The Quality of Visitor Experience

A Case Study in Peripheral Areas of Europe

by

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1. Introduction

In 1994 the Unit for Tourism Research at Bornholms Forskningscenter launched a five-year research programme entitled "Tourism in Peripheral Areas of Europe", funded by the Danish Research Council of Social Sciences. The aim of the programme was to establish the first permanent tourism research milieu of international quality in Denmark. As such, it incorporated a number of theoretical, methodological and empirical research projects dealing with issues in the supply, demand and the consequences of tourism in marginal regions. In an attempt to find an industry-relevant research project, quality management in small enterprises was chosen as the subject of this study. It is a central issue in tourism, yet it has not been dealt with at length for businesses at tertiary destinations.

Peripheral areas with declining traditional industries often see tourism as a solution to multiple macroeconomic problems. In these regions it is small and medium-sized enterprises that constitute the backbone of the tourism product, and thus are regarded as key players in economic restructuration and rejuvenation (Cooper and Buhalis 1992). At the same time, *non-price factors* have come into focus during the development of tourism offerings, because of intensified competition for the leisure customer over the past few decades. Arguably, quality management and the measurement of visitors' assessment is essential for tourism and hospitality practitioners and destinations, but little is known about how visitors integrate and extrapolate individual service perceptions within the entire tourist experience.

Indeed, the real challenge for tourism businesses is to create the right psychological environment for customers, "not to worry just about technical things" (Crompton 1994, *as quoted* in Otto and Ritchie 1996). Perceived quality cannot be measured in a vacuum: it should be understood in the context of the customer's service experience. In tourism, the shift to demand-oriented thinking must begin with a reconceptualisation of the product itself. The assessment of a destination, as far as it concerns the visitor, is a holistic assessment of the holiday stay, which includes a series of encounters with service providers, local citizens and other tourists. This implies that visitor assessment cannot be appraised in terms of a few independent providers only, as the 'sum of the parts' may not be equal to the total evaluation of a destination.

The mission of this study was to conduct a holistic, extra-organisational analysis of quality perceptions, based on visitors' extensive destination experience, and thus to reconcile two fundamentally different traditions in tourism and hospitality research. Studying the creation and consumption of the visitor experience is juxtaposed between demand- and supply-oriented research traditions, among which there is still too little cross-fertilisation taking place. Supply-oriented research in tourism has developed from general management and marketing studies, borrowing customer assessment models that do not adequately fit the visitor experience. On the other hand, demand-oriented research largely focuses on general theoretical debates or studies of decision making and customer choice,

paying little attention to the effect of tourism provision on consumption and post-consumption behaviour.

By taking both research perspectives into account, this study hopefully contributes to the growing cross-disciplinary knowledge of tourism with an empirically grounded model of customer assessment. It is also hoped that, by illuminating areas which are interpreted or emphasised differently by providers and customers, the findings will assist small and medium-sized tourism businesses to improve and integrate their offering in the Baltic and other peripheral regions in Europe.

The structure of the thesis aims to reflect a cyclical and continuous dialogue between the researcher and existing literature and thus slightly diverges from a static chronological construction. It embarks with a problem-oriented point of departure, exploring challenges of quality management and measurement at practical, conceptual and methodological levels (Chapter 1). The pilot study was designed and conducted on the basis of these advances, but the outcomes were somewhat discouraging (Chapter 3). On learning from the lessons of the pilot study, the original research goals and questions were revised and the theoretical design was extended, using a phenomenological approach to tourism experiences and quality assessment (Chapter 4). The following chapters describe the results of the empirical study from three different perspectives. Chapter 5 discusses real visitor activities connected to the consumption of experiences, Chapter 6 presents visitors' own interpretations of their stay and of the destination, while Chapter 7 tracks the visitors' spatio-temporal 'service journey' at a destination. The findings are simultaneously analysed from various disciplinary backgrounds adjacent to quality research, such as consumer psychology, cultural anthropology and services management. Chapter 8 summarises the results and systematically answers the original research questions stated in Chapter 4. It also presents a new, customer-based model of service provider assessment, which is discussed in the light of the original problem statement. The validity of the findings and the limitations of the study are also discussed. Finally, the achievements of the present research are concluded with recommendations for both academics and practitioners.

2. Research Problem

This chapter presents the initial problem formulation and its course of development throughout the study, on three different abstraction levels. Section 2.1. presents the practical–empirical *raison d'être* of this research, focusing on the difficulties of quality provision and measurement encountered in peripheral area tourism. Issues relating to both individual service providers as well as to destinations (as multi-product locations) are illustrated using examples taken from the empirical case destinations of this study (Bornholm, Denmark and Norfolk, UK). Section 2.2. discusses the theoretical–conceptual background of these practical problems, as it was initially approached (from a general service marketing and management perspective) at the beginning of the study. Finally, philosophical and methodological discourses in tourism, marketing and management studies are reviewed in section 2.3. This concludes by adopting a position of providing useful information to practitioners as the main mission of the study.

2.1. Substantial level: quality provision and measurement problems in tourism practice

Dynamic growth in the travel and transport sector since the 1960s (Poon 1993) has urged both tourism and hospitality managers to improve their offerings by ever more sophisticated means. In order to maintain or increase market share in the intensified competition, customer orientation and *non-price factors* gained strategic focus in product development and distribution. Competition through quality was demonstrated to affect market retention and return on investments beneficially (Zemke and Schaaf 1989, Zahorik and Rust 1992), to provide support and improvement for competitiveness (Camisón 1996) as well as to have contributed to cost reductions, higher effectiveness and productivity improvements (Garvin 1983, Vandermerwe and Lovelock 1994).

Various studies also found high customer satisfaction to result in greater loyalty and willingness to recommend the firm to another person (Bolton and Drew 1991, Boulding *et al.* 1993, Rust and Oliver 1994), thus indirectly promoting a positive organisational image (Harrington and Akehurst 1996). Recognising the role of customer-perceived quality and satisfaction in generating repeat business, larger hospitality and tourism organisations have restructured and streamlined themselves, adopting quality management and measurement techniques from other service industries. For examples see SAS (Carlzon 1987), Disneyland (Johnson 1991) or the Ritz–Carlton (1993) organisation.

These advanced methods acknowledge the significance of quality as perceived by customers; however, they have hardly permeated the daily operations of smaller tourism businesses. Neither have they been applied to entire tourism destinations. Quality monitoring in small firms is still lagging behind compared with larger organisations, as the former mostly rely on simple methods and *ad hoc* measurement (Callan 1989). Furthermore, their approach towards quality management is in general not proactive, i.e. they respond to customer dissatisfaction, rather than trying to prevent it. This section

discusses some possible reasons for this situation, and its consequences for both individual firms and destinations.

2.1.1. In-built failures: business characteristics and their consequences for quality provision

Academic evidence suggests that ownership and management structure may be one reason for this quality management approach in small tourism businesses, particularly in small hotels (Lee-Ross and Johns 1997, Kozak and Rimmington 1998, Sundgaard 1997). In most cases these firms are literally family organisations, owned and managed by one or two people (often husband and wife teams), and there is no management hierarchy. The majority are unqualified: for instance, on Bornholm only 17% of accommodation owners/managers and 23% of catering outlet owners/managers have any formal qualification in hospitality or tourism (Sundgaard 1997). In general, staffing follows seasonal fluctuations in labour demand: over two-third of the employees on Bornholm are contracted on a part-time basis (Sundgaard 1997). Most of these are also unskilled: 81% of part-time employees in Danish small hotels have no formal qualifications (Hjalager 1996). These characteristics match the general small tourism firm profile in the UK (cf. Callan 1989). Because of high labour turnover (Lee-Ross 1996), small firms are unlikely to invest in staff training programmes, which may result in fluctuating service performance. Furthermore, the business vision of many small firms often differs from that of their large competitors. Their overall goal is to ensure the living of the owner-manager team and this tends to be pursued by short-term planning and tactical decisions, rather than through competent strategic management.

Small businesses are relatively unresponsive to market changes, thanks to size and individual operation, and this was demonstrated by a dramatic drop in numbers of small and unaffiliated tourism enterprises across Europe during the 1980s (cf. Slattery 1992). The victims were typically small hotels, which offered personalised niche-products usually catering for downmarket visitor segments. Downmarket pricing, lack of economies of scale and seasonal fluctuations result in lower average trading margins and thus in weaker performance. In the UK for example, affiliated hotels outperform their individual counterparts by up to seven times the trading profit per bedroom (Slattery 1992). Furthermore, small firms have lower levels of capital investment, which is driven by profit or necessity, rather than by strategy (Hankinson 1989).

Thus, most small businesses have neither resources, nor strategy to update their physical facilities or to renew service culture on any systematic basis. For example, some smaller hotels on Bornholm have not been refurbished in twenty years (Sundgaard 1997). In turn, outdated facilities and inferior quality may magnify general obstacles to attracting and retaining customers. Most of these businesses will keep losing market share to allied chains and consortia, unless they can enter into formal co-operative arrangements with a consortium or marketing alliance (Morrison 1995). Tertiary geographic location in

peripheral, low-growth areas (such as out-of-the-way countryside and coastal resorts) also restricts the operation and development of small tourist enterprises (Slattery 1992).

These firms value independent operation in a 'parochial way' (Hankinson 1989), often proving unwilling to enter into formal alliances among each other or with a regional marketing agency. In fact, small tourism firms prefer to rely on informal networks in the local community and typically blend business with social alliances (Morrison 1995). Problems of reluctance towards co-operation and an inability of renewal may transcend the borders of individual firms, and affect the regional integration of tourism and hospitality provision (Cooper and Buhalis 1992). Consequences may include badly co-ordinated, uneven regional marketing or a declining destination image, especially in mature resorts in tertiary locations, where the backbone of the tourism product comprises small accommodation enterprises.

