vand is a long straggling lake, very much exposed to the wind, and not in any way beautiful except for its wildness, as its shores are almost treeless and rather flat. Its most remarkable characteristic is the colour of its water, which is a light greenish blue, like a starling’s egg, and stands out like a contrast against the yellow shore and dark mountain heights which surround it [...] the snow-capped mountains, which have been gradually getting nearer all the way from Olstappen, are now magnificently towering above us on three sides.*

*... our eating room looks very nice, with its floor always covered with fresh juniper sprays, and a cheerful fire burning in that most charming of fireplaces, the primitive Norwegian corner-hearth, which is being rapidly superseded everywhere by horrid tall, black, iron stoves, that look like coffins set up on end, and smell like flat-irons and rosin when they are lighted. [...] they take the greatest trouble to make us comfortable and the trout, flatbrod, and coffee are simply perfection” (Lees & Clutterbuck [1882] 2010, pp. 74–76).*

Quotes from the book *“Three in Norway by two of them”*, a travelogue from the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Norway, describing the adventures and experiences of three English friends who set out on a fishing and hunting expedition during one long summer in Jotunheimen.





# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Researchers have increasingly paid attention to tourists' experiences and satisfaction with the overall environment at tourist destinations because these are critical concepts in tourism marketing and management literature. What the tourists see and sense plays a role in their overall satisfaction. When travelling for pleasure, tourists seek destinations that maximize their possibility of enjoying a pleasurable experience (Lue, Crompton & Fesenmaier, 1992). One source of such pleasure is aesthetic qualities (Kirillova, Fu, Lehto & Cai, 2014). In the tourism management literature, it has been acknowledged that aesthetic qualities affect tourists' experience and satisfaction, which contribute to their loyalty towards the destination (Lee, Jeon & Kim, 2011). Destinations' aesthetic qualities, such as "scenery", have been integral elements of many scales used to measure satisfaction in tourism research (e.g., Hazen, 2009; Lee et al., 2010; O'Leary & Deegan, 2002;).

However, "aesthetic qualities" have so far been largely restricted to a single variable, such as "the place is beautiful", in destination satisfaction assessments. Although the notion of "product aesthetics" has been explored in consumer behaviour literature with regard to product choice and design (e.g., Baysia & Ganesh Das, 2008), the aesthetic component as judged by consumers has yet to become a focus in tourism research (Kirillova et al., 2014).

There is an increasing demand for nature-based tourism experiences, both globally and in the Nordic countries (Chen, Prebensen, Chen & Kim, 2013; Mehmetoglu, 2006). It is reasonable to assume that these nature-based experiences provide tourists with a variety of opportunities to discover and perceive aesthetic qualities. The example of the English tourists' experiences (p. xiii) illustrates how they sensed their destination's overall environment by viewing the wilderness in nature, smelling the oven in the cottage, and tasting the local food. These different features all played a role in their overall satisfaction with their vacation.

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. Thus, a substantial body of literature exists on tourists' preferences of natural environments.

Even though nature is the most central aspect in a nature-based holiday, other features may be important for the overall experience and the tourists' memories afterwards. 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 natural *and* man-made environments (Mossberg, 2007). Increased customer knowledge is valuable for the producers, to improve or innovate the different features, and thereby influence the tourists' overall experience (Johnson & Gustavsson, 2000). Thus, in this dissertation the main focus is on the man-made environments in nature (in addition to the natural environment). Although literature exists on aesthetics and its meaning and implications, little of importance appears to have been written on tourists' "lived experiences" and how they influence behaviour and loyalty intentions (Kirillova et al., 2014). Hence, this thesis attempts to make a valuable contribution to nature-based tourism research by systematically looking into the role aesthetic qualities play in tourists' behaviour. The contribution is not to the depth of the century-long aesthetic discussion and research in general, nor is it to aesthetic notions regarding landscape preferences. Rather, it is first of all about the role aesthetic dimensions play in tourists' satisfaction, positive emotions, and loyalty intentions with regard to the overall environment at a nature-based tourism destination.

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 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.

Through a study of the literature and empirical data from interviews and a survey, this thesis aims to gain knowledge in order to know what aesthetic dimensions or qualities that 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 satisfied and willing to pay a higher price. Managers have to consider these aspects of tourist behaviour in the product development and innovation processes. Thus, the issues addressed in this thesis include tourists' judgment of aesthetics and the role aesthetic dimensions play in satisfaction, positive emotions, and loyalty intentions.

## **1.2 The goal and the structure of the thesis**

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

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 nature-based tourism, different perspectives of the concept of aesthetics, the link between tourism and aesthetics, and finally the relationship between aesthetic dimensions 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 in ways that the tourists might have difficulty in expressing. For example, the concept has latent aspects that nature-based tourists possibly have difficulty in articulating, such as the feeling of harmony from the theory of environmental psychology. 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 dimensions<sup>1</sup> 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).

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<sup>1</sup> 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 emphasizes nature-based tourism and the overall environment at a nature-based destination. Second, it outlines some perspectives of the multidisciplinary concept of aesthetics. Third, it links aesthetics to tourism research. Finally, it examines the relationship between aesthetic qualities and the variables satisfaction, positive emotions, and loyalty intentions in nature-based tourism. Table 1 depicts an overview of the theoretical framework.

Table 1. Theoretical framework

2.1. Nature-based tourism	2.2. Different perspectives of the concept of aesthetics	2.3. Tourism and aesthetics	2.4. Qualities and behavioural responses
Nature-based tourism – a multidisciplinary subject  Overall environment at a nature-based destination	Perspectives from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philosophy</li> <li>• Psychology</li> <li>• Environmental psychology</li> </ul> Viewpoints from marketing and management literature	Aesthetics in tourism  Aesthetic dimensions	Qualities, <i>satisfaction</i> , and loyalty intentions  Qualities, <i>positive emotions</i> , and loyalty intentions

### 2.1 Nature-based tourism

Tourism is generally a complex and multidisciplinary phenomenon that may be approached from different disciplines. Relevant disciplines are sociology, economics, psychology, environmental psychology, anthropology, marketing, and geography. One of the most fundamental dimensions of tourism is provided by the natural resources. A second important dimension of tourism is the built environment (Goeldner, Ritchie, & McIntosh, 2000). This dissertation focuses on the aesthetic dimensions of nature-based tourism. 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 thesis 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 thesis 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 and travel model choice. The thesis focuses on independent tourists who are likely to value nature-based attractions and activities such as driving or cycling in natural areas. Some infrastructure is required to complement these. Examples are transport, accommodation, and specific visitor facilities as signs and maps. 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 nature-based 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). Previous experiential studies in tourism have focused on cultural experiences and, according to Vespestad and Lindberg (2011), there is a need to direct attention towards nature-based experiences.

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 nature-based 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 literature are not perceptions of a purely natural phenomenon, but rather they are somehow staged (e.g., Bærenholdt & Sundbo, 2007). 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 the physical 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, and future intentions (e.g., Albacete-Sáez, Mar Fuentes-Fuentes, & Lloréns-Montes, 2007).

Figure 1 illustrates the tourists' overall environment, including the natural environment and the man-made environment, at a nature-based destination.

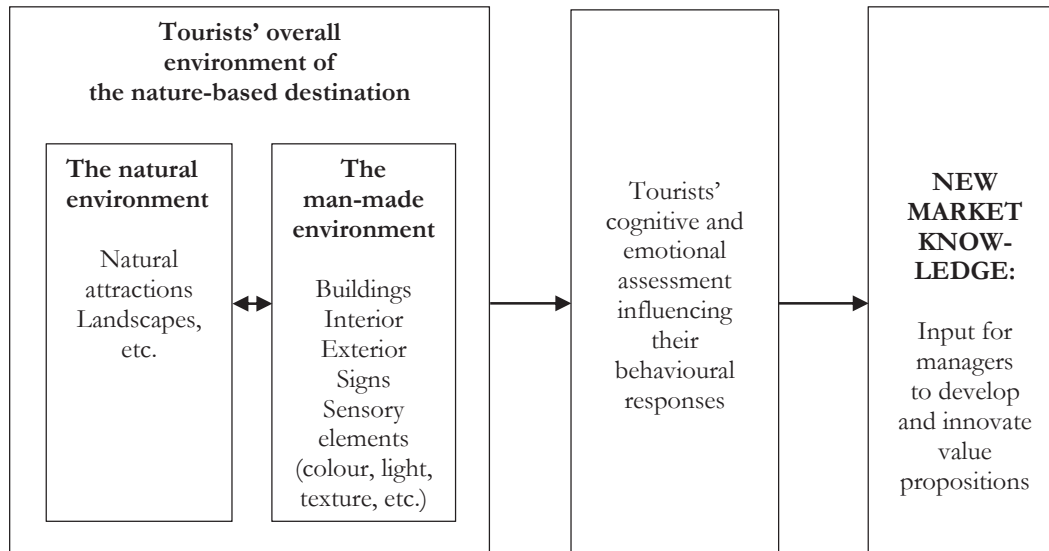


Figure 1. The nature-based tourists' overall environment

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, Neumann & Reichel, 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.

## **2.2 Different perspectives of aesthetics**

To understand the concept of aesthetics, I will go back and look briefly at the evolution of aesthetics from the perspectives of philosophy, psychology, and environmental psychology. Finally, I will present a definition for the concept as used in the thesis.

The concept of aesthetics was first expressed by the philosopher Plato in his consideration of beauty (Plato [n.d.]1951). Defining beauty as that "which gives pleasure when seen", Plato asserted that beauty resides within an object and is not subjected to observers' biased evaluations. Plato related the love of beauty to sexual desire. People long to be joined with the beautiful, which leads to love for another person on the biological level and to love for wisdom on the highest, philosophical level (Averill, Stanat, & More, 1998). The search for the answer to the question "what do we find beautiful?" is one of the longest quests in philosophy.

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). The definition suggests that the core of aesthetics is the “presence or absence of beauty”. The beautiful is in itself a focus on aesthetic preference. The sublime, meanwhile inspires awe through an awareness of what is majestic, fearful, and noble.

Burke ([1757]1990) differentiated between aesthetic judgement concerning beauty and the sublime. Beauty originates with *the emotions*, particularly in feelings towards the opposite sex, whereas the sublime originates with *the object* and not the emotions towards it. He calls this “astonishment”, i.e., a feeling of fear or awe. To call an object “sublime”, the feeling must be transformed to another strong feeling such as “relief” in contrast to “pleasure”. Burke also defined beauty as “love without desire”, which derives from objects that are gently varying and delicate (Lothian, 1999).

Kant ([1790]1987) describes two forms of aesthetic judgement: *the taste*, which judges the beauty, and *the feeling*, which judges the sublime. Similar to beauty, the sublime is pleasurable. In contrast to beauty, the sublime releases some life forces that have been inhibited. It is about a negative desire (Bale, 2009). For example, Klein (1995) describes smoking a cigarette as a sublime aesthetic experience with regard to the elegance of a cigarette and its wealth of pleasure. The satisfaction is combined with a negative experience, the intimation of death. Klein concludes that it is not despite, but *due to* the adverse effects that people are smoking (Bale, 2009). The hideous or ugly also has aesthetic value, because it may be moving. Rosenkranz ([1853]2008) describes “the hideous connection” between beauty and the comic that is characterized by formlessness and incorrectness. Edvard Munch’s picture “*Scream*” depicts human existential suffering in an aesthetic way. The modern version of hideousness, like beauty, has a historical perspective. It is something that changes over time, like fashion.

The term “aesthetics” was first used at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Baumgarten ([1750]1983). Baumgarten used the term to denote “the science of the sensory acknowledgment”, that is, the recognition we extract from dealing with the senses. In other words, it deals with the ability to receive stimulation from one or more of the five senses, and the ability to combine these sensory impressions into an overall experience. It works like a translation. According to

Baumgarten, this kind of acknowledgment has intrinsic meaning with regard to practice (Bale, 2009).

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 Dewey (1934) states 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.

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 environmental psychology.

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

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). Table 2 shows three modes of aesthetic experience in nature-based tourism.

Table 2: *Different modes of aesthetic experience in nature-based tourism.*

<b>Biological mode</b>	<b>Cultural mode</b>	<b>Personal mode</b>
The universal need for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• water</li> <li>• view</li> <li>• huge trees</li> <li>• open environments (overview)</li> <li>• not too dense vegetation</li> </ul>	Differences between e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European culture</li> <li>• Continental culture</li> <li>• Asian culture</li> <li>• Different eras</li> <li>• History of culture</li> </ul>	Different motives e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Escape from regular life</li> <li>• New experiences</li> <li>• Mountain hiking</li> <li>• Climbing/rafting, etc.</li> <li>• Pilgrimage tours</li> <li>• Hunting and fishing</li> </ul>
Natural environments, similarities across cultures	Different preferences regarding cultural artefacts such as buildings	Favourite places: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiences from childhood (family cabin, relatives)</li> </ul>

*Adapted from Bourassa (1990).*

Additional important factors for environmental attributes can enhance the processes of understanding and exploration the environment (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). 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.

The different perspectives and theories from philosophy, psychology and environmental psychology 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”.

Aesthetics has received increasing yet still limited attention in the management literature, with scholarly interest centred on aesthetic products and experiential consumption (Charters, 2006). Assessment of aesthetic qualities is an important aspect of consumptive experiences. For example, 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 him- 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. Boswijk, Thijssen, & Peelen (2007) also highlight the senses when pointing out some principles of design to develop meaningful experiences. The concept must have a theme and a story to tell, and it is important to eliminate negative cues and to engage all five senses.

Most theories in marketing and management 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. In saturated markets, an aesthetically appealing product is a way of gaining buyers' attention, communicating information, and providing aesthetic pleasure to both sellers and users (Bloch, 1995). 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). For example, an aesthetically pleasing dining environment attenuates the perceived quality of the food and service, and directly influences behavioural intentions (Ha & Jang, 2012).

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).<sup>2</sup> The provider can instead offer attractive value propositions, which are configurations of resources that take the form of products and services (Skálén, Gummerus, Von Koskull & Magnusson, 2014). In a nature-based context, value propositions can be signs and maps for cycling or hiking tours.

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".<sup>3</sup> In modern use, the term "beauty" tends to imply primarily visual appeal, therefore "attractiveness" may be a marginally better term (Charter, 2006). This is also in line with the management and marketing literature, e.g., the focus on "attractive" servicescapes or environments of the different market segments when choosing a nature-based destination for vacation. Unlike the art experience, where the appreciator is typically an outside observer, he or she is immersed in the object of appreciation in environmental aesthetics. In addition to including elements from the theory of environmental psychology, I also include contributions from the philosophers Baumgarten ([1750]1983), Böhme (2001) (the science of sensory acknowledgment), and Dewey (1934) (aesthetic experience) in this thesis.

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<sup>2</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/aesthetics> (accessed 15 January 2015).

Based on the definitions and perspectives outlined above, the following may work as a definition of aesthetics for the thesis:

Aesthetics refers to what we find “attractive” at a nature-based tourist destination. It implies multisensory “lived experience”. The aesthetic experience has both experiential and symbolic dimensions, and provides the tourist with added value. Appreciation of such consumption has both a cognitive and an affective or emotional component. Aesthetic elements can engage both the man-made and the natural environments. Attractiveness occurs when the elements fit together in a holistic environment.

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 nature-based tourism research. The definition offers opportunities for qualitative exploration research among tourists at a destination.





### 2.3 Tourism and aesthetics

Aesthetics is not a commonly used concept in tourism research in general. Instead, one tends to say something like tourist attractions or destinations are “attractive”, “beautiful”, “appealing”, “pleasurable” etc. There are several reasons for linking the concept of aesthetics to nature-based tourism.

Firstly, there is an obvious historical link between viewing as in sightseeing and tourism (Urry, 2002). The creation of romantic interpretations of landscape was a phenomenon that developed in Europe between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and included the Nordic landscapes. A gradual shift of the travellers’ motives took place. The journey as an opportunity for vital educational experiences abroad (e.g., 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). The prospective enjoyment of travelling through alpine scenery became embodied in landscape paintings. This approach sees the landscape as a postcard. Hence, 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).

It is relevant to mention that at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Alps were not described as “beautiful”, but rather the opposite in the travellers’ diaries (Gadamer, 1986). This is also the case in the example from the diary “Three in Norway by two of them”: *“Sjodals vand is a long straggling lake...and not in any way beautiful except for its wildness [...] the snow-capped mountains, which have been gradually getting nearer all the way from Olstappen, are now magnificently towering above us on three sides.”* The Englishmen describe the natural environment with fear and awe, as distinct from their everyday life, which confirms Burke’s ([1757]1990) definition of the sublime.

Secondly, 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).

Thirdly, aesthetic qualities have received increasing attention in the marketing literature in recent decades, especially with regard to its focus on the experiential and symbolic aspects of products and services. A number of service studies recognize the role of aesthetics in consumer behaviour (e.g., Baisya & Das, 2008; Brady & Cronin, 2001; Charters, 2006; Das, Baisya, & Chandra, 2003; Turley & Milliam, 2000). 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 has largely been limited to cultural experiences (e.g., Mossberg, 2007; O'Dell & Billing, 2005; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Ooi, 2005; Slåtten, Mehmetoglu, Svensson & Sværi, 2009). Even if some studies now also focus on nature-based experiences (e.g., Hazen, 2009; Hosany & Witham, 2009), Vespestad and Lindberg (2011) suggest a need to direct scholarly attention towards nature-based experiences.

Finally, 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 may be one of these attributes, linked to satisfaction with the overall tourism experience, and destination loyalty. 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 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, Xia & Chen, 2008). In tourism, aesthetic value is commonly used to judge natural reserves, and is also one of the criteria for judging cultural resources. Both World Heritage Sites (2012) and the National Geographic Society (2012) relate aesthetics to sustainable tourism development and impacts of tourism on the environment.

There are few studies in tourism focusing on the role of aesthetics. Through validation of the experience economy concept, several studies indicate that aesthetics can have an effect on customers' satisfaction in various tourism contexts. The results from Hosany and Witham's (2009) study of cruise tourists' experiences and satisfaction show that aesthetics is the main determinant of various experiential outcomes, such as predicting memory, overall perceived quality, satisfaction, and intention to recommend.

Mehmetoglu and Engen's (2011) study of an ice festival found that both escapism and aesthetics affected the visitors' level of satisfaction. Similarly, for a museum, both education and aesthetics had strong effects on the same variable. The study of Oh et al. (2007) revealed that aesthetic experiences played a dominant role in the experiential outcomes of guests' stays.

The results from the empirical studies show that "harmony", "cleanliness", and "viewing" in particular, as well as "design" are central dimensions. The term "attractive" is used together with decoration and surroundings, and "beautiful" describes scenery and buildings.

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 confirm several aspects from the theoretical framework with regard to the universality of aesthetics, like "viewing" and "harmony" (e.g., Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Bourassa, 1990). The studies are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. *Aesthetic dimensions from relevant empirical studies in tourism*

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Data sources &amp; country</b>	<b>Results related to aesthetics</b>
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>
Coghlan & Prideaux (2008)	Visitors to the Cairns/Port Douglas region, and Australia's Great Barrier Reef.	Aesthetic characteristics: <i>sun, clear water/good visibility, comfortable temperature and warm water.</i>
Hazen (2009)	Visitors at natural World Heritage sites in the USA.	Aesthetic values: <i>Viewing/scenery, beauty and cleanliness.</i>
Haukeland & Midtgaard (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>
Jacobsen (2011)	A survey with tourists along the National Tourist Routes in Norway.	Central travel motives: <i>Interesting landscape, great view/scenery and special natural attractions.</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>
Lee, Jeon, & Kim (2011)	A survey with tourists in Korea.	<i>Beautiful scenery.</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>
O'Leary & Deegan (2002)	Visitors to Ireland.	Attributes: <i>Beautiful scenery, calm/tranquillity, clean environment.</i>
Raadik et al. (2010)	Visitors to Fulufjället National Park in Sweden.	Central motives for wilderness experiences: <i>See different dramatic landscapes, see spectacular views, experience the scenic quality of nature, tranquillity/peacefulness.</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>

## 2.4 Qualities and tourist behaviour

The following two sections focus on the relationships between service qualities in general, *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 a 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, Lee, Chen, & Huang, 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. Destinations' aesthetics, such as scenery, have been an integral element of many satisfaction scales used in tourism research (e.g., Hazen, 2009). Aesthetic qualities provide a contribution *beyond* the service quality, and the research on the relationships between aesthetic qualities, satisfaction, and loyalty intentions is limited.

Satisfaction is a multifaceted concept and becomes more complex when the setting is a tourist destination including multiple service providers. Phillips, Wolfe, Hodur, and Leistriz (2013) define overall satisfaction as the individual's subjective consumption evaluation based on all the elements associated with the experience. The thesis focuses on aesthetic qualities in this respect. 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 WOM 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. Table 4 shows the results from the studies.

*Table 4. Selected empirical studies regarding the relationship between tourist satisfaction and loyalty intentions*

<b>Author</b>	<b>Study context and method</b>	<b>Independent variables</b>	<b>Dependent variable(s)</b>	<b>Results</b>
Baker & Crompton (2000)	Festival	- Service quality - Satisfaction	Loyalty: - WOM, REV	Service quality has direct effects on WOM. Service quality has indirect effects on REV.
Chi & Qu (2008)	Destination	- Service quality - Satisfaction	Destination loyalty	Service quality has effect on loyalty.
Cole & Illum (2006)	Festival	- Service quality - Satisfaction	Loyalty	Service quality has indirect effect on loyalty in general.
Heung & Quf (2000)	Destination (Hong Kong)	- Service quality - Satisfaction	Loyalty	Service quality has effect on loyalty.
Hosany & Witham (2009)	Cruise	- Experience dimensions - Satisfaction	WOM	Experiences have direct effects on WOM.
Jang & Feng (2007)	Destination	- Novelty - Satisfaction	Loyalty: - REV	Satisfaction has direct effect on REV.
Kim, Holland, & Han (2012)	Destination (Orlando)	- Service quality - Perceived value - Satisfaction	Loyalty	Service quality has both direct and indirect effects on loyalty.
Kozak & Rimmington (2001)	Destination (Mallorca)	- Service quality - Satisfaction	Loyalty	Service quality has direct effect on WOM. Service quality has indirect effect on REV.
Moutinho, Albayrak, & Caber (2012)	Destination (Turkey)	- Service quality - Satisfaction - Perceived value	Loyalty	Service quality has both direct and indirect effects on loyalty.
Petrick (2004)	Cruise (Caribbean)	- Service quality - Satisfaction - Values	Loyalty: - WOM, REV	Service quality has direct effect on REV. Service quality has direct effect on WOM.
Tarn (1999)	Restaurant	- Service quality - Perceived value - Satisfaction	Loyalty: - REV	Service quality has both direct and indirect effects on REV.
Thrane (2002)	Festival	- Service quality - Satisfaction	Loyalty: - WOM, REV	Service quality has direct effect on WOM Service quality has indirect effect on REV.
Yoon & Uysal (2005)	Destination (Northern Cyprus)	- Service quality - Satisfaction	Loyalty: - WOM, REV	Service quality has direct effects on both WOM & REV.
Žabkar, Brenčič, & Dmitrović (2010)	Destination (Slovakia)	- Service quality - Satisfaction	Behavioural intentions	Service quality has direct effects on behavioural intentions.

WOM = Word of Mouth, REV = Revisit Intention

### *Experiential qualities, positive emotions and loyalty intentions*

Emotions are highly relevant when studying tourist experiences. It is reasonable to assume that tourists' appraisals of nature-based aesthetic qualities and positive emotions can affect their decisions about whether they will revisit a tourist destination in the future or recommend it to others. Consequently, it is important to examine the effect of aesthetic experiential qualities on tourists' positive emotions and loyalty. An emotion is related to a person's emotional state, which arises from experiences. Several researchers indicate a significant relationship and direct effects between aesthetic experiential qualities and positive emotions (e.g., Kim & Moon, 2009; Pullmann & Gross, 2004).

The thesis suggests that aesthetic qualities can have both direct and indirect effects on loyalty, mediated by positive emotions. This is justified by existing research, which indicates that qualities can affect loyalty in one of three ways: directly (Lee, Lee, & Choi, 2011; White & Yu, 2005), indirectly mediated by positive emotions (Kim & Moon, 2009), or both (Pullmann & Gross, 2004; Ryu & Han, 2011).

The 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. 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 as well as failing to recommend the experience to others. On the other hand, positive emotions may lead to decisions to revisit the attraction or place in the future and recommendations to others to do the same.

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).

Results from previous studies indicate a positive relationship between positive emotions and loyalty responses (e.g., Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005; Yu & Dean, 2001). Table 5 summarizes the results from selected empirical studies.



Table 5. Selected empirical studies regarding 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 & Gross (2004)	VIP tent Touring circus	Experiential design elements Emotions	Loyalty – WOM	Experiential qualities and emotions have effect on loyalty, and indirect effect on WOM.
Ryu, & Jang (2007)	Upscale restaurants	Facility aesthetics Emotions	Behavioural intentions	Facility aesthetics have effect on pleasure, and pleasure has effect on behavioural intentions.
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 models based on the theoretical framework. Furthermore, it presents the research method.

#### 3.1 The research questions and the theoretical models

The theoretical framework indicates that there are some universal aesthetic qualities of the natural environment, e.g., the need for vantage points to get an overview. Even for man-made environments, there are some universal factors, such as the need to understand the environment and the need to explore. Man-made environments are more affected by cultural and personal modes, and thus are subject to variability. There is therefore a need for more research on how tourists experience the overall environment. Based on the theoretical framework, the overall goal of the thesis is twofold. First, it aims to increase knowledge of aesthetics in nature-based tourism and to develop certain aesthetic dimensions in such a context. Second, it aims to increase knowledge of how these aesthetic dimensions influence the variables satisfaction, positive emotions, and customer loyalty. To achieve this, aesthetics in general and aesthetic dimensions in particular in nature-based tourism is explored in four papers. The methods used for data collection are qualitative interviews and a survey.

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 increase knowledge of aesthetics in nature-based tourism, and identify central aesthetic dimensions based on different theoretical perspectives, results from previous studies, and data from key informants and tourists. 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 2 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).

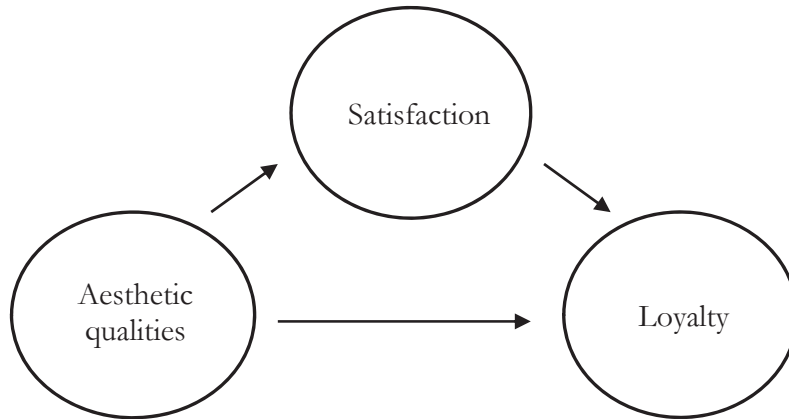


Figure 2. The theoretical model showing the relationship between aesthetic qualities, satisfaction, and loyalty

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 3 illustrates the relationship between aesthetic qualities on one side and loyalty intentions on the other, mediated for positive emotions (RQ 4).

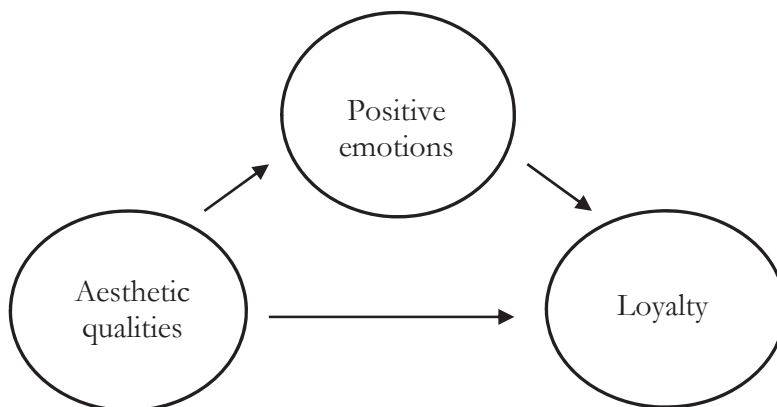


Figure 3. The theoretical model showing the relationship between aesthetic qualities, positive emotions, and loyalty

### 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”.<sup>4</sup> 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

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<sup>4</sup> <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, Trollstigplataet, Ørnesvingen, and Linge Ferry Quay.



Picture 1: Trollstigplataet and Trollstigen Road ([www.nasjonalturistveger.no/en](http://www.nasjonalturistveger.no/en))



Picture 2: The café at Trollstigplatået (Photo: M. Breiby)



Picture 3: Gudbrandsjuvet ([www.nasjonalturistveger.no](http://www.nasjonalturistveger.no))

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”<sup>5</sup>, 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 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 since little previous *empirical* research exists on how tourists experience the overall environment at a nature-based destination. Although the study is exploratory, I use results from previous research related to nature-based tourism and aesthetics. The sources comprise a combination of aesthetic theory from different disciplines and empirical data from qualitative interviews and survey questionnaires. This choice of research method

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<sup>5</sup> [www.juvet.com](http://www.juvet.com) (accessed January 2015).





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 required to address the research question (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 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.

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 the meaningful comparisons required to address the research question, and a picture of the different aesthetic dimensions and forces that shape aesthetic judgments was obtained (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.

This method provided an opportunity to map the tourists' understanding of aesthetics and enabled a comparison of the key informants' and the tourists' understandings. The results were used to design the questionnaire in the quantitative survey.

### *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 & 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, 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 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 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).

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 & Guba, 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. Liljander and Strandvik (1997) 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).<sup>6</sup>

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.