2.1.2. Inadequacy of existing quality measurement schemes

Nevertheless, it would be unjust to depict managers of small businesses and destinations as incompetent and ignorant of quality management. Indeed, most practitioners are aware of the *essence* of quality management (Callan 1995, Harrington and Akehurst 1996), and they describe it from a customer-oriented perspective similar to the ISO definition[1]: '…to understand and respond to the requirements of the value-conscious consumer' or '…providing customers with what they want in a friendly and efficient manner without being obtrusive' (Callan 1989). Most small hospitality and tourism organisations carry out some sort of quality assessment (Harrington and Akehurst 1996); however, programmes lack rigour and sophistication in implementation. On the other hand, it can also be argued that presently available quality measurement tools (such as customer comment cards and standardised grading schemes) do not fit the practices or structures of smaller tourist providers. Where tourist destinations are concerned, there is simply a lack of techniques that adequately address regionally co-ordinated quality management issues. In the following section both practical and theoretically based quality measurement tools are presented and discussed.

Comment cards

Customer comment cards are mini-questionnaires, placed in hotel rooms, restaurant entrances, visitor centres, etc., in order to solicit customer feedback about the service offering. They generally consist of a few questions assessing predefined aspects on a Likert scale, together with some demographic questions. Although this is one of the most widespread monitoring techniques (Harrington and Akehurst 1996), comment cards have been criticised by academics. Lewis and Pizam (1982) assess them as overly product-dominated (ignoring the importance of quality aspects for the guest), unreliable and statistically insignificant, while Jones and Ioannou (1993) note that they focus only on

1 The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs (ISO 9004-2, 1991).

aspects that are easy to measure and contain serious flaws in the form of non-response errors.

Another typical flaw in the quality management of small firms is the way written or verbal comments from customers are followed up. Although communication between staff and management may be better thanks to a flat organisational structure, there are usually no set routines or responsible persons to control the quality loop. Quality improvement may depend on management's involvement and its acknowledgement that time and effort are required. Small organisations may not realise that quality management is a long-term cyclical process (Grönroos 1984, Ishikawa 1985), rather than a one-off event or that it is necessary to monitor and meet customers' needs constantly within the entire organisation.

In contrast to integrated monitoring processes in larger organisations (e.g. TQM programmes, Scorecard systems), managers of small businesses do not establish objective, measurable quality standards (e.g. how quickly should a customer be served). Small hoteliers for instance, set qualitative service standards by giving staff practical directions in *genuine hospitality* (i.e. how to greet and treat customers, mail and phone enquiries, special attention for repeat guests) (Callan 1989). However, as these directions are concerned with the way guests should be handled, rather than with product specifications, they may not be easily reflected in objective data acquired from comment cards.

Grading schemes

Another option for assessing quality provision in hospitality and tourism businesses is through external classification or grading schemes. There is a proliferation of quality grading schemes in the hospitality industry around the world, which makes it difficult to establish an equivalence between the systems of two different countries. Within a given country, grading systems look quite universal. Small hotels in England are classified and typically graded by the national tourist board (ETB), but they can also be listed (against fees) in the guides published by motoring and other organisations (AA, Egon Ronay, Good Food Guide, RAC and Michelin). Similarly, Danish accommodation and catering establishments are classified along national grading schemes administered by the trade union HORESTA and the Danish Tourism Board. This system has recently been complemented with an environment-conscious qualification programme, named Grønne Nøgle ("Green Key").

Most of these classification schemes are product-oriented and do not take note of the customer's interpretation of quality. They predominantly assess measurable and tangible product elements, but are inadequate to capture subjective, intangible factors of service excellence. Within ETB Crown gradings, for instance, a hotelier may provide a mechanically correct and uniform service without responding to customer's requirements. Johns *et al.* (1998) criticise UK award schemes for concentrating too rigidly on facilities and thus being incompatible with small hospitality businesses' organisational and service structure. He claims that they focus on the wrong and atomistic priorities (e.g. availability of king size bed) without acknowledging the uniqueness of the holistic offering (e.g.

accommodation in a 16th century inn). Guests of small hotels may value the customised care and personal relationship offered by such providers more than a standardised service product at a large hotel. Recognising this, the Scottish Tourism Board has developed 'soft' (subjective) measures for 'service' gradings, focusing on the holistic value-for-money of the service experience.

There are also benchmarking systems for small hotels at the Department of National Heritage and the British Resort Association. These are self-assessment schemes, consisting of a quantitative checklist of best practice, and considered to be less rigid than the Crown classification. However, they still do not acknowledge the customer's perspective to the extent of forms of qualitative grading systems. These systems (e.g. the Egon Ronay or Michelin guide) base their assessment on *both* pragmatic/tangible aspects (such as choice and comfort) *and* intangible service elements (e.g. friendly and pleasant atmosphere) by using mystery shopping techniques. Experts disguised as guests focus on quality aspects that naturally depend on the subjective view of the customer and thus more closely reflect a holistic perception of *value for money* (Nightingale 1985). Small hospitality firms prefer these qualitative rating schemes to the Crown system (Callan 1989), because they can represent several dimensions of the *lodging experience.*

Qualitative schemes may provide a more precise picture of customers' quality perceptions of a single provider, but it is unclear to what extent grading experts' opinions overlap with those of customers. These techniques fail to integrate hard/technical aspects and it may be difficult to operationalise and train for holistic or subjective aspects such as 'friendliness', without being familiar with the real experiential context. Furthermore, it is not enough to collect information only at the level of the individual accommodation provider. Visitors encounter a range of tourism providers during their stay, but to date, co-ordinated quality monitoring systems do not exist on a regional level. Without this information, destination marketers face a difficult task in predicting and understanding visitors' total satisfaction and intention to revisit a tourist area.

2.1.3. Theoretical approaches to quality measurement schemes

As a result of growing academic interest in quality management, scholars have developed a multi-item assessment scale, known as SERVQUAL (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988) that measures quality according to a set of service dimensions. This instrument has been adapted to specific offerings by hospitality and tourism researchers. These include airline and skiing services (Fick and Ritchie 1991), meal experiences (Johns and Tyas 1996), theme parks (Stiernstrand 1997) and historic houses (Frochot 1999). Despite these efforts, adjusted SERVQUAL-scales have not permeated the practical operations of large or small hospitality businesses. This may be partly because of the cumbersome and lengthy administration of the instrument, (which contains a list of repeated questions about expectations and perceptions), and its inability to reflect hedonic or sensory aspects of tourist offerings. It can also be argued that the theoretical basis underpinning SERVQUAL (disconfirmation of expectations as a basis for quality evaluations) might not be the most

appropriate to assess visitors' travel, leisure or meal experience. (For further discussion, see section 2.2.4.)

It can be concluded that, despite the apparent proliferation of different quality measurement techniques in practice and in academic research, neither small tourism and hospitality providers, nor destination managers possess tailor-made schemes for monitoring the quality of their offerings. Standard measures and constructs borrowed from other industries are probably not appropriate for measuring the particular features of tourism and hospitality offerings. Quality schemes borrowed from larger organisations are also unsuitable, because small businesses typically offer their guests non-programmed, customised care rather than standardised service by 'human cog-wheels'. Quality perceptions of a small hotel experience are more likely to be coloured by mood than those of a clockwork system 'processing' customers. Hence, it seems contradictory to evaluate these firms using large hotel standards or to constrain multi-skilled employees to adopt systems thinking in a flat organisation. On the other hand, it is difficult to apply and integrate the findings of qualitative ('soft') schemes into direct managerial actions because they are related to unmeasurable features. Thus, the substantial challenge of quality management practice is still to develop quality measurement standards that are both operational and correspond to the way customers perceive hospitality and tourism offerings.

2.1.4. When hospitality meets tourism: consequences at an integrated level

An often ignored aspect of measuring quality performance among hospitality and tourism providers is to see it in a larger context, especially if they cater for leisure markets. As a result of product integration and complexity in tourism, positive customer assessment and satisfaction cannot be achieved separately by independent businesses, but requires a whole network of providers within a destination. A holiday destination offers a complex chain of service experiences, which may include service encounters during organisation of the trip, distribution of travel information, transport, accommodation, catering, and various leisure activities. This implies that visitors may experience widely differing quality levels at various tourism and hospitality practitioners during their trip.

Arguably, customers' assessment of individual service providers affects their global perception of multi-product locations (e.g. tourist destination). A single provider's service delivery failure may negatively influence the customer's overall holiday evaluation and may provoke unfavourable post-consumption behaviour (complaints, negative word-of mouth or no return). On the other hand, theoretical assumptions about satisfied customers' post-consumption behaviour do not explain empirical evidence of disloyal behaviour towards destinations. Not only is there a measurement problem of gauging intangible, atmospheric aspects of the offering, but it is also unknown how visitors understand this total offering and how they accumulate service perceptions during a leisure-related stay.

Thus, destination marketers have to focus on the quality of the entire visitor experience, not only that of core (accommodation and catering) service providers. Co-ordinating quality management among tourism and hospitality businesses is a challenge for most destinations with today's increased competition. The task is particularly important for mature, seasonal destinations, such as Baltic Sea resorts (Twining-Ward and Baum 1998) which have already begun to show signs of weariness and decline. For example, the resort island of Bornholm provides fluctuating quality levels for its customers, thanks to the lack of a co-ordinated and professional approach in the local tourism industry (Sundgaard 1997). This has contributed to a fragmented destination image, and the island is now experiencing difficulties in renewing its visitor markets by attracting new and younger visitors (Twining-Ward and Twining-Ward 1996, Rassing and Hartl-Nielsen 1997).

2.2. Conceptual discourses in service research relating to customer assessment

2.2.1. Where does service research stand today?

In order to respond to the practical challenges posed by the rapidly growing service sector, a similar 'service revolution' is discernible in scholarly research over the last three decades, which has produced new theories and models describing service supply and demand. By 1990 a new academic field, service marketing, had emerged which focused uniquely on tertiary offerings and claimed to be substantially different from the broader marketing discipline (Berry and Parasuraman 1993). Brown *et al.* (1994) map the progress of development in service marketing in terms parallel to human evolution, identifying three stages: Crawling Out (pre-1980), Scurrying About (1980-85) and Walking Erect (post-1986). These eras are reviewed below.

The *Crawling Out* stage refers to the academic legitimisation of service marketing. This occurred in the wake of Shostack's landmark article (1977), which accuses marketing science of failing to create relevant paradigms for the service sector (p. 73). This stage concentrated most of its efforts on developing a body of knowledge based on a distinction between services and goods. Thus, services can be defined as delivering benefits to customers through an interaction between the customer and the provision system, without producing tangible goods (Bateson 1995). All services are seen as similar in bearing four characteristics distinct from goods: intangibility, perishability, heterogeneity and the simultaneity of production and consumption. Later, recognising that most purchases can be located somewhere on a goods–services continuum (Sasser 1972, Nightingale 1985), rather than in mutually exclusive categories, researchers began to acknowledge the particularities of *complex products* or *offerings* (Gummesson 1991): synergistic amalgams of services and goods.

The latter represented an early attempt towards market-orientation in service research. There was no need to differentiate between goods and services or discrete components or

activities, since customers bought a holistic bundle of tangible, service and software elements. From this perspective, the four "service characteristics" are not all tenable. For instance, offerings may not necessarily be intangible, being observable phenomena which are physically materialised by an action (Malver 1996). Heterogeneity is not entirely correct either, as most service situations and encounters are scripted along a loose and unwritten social framework (Solomon *et al.* 1985). This is valid for most service offerings, including tourism and hospitality-related ones.

In response to the challenge of defining this perplexing offering and appraising customers' assessment of it, the bustling *Scurrying About* era started. (Brown *et al.* 1994) This stage was marked by the launch of several service-related journals, and major contributions related to issues in service quality (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985, Grönroos 1984) and service encounters (Solomon *et al.* 1985, Czepiel *et al.* 1985). Significant conceptual models were developed, which attempted to break down the 'service product' according to customer logic. For instance, Normann (1984) models the service offering as consisting of core and peripheral elements, and these can also be adapted to integrated tourism and hospitality products (Gilbert 1990). These two elements, complemented by customer participation, constitute the augmented or holistic service offering, which is perceived, purchased, consumed and evaluated by the customer.

The next step in conceptualising the service offering was an acknowledgement of its temporal scope and structure. Instead of focusing only on its final outcome (a residual of goods-oriented thinking), the dimension of service *process* was added (Brown and Swartz 1989). This concept reflects the work of Eiglier and Langeard (1987) on servuction models (i.e. the production of services) and the operational blueprinting studies of Kingman-Brundage (1989) and Shostack (1992). Outcome and process thinking also influenced the way scholars conceptualised and measured service quality (see section 2.2.3.). Other service scholars strove to maintain a customer focus (Grönroos 1984), engendering the approach termed "the neo-service paradigm" (Heskett 1986) or Post-Fordism (Nolan and O'Donell 1987). Instead of emphasising internal efficiency, economies of scale and cost reduction, the neo-service paradigm prioritises the external effectiveness of the firm and measures total performance as it is perceived by the customer.

Brown *et al.* claim (1994) that service research arrived at its mature, *Walking Erect* stage at the end of the 1980s, since there was a proliferation of differentiated and cross-functional discussions, relating to both operational and marketing areas. However, this statement is questionable. Despite an explosive growth in publications and conferences on service marketing issues, some of the initial problems are still perceptible in current research. Services and quality are still inconsistently understood and interpreted, and there is a lack of concept coherency between researchers and marketers in different areas (Lindquist and Persson 1993, Johns 1999). Customers, providers and scholars use the same terms, but interpret them differently, which is a potential source of practical difficulty in service quality management. In contemporary English, the term 'service' can stand for an abstract product concept, but also for an act of assistance, an organised system

to supply public needs or a set of tableware, and so on. Academic and applied research is still characterised by a cacophony of fragmented and simultaneous work across different service industries, and by controversial and contradictory findings.

In this thesis it is suggested that research in services management and marketing, at least within tourism, is still at the *'Scurrying About'* stage of conceptual development. (See discussion on the disciplinary dilemma of tourism under section 2.3). This proposition is justified by a review of general and tourism-related research achievements in customer assessment (in the remainder of section 2.2.), as well as by an overview of methodological issues in service research. These conceptual–methodological tenets provided the original point of departure for the pilot study, which has resulted in some controversial findings. Chapter 3 discusses these findings and argues that the customer-oriented neo-service paradigm shift is yet to come in service and quality research.

2.2.2. Defining customer assessment: objective or subjective?

This section reviews the evolution of the most perplexing concept in service literature: quality. This elusive term can be used both as an assessment construct and as a characteristic of a product. It is not a purely academic concept: every person has an internal 'barometer' to assess quality, even without being able to define what quality means or what aspects connote it (Cardello 1995). This has led to much unconscious individual variation in defining the concept, among both laymen and scholars. As Pirsig (1974) expressed it: "This quality that we make so much of, is just a fancy name for whatever [we] like" (p. 127).

Etymologically, the word quality originates from the Latin *qualitas*, designating a 'distinguishing inherent feature' or a 'peculiar and essential character' (Longman Dictionary 1994), synonymous with property, attribute or nature. In contemporary language and especially in management circles, quality is used in its second meaning, indicating the 'degree of excellence or superiority of something'. Quality management has evolved in manufacturing, where this 'excellence or superiority' is outlined as an intrinsic, measurable, objective property of produced goods. Early approaches to the definition of quality relate either to designed product features: 'conformance to specifications' (Crosby 1984) or to production: 'zero defects' (Garvin 1983), supporting an operational and product-centred view. This notion also presupposes that the quality of products or of the production process can be subjected to objective measures and predetermined standards. However, hard standards based on this manufacturing analogy are less applicable to services, where offerings are often intangible and co-produced by the customer.

Thus, service scholars argue that absolute, technocratic quality standards are incompatible with the nature of services, and propose more customer-centred definitions. Juran's (1979) description of quality as: 'fitness for purpose' indicates that excellence should be interpreted in relative terms, i.e. by its appropriateness for a given situation ('beauty is in the eye of the beholder'). A similar subjective approach is brought out in the ISO (1991)

definition of quality: “the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs”. This interpretation represents a humanistic and holistic view of quality, as an individual and global impression of an offering. Just as customers do not buy a series of technically discrete features, nor do they evaluate parts of the total offering separately (Gummesson 1992a).

However, defining quality as a function of the customer’s subjective perception and overall liking causes some conceptual problems. It implies that quality is highly context-dependent and differs between both people and situations (Cardello 1995). Garvin (1983) argues that an entirely personal interpretation of quality would equate it to arbitrary concepts, like feelings or taste. This would make it difficult to agree on any inter-subjective understanding of quality, hindering feedback for improvements in service provision. Thus, service scholars have adopted a halfway position. Quality is not an objective phenomenon, nor does it exist independently from those assessing it - but it is not entirely subjective either. Although people’s thoughts and feelings of similar situations are not identical, their judgements can share certain facets that can form an interpretable and common yardstick for assessing quality (Oberoi and Hales 1990). The most evident common frame of reference is that of the shared values of a specific culture (Edvardsson 1996).

The current ‘mule’ concept used by academics – ‘*perceived quality*’ – mirrors this unresolved definitional complexity, but may obstruct, rather than promote the understanding of customer assessment. It is maintained that perceived quality is the customer’s inference about a product’s overall excellence or superiority, based on a rational assessment of characteristics and an affective judgement (Zeithaml 1988). Definitions such as ‘overall evaluation of a product’ (Olshavsky 1984) and ‘global value judgement’ (Holbrook 1994) suggest that the evaluation of quality is not only relative (i.e. a comparison process depending on intrinsic customer values and preferences), but also holistic, merging the customer’s perception of details into an overall attitude (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985) towards the offering.

Perceived service quality does not exist in a vacuum, but is closely intertwined with other customer assessment concepts, such as satisfaction. Since the provision of service quality aims to generate satisfaction (Grönroos 1991, Parasuraman *et al.* 1985), it is difficult to make a conceptual distinction between the two. Even the dictionary definition of satisfaction (‘fulfilment of a need or want’ or a ‘general feeling of contentment’) (Longman dictionary 1994) overlaps with the ISO (1991) definition of quality. Johnson and Mathews (1997) report that customers understand satisfaction as a holistic group of feelings or evaluation processes. As both perceived quality and satisfaction are defined along the same lines, i.e. as comparison processes (see next section), there is still an on-going discussion among researchers (cf. Iacobucci *et al*. 1995, Chong *et al*. 1997) as to whether the two concepts are separate or not. Another related concept, service value (customers’ judgement of whether they got a fair return on monetary or non-monetary sacrifices) makes the understanding of customer assessment even more complex.

It is proposed here that the cognitive backgrounds of these prevalent assessment constructs are so close that ordinary individuals are unable to separate service quality perceptions, satisfaction and value judgements clearly. Probably the main differences between them are the different academic traditions from which they developed. Perceived quality and service value are marketing concepts, developed from a narrow set of psychological assumptions, that eventually coincide with the principle tenets of satisfaction (e.g. perceptions), which originate from a more specialised psychology-related discipline (consumer behaviour).

These customer assessment constructs have to be treated simultaneously. From a demand-oriented and contextually defined perspective, perceived service quality cannot be understood without customer satisfaction or service value. From a practical point of view, the distinction does not make sense (Johnson and Mathews 1997). They are three sides of the same thing, which may be interpreted as a single composite construct: a summary of evaluations based on a wide spectrum of socio-culturally defined values.

The challenge currently facing management and marketing scholars is to interpret the customer's overall judgement in a way that is also operational for the service provider. Although acknowledging that customers may not consciously break down their assessment into discrete quality aspects, researchers are determined to identify those aspects that crucially affect overall judgement, thereby assisting practitioners to improve their offerings and service delivery processes. The following sections therefore examine how scholars have gone about conceptualising and operationalising customer assessment.

2.2.3. Conceptualising the structure of customer assessment

The conceptualisation of customer assessment can follow two courses: (1) process-type approaches, dealing with the cognitive antecedents and consequences of service quality and satisfaction, and (2) outcome-type approaches, which consider evaluation judgements based on a static framework. While there is some attempt (Oliver 1993a, Iacobbucci *et al.* 1995) to treat service quality and satisfaction as separate evaluative constructs, many scholars seem to bother little about distinguishing between the two. This section gives an overview of both.