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

### *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 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).

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 variables explained little of the variance in the dependent variables (the three 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 Paper 1: 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 results indicate that the concept of aesthetics in a nature-based tourism context 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 the senses. The key words from the interviews are “perception”, “structure”, “senses”, “attractive”, “beauty”, and “pleasant”.

Several informants mentioned the words “structure” and “attractive”, and as one of them put 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 recognized aesthetic quality ... but where are the people?*

The results from the interviews with key informants revealed five aesthetic dimensions: (1) “harmony”, (2) “variation/contrast”, (3) “scenery/viewing”, (4) “genuineness”, (5) “art/architecture”. Table 6 illustrates the aesthetic dimensions with subcategories divided into man-made and natural environments.

Table 6. *Aesthetic dimensions with subcategories (the key informants)*

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

The subcategories indicate that “harmony” is the most important aesthetic dimension for the man-made environment, while “genuineness” and “art/architecture” are also relevant. For the natural environment, “variation/contrast” is central, together with “scenery/viewing”.

“Harmony” represents the desire to experience silence; 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 overwhelming nature and small/silent places to stay the night, and experiencing both silence and natural sounds, e.g., from waterfalls at the accommodation. “Scenery/viewing” reflects the desire to view beautiful landscapes from the road and facilitated view- and photo-points along the road.

“Genuineness” reflects an interest in tasting traditional food, smelling and hearing nature, and the feeling of nostalgia at the tourism businesses. The findings indicate that “art/architecture” was emphasized especially by key informants. This dimension 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.).

Focusing on architecture, one of the informants provides 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 an experience .... And then you have something to talk about.*

The informant commends the National Tourist Routes for being good at making experiences out of places that most of the tourists might visit during their travels along the tourist routes.

#### **4.2 Paper 2: Exploring aesthetic dimensions in nature-based tourists’ experiences** (Research Question 1)

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, the “National Tourist Route Geiranger-Trollstigen”. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with travellers on holiday along the route to explore how they experienced central aesthetic dimensions in such a context.

The results from the interviews with tourists revealed five aesthetic dimensions: (1) “harmony”, (2) “variation/contrast”, (3) “scenery/viewing”, (4) “genuineness”, and (5) “cleanliness”. In contrast to the experts, the tourists emphasized “cleanliness” rather than “art/architecture”.

“Cleanliness” includes the desire to experience unspoilt nature (e.g., unpolluted water), breathing fresh and clean air, cleanliness and tidiness at the tourism businesses, and clean, well-maintained 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.*

The emotional aspects were expressed like the feeling of experience clean nature, and especially the feeling of breathing clean air.

“Variation/contrast” signifies the desire to experience colours and variation in the landscape (e.g., white mountains and blue fjords), and experiencing nature as both harsh and beautiful. The dimension also signifies contrasts in nature in terms of weather, seasons, and daylight and moonlight. 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 ....*

“Harmony” represents the desire to experience silence in nature (away from traffic and people), spend the night close to nature (e.g., by a river), a feeling of freedom and happiness, harmony with the buildings and nature. “Scenery/viewing” reflects the desire to view spectacular and overwhelming nature, and seeing natural attractions (e.g., Trollveggen). Viewing nature provides a feeling of fascination. This dimension also includes viewing cultural landscapes (e.g., small farms, old towns, and churches).

“Genuineness” reflects an interest in tasting local food (e.g., fish, whale). 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. Table 7 illustrates the aesthetic dimensions with subcategories for man-made and natural environments.



Table 7. *Aesthetic dimensions with subcategories (the tourists)*

Variation/ contrast	Harmony	Scenery/ viewing	Genuineness	Cleanliness
Man-made environment				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiencing variation, not feeling monotonous or boring (e.g., special accommodation)</li> <li>Variation gives a feeling of well-being.</li> <li>The feeling of contrast to the usual environment and life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harmony with the buildings and nature.</li> <li>Accommodation in nature (e.g., by a river).</li> <li>Sharing experiences with others gives a feeling of well-being.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeing natural attractions (e.g., Trollveggen).</li> <li>Viewing the cultural landscape (e.g., small farms, old towns).</li> <li>Viewpoints along the road.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tasting local food (fish, whale, etc.).</li> <li>Experiencing the cultural heritage.</li> <li>Meeting friendly hosts and nice people.</li> <li>Sensing the place's atmosphere.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cleanliness and tidiness at the tourism businesses.</li> <li>Nice and clean walking paths.</li> </ul>
Natural environment				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiencing contrasts in nature with both sunshine and rain.</li> <li>Experiencing nature as both harsh and beautiful.</li> <li>Experiencing variations in landscape (mountains, fjords, waterfalls etc.).</li> <li>Experiencing a lot of colours in nature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiencing silence in nature (away from traffic and people).</li> <li>Feeling of freedom and happiness.</li> <li>Being close to nature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Viewing spectacular, fantastic, and overwhelming nature.</li> <li>Viewing nature gives a feeling of fascination.</li> <li>Driving and viewing nature from the narrow roads feels charming.</li> <li>The view gives a feeling of fear.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling of being surprised.</li> <li>The feeling of safety with no cars.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiencing nature looking fresh and verdant.</li> <li>Breathing fresh and clean air.</li> <li>Experiencing unspoilt nature (e.g., unpolluted water).</li> </ul>

#### 4.3 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. 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 qualities<sup>7</sup> (“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).

Figure 5 illustrates how the aesthetic dimensions affect loyalty intentions, mediated by satisfaction. 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 “cleanliness” had a direct effect on the intention to visit similar roads. The results indicated a more complex explanatory pattern for the intention to recommend.

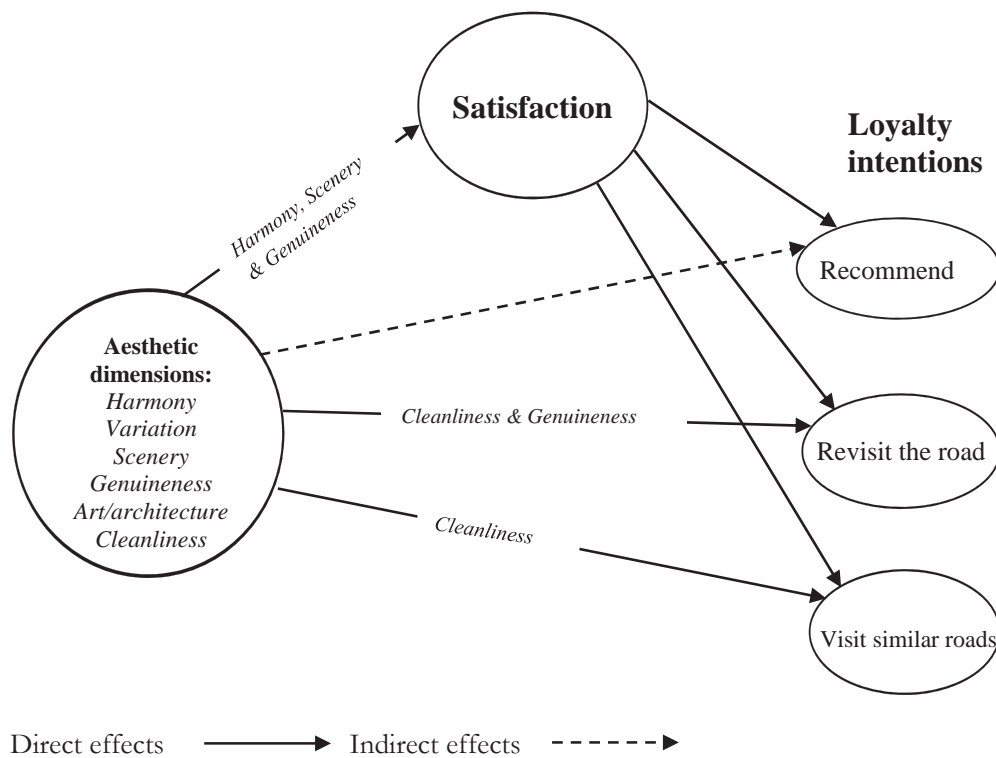


Figure 5. How aesthetic qualities can affect loyalty directly and indirectly mediated by satisfaction (RQ 2)

<sup>7</sup> For the aesthetic quality “variation/contrast”, the CA was 0.32, and it was therefore excluded from further analyses.

The results indicate that service quality has both direct and indirect effects on different aspects of loyalty mediated by overall satisfaction. Thus, it may be valuable to treat, for example, the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit separately in further research.

#### 4.4 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. Figure 6 illustrates how the aesthetic dimensions affect loyalty intentions, mediated by positive emotions. The findings indicate that the aesthetic qualities of "scenery/viewing", "genuineness" and "cleanliness" are important factors influencing positive emotions. "Scenery/viewing" influence the intention to recommend the road to others, and "cleanliness" the intention to visit similar roads. Positive emotions is important for all three loyalty intentions and their outcomes.

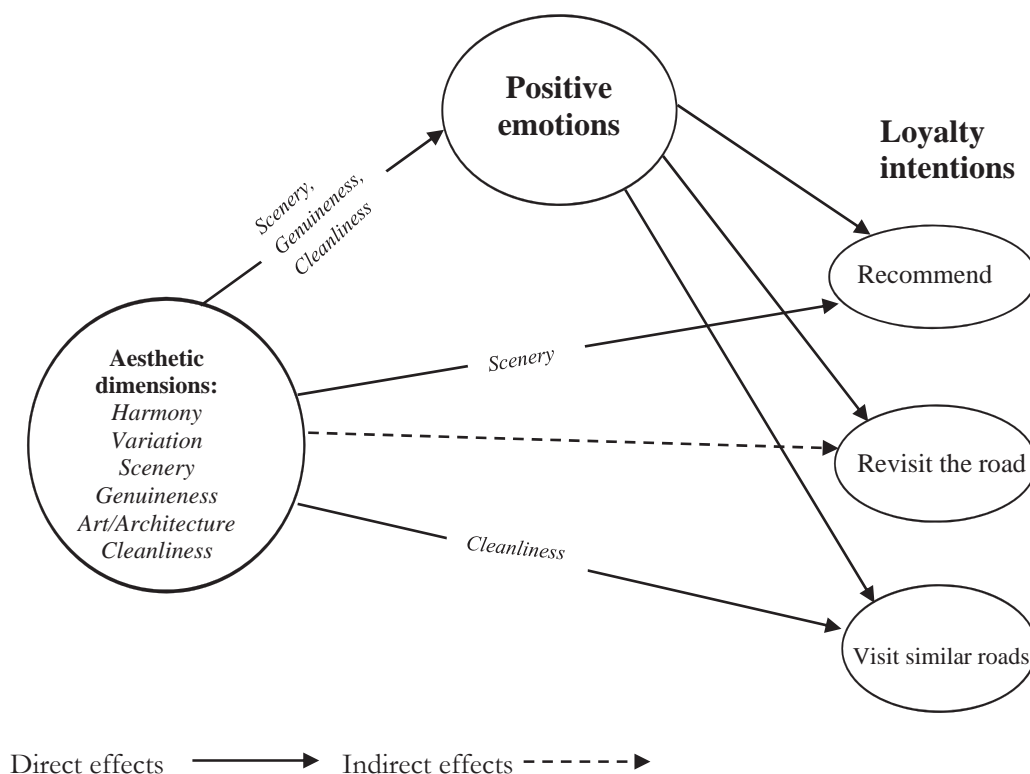


Figure 6. How aesthetic qualities can affect loyalty directly and indirectly mediated by positive emotions (RQ 3)

#### 4.5 An overview of the links between the appended papers

Table 8 summarizes the findings and illustrates the relationship between the four papers. Papers 1 and 2 answer Research Question 1 regarding aesthetics and 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 8. 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>						
<b>Key informants</b>	X	X	X	X	X	
<i>Paper 2: (RQ 1)</i>						
<b>Tourists</b>	X	X	X	X		X
<i>Paper 3: (RQ 2)</i>						
<b>Satisfaction</b>	*		***	*		
<b>Loyalty:</b>						
Recommend			***			*
<i>Satisfaction</i>						
Revisit the road				**		*
<i>Satisfaction</i>				*		*
Visit similar roads			*			***
<i>Satisfaction</i>						***
<i>Paper 4: (RQ 3)</i>						
<b>Positive emotions</b>						
<b>Loyalty:</b>						
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 the thesis. First, it discusses the theoretical contributions to nature-based tourism research and how the findings match existing research. This is followed by a discussion of the managerial implications for tourism practice, both for nature-based tourism in general and for the specific case “National Tourist Routes” in particular. Finally, the chapter presents some suggestions for further research.

### 5.1 Theoretical contributions to nature-based tourism research

The overall goal of the thesis is twofold. First, it aims to increase knowledge of aesthetics in nature-based tourism and to develop certain aesthetic dimensions in such a context. Second, it aims to increase knowledge of how these aesthetic dimensions influence the variables satisfaction, positive emotions, and customer loyalty.

#### *Research question 1 (RQ 1)*

There has been limited focus on aesthetics in tourism research with regard to nature-based experiences and the man-made environment at a destination. Instead, the tourists’ preferences for landscapes have been emphasized (e.g., Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Hazen, 2009; Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010). The 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 tourists’ preferences. The thesis has contributed to deepening and broadening existing research on the concept of aesthetics in nature-based tourism from different theoretical perspectives and revealing key informants’ and tourists’ understandings of central aesthetic dimensions (RQ 1).

The first theoretical contribution from the thesis is that it will be valuable to include several senses, not only the traditional sense of viewing or gazing, in tourist behaviour research. Based on the results, we can conclude that the concept of aesthetics in nature-based tourism is more than the visual and passive receiving of stimuli, as Pine & Gilmore (1999) define the concept. Rather, the concept should be understood as how the individual tourist experiences nature and man-made environments in nature through an active interplay of the senses. Aesthetics in nature-based tourism is uniquely judged and appreciated. Tourists’ assessment of aesthetics goes beyond visual aspects and engagement of the senses. This stance coincides well with Urry’s (2002)

argument positing that tourist experiences also involve a variety of sensescapes, including soundscapes, smellscapes, and tastescapes, in addition to the conventional conception of the “tourist gaze” and sightseeing (Kirillova et al., 2014). This also illustrates Dewey’s (1934) statement that an aesthetic experience is a result of the interaction between the environment and the individual.

The key words in terms of aesthetics from the interviews are “perception”, “structure”, “senses”, “attractive”, “beauty”, and “pleasant”. This supports Baumgarten’s ([1750]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 shows the importance of emphasizing the active element of sensing in the product development process. The terms “attractive” and “beautiful” are supported in several empirical studies in tourism (e.g., Albacete-Sáez et al., 2007; Hazen, 2009; Lee et al., 2011; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Oh et al., 2007). Still, the term “beauty” tends to imply primarily visual appeal, therefore “attractiveness” may be a better term to use in further nature-based tourism research, e.g., a focus on “attractive” environments for different market segments at a destination.

The results emphasize that nature-based tourism research should include the overall or holistic environment when studying tourists’ experiences at a destination, and not separate the man-made and the natural environments, which is typical in several tourism studies (e.g., Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Hazen, 2009; Raadik et al., 2010).

Furthermore, the four aesthetic dimensions “harmony”, “variation/contrast”, “scenery/viewing”, and “genuineness” were central to 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, and “scenery/viewing” and “variation/contrast” for the natural environment. A discussion follows on how the different aesthetic dimensions match existing research.

Most of the informants mention “harmony” when they suggest aesthetic dimensions in nature-based tourism. Some informants use the words “balance” and “coherence”. Previous studies that place “harmony” as a central dimension (Albacete-Sáez et al., 2007; Haukeland & Midtgard, 2000; Hosany and Witham, 2009; Oh et al., 2007) support this observation. The dimension of harmony is also confirmed in previous research on environmental psychology (e.g., Galindo & Hidalgo,

2005). The new insight from the thesis might be the feeling of harmony when *combining* both the natural and the man-made environments in nature. An example is the feeling of being “at one with nature” when staying the night at a place where one gets close to nature, and where the architecture (especially the buildings) harmonizes well with the landscape.

Results from previous studies also support the dimension of “variation/contrast”, especially “interesting/beautiful/dramatic landscape” in nature (Haukeland & Midtgard, 2000; Jacobsen, 2011; Raadik et al., 2010). This dimension also matches with theories within environmental psychology and the need to explore the environment and the degree of complexity (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Emotional aspects were highlighted with respect to variation of experiences, e.g., feeling both scared and delighted, and having variations in nature that give one a feeling of well-being. I observed, for example, that walking all the way 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 had managed this challenge. This coincides with the sublime experience and the feeling of “astonishment” (Burke [1757]1990).

Several informants highlight “scenery or viewing” as a central dimension. Previous studies also support this finding (Hazen, 2009; Jacobsen, 2011; O’Leary & Deegan, 2002; Raadik et al., 2010). This dimension refers to Bourassa’s (1990) theory about the biological mode and the universal need to obtain an overview. This theory is supported by previous studies pointing out that, in contrast to urban landscapes, the aesthetic values of natural landscapes generally have similar effects on different people (Johannesdottir, 2010; Wang et al., 2008). Viewing landscapes is a prerequisite for well-being (Strumse, 2001, 2002).

Haukeland and Midtgard (2000) found that “authentic surroundings” were important for tourists’ experiences. Still, authenticity in tourism remains a debated concept. Kirillova et al. (2014) suggest that the “authentic” dimension relates to the perceived integrity of a destination in terms of its intrinsic properties, expressed via the theme of “balance”. Researchers in environmental psychology explore “balance” using equivalent terms such as “harmony” (Galindo & Hidalgo, 2005). The results from this thesis with regard to the man-made environment, revealed that feeling harmony at a tourism business may not depend on the local traditions, but rather on the overall theme or design, for example. Thus, it might be more appropriate to divide “harmony” and “authentic” into two separate aesthetic dimensions, and use the term “genuineness” instead of “authenticity”.

Results from previous studies focusing on “beautiful and clean”, “clean environment”, “clean public toilets”, and “unpolluted environment” support the dimension “cleanliness” (Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Haukeland et al., 2010; Hazen, 2009; Jacobsen, 2011). Emotional aspects were expressed such as the feeling of experiencing clean nature, and especially the feeling of breathing clean air. Both “genuineness” and “cleanliness” match with how World Heritage Sites (2011) and the National Geographic Society (2012) link aesthetics to sustainable tourism development and to 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. These dimensions are also central to research into designing experiences (Boswijk et al., 2007) by eliminating negative cues.

The focus on art and architecture is supported by the study of Slåtten et al. (2009), where “Viewing the architecture” and “Viewing the ice sculptures” in a winter park are central dimensions for atmospheric experiences that touch visitors emotionally. Other studies also emphasize “beautiful buildings” (Haukeland & Midtgard, 2000) and “design” (Hosany & Witham, 2009; Kirillova et al., 2014; Oh et al., 2007). In relation to the “National Tourist Routes”, the dimension of “art and architecture” may be included with respect to those informants who are acquainted with this nature-based attraction.

#### *Research question 2 (RQ 2)*

The tourism marketing literature has only recently turned its attention to the role of aesthetic qualities in the tourist experience as a source of 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 do affect satisfaction and the intention to recommend (Bonn et al., 2007; Hosany & Witham, 2009; Kwortnik, 2008; Oh et al., 2007). Prior tourism research shows that service quality in general can affect loyalty in one of three ways: directly (Petrick, 2004; Moutinho et al., 2012; Žabkar et al., 2010), indirectly (Cole & Illum, 2006; Tarn, 1999), or both directly and indirectly (e.g., Baker & Crompton, 2000; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Thrane, 2002).

The thesis has 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 intention to recommend.

More specifically, the analyses show that overall satisfaction with the experiences along the road has a positive effect on the intention to recommend, 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 & Crompton, 2000; Thrane, 2002). However, several studies show that service quality has both direct and indirect effects on the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit (e.g., Kim et al., 2012; Moutinho et al., 2012; Žabkar et al., 2010).

The analyses also show that overall satisfaction has a clear and positive effect on the intention to revisit the route and to visit similar routes. Aesthetic qualities have a more complex explanatory pattern; they appeared to have a direct effect on the intention to revisit the route, and both direct and indirect effects on the intention to visit similar routes. The effect of aesthetic qualities on the intention to revisit is supported by Petrick’s study (2004), which was conducted in 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 & Crompton, 2000; Tarn, 1999; Thrane, 2002). Future research should take these contributions into account by not treating the three loyalty intentions as indicators of a more general construct of *loyalty*, which has been typical in previous studies (e.g., Cole & Illum, 2006; Kim et al., 2012; Moutinho et al., 2012; Žabkar et al., 2010).

### *Research question 3 (RQ 3)*

Finally, the thesis has expanded our understanding of the relationship between aesthetic dimensions, positive emotions, and loyalty (RQ 3). The findings from the thesis 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.

These results are consistent with prior quality experience studies and appear trustworthy (e.g., Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009; Hosany & Witham, 2009; Slåtten et al., 2009). Positive emotions had a direct influence on both the intention to recommend, the intention to revisit the route, and the intention to visit similar routes. By contrast, aesthetic qualities had both direct (“scenery”) and indirect effects (“cleanliness”) on the intention to recommend. These findings are similar to

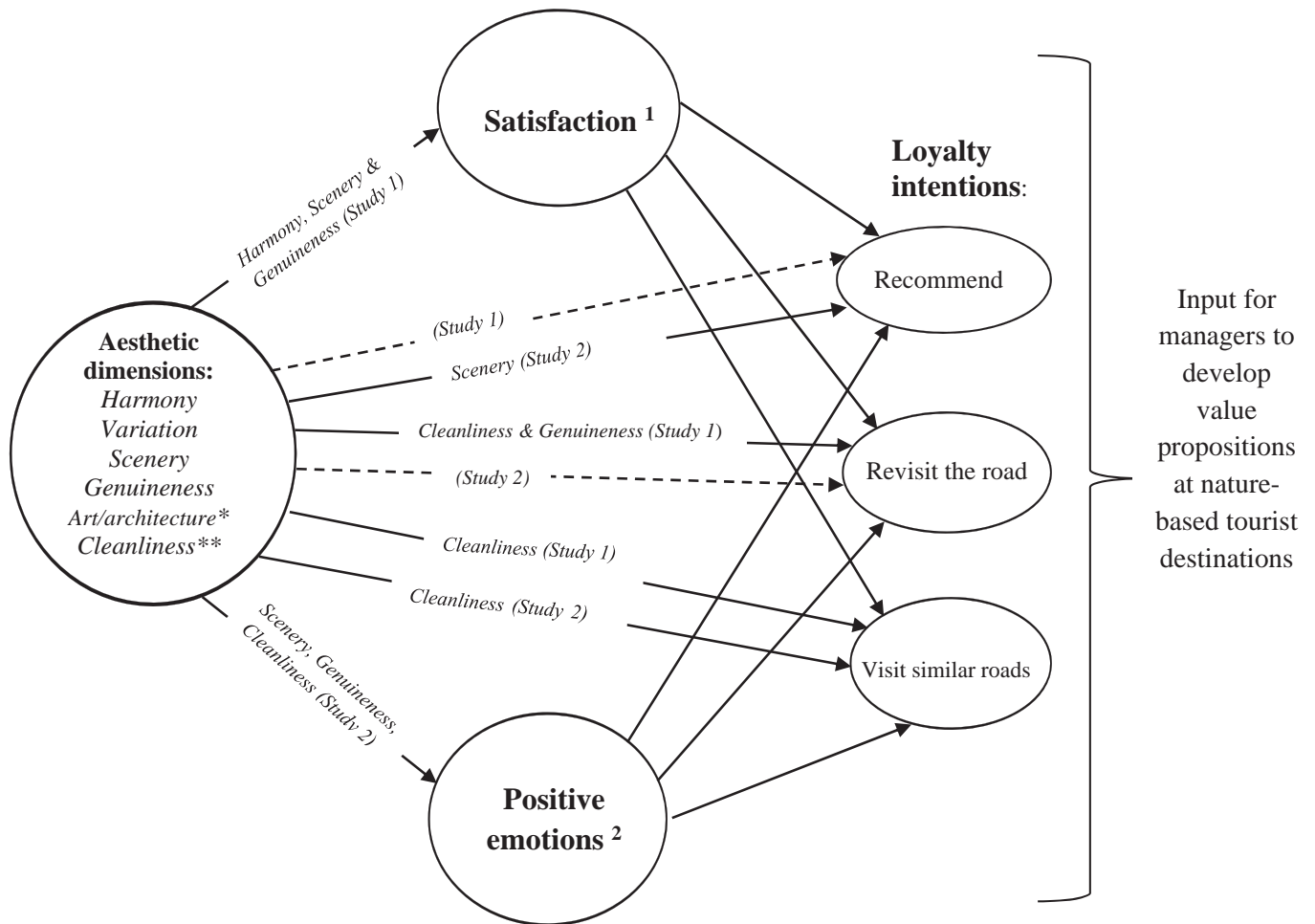
those from an experiential context (a VIP hospitality tent for a touring circus), where design elements had both direct and indirect effects on intention to recommend, mediated by emotions (Pullmann & Gross, 2004). A study from a winter park also confirms the indirect relationship between aesthetic quality (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 (2009) study in a restaurant context. They found that service quality (“servicescape”) had an indirect effect on the intention to revisit, mediated by emotional state.

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.

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 7 provides one way of illustrating the overall contributions of this thesis. This is a conceptual model that has not been empirically tested, but is analysed in two separate parts. The figure illustrates the six aesthetic dimensions that were revealed by the two groups of informants; key informants and tourists. Moreover, Figure 7 shows how the aesthetic dimensions may 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 7. A conceptual model for the overall relationships in the project

## 5.2 Managerial implications

The main managerial implication from the thesis is that it is important to take aesthetic qualities in nature-based experiences seriously. Tourists' assessment of aesthetics goes beyond visual aspects and engagement of the senses. For managers, it is important to facilitate a variety of sensescapes, including soundscapes, smellscapes, tastescapes, and touchscapes, in addition to the conventional "tourist gaze". Based on the results from the thesis, three managerial implications can be emphasized for managers at nature-based destinations in general, and for the case "National Tourist Route" in particular.

First, it is relevant that managers take aesthetic dimensions into consideration when measuring tourists' experiences and develop value propositions at a nature-based destination. This implication is particularly relevant for managers in tourism, where *satisfaction* is at the core of their product and service. Managers can benefit from this information because the aesthetic dimensions "harmony", "scenery", and "genuineness" affect satisfaction. Specifically, the findings show that the aesthetic dimensions are linked to decision-making processes regarding loyalty. "Cleanliness" and "genuineness" have a direct effect on the intention to revisit the destination, whereas "cleanliness" has a direct effect on the intention to visit similar roads.

For example, "harmony" 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 ([www.juvet.com](http://www.juvet.com)) along one of the National Tourist Routes, offers accommodation close to nature, near a river, that provides opportunities for sensing nature by hearing and seeing the river, and experiencing the local plants and animals. They have also developed buildings that respect the natural environment. One of the informants advises against "*the pressure to create surprise elements or wow elements*" if the tourists' experiences are primarily related to the experience of nature. Developing buildings that respect the natural environment might support this argument. An orientation towards experiences in nature might enhance the senses. Marketing product packages with guided tours for experiencing nature can contribute to actively sensing experiences.

For the specific case "National Tourist Routes" and as a contrast with everyday life and the possibilities of sensing nature, "the slow journey", such as driving an old car or a cabriolet, cycling, horseback riding, or walking can be used as a part of the routes' image.

For the dimension “scenery/viewing”, it is worthwhile offering tourists opportunities for viewing both natural and cultural landscapes from the road. Private and public actors can, for instance, offer both facilitated viewpoints along the roads, such as the “Ørnesvingen” along one of the National Tourist Routes ([www.nasjonaleturistveger.no/en/geiranger-trollstigen/ornesvingen](http://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. This may also prevent overgrowth. Guided tours are relevant for experiencing extraordinary viewpoints and photo-points at some distance from the road, typically as part of a group. This can help satisfy tourists’ increasing use of photos from holiday experiences on social networks such as “Facebook” as a way of symbolizing their identity. Pictures in marketing campaigns might reflect the possibilities of viewing both the natural and the man-made environments.

Furthermore, “genuineness” includes the importance of serving locally produced food and beverages, telling stories of local historical significance, and offering accommodation at tourism businesses that reflect the local history. These recommendations indicate the importance of nature-based tourists feeling that they are integrated into the local or territorially anchored environment. Local nature and culture and the inhabitants’ shared values are relevant. As a way of highlighting a destination’s genuineness, SMEs<sup>8</sup> might focus on nature and local history, not only a single firm, but the entire destination. The experience concepts might be linked to the spirit of the place and its people, such as the destination’s legends and stories. One example is the farm “Kvebergsøya” ([www.kvebergsoeya.com](http://www.kvebergsoeya.com)) along the National Tourist Route Rondane, where tourists can stay at a farm with origins in the 17<sup>th</sup> century surrounded by forest, lakes, and mountains, go fishing with traditional “rod or net”, and eat freshly smoked trout for dinner.

As a source of competitive advantage, genuineness might also be combined with new elements. Combining art and architecture with nature along the National Tourist Routes may, 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. Innovative architecture for public toilets, for example, can make an otherwise ordinary visit a memorable experience, which the rest area “Hereiane” along one of the National Tourist Routes does ([www.nasjonaleturistveger.no/en/hardanger/hereiane](http://www.nasjonaleturistveger.no/en/hardanger/hereiane)).

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<sup>8</sup> Small and medium-sized enterprises.

With regard to the dimension “cleanliness”, both public and private actors are responsible for keeping the environment clean at nature-based destinations. Even an otherwise beautiful environment might leave a negative impression if not properly managed. The sight of overfilled rubbish skips and wrecked cars are examples of negative cues for visitors. In contrast, destinations should strive to provide opportunities for tourists to experience activities involving a variety of sensescapes, such as drinking water from streams or swimming in rivers.

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’ *positive emotions*. This implication is relevant for managers in tourism, where positive emotions also is at the core of their product and service. To stimulate tourists’ positive emotions of, e.g., “joy”, “inspiration”, and “excitement”, managers can create nature-based experiences that capture the aesthetic qualities of “scenery”, “cleanliness”, and “genuineness” in the product development and innovation processes at the destination. With regard to the intention to revisit the route, “cleanliness” and “genuineness” were especially emphasized, and these qualities need to be understood and managed.