Process-type approaches

Process-type approaches focus on the psychological processes underlying customer assessment. Conceptualisations of both service quality and satisfaction are centred around the notion of *comparison* or a *degree of fit* between what was expected and what was actually experienced during the consumption of an offering (Oliver 1980, Tse and Wilton 1988). This idea probably goes back to discrepancy theory (Porter 1961, Kerlinger 1964), and all models of perceived quality, service value or satisfaction are similar in the sense that they imply judgements of a product with reference to some sort of standard.

Early contributions to satisfaction theory include assimilation-contrast theory (Anderson 1973), which suggests that customers assimilate the discrepancy between expectations and

product evaluations to a certain extent, but if the discrepancy is too large, they contrast them (cf. Johnston 1996). Expectations have been proposed as reference standards in various models of customer assessment, such as the disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver 1980) and gap theory (Grönroos 1984), which underpin conceptualisations of both service and satisfaction. Service quality is defined as a perceptual gap (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985) between customers' expectations and perceptions or a "measure [of] how well the service level delivered matched customer expectations" (Lewis and Booms 1983, p. 99) while satisfaction judgements are understood to be related to customer's perceptions of the discrepancy between their expectations and product performance (Oliver 1980).

In order to distinguish between service quality and satisfaction, researchers attempt to separate them on the basis of their cognitive antecedents. Oliver (1993b) suggested that, as a basis of disconfirmation, expectations are conceptually different for the two constructs. Expectations of service quality are based on experience norms (Woodruff *et al.* 1985), and the level of comparison is a normative assumption about what an organisation *should* provide. In other words, service quality judgements are based on *ideal* expectations, and compare desired service with perceived service (Zeithaml *et al.* 1993). On the other hand, satisfaction is a comparison between *predicted* and perceived service, suggesting that the comparison is against what a certain service provider *would* offer. Hence, expectations of satisfaction are customer-defined predictions of what will happen during a specific consumption experience (Oliver 1993a). Although there is some empirical evidence confirming these assumptions (Spreng and Mackoy 1996), it is doubtful whether the dynamic structure of expectations can be adequately reflected and understood through practical measurement techniques.

Another approach to separating the two constructs focuses on the varying durability of service quality and satisfaction. Perceived service quality can be taken as the customer's global judgement of the superiority of an organisation based on the customer's ideals of excellence (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988). In other words, service quality is a continuous and general attitude towards an organisation. Satisfaction, in contrast is a specific judgement (Oliver 1981) or short-term evaluation, related to a concrete transaction, and may be influenced by a large number of non-quality issues such as needs, equity, perceptions of fairness or hedonic contentment (Mano and Oliver 1993). In this sense, customer satisfaction with a particular encounter is a subordinate part of a more enduring service quality attitude. Swartz and Brown (1989) and Bitner *et al.* (1990) demonstrate that short-term incidents of satisfaction mediate the effect of previous experiences in order to form an overall perception of service quality. In this way, subsequent revisions of service quality are amalgamated into long-term attitudes towards a company or an offering (Bolton and Drew 1991, Taylor and Baker 1994).

Another model of the relationship between the two constructs takes the opposite view, that perception of service quality is the antecedent of satisfaction (Cronin and Taylor 1992, Woodside *et al.* 1989), and short-term quality judgements aggregate into and affect satisfaction with a service offering. The chronology debate between the two constructs

appears to be resolved by the suggestion of Liljander (1996) that both service quality and satisfaction can be related to long-term relationships and to short-term episodes of service experience. This implies that an accumulation process of consumption experiences has to be taken into account.

Thus it is clear that the nature of these concepts and the relationships between them are obscure and conflicting (Iacobucci *et al.* 1995). Furthermore, expectations may be vague and dynamic over time (Reeves and Bednar 1994) and other comparison standards may be more appropriate for modelling customer assessment. For instance, internal measures of comparison, such as motivation or values may be better predictors of quality or satisfaction than external and direct standards, such as expectations of brand or product norms. This is supported by the findings of Cronin and Taylor (1992), who conclude that actual perceptions of service performance are the major component of holistic evaluation. This is particularly relevant to experiential offerings, which cannot be anticipated in detail. Empirical findings from a study of white-water rafting (Arnould and Price 1993) suggest that tourism-related offerings can be experiential and provide extraordinary experiences as customer benefits. This implies that expectations and perceptions are unlikely to be formed or compared in the manner suggested by service quality/satisfaction models.

Outcome-type approaches

Outcome type approaches focus on the psychological state of customer assessment, rather than its causes and antecedents. These discussions are characterised by analogous efforts to define the detail of assessments, and plagued by a similar confusion of overlapping constructs. Although some arguments have already been mentioned, this section gives a brief overview of two conceptualisations: episodic and enduring outcomes.

Episodic outcomes relate to specific consumption experiences and can be subsequently divided into two proposed areas: affective and fulfilment responses. Affective responses are elicited by the surprise or novelty element of a particular situation (Oliver 1993b) and, by complementing comparative cognitive processes, may be important determinants of assessment (Westbrook and Reilly 1983). Fulfilment responses originate from motivation theory (Maslow 1967) and the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen 1988). They assume that behaviour is driven by the desire to satisfy a need (Maslow 1967) and by the achievement of relevant goals (Ajzen 1988), so that satisfaction is viewed as the end point of the motivational process (Johnson and Mathews 1997).

These approaches (Ajzen 1988, Maslow 1967) have given rise to models that depict customer assessment as a multifaceted concept. Oliver (1989) developed a framework of four satisfaction states defined along dimensions of high/low arousal and high/low reinforcement. Satisfaction can then be further specified in terms of contentment, pleasure, surprise and relief. Later it was demonstrated (Mano and Oliver 1993) that utilitarian (e.g. value for money) and hedonic (e.g. aesthetic appeal or interest) components of an offering may elicit affective and cognitive customer responses, which mutually mediate assessment. Service quality conceptualisations are often based on this idea of multi-dimensionality, and

they define a range of service factors/aspects/dimensions that may influence customer assessment (cf. Parasuraman *et al.* 1985, Johnston *et al.* 1990, Khan 1982). The implication here is that customer assessment ought to be modelled differently for different services. Because of the varying utilitarian/hedonic configuration of different offerings, the meaning of particular characteristics for the customer has to be acknowledged. Benefits of service offerings may vary endlessly in their (utilitarian/hedonic) dimensional configuration. For example, the benefits of bank or car repair services are primarily utilitarian, while a cinema visit or cruise journey provides hedonic benefits. Thus the legitimacy of an ultimate conceptualisation of customer assessment (i.e. depending on a generic set of dimensions) is questionable.

Customer assessment can be also seen as an aggregated and permanent outcome. Service quality in particular is depicted as an enduring attitude (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988, Bitner 1990) which may be mediated by concrete, episodic outcomes, as discussed in the previous section. Enduring outcomes can also be the result of accumulated multiple experiences of a service. This latter approach is the most appropriate for modelling the assessment of hospitality and tourism offerings, which contain a stream of sequential service encounters over a short period of time.

In conclusion, the various conceptualisations discussed above all add to an overall understanding of customer assessment. However, thanks to the great variation among tertiary offerings, no generic conceptualisation can readily fit a specific offering. Process- and outcome-based models of customer assessment and various comparison standards have to be adapted to specific service situations. Perhaps a rule of thumb should be to take the point of departure in asking “What are the benefits for customer?”, rather than “What is the core offering?” Furthermore, instead of a futile struggle to separate quality evaluations from satisfaction judgements, a broader view of customer assessment may be more reality-proof, more valid and thus more practicable for managers.

Arguably, descriptions of customer assessment should acknowledge theories of consumer behaviour concerning psychological, sociological and situational factors that may be relevant to the consumption experience. Assuming that the customer’s evaluative judgements are integrated impressions of an offering, they may be the result of both cognitive comparisons *and* affective responses to a specific encounter. This duality is reflected in Oliver’s definition of satisfaction: “a summary of psychological state, resulting when emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the customer’s prior feelings [expectations] about the consumption experience” (Oliver 1981, p. 27). The challenge is then how best to conceptualise this complex construct to a specific situation or offering.

2.2.4. Measuring customer assessment

Customer assessment constructs are concerned with describing the object of the assessment, i.e. *what* is the customer perceiving or from *what* is he/she deriving

satisfaction. Currently, several customer assessment constructs exist, but as discussed above they provide an eclectic and sometimes problematic basis for developing practical measurement techniques. The following section discusses three prevalent approaches, i.e. attribute-based, process-based and incident-based approaches, together with their influences on quality measurement.

Attribute-based approaches

Attribute-based frameworks assume that quality consists of a series of sub-qualities, dimensions or aspects. In order to anticipate and capture customer requirements of complex offerings, attribute-type approaches aim to *break down* the customer's perceptions in terms of a set of dimensions. Specifically they wish to extract those dimensions that play an important role in determining customers' overall satisfaction with an offering. Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) present a comprehensive model of service quality, based upon previous contributions of Sasser *et al.* (1978), Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982), Grönroos (1984) and others. This "gap-model" specifies perceived quality as a function of four operational gaps (positioning, specification, delivery and communication) located in the service production cycle. These gaps contribute to a fifth, perceptual gap between expectation and perception, which represents the customer's judgement of service quality.

Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) identified ten generic service quality dimensions along the four operational gaps through in-depth interviews with executives and focus groups with service customers. These were subsequently compressed through factor analysis into five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. These are claimed to be generic and applicable across all service offerings. However, despite the common definition of services as "delivering benefits to customers through an action" (Bateson 1985, p. 5), it is questionable whether general dimensions are equally valid across the various types of services. Is it really reasonable to relate services offered by shoe repairmen, politicians, doctors, prostitutes, waiters and brokers to each other, in the name of "they don't make things - they make things for you" (Silvestro and Johnston 1990, p. 206)?