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).

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 positive emotions. This added value can be a source of competitive advantage and result in increased profit for individual businesses through increased sales.

Finally, 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.

On the basis of the finding that overall satisfaction with the tourist route appears to have more influence on future intentions of loyalty than the aesthetic qualities, the marketers of the tourist route also need to invest effort in other strategies that will enhance tourists’ overall satisfaction, especially their intention to recommend. One relevant strategy involves the concept of a servicescape, which entails a thorough consideration of a nature-based destination from the point of view of the tourists’ experiences. Just as Kwortnik (2008) conceptualized the *shipscape* as a context-specific type of servicescape, including the man-made physical, social, and natural environment, it can be fruitful to use the concept of a *roadscape* to visualize an overall marketing strategy for the case “National Tourist Routes”, including the social environment (i.e., host service and other guests).

A nature-based tourist destination also needs to invest effort in service qualities in addition to aesthetic dimensions 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 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, and thereby encourage positive word of mouth and increase the likelihood of travellers revisiting the destination.

### **5.3 Further research**

Research on aesthetics and 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 control variables explained little of the variance in the dependent variables (the three loyalty intentions), 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 satisfaction with and positive emotions regarding the tourist route appear to have more influence on future intentions of loyalty than the aesthetic qualities, future research need to emphasize other qualities that will enhance tourists' overall satisfaction. Other qualities may include the hospitality and expertise of employees of tourist businesses, interactions with other guests, information, or price.

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 products and services 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 (Skålén et al., 2014). This may also be the case in tourism research.



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

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](http://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](http://www.kicheche.com)) and the Hidden Valley Cabins (2013) in Australia ([www.hiddenvalleycabins.com/au/](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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 past two decades, the literature on the concept of aesthetics as it relates to human-made environments in nature-based tourism is limited. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain knowledge of the influence of central aesthetic dimensions on tourists' experiences in a nature-based setting. The empirical context is a specific tourist route in Norway. The findings revealed 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 human-made and the natural environment, to better understand tourists' overall "experiencescape" at nature-based destinations. It also emphasizes the importance for managers of focusing on the role of aesthetic dimensions in tourists' satisfaction. It is especially important to understand how to manage aesthetic dimensions in such a way that they both add customer value and can be a source of competitive advantage for service businesses at nature-based tourist destinations.

Key words: Aesthetic dimensions, nature-based tourism, experiences, human-made environments

## **Introduction**

International competition in tourism markets constitutes a major challenge for destination managers and individual producers (Gooroochurn & Sugiyarto, 2005). Services in nature-based areas are largely provided by small and medium sized tourism enterprises. As their 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 has received increasing attention in the service literature over the past quarter of a 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; Turley & Milliam, 2000), and aesthetics is a central concept in the experience economy literature (e.g., Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Boswijk, Thijssen, & Peelen, 2008; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). This role has only recently become a theme in tourism research on consumer experiences (e.g., Bonn, Joseph-Mathews, Dai, Hayes, & Cave, 2007; Hosany & Witham, 2009). However, it seems that previous tourism research has, to a large extent, 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), including in the Nordic landscape (e.g., Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010; Haukeland, Grue, & Veisten, 2010). However, there are few empirical studies on aesthetic dimensions and the human-made environments in nature-based tourism (O'Neill, Riscinto-Kozub, & Hyfte, 2010). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain knowledge of the influence of central aesthetic dimensions on tourists' experiences in a nature-based setting. Specifically, in addition to the natural environments, it emphasizes the human-made environment situated within nature: accommodation, food outlets, and signs, all of which may be central features in a nature-based holiday and thereby influence tourists' satisfaction. The study seeks to explore the research question: "What kinds of aesthetic dimensions and forces shape aesthetic judgments in nature-based tourism"? The results contribute to the tourism literature by identifying the possible links between aesthetic dimensions and increased satisfaction and repeat visitation. They also provide relevant data to assist destination managers to develop appropriate tourism strategies by

including aesthetic dimensions as an important aspect in the marketing and product development processes.

The context is 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 the public and private sectors in the marketing and product development processes. Tourists or members of the visitor parties to the tourist destination were interviewed as they travelled along the selected tourist route during the summer.

This study begins with a literature review, then presents the aesthetic dimensions that came to light during the interviews, and discusses their 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 (sic) 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 human-made environment that are formulated mainly on the basis of knowledge from architects and landscape architects. Both the World Heritage Sites (2011) and the National Geographic Society (2012) relate aesthetics to sustainable tourism development and the impacts of tourism on the environment.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> 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 in appreciating aesthetics and is 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 human-made environment, for example, accommodation, restaurants, and signs in nature (Mossberg, 2007; O’Dell & Billing, 2005; Pan & Ryan; 2009).

Pine and Gilmore (1999) have linked entertainment, education, esthetic (aesthetics), and escapism and have defined them as the four “realms” of an experience. According to Pine and Gilmore, an individual in an aesthetic experience, such as standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon or visiting an art gallery, immerses him- or herself but remains passive. By contrast, Tordsson (2008) argues that aesthetics involves not only passive reception but also active sensing. In Western societies today, we use a lot of energy to shelter from the outside world, and therefore limit our daily impressions and experiences of the world. These efforts might result in “sensory numbness”. As a means of countering this condition, Tordsson suggests that people seek out in nature to enhance the senses. This study employs this broad definition of aesthetics as a general sense of learning, and emphasizes nature-based experiences that have an aesthetic purpose as a substantial goal, rather than products that use aesthetic elements (such as styling) as a marketing or promotional tool.

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). Today, there are segments of the population that prefer using and exploring the landscape and nature actively, rather than simply passively consuming 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), namely that nature-based tourism should be associated with leisure activities in nature, with key components being the tourists, nature, and the experiences in nature. Furthermore, the nature-based tourism industry represents activities in different sectors directed to meet the demands of nature tourists. In addition to the natural environment, the study extends the previous research by specifically considering the influence of the human-made environment in nature on tourist” experiences. The next section presents the aesthetic dimensions of natural and human-made environments identified by previous research.

### *Aesthetic dimensions of natural and human-made environments*

The creation of romantic interpretations of landscape, including the Nordic landscapes, was a phenomenon that developed in Europe between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. A gradual shift in travelers' motives 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). Results from empirical studies on tourists' preferences for nature and different types of landscapes" (Coghlan & Prideaux, Jacobsen, 2011, 2009; Haukeland et al., 2010; Hazen, 2009, Raadik, Cottrell, Fredman, Ritter, & Newman (2010), show that the central desired qualities are "scenery/view", "clean environment "interesting/beautiful/dramatic landscape", and "silence/peacefulness". These studies indicate a relation between aesthetic dimensions and the choice of nature-based tourist destinations. The focus is mainly on the visual aspect through viewing and "gazing" at the landscape. Most of the studies apply a quantitative approach along with fixed categories. Environmental psychology research shows that "landscape", "scenery", and "harmony" have an effect on peoples' well-being in nature (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 is justified by this proposition.

Few studies have focused on aesthetic dimensions and the human-made environment in nature-based tourism experiences. Relevant studies show that in particular, the qualities of "harmony", "design" and "attractiveness have effects on customers' satisfaction (Haukeland & Midtgard, 2000; Hosany & Witham, 2009; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Oh et al., 2007; Slåtten, Mehmetoglu, Svensson, & Sværi, 2009). These studies also mainly focus on the visual aspect, such as "viewing the architecture" (Slåtten et al., 2009). In a broader tourism perspective, the effect of the human-made environment, or the "servicescape", on tourists' satisfaction with tourism businesses in general has been recognized for many years (Albacete-Sáez, Mar Fuentes-Fuentes, & Lloréns-Montes, 2007; Heide & Grønhaug, 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 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 present study's method and the findings from the interviews with tourists.

## **Method**

This study was of an exploratory nature, as little previous research exists on the topic. The research investigated what kinds of aesthetic dimensions and forces shape aesthetic judgments in nature-based tourism, where a qualitative approach is suitable (Pratt, 2009). An instrumental case study was 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 was the “National Tourist Route (NTR) Geiranger/Trollstigen” (2012) in Norway. By 2015, 18 routes will be completed 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 tourist experience through human-made additions is at center stage in the project (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 2002-2015 period. The money is allocated for improving journeys, developing rest areas, parking places with activities and experiences, and more. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration is responsible for the project management in cooperation with two architectural committees comprising architects, landscape architects, and artists (both emerging and well-established ones).

The NTR Geiranger/Trollstigen was chosen for three reasons. (1) It combines nature, architecture, design, and art at the viewing points and at the tourism businesses (e.g., cafeterias and accommodation). Both the cafeteria and the viewing point at Trollstigen have received much international attention. One of the hotels along the route, Juvet Landscape Hotel ([www.juvet.com](http://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 includes the

natural attraction of Trollstigen. Trollstigen draws about 600,000 visitors during the summer season, and is the second most visited nature-based attraction in Norway. This route attracts both international and domestic visitors, with the demographic composed of a combination of independent and individual round-trip tourists, mountain tourists, and organized cruise tourists.

*Data collection and analysis*

Interviews were conducted with ten tourists or members of visitor parties while they were visiting NRR Geiranger-Trollstigen. Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007) of individual round-trip tourists, who are the route’s primary market, was conducted. Most of the interviews took place at a cafeteria at the viewing point for Trollstigen, with one at a ferry pier, and the others at camping sites. Other sample-selection criteria were varying nationalities, visitor parties, and modes of transport, as described in Table 1.

**Table 1.** A brief presentation of the participants

No.	Members of the visitor party	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	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 tourists gave rich and varied information that pointed to relevant aesthetic dimensions of the tourist experience. Seven tourists were interviewed with other members of the visitor party. This resulted in valuable discussions and reflections about the topic. In all, 17 tourists were involved in the interviews. The sample provided sufficient information for the meaningful comparisons required to address the research question, and a picture of

the different aesthetic dimensions and forces that shape aesthetic judgments was obtained. The sample helped the researcher to gain more knowledge about the concept of aesthetics (Mason, 2002). The research is of subjective quality, and has a risk of confirmation error.

The interviews were semi-structured, and an interview guide (in Norwegian and English) was used for the data collection. The interviews began by informing the interviewees about the purpose of the study and the theme of the questions. The participants then gave a short summary of where they had come from, their visitor party, and the mode of transport they were using. In the main part of the interview, the objective was to elicit as many statements and explanations as possible of what the concept of aesthetics was and could be, both in general terms and in a nature-based context. The participants were asked to give examples and elaborate on statements about important aesthetic dimensions. The dimensions could be associated with nature, activities/attractions in nature, places they were visiting, and/or businesses where they ate or stayed the night. The participants were also asked to give examples of the experiences they were primarily seeking along the scenic road, and what kinds of feelings were evoked by these experiences. The interviews lasted from about 40 minutes to one hour, and the researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim.

The semi-structured interview is an effective way for a researcher to obtain knowledge about tourists' personal experiences (Mason, 2002), yet occupying the tourists' vacation time can be perceived as disturbing. Five visitor parties did not want to be interviewed: three said they did not have time and two gave no explanation.

To explore the central aesthetic dimensions of tourism experiences, this study employed a "thematic analysis" for analyzing patterns of themes within the 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 data collection and analysis was a circular and recursive process, which requires movement back and forth as needed, throughout the phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis began during the data collection. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The researcher listened carefully to the interviews and read them several times to get a general sense of the material. The written information was coded into words and phrases from the interviews on the basis of the research question. The codes were analyzed to find relationships 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 criterion for selecting the number of categories was that they should reflect the categories highlighted by the majority of the respondents, as well as the depth and complexity of the concept (Mason, 2002). The indexing was done manually.

It is important to note that the data were created through cooperation between the interviewees and interviewer. Another interviewer might have obtained different results, because dialogues are complex, 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 with researchers at a university college workshop in Norway. The next section presents the findings.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results confirmed several of the aesthetic dimensions that were identified in the literature. Each of the dimensions is discussed and presented with regard to the natural and the human-made environment.

### *Variation/contrast*

All of the visitor parties stated that it is important to experience “variation or contrast” during the holiday. The examples 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 colors and 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 way that contrasts greatly with how they experienced nature at home. One member of a visitor party 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 [sic] 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 on landscape preferences support this dimension (Haukeland et al., 2010; Jacobsen, 2011; Raadik et al., 2010). Emotional aspects were highlighted with respect to the variation of experiences, such as not feeling monotony or boredom, feeling both scared and delighted by nature, and having variations in nature that give a feeling of well-being. During the stay in the field, the researcher observed, for example, that going out to the viewing point at Trollstigen was a frightening experience for many of the tourists. Several were quite happy afterward when they expressed how they handled this challenge.

### *Harmony*

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

... we always stay the night 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 visitor parties from Norway spoke of an example where there was no harmony between the buildings and nature:

In general, I think in Norway... in the nice places famous for their mountain passes, the eating places look as if they were inserted randomly. It looks like they just have been dumped down in many places... they are not in proportion with the nature they are surrounded by.

The visitor parties also mentioned certain emotional aspects, such as feeling free, good, and happy when being close to nature, and a sense of belonging in nature. The dimension of harmony is also confirmed in previous 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 human-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 visitor parties as a central dimension. Examples from the natural environment were viewing spectacular, fantastic, and overwhelming natural sites, seeing high and beautiful mountains, and seeing other natural attractions. One tourist 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 visitor parties highlighted the human-made environment as part of views of the cultural landscape, including small farms, old towns, churches, and old stone bridges along the road. They also emphasized the importance of maintaining clear viewing points along the road and preventing overgrowth. One of them said:

... 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 exploring the narrow roads is 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 visitor parties brought up the dimension of “genuineness” regarding the human-made environment. Central conditions mentioned were tasting traditional and local food (such as fish and whale), 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 tourists from Finland expressed the 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 the outside of some hotels looks quite 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 their accommodation, the feeling of being surprised, and the feeling of just being there. Haukeland and Midtgard (2000) found that “authentic surroundings” were important for tourists’ experiences in their study. Still authenticity in tourism remains a debated concept. The results of this study revealed that it might be more appropriate to use the word “genuineness” in the context of “uniqueness”, rather than as “authentic”, with regard to the human-made environment. The feeling of “genuineness” at a tourism operation may depend not on factors such as the local traditions but on the overall theme, design, or art that makes a business different from other businesses.

### *Cleanliness*

A recurrent theme of the interviews was the dimension of “cleanliness”, both in the natural and the human-made environment. Six tourists mentioned this, and expressed it as the opportunity to breathe fresh and clean air and to experience unspoilt nature (e.g., unpolluted water), nature looking fresh and verdant, cleanliness and tidiness at the tourism businesses (e.g., toilets, etc.), and clean walking paths. One of them said:

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 human-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... [H]ere they could have improved this walk into a very nice walk, half way 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 consistent with the way 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 “cleanliness” are also central to the research on designing experiences (Boswijk et al., 2007) by eliminating negative cues and making the concept natural and authentic. The emotional aspects were expressed as the feeling of experiencing clean nature, especially the feeling of breathing clean air.