One problem with applying these generic dimensions to the tourism and hospitality industry is that they collapse tangible aspects into one single category. In order to avoid this, tourism and hospitality researchers have developed several alternative and industry-specific dimensional categories that would better fit the tourist or meal experience. For instance, Martin (1986) proposes procedural (system-related) and convivial (social) dimensions, Jones (1993) differentiates between three aspects: food and beverage, service attributes of staff, and the physical attributes of the restaurant environment. A similar break down can be traced in Nightingale (1985) and Collison and Turner (1988), who suggest a food–service–atmosphere model. Johnston *et al.* (1990) and Johnston (1996) suggest lists of twelve and eighteen dimensions that provide a more refined picture of service quality than the five generic dimensions. However, these industry-specific dimensional profiles are criticised as being too arbitrary, lacking both theoretical support and empirical confirmation (Johns *et al.* 1996).

The SERVQUAL-scale, developed by Parasuraman *et al*. (1988) on the basis of their service quality model is attribute-based, measuring service quality as the difference between customer expectation and perception scores for twenty-two items of service provision, defined from the five generic dimensions. Despite being a major breakthrough in service quality research, SERVQUAL is criticised both on theoretical and procedural grounds. The theoretical relevance of using the expectancy–performance gap as the basis of measuring service quality as well as the *post hoc* measurement of expectations is questioned by a number of authors, including Carman (1990), Teas (1993) and Liljander and Strandvik (1993).

As discussed in section 2.2.1, expectations are complex structures, based upon personal perceptions and cultural factors, which are difficult to quantify as comparison standards. Furthermore, they are unlikely to be formed in the same way as performance perceptions. Teas (1993) claims that the variations in dimensionality between individual expectations and perceptions are so large that it is not appropriate to use identical scale wordings to measure the perceptual gap directly. Cronin and Taylor (1994) suggest that performance alone is a more useful measure than performance-minus-expectations, arguing that actual experience and incidents have the largest influence on assessments. As the instrument rates service at a single point in time (*post hoc*), it cannot capture process aspects of services (Babakus and Boller 1992). The scale has been reassessed and refined (Parasuraman *et al.* 1991, Parasuraman *et al.* 1994), separating the screening of general expectations and actual perceptions, and changing the wording, but the conceptual problems remain unresolved. The universal applicability of the scale across all services has also been questioned, and it is demonstrated (Babakus and Boller 1992, Johns *et al.*1998) that the dimensionality of service quality may depend on the type of offering under study.

A number of authors attempting to adopt SERVQUAL in tourism and hospitality studies also confirm that this instrument cannot be readily applied to all services. (e.g. Oberoi and Hales 1990, Knutson *et al.* 1991, Stevens *et al.* 1995) The latter two groups claim that a differentiated SERVQUAL questionnaire is an effective means of assessing accommodation or foodservice quality, but they had to alter the original in significant ways. The five-factor pattern persistently failed in SERVQUAL replications (Fick and Ritchie 1991, Saleh and Ryan 1991, Johns and Tyas 1996). In a study of airline, hotel, restaurant and ski area services, Fick and Ritchie (1991) report several operational and methodological problems, and suggest that SERVQUAL may not be the most valid approach to defining the quality of service offerings in tourism, which are different from utilitarian transactions. Another tourism-related study (Saleh and Ryan 1991) criticises SERVQUAL as being unable to capture conviviality, i.e. expressive performance, which is the essence of this type of service. Oberoi and Hales (1990) reconfirm that functional aspects influence customers' assessment of conference hotel services to the greatest extent, but at the same time find the five-dimension pattern problematic, as it collapses diverse tangible attributes into a single generic dimension.

Applications of SERVQUAL in contract catering (Johns and Tyas 1996), and restaurant services (Johns *et al.* 1996) fail to confirm not only the expected five-factor pattern, but also the dimensions proposed by other authors (e.g. Martin 1986, Khan 1982, Johnston *et al.* 1990). Johns *et al.* (1996) were unable to extract clear factors relating to the meal experience, although food and staff aspects seemed to be common to all the service offerings studied. The authors suggest that fundamental assumptions behind attribute-type approaches to service quality measurement may be inconsistent with the customer's more holistic and experiential impression of foodservice offerings (Johns and Tyas 1997).

Other techniques claim to define product attributes according to the customer's thinking and maintain that quality aspects may contribute to customer assessment in different ways. Bipolar evaluation structures originate from Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory, suggesting that attributes can be divided into *hygiene* factors and *motivating* factors. Hygiene factors are only evaluated negatively, in cases where they were inadequate or missing, while motivating factors can be evaluated both negatively and positively. This idea has been used by several authors to classify customers' comments about received service (Silvestro and Johnston 1990, Johnston 1995, Johnston and Heineke 1998). These researchers identify service attributes as *satisfiers*, *dissatisfiers*, *criticals* or *neutrals* in relation to the customer's experience and note that each quality attribute influences the global assessment of the offering in a different way.

This latter approach improves upon SERVQUAL-type approaches in the sense that it acknowledges the varying contributions of service aspects. However, it does not solve the practical problem of identifying common generalised service attributes. Johnston's (1995) quality factors may affect individual perceptions in different ways, since an attribute may be a satisfier in one service experience, but a dissatisfier in another (Johns and Howard 1998). Hence, it can be argued that, however promising, this approach is difficult to adopt in hospitality operations practice.

Process-based approaches

Process-based approaches aim to address the dynamism of lengthy service processes, which ideally should be monitored as they unfold (Stauss and Weinlich 1997, Danaher and Mattsson 1994). Brown and Swartz (1989) were the first to stress the temporal dimension of services, suggesting that the character of the process may play a greater role than that of the outcome in determining customers' overall evaluations. Non-quantifiable functional or process-related dimensions may also influence perceived service quality to a much greater degree than standardisable, technical or outcome-related dimensions (Brogowicz *et al.* 1990). These authors propose a 'synthesised' model of quality that focuses on the gaps in the provision cycle (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985) as well as on the technical (*what?*), functional (*how?*) and organisational features of service (Grönroos 1984).

Process-based approaches may be particularly appropriate for addressing extended service experiences in tourism and hospitality, where the summation of all service encounters,

rather than just one interaction, is thought to affect the customer's evaluation (Danaher and Mattsson 1994). This thinking is also apparent in the *net service quality* model (Oberoi and Hales 1990) which includes customers' comparative judgements of individual attributes *as well as* the cumulative effects of these judgements on overall assessment. The following section reviews studies that attempt to assess customers' service quality perceptions from sequential customer evaluations evolving during service delivery processes.

In order to explore how customer evaluations are influenced by the structural content (complexity, duration and sequence) of extended deliveries, some authors (Danaher and Mattsson 1994, De Ruyter *et al.* 1997) take their point of departure in the service journey concept (Johns and Clark 1993), viewing the service experience as a journey through a series of distinctive events or encounters. Thus, the visitor's journey can be represented by a flowchart, indicating encounters with a few 'main objects' (Singh 1991) provided by the service system. Danaher and Mattsson (1994) describe service journey paths in hotels, using four 'key' service encounters (check-in, restaurant, hotel room and check-out), for which they measured cumulative customer satisfaction along three context-specific factors. Ruyter *et al.* (1997) used a similar selection of main stages or service encounters (entrance, collections, restaurant, museum shop) in their study of service quality in Dutch museums.

Instead of using atomistic, provider-based comparison standards (such as expectations of product attributes), Danaher and Mattsson and De Ruyter *et al.* apply intrinsic value dimensions based on Hartman's (1967) axiological model. This model maintains that all human experience is assessed along three generic and comparable value dimensions. Mental matching processes between concrete (experienced) and abstract (inferred) properties may occur along emotional (E), practical (P) and logical (L) dimensions. Hartman proposes that these three value dimensions constitute a hierarchy with emotional values at the highest level (E>P>L). For example, the total evaluation of an offering includes gestalt feelings and impressions (E), an appraisal of functionality, i.e. fitness for purpose (P) and rational judgements (e.g. correctness or value for money) (L). The advantage of these dimensions is that they are customer focused but, at the same time, can be related to provider attributes, such as functional/expressive factors (as E), technical/instrumental factors (as P) and sacrifice/cost factors (as L), respectively (cf. Swan and Combs 1976, Grönroos 1984, Bolton and Drew 1991, Zeithaml *et al.* 1988).

Mattsson and his colleagues report that different encounters in the service journey emphasise different quality factors and that satisfaction levels are influenced by both the nature and sequence of encounters, while the length of service processes seems to be less crucial. Despite the duration of the delivery process, the latest encounters always seem to determine overall satisfaction. Process-based approaches are arguably more appropriate for assessing the customer's point of view, because they acknowledge the unequal importance of service episodes and aspects *without* applying long lists of provider-defined attributes to

capture customer assessment. Furthermore, they are able to map extended service offerings as they unfold during the customer's service journey.

Incident-based approaches

Incident analysis is conceptually different from the two previous approaches to assessing customer defined service quality. Instead of making assumptions about the structure (attributes or stages) or process (i.e. involving some comparisons) of service perception, incident-based techniques are based on customers' qualitative self-reporting of concrete service experiences. The *Critical Incident Technique* (CIT) introduced to services marketing by Bitner *et al.* (1990) focuses on specific, abnormal service events. Instead of mapping customer perception of all service attributes, the CIT only examines service experiences with positive or negative outcomes (incidents) and aims to reveal underlying mechanisms, by analysing the behavioural and situational causes behind them. CIT has also been used to detect quality problems in hotel services and restaurants (Lockwood 1994). Incident-based techniques are held to provide a better picture of customer perceptions because they only capture quality aspects that are crucial for the customer.

However, traditional incident-based analyses have two major flaws. They only capture 'critical' episodes, thus customers' evaluation of neutral situations and their effect on post-consumption behaviour remain unknown. To avoid this, Stauss and Weinlich (1997) use an alternative "sequential incident technique" (SIT), which analyses non-critical episodes as well, during the entire period of service delivery. Another flaw of CIT may be that descriptive verbal accounts are difficult to standardise and cannot indicate the ways in which service is satisfactory or not satisfactory. Although Bitner *et al.* (1990) and Pieters *et al.* (1995) attempt to define dimensions by locating the causes and foci of critical incidents, these may be arbitrary for different customers, so the results are unlikely readily to suggest areas of operational improvement.

An alternative practical solution to some of the problems outlined above may be the Profile Accumulation Technique (PAT) (Johns and Lee-Ross 1996), which, like CIT is able to extract operational- and context-specific quality dimensions from verbal descriptions of customers. Using a free-response approach, Profile Accumulation collects customer perceptions of quality aspects and attributes by asking a few general and simple questions. The name of the technique refers to its ability to build up quantitative profiles of quality aspects as the number of responses increases. PAT has been applied successfully in hospitality operations (Johns and Lee-Ross 1996, Johns and Howard 1998), providing a relatively small number of quality aspects and attributes from a large verbal database, and hence immediate, relevant and precise information for proactive quality management.

In conclusion, all these approaches have their conceptual, operational and practical advantages and drawbacks, and the selection of measurement method should depend, first of all, on the particular characteristics of a specific product or service. In the case of integrated and extended offerings in tourism and hospitality it seems that a process-based

approach may be most appropriate. This was therefore considered during the pilot study design, presented in Chapter 3.

2.3. Methodological issues in tourism, marketing and consumer research

The point of departure of this study was not only influenced by practical and conceptual issues, but also by the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of service-related research. Although indirectly, both the research problem formulation and research design show the influence of methodological considerations underlying general tourism studies, as well as those in marketing and management research. Taken together, these fields constitute the disciplinary backbone of this study, and it is therefore considered necessary to review their methodological development.

The study of tourism is a relatively young academic field, and still suffers from frustrations emerging from a disciplinary dilemma. Broad methodological discussions (Jafari 1990, Tribe 1997, Echtner and Jamal 1997) have not yet reached any agreement in tourism, primarily because the field deals with pragmatic phenomena upon which scholars of different disciplinary backgrounds impose different conceptualisations. Mainstream tourism research is based on the philosophical and methodological preferences of a few acknowledged tourism scholars, who use their own original academic field as the point of reference for analysis. Thus, most of the newly generated knowledge is either descriptive or based on theories borrowed from economics, geography or sociology, which have been "stretched or contextualised to give them a tourism dimension" (Tribe 1997, p. 641). Generally, the empirical field is the only link between tourism concepts, which, torn from the logical structure of their contributory disciplines, find it difficult to merge together into a distinct and cohesive theoretical framework.

Epistemologically, tourism studies can be envisaged as being in the eclectic, pre-paradigmatic stage of a Kuhnian scientific revolution. They bear the symptoms of diverse and disorganised research, random fact gathering and a general lack of fundamental laws and theoretical assumptions (Kuhn 1970). Unlike established disciplines, tourism does not possess a single, systematic and legitimate method for analysing its phenomenal world. To overcome this, it is suggested, following Kuhn (1970), that the pre-science should develop a distinct disciplinary matrix "consisting of a shared constellation of beliefs, values, techniques…models and examples" (p.175). However, tourism scholars study a wide range of social and economic phenomena that can be approached from several disciplinary stances. Owing to the insurmountable paradigmatic differences among some of these disciplines, the development of a unanimous 'tourismology' paradigm (Jovicic 1988) is unlikely. Even if such a scientific revolution occurred, the result would most likely be a conformist discipline, which adopts the theories and methodology of one or two dominant founding areas (Echtner and Jamal 1997). Tribe (1997) warns against such progress, which could end up in a slavish emulation of positivistic methods from the natural

sciences (as it has in economics), and might also compromise the practical *utility* of tourism knowledge.

There is a split between those who think that human affairs should be studied by the methods of the natural sciences and those who believe that there is a fundamental difference between 'social' and 'natural' knowledge. Max Weber (1949) and his school claim that social sciences cannot proceed through measurement or experiment, since the objects of study are complex psycho-social processes. Thus, the aim of the social sciences is not to explain, but to understand the social phenomena in 'meaningful' categories of human experience. This defensive standpoint was made during the rise of social sciences, when natural–scientific logic and methods were held to be the only epistemologically acceptable ones, and the particular problems of social scientists were disregarded. In this vein, Shutz (1962) accuses social scientists of developing their methodology only up to a level of generalisation, which justifies their conviction that the methods of natural sciences cannot be used in social investigations.

Clear-cut efforts either to demarcate or integrate methods of social and natural sciences are in fact rooted in false epistemological understanding. According to Bernstein (1991), differences and overlaps between these forms of knowledge are blurred and continuously changing, so that scientific standards may or may not be relevant in particular areas of study. He does not regard paradigmatic differences as a barrier, but rather as an opportunity and temporary challenge, which may be overcome through debate, conversation and dialogue. Alternative philosophical and methodological approaches, such as hermeneutics, offer researchers the opportunity to compare and reconcile cross-disciplinary differences and to develop a deeper insight into a particular phenomenon. Thus, arguments for the development of tourism into a holistic and distinct social discipline may inhibit a greater understanding of all forms of contributory knowledge, whether they are labelled 'scientific' or not.

Marketing and consumer psychology, the main disciplines underlying the present study, also bustle with epistemological debates, which question truthfulness and demand the justification of research methods. In the quest to make marketing research more 'scientific', two dominant philosophies are normally contrasted: scientific realism and critical relativism (Anderson 1986). Scientific realists (Hunt 1990) take the philosophical perspective that there is an objective reality, which can be captured by objective methods. For them, the goal of marketing research is to generate 'true' (i.e. objectively falsifiable) knowledge, that corresponds to the real world. The extent to which this knowledge corresponds to reality can be evaluated critically through 'intersubjective certification' (Hunt 1990). Others (Peter and Olson 1983) regard science itself as a particular marketing activity, where the goal is to convince acknowledged groups of researchers. The judgement and acceptance of new knowledge thus depend not only on the strength of its arguments, but also on the professional status of its authors. However, claiming elitist and conformist knowledge to be unquestionably reliable may turn science into a modern, institutionalised oppression (Feyerabend 1975).

Critical relativists (Anderson 1986) offer an alternative and more pluralistic perspective to the evaluation of knowledge production. There is no distinct criterion that distinguishes science from non-science, and thus all knowledge is science that society chooses to call science. There is no such thing as a single, objective scientific method (Feyerabend 1975), and individuals must have the freedom to choose or reject a particular system of thought. The principles of epistemological anarchy – 'no methodology' and 'anything goes'– lead to a proliferation of theories, which may compete and support each other on equal grounds (Chalmers 1978). These processes are especially beneficial to socially constructed and context-bound disciplines like tourism or marketing, where knowledge is "not going to be stable over time" (Zinkhan and Hirschheim 1992). Marketing scholars "are trying to hit a moving target" (1992, p. 83), so that the pursuit of a constant truth seems inappropriate. Such 'truth' is not the goal.

Anderson (1986) regards science as relative to the environment where it is established, since knowledge is dependent on the individual researcher's goals, beliefs, values, standards and methods. Different interpretations of theories may lead to differing results even within the same school of thought, and these should be evaluated in the light of the specific problem. In other words, relativists recommend judging theories according to how *useful* they are (Peter 1992). This is particularly valid for business-related disciplines. Research philosophies in tourism, marketing and customer studies are centred around the goal of usefulness, since scholars attempt to serve the industry from which they originate. Although it might be claimed that this contradicts the criterion of pure science (pursuing knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself) (Zinkhan and Hirschheim 1992), the present author believes that practical business implications of research must be given due consideration.

3. Lessons from the Pilot Study

This chapter presents the main controversial findings of the empirical pilot study and illustrates how these contributed to a change of research direction and approach. It briefly introduces the original research design drawn from the major conceptual and methodological issues discussed in the previous chapter. The various practical, conceptual and methodological problems are highlighted and analysed, giving ground to a revised point of departure (3.4). A detailed and practical description of the pilot study can be found in the next chapter.

3.1. Problem formulation and research design

The point of departure of the research was a process-oriented view of visitors' holiday experiences, drawn from the studies of Mattsson and his colleagues (Danaher and Mattsson 1994, Chadee and Mattsson 1996, De Ruyter *et al.* 1997) This approach is centred around the idea that a holiday destination offers complex experiences in the form of many sequential service encounters. During an extended temporal frame, visitors encounter a chain of providers, regularly or occasionally, according to their recreational motivation and needs. An ongoing experience of encounters during an entire trip may include different service functions: organisation of the trip, distribution of travel information, transport, accommodation, catering and other activities. Although visitors regard an area with all its offerings as one single product before their visit, it was felt that their overall holiday evaluation might be affected by every single service interaction. At the time of the pilot study (Spring 1997), little had been published about experiences of longer lasting delivery processes, or how tourists might construct assessments of an entire holiday. Neither was it known how their perceptions of individual service providers might contribute to global quality and satisfaction judgements about a destination.

The goal of the pilot study was to describe visitors' appraisal of multiple service offerings within a destination, in the context of their own judgement of holiday experiences. The initial research questions (see below) assumed extended temporal–spatial dimensions of the visitor's evaluation process. Because of the unresolved puzzle of differentiating visitors' assessment constructs, both perceived service quality and satisfaction with destination providers were to be studied. The main questions were:

- How do visitors perceive and assess individual service providers?
- How does visitor assessment accumulate throughout the holiday experience?
- How do visitors' quality perceptions influence their total satisfaction with the destination?

Because this problem seemed to focus closely on customer perceptions, the pilot study design adopted the stance of the 'neo-service paradigm' (Heskett 1990, Jones and Hall 1996). This approach differs from the new manufacturing and service paradigms (*Disneyism* and *Post-Fordism*) (Amin 1994, Nolan and O'Donnell 1987) in the sense that

it aims to understand customer processing operations rather than the components of the output. The essential focus of the neo-service paradigm is human interaction within service encounters, which is assumed to add value to the customers' experience and hence upgrade their assessment (Grönroos 1994, Gummesson 1994). In the case of a destination, the 'service encounter' can be studied in specific episodes as well as at the integrated level. Accordingly, it was decided that both levels should be considered within the visitor experience, since this fitted best with the aims of the pilot study.