To summarize, the qualitative interviews with the tourists revealed five aesthetic dimensions: “variation/contrast”, “harmony”, “scenery/viewing”, “genuineness”, and “cleanliness”. The dimension of “variation/contrast” stood out as being important for all the tourists. The five dimensions are supported by previous studies, in which four of them, (“harmony”, “variation/contrast”, “scenery/viewing”, and “cleanliness”), had previously been found to tourists’ well-being and choice of nature-based tourist destinations. Previous research has not included “genuineness” as an aesthetic dimension, but it has been identified as important for tourists’ experiences in general, linked to “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. Deeper analysis shows that the international visitor parties highlighted the dimension of “*cleanliness*” for both the natural and the

human-made environment, and the domestic visitor parties emphasized the dimension of “genuineness”, especially for the human-made environment. 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"> <li>Experiencing variations in landscape (mountains, fjords, waterfalls, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiencing silence in nature (away from traffic and people)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Viewing spectacular, fantastic, and overwhelming natural sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tasting local food (fish, whale, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiencing unspoilt nature (e.g., unpolluted water)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiencing many colors in nature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being close to nature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeing natural attractions (e.g., Trollstigen)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiencing the cultural heritage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breathing fresh and clean air</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiencing contrasts in nature with both sunshine and rain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accommodation in nature (e.g., by a river)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Viewing the cultural landscape (e.g., small farms, old towns)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting friendly hosts and nice people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiencing nature looking fresh and verdant</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiencing nature as both harsh and beautiful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harmony between the buildings and nature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Viewing points along the road</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sensing the places’ atmosphere</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cleanliness and tidiness at the tourism businesses</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiencing variation, not feeling monotony or boredom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling of freedom and happiness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Viewing nature evokes a feeling of fascination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling of being surprised</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clean walking paths</li> </ul>

## Conclusions

Aesthetic dimensions have received increasing attention in the service literature over the past quarter of a century, especially with regard to the focus on experiential and symbolic aspects of products and services. The tourism literature has only recently turned its attention to the role of aesthetics in the tourist experience as a means of obtaining competitive advantages for service businesses and destinations. A central topic for nature-based tourism strategies to explore is what kinds of aesthetic dimensions and forces shape aesthetic judgments. The findings in the research to date show that aesthetic dimensions are mostly linked to landscape preferences and the natural environment (e.g., Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010; Haukeland et al., 2010; Hazen, 2009; Raadik et al., 2010).

The findings from this study support these results, and extend the research by also including central dimensions for the human-made environment. The analysis revealed five dimensions and forces that shape aesthetic judgments: “variation/contrast”, “harmony”, “scenery/viewing”, “genuineness”, and “cleanliness”. The first three dimensions are all central for both the natural and the human-made environment. “Genuineness” was important only with regard to the human-made environment, and “variation/contrast” was important only with regard to the natural environment. “Genuineness” has not been included as an aesthetic quality in previous research, but has been identified as important for tourists’ experiences in general, when linked to “authentic surroundings”. The results from this study revealed that it might be more appropriate to use the word “genuineness” instead of “authentic” with regard to the human-made environment. The feeling “genuineness” or “uniqueness” at a tourism business may depend not on such things as 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 five dimensions (e.g., feeling both scared and delighted, and the 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 dimensions and forces that shape aesthetic judgments influence preferences for the natural and human-made environment in tourists’ nature-based experiences. Future research should emphasize this by including the overall or holistic environments, rather than separating the human-made and natural environment, as is typical in tourism studies (e.g., Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009; Hazen, 2009; Raadik et al., 2010). Previous research shows that satisfaction is important for loyalty intentions, and by including the overall environment, it may be easier to identify features that tourists’ are not satisfied with at nature-based destinations. The findings also suggest that it might be fruitful in future research to include several senses, and just not the traditional viewing or gazing.

The study’s findings may assist producers to improve or change the different features, and thereby influence the overall satisfaction of tourists. Marketing campaigns for different market segments could, for example, focus on “*variation/contrast*” in nature by combining pictures of, say, mountains, rivers, and waterfalls. They could show the many colors of

nature, and depict nature as both beautiful and brutal in order to trigger emotions of being scared, excited, and happy. Offering product packages with guided tours for experiencing nature in different weather conditions, both daylight and moonlight, can appeal to the desire for variation and for the active sensing of nature-based experiences. As a contrast with everyday life as a means of fully sensing nature, “the slow journey”, like driving an old car or a cabriolet, cycling, horseback riding, or walking, could be used as a part of a destination’s image.

The feeling of “*harmony*” for the nature-based tourist could be achieved by offering accommodation close to nature (e.g., by a river) that offered possibilities for sensing nature. Developing buildings that respect the natural environment may 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 come from being in nature. Courses for hosts may be relevant for businesses to ensure that guests have the feeling of being taken care of.

For the dimension of “*scenery/viewing*”, it is important to offer opportunities for tourists to view spectacular and beautiful natural sites, special attractions, and cultural landscapes. This can be done by maintaining clear viewing points and walking paths along the scenic routes, and preventing overgrowth. Pictures in marketing campaigns could reflect the opportunities for viewing both the natural and the human-made environment. Possible pictures of natural environments include overwhelming mountains and waterfalls that evoke feelings of fascination. Pictures of human-made environments might include cultural landscapes, including small farms, old towns, churches, and stone bridges.

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 such as the local culture and natural environment, and the inhabitants’ shared values. As a way of highlighting a destination’s uniqueness, the small and medium sized tourism enterprises might focus on nature and on the local history, not only for the individual enterprise, but also for the entire destination. The experience concepts might be overtly linked to the spirit of the place and its people, such as 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. This might even lead new market segments to become interested in natural experiences.

With regard to the dimension of “*cleanliness*”, both public and private actors are responsible for keeping the environment clean at nature-based destinations. Even an otherwise beautiful environment can leave a negative impression if polluted. The sight of overfilled rubbish skips and wrecked cars in nature are examples of negative cues for visitors. The destination could also offer opportunities for tourists to take active part in nature-based activities, such as drinking water from a stream, swimming in a river, or any other sense-enhancing experience.

The aim of this study was limited, which means that the results should be seen as a basis for future research, such as larger-scale testing of aesthetic dimensions in other nature-based contexts. The dimensions and forces that shape aesthetic judgments can be seen in the context of different products, based on different tourists’ needs and preferences for different elements in the aesthetic experience depending on, for example, the tourist’s travel motive, nationality, visitor party, age, type of transport and travel, previous travel, experience, and education. These aspects should be investigated further. Although emotional aspects were mentioned for the five dimensions, and this supports the past conceptual studies of active and emotional participation in nature-based experiences, further research might be valuable. With regard to alternative aesthetic dimensions, I hope the findings can 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 of a Scenic Road**

## **Abstract**

This study examines the effects of aesthetic qualities and tourists' satisfaction and loyalty in a context of nature-based tourism. The analysis reveals that tourists' evaluations of the aesthetic qualities of *scenery*, *harmony* and *genuineness* positively affected their satisfaction with the scenic road, and that satisfaction had a direct influence on both their intention to recommend that road, to revisit it, and to visit similar roads. By contrast, the aesthetic qualities of *cleanliness* and *genuineness* had only a direct effect on 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 in recent decades, especially with regard to its focus on the experiential and symbolic aspects of products and services. A number of service studies recognize the role of aesthetics in consumer behavior (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 has largely been limited to cultural experiences (e.g., Mossberg 2007; O'Dell and Billing 2005; Mehmetoglu and Engen 2011; Ooi 2005; Slåtten, Mehmetoglu, Svensson and Sværi 2009). Even if some studies now also focus on nature-based experiences (e.g., Hazen 2009; Hosany and Witham 2009), Vespestad and Lindberg (2011) 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 survive in an increasingly competitive global market (Phillips, Wolfe Hodur, and Leistritz 2013). The relationship between service quality in general, satisfaction and loyalty are therefore well recognized in studies of tourists' behavior (Baker and Crompton 2000; Chen, Lee, Chen, and Huang 2011; Kim, Holland, and Han 2012; Kozak and Rimmington 2000; Petrick 2004; Thrane 2002). The results indicate that service quality has both direct and indirect effects on various aspects of loyalty mediated by overall satisfaction; for example, it may be valuable to treat tourists' intentions to recommend, and intentions to revisit, separately. Aesthetic qualities are among several service quality attributes or components offered to visitors at tourism destinations. Like other service quality attributes, they may be customer oriented and strategically important for the customers' overall experiences (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985). In tourism research, it has been acknowledged that aesthetic characteristics affect tourists' experiences and satisfaction, contributing to their loyalty towards a destination. Hence, a destinations' aesthetic qualities, such as scenery and cleanliness, have been an integral element of many satisfaction scales used in tourism research (e.g., Chi and Qu 2008; Moutinho, Albayrak, Caber 2012; Yoon and Uysal 2005). However, to this authors' knowledge, a study focusing primarily on the relationship between

a variety of 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 including the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit the destination. Specifically, this study will examine the relationship between (1) five aesthetic qualities (*scenery, cleanliness, harmony, art/architecture* and *genuineness*) and satisfaction, and (2) the five aesthetic qualities, satisfaction, and three loyalty intentions (to recommend, to revisit and to visit similar routes). This is an experiential study and a first attempt to develop a scale to measure the effects of aesthetic qualities on satisfaction and loyalty intentions in a nature-based setting. The focus on different aesthetic qualities is a contribution to the marketing literature on the possible links between aesthetic qualities and their outcomes (e.g., greater revenue through increased market share). The study also provides data that is relevant to destination marketers for the development of appropriate marketing strategies to add value and increase the tourists' satisfaction through aesthetic qualities as an important aspect of nature-based experiences. This may increase the likelihood of tourists 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), which states that nature-based tourism should be associated with leisure activities in nature, where the key components are the tourists, nature, and experiences in nature. Furthermore, the nature-based tourism industry offers facilities to meet the demands of the nature-based market segments, such as trip activities or travel mode choices (Mehmetoglu 2006, 2007). The present study extends the previous research by specifically considering the physical or built environments in nature (e.g., accommodation, food, and signs) that may be central in a nature-based holiday, and thereby influence 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 the Introduction, Part Two provides the conceptual framework, which 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 examines the theoretical and practical implications for marketing purposes.



## Conceptual Framework

### *The Concept of Aesthetics*

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.

The concept of aesthetics was first expressed by Plato in his consideration of beauty (Plato [n.d.] 1951). However, the term “aesthetics” was first used at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Baumgarten ([1750] 1983). Baumgarten used the term to denote “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 aesthetic value. Regarding the latter issue, objectivists view aesthetic value as inherent in the design of the object (Kant, [1790] 1987), while subjectivists argue that aesthetic value lies in the subjects’ response to the design (Hume, [1757] 1998).

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.” Among those who take a psychological approach, the focus on beauty is much debated. What one person considers beautiful, another person may consider ugly or boring. There is no one story common to all aesthetic experiences, although certain themes may be more usual than others, owing to shared biology and shared socialization (Averill et al. 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.

Most approaches to 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 humans (Averill et al. 1998). The biological explanation is much debated, because 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 built environments would probably be experienced through the cultural and personal modes and thus be subject to variability (Strumse 1996).

The different perspectives and theories from philosophy and psychology have inspired the marketing and management literature on the more practical use of the multidisciplinary concept of aesthetics regarding consumption. The economy is usually described as a system for satisfying needs. As a result of increasing satisfaction of basic needs, there may be needs in the western world today that arise to an even greater extent than functional needs. According to Read (1965), the evolution of aesthetics came when man, after ensuring that products served their functional purpose, looked for further uses for them, focusing on emotions. Hence, the earlier and quite narrow focus on the concept of “usability” has been replaced with that of “user experience.” As a natural result of this shift, practitioners in the so-called “experiential 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 image or “pre-experience” that the tourist has of the expected experience at the destination (Oh, Fiore and Jeoung 2007). Hence, the experiential

economy is relevant to this study, the purpose of which is to examine the effects of aesthetic qualities on tourists' satisfaction and loyalty to a nature-based tourist destination.

Much of the attention of marketers has focused on products with a visual dimension, such as advertising and designing websites, rather than on the aesthetic experience itself, such as that provided by music or architecture (Charters 2006). Furthermore, in the tourism literature, the visual aspects such as the *tourist gaze*, beauty, design and style, have been emphasized (Pikkemaat and Weiermair 2004; Urry 2002; Weaver 2009). However, recent research highlights the importance of using multiple senses in marketing and experiential development (Mossberg 2007; Wang, Xia and Chen 2008). Based on the definitions and perspectives outlined above of the concept of aesthetics, the following can be suggested as a definition for this study: "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."

### ***Aesthetic Qualities and Nature-based Tourism***

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). Although a substantial body of literature exists on aesthetic notions with regard to landscape preferences and the establishment of national parks (e.g., Bourassa 1990; Coghlan and Prideaux 2009), the literature on the built environment in nature-based tourism is scarce. 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 focus of this study is not landscape preferences, but it extends previous research by specifically focusing on the use of the physical or built environment at a nature-based tourism destination to increase tourists' satisfaction and loyalty intentions.

Relevant studies from various experiential contexts (e.g., heritage attractions, cruises and bed-and-breakfast accommodation) show that *harmony*, *design* and *attractive surroundings* (Bonn et al. 2007; Hosany and Witham 2009; Kwortnik 2008; Oh et al. 2007) affect customers' overall satisfaction and future intentions, such as their willingness to recommend. 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. 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).

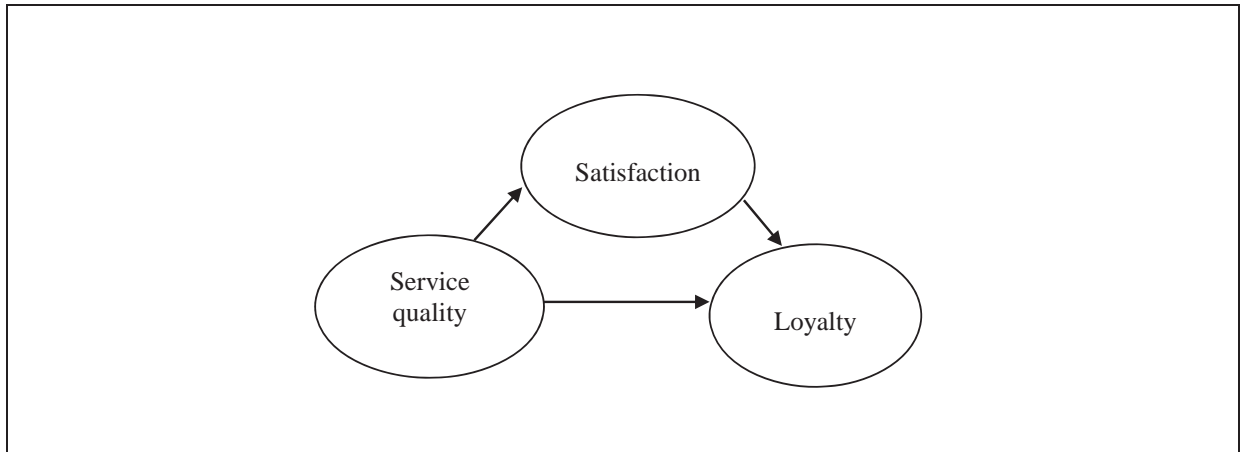
The results from empirical tourism studies on aesthetic notions with regard to activities in nature note that central aesthetic qualities are *scenery/viewing* (Hazen 2009; Raadik, Cottrell, Fredman, Ritter, and Newman 2010), *clean environment* (Coghlan and Prideaux 2009; Haukeland, Grue, and Veisten 2010; Hazen 2009), *beautiful/dramatic landscape* (Haukeland et al. 2010; Jacobsen 2011; Raadik et al. 2010), and *silence/tranquility/peacefulness* (Raadik et al. 2010).