In order to capture the extended, dynamic nature of the holiday experience, a longitudinal and process-based approach and corresponding method was chosen. The goal of the pilot study was to map customers' integrated assessment of the service journey (i.e. the chain of several service providers) at a destination by putting together episodic service encounters like jigsaw pieces, along a generic framework. It was intended that this framework would include all key service provision stages in the service journey, including transport, accommodation, catering and attractions. Based on previous research designs following a dynamic modelling of customer assessment (Danaher and Mattsson 1994, Chadee and Mattsson 1995), it was assumed that customers' final assessment of a destination could be represented as the cumulative sum of individual experiences.

Apart from isolated studies of contained tourism experiences, such as white-water rafting (Arnould and Price 1993), integrated offerings (especially destinations) have not been investigated in any detail. Nor was there, at the time this work was planned, any empirical evidence of cumulative links between visitor experiences, perceived quality and satisfaction (for later references, cf. Price *et al.* 1995b, Gyimóthy 1999). Thus, the pilot study adopted a case study framework, applying qualitative methods to a small sample of respondents. In order to capture different stages of the visitor journey, data was collected in three forms:

1. Pre-holiday impressions and expectations of the destination as well as of service providers were mapped by mini-questionnaires to potential visitors to the destination.
2. Visitors episodic perceptions and assessment of individual service providers were screened by in-depth interviews, supported by audio-visual recordings of 'key' service episodes (e.g. accommodation episodes would consist of recording the check-in, room, breakfast and check-out encounters).
3. Visitors' total perception and assessment of the destination were screened by in-depth interviews at the end of their stay or upon departure.

Data collection took place at two comparable holiday destinations: Norfolk (UK) and Bornholm (Denmark), in order to enhance the generalisability of the findings. (For a detailed description and comparison of the two destinations, see Chapter 4.) From ongoing visitor surveys on Bornholm (Hartl-Nielsen *et al.* 1996) and in Norfolk (NATA 1993, EATB 1994), it was possible to identify generic visitor 'paths' at both destinations and to identify key visitor sites and major service providers (Table 3.1). Data were collected in

April 1997 in Norfolk and May-June 1997 on Bornholm. First, in order to obtain pre-holiday expectations, 100 open questionnaires were posted to potential visitors (50 to each destination) who had requested information at the Norwich Tourism Information Centre and the Bornholm Welcome Centre. Second, video recordings and open interviews were planned to be conducted with real visitors at different locations (accommodation providers, main attractions, visitor centres, transport).

Table 3.1. Major service providers in Norfolk and Bornholm

Service Providers	Bornholm	Norfolk
Access	Ferries (Bornholmstrafikken, Scandlines)	not applicable
Attractions	Hammershus Castle Round churches (Østerlars, Olsker) Brandesgårdshaven Park Arts and crafts workshops (Baltic Sea Glass, Bülow Glass, Melsted Ceramic) Art Museum	Norwich Castle and Museum Norwich Cathedral Pleasure Beach, Great Yarmouth Thetford Forest Park Barnham Zoo Bressingham Steam Museum
Amenities	Hotel Fredensborg Hotel Griffen Hotel Siemsens Gård Æblehaven Holiday Centre Sanne's camping, Gudhjem Fish smokehouses (Svaneke, Gudhjem) Restaurants (Le Port, Fyrtøjet, Truberg)	Great Yarmouth hotels North Norfolk inns
Ancillary services	Bornholms Velkomstcentre Nordbornholms Turistbureau Nexø-Dueodde Turistbureau	Norwich Visitor Centre Great Yarmouth Visitor Centre

The purpose was to gain an insight into the nature and relationships between visitor expectations, experiences and assessment along the service journey framework and, at the same time, to allow customers to use their own terms and categories. By identifying crucial, satisfaction-related aspects from the questionnaires and interviews, it was hoped to identify whether and how visitors' quality perceptions of service providers influenced their total destination assessment. The interviews were conducted in the mother tongue of the respondents and were subsequently translated into English, where necessary, as literally as possible.

The original intention was to discover the richness of data by using a combination of methods, including qualitative text analysis and keyword search, as well as the semi-quantitative CAMERA technique (Van der Vlugt *et al.* 1992) for analysing the video sequences. The multiple findings would be integrated using grounded theory principles (Glaser and Strauss 1967), that is, exploring and validating emerging ideas about the 'extended journey concept', by constantly comparing them with already existing theories of customer assessment. As an extended multi-site case study (conducted in parallel in Norfolk and Bornholm), the two streams of data would be triangulated in order to achieve better reliability and external validity of findings.

Despite elaborate design and preparations, the pilot study did not run smoothly and during the course of data collection and analysis several practical and conceptual difficulties arose. These are presented and discussed in the remainder of this section.

3.2. Practical lessons

Data collection was more problematic than expected, particularly the audio-visual recording. Very few service providers allowed their premises or their staff to be videoed. Only accommodation providers were reasonably co-operative. The physical parameters of these sites were not always optimal, and problems were encountered with lighting, space and filming angle. Finding visitors willing to participate (i.e. to be filmed) was even more difficult. Some would let the researcher film particular service encounters, but not subsequent episodes, while others would only contribute with verbal interviews. Thus, it was impossible to reconstruct entire service journeys according to the intended generic design. Nevertheless, the fragmentary data provided some insight into customer assessment on a looser temporal framework (within pre- during and post-experience stages).

Other problems were associated with capturing *detailed* written and verbal accounts of service experiences. Both the mini-questionnaires and the interviews were open in structure, so as to capture service perceptions in the visitors' own terms. However, few visitors were able to give lengthy or precise descriptions of specific service episodes. Typical written responses contained trite key words or word combinations, such as: 'cleanliness', 'nice people', 'good food', 'great entertainment', rather than complete sentences or accounts. It was no easier to capture respondents' perceptions of services in the open interviews. The first pilot interviews included odd dialogues like the ones below (Interviewer = I; Respondent = R):[2]

I: So how do you like this coffee shop?
R: It's nice.
I: How nice?
R: Very nice. (87)

I: So when you were thinking about Norfolk…what did you think, how did you imagine your stay here?
R: Er…I didn't think of anything special. I wanted to find the old English way of life, but nothing special about Norfolk. (88)

I: What expectations have you had of this inn you are staying at?
R: It's just as we thought, it's all right, an old house, they are very nice.
I: So what do you think about the service here?
R: They are all right…You mean in this hotel? Oh, yes. It is very good, people have been very pleasant. (82)

2 Numbers in brackets indicate respondent identification. See respondent profile in Appendix 2.

I: When you return home, what are you going to tell people about this place [a bed and breakfast] ?
R: Well we'd recommend it if anybody asked.
I: And would you think of returning here yourselves?
R: Well, yes, if we wanted to come back to Norfolk, maybe…yes. (90)

Perhaps the most bizarre and eye-opening conversation took place with an elderly English couple on the 18th April 1997 at the Scole Inn in Norfolk:
I: Have you experienced any services during your two-week stay here in Norfolk?
R: No. Actually, it's the catholic church we are going to tonight. Six o'clock tonight. (86)

3.3. Conceptual lessons

At this point of the pilot study it was realised that respondents' conceptual understanding of services, integrated tourism products and destinations were substantially different from the researcher's. It seemed that the subjects to be explored (service and service quality) did not exist, or at least, visitors did not think of them along the lines proposed by academic models. This was confirmed in subsequent analysis of the data, which highlighted major conceptual problems. The most striking findings of the pilot study can be summarised as:

1. Visitors conceive the tourism product in a different way:
   - they have a tacit (i.e. implicit) understanding of services;
   - there are no 'key' service stages in the visitor journey;
   - experiences beyond the control of service providers are also important.

2. Visitors use different frameworks to assess the tourism product:
   - visitor expectations of destinations and service providers are vague;
   - a sense of 'difference' is central to the total assessment;
   - comparison standards in the assessment are altered;
   - there is no clear demarcation between quality perceptions and satisfaction.

These points are discussed below.

3.3.1. Different understanding of the tourism product

Despite the claim that service research is now customer focused (Grönroos 1984, Brown *et al.*1994), frameworks describing the structure and perception of service offerings are still supply-oriented and seem to be far from the customer's perspective. In the case of tourism and hospitality offerings (especially leisure-related offerings) traditional scenarios are quite inadequate for describing customers' experiential processes (cf. Arnould *et al.* 1998). As Dimanche and Samdahl (1994) noted: "To look at leisure as a 'product' that is 'consumed' develops only shallow evidence for the interconnectedness between leisure and consumer behaviours. On a deeper level it is apparent that both leisure and consumption

have a symbolic nature that *represents something much greater than either the activity or the purchase.*" (pp. 120-121, emphasis added).

The core of the problem lies in the conceptualisation of services within a holiday offering, which is centred around the idea of a generic service structure. Gilbert (1990) describes this offering as a static amalgam product, based on Normann's bundle model of core and peripheral elements (Normann 1984). There also exist dynamic, process-based models, trying to capture the visitor's path in a service organisation (Johns and Clark 1993, Danaher and Mattsson 1994). These generic (service journey) models are built on manufacturing logic, that is, representing distinct elements in a mechanistic 'clockwork' system, through which customers are processed like raw materials. Both static and process-based conceptualisations are centred around service production and delivery, suggesting that customer assessment must focus on product/service *outcomes*, and break down them into discrete attributes (cf. Parasuraman *et al.* 1985), or on service production *processes*, focusing on distinct stages of the delivery (cf. de Ruyter *et al.* 1997).

The pilot study findings seemed to contradict both frameworks. Visitors hardly ever mentioned the word 'service' (unless prompted); rather, they referred to the offering in terms of objects (tangibles) or people (staff). When they talked about tangible aspects, visitors spoke of outcomes or circumstances at service providers, often in the passive voice (*The exhibition was well kept, all the papers and the pictures were well explained*). When talking about interpersonal encounters, respondents spoke of 'they' or 'people' *(…When they hear we can't speak English so well, they just listen and try to help us*), and it was not always clear whether they were referring to service staff or local inhabitants. As well as the (relatively few) service perceptions, visitor accounts were full of general holiday experiences that were beyond the control of providers (such as natural phenomena or the behaviour of other visitors).