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 and 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 built 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” tourist, (e.g., not part of an organized tour group) 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 based on all the elements associated with the experiences, such as accommodation, attractions, activities and food. The concept of satisfaction is defined by marketers as postpurchase behavior, and this is of strategic importance to businesses because of its influence on repeat purchases and word-of-mouth recommendations (Heung and Quf 2000). Among other researchers, Soutar (2001) has concluded that satisfied customers are much more likely to exhibit positive postpurchase behavior, such as making 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 use for their overall quality assessment (Pizam and Ellis 1999). This study focuses on 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 to attract first-time tourists, and because it is a positive indicator of satisfaction (Oppermann 2000). The relationship between service quality in general, satisfaction and loyalty are therefore well recognized in studies of tourist behavior. Earlier findings show that service quality has both direct and indirect effects on loyalty mediated by overall satisfaction. Cole and Illum (2006), for example, indicate that service quality did not affect loyalty directly, but only indirectly through satisfaction. By contrast, Petrick (2004), Moutinho 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 exerts both a direct and 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 service quality and satisfaction on the intention to revisit are not necessarily similar to those on willingness to recommend to others. Based on the findings from these studies, Figure 1 illustrates the ways in which service qualities can affect loyalty.



**Figure 1.** Relationship between service quality, satisfaction and loyalty.

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

In light of Figure 1, aesthetic qualities may appear to affect loyalty in one of three ways: directly, indirectly as mediated by tourist satisfaction, or both. This study, set within the context of tourists visiting scenic roads, examines the effects of aesthetic qualities on both their intention to recommend the road to others and their intention to revisit. Of those who visit the *Geiranger–Trollstigen National Tourist Route*, 50% are international travelers, and for many tourists this is an once-in-a-lifetime experience. Thus, the intention to revisit may be divided into (1) revisiting this specific road, and (2) visiting other similar roads. This *decomposition* is supported by Oppermann (2000), who argued that because of 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 include a number of control variables that 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 in Norway will have been prepared as new tourist attractions, of which *Geiranger–Trollstigen* is one. In addition to the driving experience and the natural environment, the project description emphasizes an enhancement of the experience: “*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 to date, with a budget of more than 258 million Euros for the period of 2002–2015. The money is allocated to improve journeys by developing rest areas, parking places with activities and experiences and additional facilities. The elements that the project leaders expect other actors to provide include activities and experiences, as well as food, accommodation and hospitality. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration is responsible for the project management in cooperation with two architectural committees comprised of architects, landscape architects and artists.

The *Geiranger–Trollstigen National Tourist Route* was chosen for the following reasons: (1) it combines nature, architecture, design, and art at the viewpoints and 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, the *Juvet Landscape Hotel*, has won a number of awards because of its 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 to Trollstigen, a natural attraction, is the second-most visited nature-based attraction in Norway, and it draws approximately 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 round-trip tourists, mountain tourists, and organized cruise tourists.

### ***Measures and Scale Items***

Because there is a lack of previous research on the effects of aesthetic qualities on satisfaction and loyalty intentions in nature-based tourism settings, this project is a first

explorative attempt to develop a new scale instrument from previous research results and interviews with experts (14 interviews) and tourists (10 interviews).

To ensure a broad perspective on the multidisciplinary concept of aesthetics, experts or key informants 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 disciplines within tourism such 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 in terms of the latent aspects that nature-based tourists might have difficulty in explaining themselves. The interview guide was tested on a group of colleagues, and was modified after these pilot interviews. The experts were asked the following questions:

- How would you define the concept of aesthetics in nature-based tourism? How would you describe an aesthetic experience?
- What kind of aesthetic elements do you think a tourist would highlight after a nature-based holiday, and why?
- What kind of specific dimensions do you think influence tourists' satisfaction with nature-based experiences?

The interviews were individual face-to-face interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Twelve of the interviews took place at universities and businesses. For practical reasons, one interview was conducted via Skype and another by telephone. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The tourist travel companions were interviewed while visiting the Geiranger–Trollstigen National Tourist route. Independent round-trip tourists, who comprise the route's primary market, were selected using purposeful sampling (Creswell 2007). Therefore, most of the interviews took place at a cafeteria at the Trollstigen viewpoint, one at a ferry pier, and the others at camping sites. Other sample selection criteria were that there should be a variety in nationalities, travel companions and transport. The 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 on the topic. In all, 17 tourists were involved in the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and an interview guide (in Norwegian and English), was used for the data collection. The interviews began with the interviewees being informed about the purpose of the study and the theme of the questions. The participants then gave a short summary of where they had come from, their travel companions, and their form of transport. In the main part of the interview, the participants specified how they would describe an aesthetic nature experience and gave their views and examples of important conditions while travelling along the route (associated with nature, activities/attractions in nature, places they were visiting and/or places where they ate or stayed the night). The interviews lasted for 40–60 minutes, and I transcribed the recordings verbatim. Yet occupying the tourists' vacation time can be perceived as disturbing. Five travel companions did not want to be interviewed—three said they did not have time and two gave no explanation.

I conducted a thematic analysis of the patterns of themes within the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I employed an “abductive research strategy,” moving back and forth between the primary data and broader concepts (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). First, the written information was coded into words and phrases from the interviews (open and axial coding). Then the codes were categorized systematically, in line with the selective coding described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Indexing was done manually. 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. This was especially common in relation to experiences in nature, for example the dimensions of *harmony* and *genuineness*. Despite this overlapping, they were categorized as separate aesthetic dimensions because they did not overlap with regard to the built environment in nature. For example, feeling a sense of harmony at a tourism business may not depend on local traditions, but on its overall theme or design. The criteria for selecting the number of categories were that they should mirror what the majority of the respondents highlighted and reflect the depth and complexity of the concept. Finally, they should provide a reasonable number for the analytical purpose (Mason 2002).

The results from the interviews offered an opportunity to compare the experts' and the tourists' understanding. The four dimensions of *harmony*, *variation/contrast*, *scenery/viewing*

and *genuineness* were common to both experts and tourists. The findings indicate that *art/architecture* was especially emphasized by the experts, and *cleanliness* especially by the tourists. *Art/architecture* reflects a desire for art to provide a new experience of nature, and for architecture to challenge but not compete with nature. This dimension also reflects the desire for architecture that makes routine activities—for example going to the toilet—an experience, that supports sustainable development, and that offers unexpected design features at the tourism businesses (in features such as rooms). *Cleanliness* includes the desire to experience unspoilt nature (e.g., unpolluted water), to breathe fresh and clean air, observe cleanliness and tidiness at the tourism businesses, and see clean, well-maintained walking paths.

The interviews were a valuable supplement to this first attempt to develop a scale to measure the effects of aesthetic qualities on satisfaction and loyalty intentions in a nature-based setting. Based on the information revealed in these interviews, and the results from previous empirical research, 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 independent tourists (11 international and 9 domestic travelers) who visited the tourist route at the end of June 2012 participated in the pilot test. Based on the results of this test, the survey questionnaire was refined and finalized. This author then refined and finalized the survey questionnaire. The final scale 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 harmonizes with landscape
	Businesses' interior harmonizes 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

For each of the five aesthetic qualities or dimensions, there were four specific measure items in the questionnaire. Examples of the measure items for the aesthetic quality of *cleanliness* were:

- (1) *I experienced nature as being pure along the road*
- (2) *The amount of litter along the road was minimal*
- (3) *I found that it was clean in and around the businesses*
- (4) *There were good opportunities to drink clean water in the natural surroundings.*

According to Liljander and Strandvik (1997), cognitive assessments have traditionally been used to measure service quality and satisfaction. This method is applied in this study.

The reliability analysis indicated that the Cronbach's alpha (CA) coefficients were sufficiently high for five of the aesthetic qualities; that is, they were approximately the minimum value of 0.50, which has been considered acceptable as an indication of reliability for short scales, such as those with fewer than ten items (Pallant 2004). For the aesthetic quality of *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 four items together (0.57). This item was therefore removed. For the aesthetic quality of *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 as 4 to avoid losing too many cases for the multivariate analyses. 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: *To what extent 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 Geiranger–Trollstigen National Tourist Route specifically; and (2) intention to visit similar routes (other than the Geiranger–Trollstigen route). In the questionnaire, the tourists were asked about the extent to which 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 cannot help the Geiranger–Trollstigen route to build loyalty, but it may indicate that the tourists' may be loyal to similar nature-based routes in the future. For example, in Norway, there are 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 as 0. Likewise, international visitors were coded as 1 and Norwegians as 0. Finally, travel companions with children were coded as 1 and those without as 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 travelers (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

Note: The variables were measured on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*.

### **Data Collection**

The population for this survey is composed of independent travelers on holiday along the *Geiranger–Trollstigen National Tourist Route*. A total of 1030 questionnaires were randomly distributed to independent tourist travelling companions along the road in July 2012. The randomness was with regard to people. The survey was conducted daily for a period of three weeks. The primary market for the route is the independent round-trip tourist (e.g., not part of an organized tour group). Most of the questionnaires (63.3%) were therefore distributed at two of the most frequently visited nature attractions, Trollstigen (35.8%) and Gudbrandsjuvet (27.5%), where the project has combined nature, architecture, and design. The other sampling points were at the Linge (18.5%) and Eidsdal (18.2%) ferries, located approximately at the middle of the National Tourist Route. The collection sites are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** The Collection Places

Place	Frequency	Percent
Trollstigplataået	365	35,8
Gudbrandsjuvet	280	27,5
Linge Ferry	189	18,5
Eidsdal Ferry	186	18,2

The tourists answered the questionnaire themselves, and four project assistants collected the questionnaires directly afterwards. The questionnaire was available in Norwegian, English and German. Allowing the tourists to answer the questionnaire in their own languages 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, or aspect. 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 for raw data from focus groups. The closed questions also assured content validity. Ten questionnaires were not usable and ten were answered by respondents who were less than 18 years old. Of the 1030 questionnaires distributed, 1010 could be used for this study.

### ***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, in contrast to more complicated methods such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The relationships between the aesthetic qualities, satisfaction and the dependent (loyalty) variables were examined using a hierarchical regression procedure. In the first step, only the aesthetic qualities were included as independent variables explaining the loyalty variables. In the second step, the satisfaction variable was added to the aesthetic qualities as an independent variable. In this way, the analysis both captures the direct and indirect (through satisfaction) effects of the aesthetic quality variables on the loyalty variables. The analyses control for the variables of *nationality, previous visits, age, number of stops, travel companion, type of visits, education* and *income*. Because these variables contributed little to the statistical explanation of the various dependent variables, their effects are not reported. 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 4.

**Table 4.** Profile of Tourist Travelers

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>		
29 years and younger	137	14.1
30–39 years	163	16.8
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%.

\*\* Day trip (the route is the final destination), Round trip (just passing through, no accommodation), Shorter stay (1–2 nights along the route), Longer stay (at least 3 nights along the route), Other (no tour, live here).

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

## Results

In Table 5, 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 affect overall satisfaction with experiences along the tourist route (significant at the 0.05 level).

**Table 5.** Relationship between Satisfaction and Five Aesthetic Qualities: Linear Regression Analysis (N = 700)

Independent variables	B	Standard Error	Beta	Significance	Variance Inflation factor
(Constant)	2.888	0.284		0.000	
Scenery	0.242	0.051	0.214	0.000	1.690
Cleanliness	0.076	0.060	0.057	0.200	1.688
Harmony	0.153	0.053	0.133	0.004	1.785
Art/architecture	0.020	0.051	0.018	0.699	1.898
Genuineness	0.123	0.047	0.112	0.009	1.573

$R^2 = 0.177$

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 variance in the visitors’ overall satisfaction was explained by the five aesthetic qualities. The data fit the model predicting the variance in the visitors’ overall satisfaction level. A general comparison with prior studies of service quality showed that



these results appeared trustworthy (e.g., Chen et al. 2011, Heung and Quf 2000, Kozak and Rimmington 2000).

In Table 6, 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 effect of the aesthetic qualities on the intention to recommend (right column). The results show that this effect is insignificant.

**Table 6.** Relationship between Intention to Recommend, Five Aesthetic Qualities and Satisfaction: Hierarchical Regression Analysis (N = 690)

Independent variables	Intention to recommend					Intention to recommend				
	B	Std. error	Beta	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Std. error	Beta	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>
(Constant)	3.639	0.260		0.000		2.398	0.244		0.000	
Scenery	0.171	0.047	0.168	0.000		0.062	0.042	0.061	0.133	
Cleanliness	0.129	0.054	0.109	0.017		0.088	0.048	0.074	0.065	
Harmony	0.078	0.048	0.076	0.107		0.011	0.042	0.011	0.792	
Art/Architecture	0.064	0.046	0.068	0.164		0.052	0.041	0.055	0.198	
Genuineness	0.083	0.043	0.084	0.057		0.030	0.038	0.031	0.430	
<i>Satisfaction</i>						<i>0.445</i>	<i>0.031</i>	<i>0.490</i>	<i>0.000</i>	
R <sup>2</sup>					0.154					0.349
R <sup>2</sup> Change										0.195*

\* p<0.001

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

Combined, the analyses in Table 6 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 in 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 stated above, several studies in 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 7 displays the same kind of information as Table 6, but for the intention to revisit the road. In contrast to the intention to recommend (Table 6), *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 8).

**Table 7.** Relationship between Intention to Revisit the Road, Aesthetic Qualities and Satisfaction: Hierarchical Regression Analysis (N=688)

Independent variables	Intention to revisit the road					Intention to revisit the road				
	B	Std. error	Beta	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Std. error	Beta	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>
(Constant)	3.328	0.442		0.000		2.397	0.457		0.000	
Scenery	0.014	0.078	0.008	0.859		-0.071	0.077	-0.043	0.359	
Cleanliness	0.227	0.091	0.119	0.013		0.192	0.089	0.100	0.031	
Harmony	-0.079	0.080	-0.049	0.327		-0.132	0.079	-0.081	0.096	
Art/Architecture	0.090	0.077	0.059	0.243		0.085	0.075	0.056	0.262	
Genuineness	0.242	0.072	0.155	0.001		0.199	0.071	0.128	0.005	
<i>Satisfaction</i>						<i>0.344</i>	<i>0.057</i>	<i>0.243</i>	<i>0.000</i>	
R <sup>2</sup>					0.063					0.111
R <sup>2</sup> Change										0.048*

\*  $p < 0.001$

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

**Table 8.** Relationship between Intention to Visit Similar Roads Aesthetic Qualities and Satisfaction: Hierarchical Regression Analysis (690)

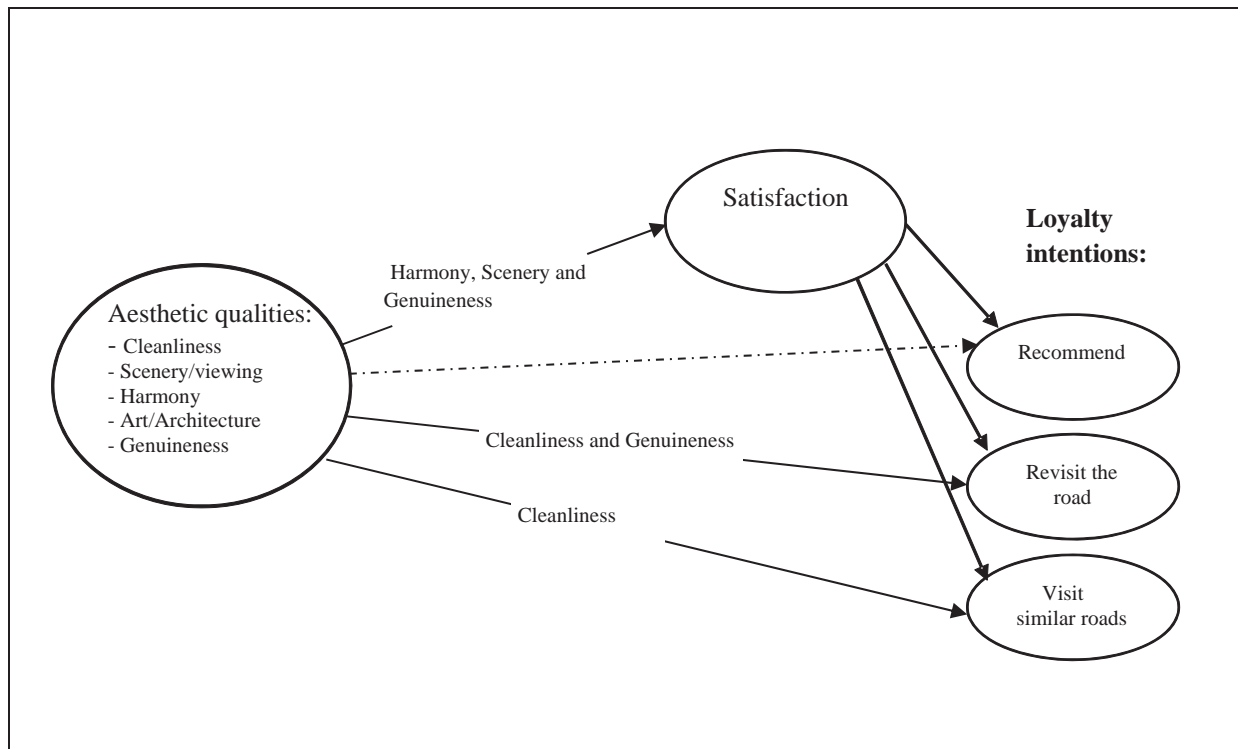
Independent variables	Intention to visit similar roads					Intention to visit similar roads				
	B	Std. error	Beta	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Std. error	Beta	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>
(Constant)	3.597	0.317		0.000		2.745	0.329		0.000	
Scenery	0.141	0.057	0.117	0.014		0.070	0.056	0.059	0.208	
Cleanliness	0.322	0.066	0.229	0.000		0.300	0.064	0.214	0.000	
Harmony	-0.034	0.059	-0.028	0.569		-0.077	0.057	-0.063	0.180	
Art/Architecture	-0.020	0.057	-0.018	0.721		-0.024	0.055	-0.021	0.665	
Genuineness	0.054	0.053	0.047	0.307		0.016	0.052	0.014	0.760	
<i>Satisfaction</i>						<i>0.291</i>	<i>0.041</i>	<i>0.274</i>	<i>0.000</i>	
R <sup>2</sup>					0.098					0.160
R <sup>2</sup> Change										0.062*

\*  $p < 0.001$

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 Tables 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 effects of aesthetic qualities have a more complex explanatory pattern; they appeared to have a 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 in Petrick's study (2004) in a cruise context. In contrast, the studies in a festival

context show that service quality has only an indirect effect on the intention to revisit (Baker and Crompton 2000; Tarn 1999, Thrane 2002). Figure 2 provides a portrayal of this study's findings.



**Figure 2.** How aesthetic qualities affect loyalty, directly and indirectly mediated by satisfaction.

Note: Direct effects  $\longrightarrow$  Indirect effects  $\dashrightarrow$

## 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 of 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 of the research to date show that aesthetic qualities affect satisfaction and the intention to recommend (Bonn et al. 2007; Hosany and Witham 2009; Oh et al. 2007). Prior tourism research shows that service quality in general can affect loyalty in one of three ways: directly (Petrick 2004; 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 of this study support the latter more complex explanatory pattern, that aesthetic qualities can affect loyalty both directly and indirectly. The analysis revealed that the tourist's evaluation of the aesthetic qualities of *scenery*, *harmony* and *genuineness* affected their satisfaction with the scenic road (destination) positively, and that satisfaction had a direct influence on both the intention to recommend and the intention to revisit the road and other similar roads. In contrast, the tourists' evaluation of the aesthetic qualities of *cleanliness* and *genuineness* had only a direct effect on the intention to revisit the road. For the intention to recommend the road to others, the aesthetic qualities of *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 visit similar roads. Even if the aesthetic qualities explained a relatively low proportion of the variation in the tourists' overall satisfaction, the results of 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 of this study suggest that there are different explanatory patterns for overall satisfaction and the three 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 of previous studies (e.g., Cole and Illum 2006; Kim et al. 2012; Moutinho 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 themselves. The destination may be an once-in-a-lifetime experience, but they may visit similar destinations, as this study indicated.

Because of 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 overall satisfaction, this study identifies three aesthetic qualities that can

be highlighted in marketing campaigns with regard to both natural and built environments: (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, accommodation close to nature, the architecture of businesses in harmony with the landscape, and the businesses' interior in harmony with the outdoor surroundings; (3) *genuineness*, with ample opportunities to encounter plants in their natural surroundings, multiple opportunities for eating local dishes, the presence of businesses that reflect or preserve traditions, and good opportunities to experience animals in nature. The latter focus on "genuineness" reflects travel trends that focus on "real" local experiences. Studies such as those of Chi and Qu (2008), Jang and Feng (2007), and Kim and Moon (2009) emphasize aspects such as local food and drinks, local handcrafts and unique lodging.

To increase the intention to recommend, the importance of *scenery* and *cleanliness* was emphasized. The latter focuses on pure nature and opportunities for drinking clean water, a minimum of litter along the road, and cleanliness 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 need to invest efforts in other strategies that will enhance tourists' overall satisfaction, and especially the intention to recommend. One relevant strategy may be to focus on push motivations such as emotions. Yoon and Usyal (2005) indicate that emotions have a positive and direct relationship with destination loyalty. Another strategy may involve the concept of servicescape, which would entail a thorough consideration of the tourist route from the point of view of the tourists' experiences. Kwortnik (2008) conceptualized the *shipscape* as a context-specific type of servicescape, including the built, physical, social, and natural environment, so 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 three major limitations to this study. First, 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. In particular, the aesthetic quality of *art/architecture* may be tested in other nature-based contexts to see if it affects satisfaction and loyalty intentions. Several aesthetic qualities other than the five in the study and other quality aspects may contribute to satisfaction and loyalty intentions in such a context to explain more of the variance. Future research may therefore examine these and other service qualities simultaneously to deepen understanding and develop a more robust and stable scale for these aspects.

Second, 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 would help to produce more reliable indicators and to validate the constructs further. 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, satisfaction and loyalty intentions are always consistent, for example across cultures and age groups. Further investigation of these issues would therefore make an interesting extension to this study.

Third, in the conceptual framework, satisfaction is mentioned as a postpurchase behavior. The data in this study have been gathered during the trip along the scenic road. Future research may also focus on the tourists' evaluation of aesthetic qualities and satisfaction after the trip. This study's results clearly support the conclusion that aesthetic qualities are important factors in obtaining satisfied tourists, who 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.

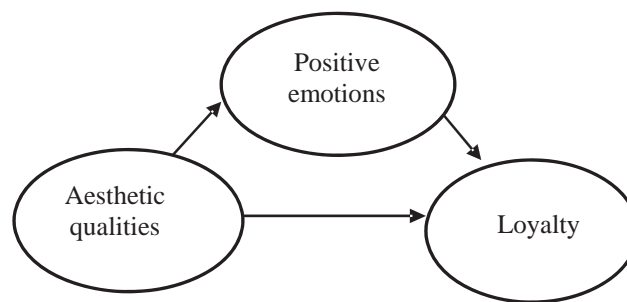
Shusterman and Tomlin (2008) state that aesthetics is of fundamental value to people. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that these experiences within the area of nature-based tourism provide tourists with a variety of opportunities to discover and perceive aesthetic qualities. Moreover, such experiences 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

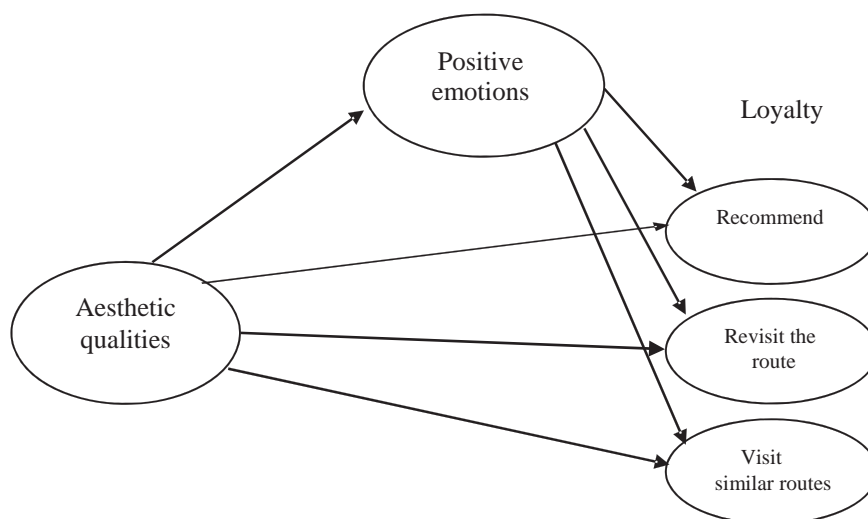


(behavioural responses) and recommend that others do the same (non-behavioural responses). The point is that emotions, linked to appraisal of experiences, often result in a mental note, or are stored in our memories (Johnston & Clark, 2001). Consequently, emotions function as a key stimulus for activities (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

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<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 (N=671)

Variables	Intention to recommend				Intention to recommend			
	Beta	B	Standard error	VIF	Beta	B	Standard error	VIF
<i>Aesthetic Qualities</i>								
<i>Scenery</i>	0.177	0.178 ***	0.047	1.705	0.108	0.109 *	0.045	1.757
<i>Cleanliness</i>	0.108	0.128 *	0.055	1.688	0.061	0.071	0.052	1.713
<i>Harmony</i>	0.073	0.074	0.048	1.780	0.060	0.061	0.046	1.782
<i>Art/architecture</i>	0.069	0.066	0.046	1.865	0.058	0.055	0.044	1.866
<i>Genuineness</i>	0.078	0.078	0.044	1.540	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>		3.630						2.751
<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>		0.155						0.248
<i>F</i>		24.434						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 (N=668)

Variables	Intention to revisit the route				Intention to revisit the route			
	Beta	B	Standard error	VIF	Beta	B	Standard error	VIF
<i>Aesthetic Qualities</i>								
<i>Scenery</i>	0.014	0.024	0.079	1.663	-0.037	-0.061	0.079	1.721
<i>Cleanliness</i>	0.118	0.224 *	0.092	1.657	0.078	0.149	0.091	1.690
<i>Harmony</i>	-0.055	-0.089	0.081	1.782	-0.064	-0.103	0.080	1.784
<i>Art/architecture</i>	0.067	0.103	0.078	1.844	0.059	0.089	0.076	1.846
<i>Genuineness</i>	0.145	0.229 **	0.074	1.536	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>		3.330				2.415		
<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>		0.061				0.107		
<i>F</i>		8.578				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 (N=672)

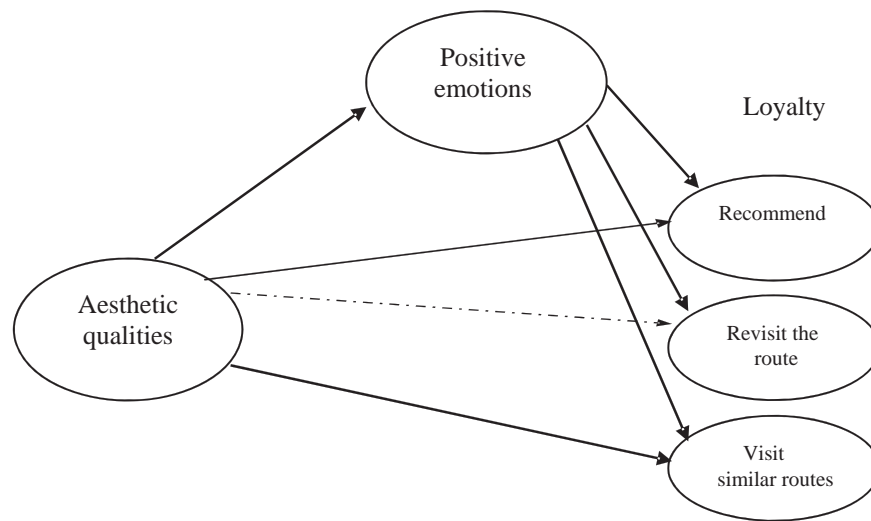
Variables	Intention to revisit similar routes				Intention to revisit similar routes			
	Beta	B	Standard error	VIF	Beta	B	Standard error	VIF
<i>Aesthetic Qualities</i>								
<i>Scenery</i>	0.129	0.151 *	0.056	1.701	0.085	0.099	0.056	1.759
<i>Cleanliness</i>	0.227	0.312 ***	0.066	1.687	0.199	0.274 ***	0.065	1.710
<i>Harmony</i>	-0.044	-0.052	0.059	1.770	-0.052	-0.062	0.058	1.772
<i>Art/architecture</i>	-0.010	-0.012	0.056	1.859	-0.016	-0.018	0.055	1.859
<i>Genuineness</i>	0.030	0.035	0.053	1.545	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>		3.731						3.103
<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>		0.095						0.129
<i>F</i>		13.937						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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# Appendices





# **Appendix 1**

**Interview guide for the interviews with key informants**

**(Translated to English)**

**Empirical base for Paper 1**



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# Aesthetics in nature-based tourism

## Interview guide for the interviews with key informants

Spring 2011

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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)**



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## **Aesthetics in nature-based tourism**

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

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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? .....days .....hours

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  Yes .....times.

7). **How many of you are travelling together?** .....adults .....children (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!**



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