The findings mentioned above were incompatible with outcome-based models, because visitors did not regard service offerings according to a core-and-peripheral hierarchy. Nor did the findings conform to operational, process-based models, because respondents recounted episodes and incidents in an arbitrary order, regardless of any chronological or generic 'journey stages'. Both types of provider-based models are falsifiable from the customer's perspective, because they are based on atomistic, operations management thinking, the only difference is that outcome-based models focus on a logical system with *discrete* components, while process-based models are based on a cumulative system with *continuous* components. Both models fail to capture specific demand-oriented features, such as the experiential aspects of hospitality and tourism products. Different services have dissimilar structures and benefits for customers, and it can be argued that the difference between services and experiential, hedonic offerings is as big as that between tangible goods and services (Pine and Gilmore 1998).

These experiential features were reflected in the pilot study findings. Respondents' perceptions were holistic and organised in terms of a bipolar 'me versus them' structure.

This implied, that the *centre* of customers' perceptions was their *subjective experience* and not core product elements or key operational stages. This holistic experience *was* in effect the tourism and hospitality 'product' (cf. Otto and Ritchie 1996, Prentice *et al.* 1998). Thus the pilot study suggested that visitors did not break down their complex experiences into service and product terms and did not give equal attention to each aspect they encountered during the holiday's extended temporal framework. Furthermore, their global perception of an integrated destination product might be *more than the sum of the parts* (service providers). Thus, in order to understand the visitor's holiday assessment, it is necessary to acknowledge the object of assessment as a bundle of experiences, which may include service encounters equally with other, 'external' episodes.

3.3.2. Different framework of assessment

The conceptual difference between supply- and demand-oriented views on the tourism offering yields a latent paradigmatic gap (or trap) that underlies all descriptions of customer assessment. Despite a long-voiced emphasis upon the 'customer's view' in service quality research, so far only few scholars have acknowledged the implications of the concept: "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" (Klaus 1985). Above all, this means that the customer's evaluation is based on his/her arbitrary hierarchy, rather than on externally decided service attributes, such as those of Parasuraman *et al.* (1985), or stages of service delivery (Danaher and Mattsson 1994, de Ruyter *et al.* 1997). Furthermore, customers do not give equal attention to each aspect or stage of service delivery, especially if it extends over a longer period of time. As Pieters *et al.* (1995) express it: "Consumers are not rational book keepers with balance sheets in their heads" (p. 320).

Another issue is the narrow theoretical fundament underpinning the two prevalent customer assessment constructs (service quality and satisfaction). Not only do these share the same conceptual framework (i.e. explained by the disconfirmation of some comparison standard), they are also both off-shoots of cognitive psychology. This school of thought maintains that cognitive processes are driven by *logico-paradigmatic understanding* (labelled by Bruner 1986), so that it is valid to depict customer choice and assessment as a result of rational thinking. According to this approach, customers assess complex offerings by cumulating and averaging multi-attribute experiences, and if their perceptions are positive, they are also likely to exhibit positive post-consumption behaviour.

However, this theoretical framework did not match the findings of the pilot study. Respondent perceptions and assessment were heavily coloured by instantaneous affective responses that did not seem to be the result of a cognitive comparison process *(the smell of the rotting seaweed was dreadful!*). This is not to say that visitors did not use reference standards, but these appeared randomly, without any being more important that the others. Within the same interview, three different reference standards were identified during the evaluation of the same food outlet, such as home, (*the food is more salty than at home)* other destinations *(touristy places ought to keep open, even on weekends)* and previous experience *(we had better sandwiches last time*). These findings seem to reconfirm the

suggestion that customers update long-term attitudes towards a service offering on the basis of cognitive comparisons *and* holistic, emotional judgements (Oliver 1993b). But it is equally consistent with Hartman's (1967) tripartite (emotional, logical, practical) value structure. However, it was impossible to establish *which* comparison standard was the most substantial among this customer's three (simultaneous) evaluations.

Expectations seemed to be important, but apparently not in the way they are conceptualised in the service literature (i.e. precise predictive norms of product attributes) (Zeithaml 1993). Before arrival, visitors only had vague preconceptions about a destination, either as abstract predictions (*Norfolk is flat*) or as anticipated benefits *(looking forward to a great time*). No particular service provider-related aspects appeared in these holistic, pre-consumption prospects. Consequently, customers seemed to assimilate their 'specific' expectations backwards (Pieters *et al.* 1995), by comparing perceptions with arbitrary reference standards, triggered by concrete experiences.

Another interesting discovery was that, although visitors used comparisons quite often in their accounts, these did not lead to assessment. Disconfirmation often functioned to update previous impressions or to add new ones *(Bornholm is bigger than I imagined…but it is not negative or positive in any way*), thereby assisting individuals to process novel environmental information. At other times, the result of comparisons did not yield 'better' or 'worse' results; instead, the assertion of difference was itself a positive experience (*I love the food here, with so many sandwiches and a lot of tea…it's different from where I come from!*). These and similar findings suggested that visitors' global assessments were arbitrary configurations of sensory impressions, affective responses and a range of retrospectively processed comparisons, without any straightforward logical structure.

This does not imply that customer assessment was totally arbitrary and structureless. Rather, the lesson was that reality did not support reductionist consumer behaviour models, and that customer perception and assessment could not be described in terms of a few simple activities or concepts. The assessment of products (especially leisure-related offerings) may be influenced by complex layers of socio-cultural meaning, rather than by a list of normative expectations. This standpoint has been proposed by sociologists and cultural anthropologists in tourism research and other fields, but it seems to have had little impact on service research.

3.4. Methodological lessons: service quality research constructs its own reality!

The conceptual problems presented above illustrate the confusion which exists in the ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of business-related sciences (i.e. marketing and management studies). Akin to tourism research, these borrow from many different scientific schools of thought, each of which has its own root metaphor for understanding reality (Morgan 1980). This methodological eclecticism is not necessarily a negative feature, as long as scholars objectively judge and revise their research stances

towards empirical evidence and thus maintain the *usefulness* of their research (Peter 1992).

Much of service quality research seems to have lost this connection with reality without appreciating the symptoms of this detachment. Journals brim with novel service quality models, adapted to an even wider spectrum of service industries, without ever being verified in a given empirical context. In the cross-disciplinary flow of theories, these models are continuously modified in a closed cyclical process of testing, falsifying and adaptation, yet their theoretical underpinning remains false and unchanged (Liljander 1996). Probably this is the reason why the proliferating academic models and quality measurement schemes are not adopted in managerial circles (and especially not in tourism and hospitality).

Second, it can be argued that the so-called customer paradigm shift (Grönroos 1984), or neo-service paradigm (Heskett 1986) has turned out to be somewhat eclectic and disproportionate. This is in considerable part a result of the disparity between the ontological and epistemological standpoints of academic disciplines and the practical purposes of management and marketing research. Service scholars claim that the new paradigm is different from manufacturing thinking, because it adopts an ontological position that corresponds to the customer's point of view. The demand-oriented perspective is claimed on the basis that customers are assumed to perceive offerings as an integral entity, making their service quality and satisfaction judgements on holistic impressions. Research under the umbrella of the neo-service paradigm supposedly deals only with measuring 'customer perceived quality' and with 'customer satisfaction' and tracking the 'customer's path' through operational units.

However, this interpretation is potentially at odds with the aims of service providers, who, in order to allocate their efforts to specific management areas (human resources, operations and marketing management), need to know which attributes of the offering are important. A number of management scholars have tried to resolve this challenge by adopting a production-oriented epistemology. Their models consider customer perceived service quality as a break down construct that is quantifiable in terms of objective dimensions. Both outcome and process-based approaches and hence their related measurement methods are built on the false assumption that customers and providers perceive and evaluate offerings in similar, delivery-related terms (discrete attributes or continuous phases). The obsession with measuring human experience and the quest for an ultimate quality scale has created a situation where service quality research is constructing its own reality. This was illustrated in the language and expressions of pilot study respondents:

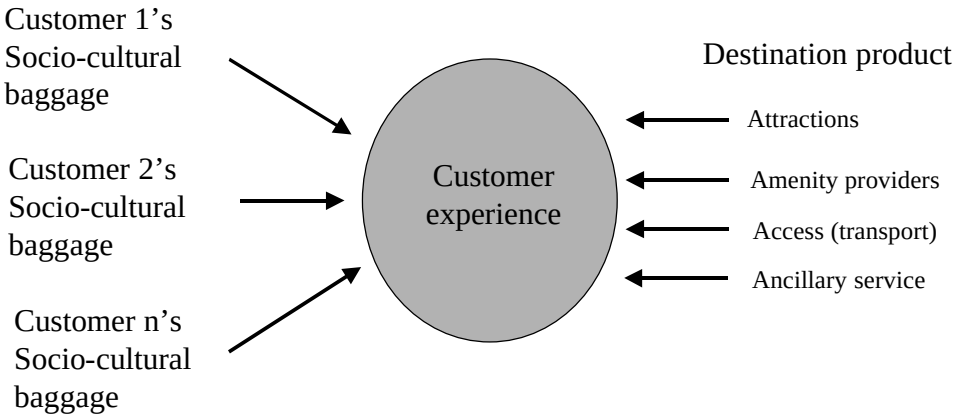
Your visitor Centre has an excellent service. (88)
The island has a very good relationship between price and quality. (97)
I wouldn't give the hotel more than 5 points out of 10, there was no bath mat in the bathroom! (93)

Rather than achieving a neo-service paradigm, the excerpts above present alarming evidence that service scholars and managers *condition* customers, rather than trying to understand them. This can also be seen in the uniformity of professional terms across service industries (a visit to the doctor or to a destination are both called *service encounters*). Another example is the attempt to average the customer's experience, especially in larger organisations (guaranteed similar rooms all over the world at the same hotel chain), in a sense digitalising social behaviour. Despite the neo-service paradigm, the customer's point of view is still conceived from the suppliers' perspective, with perceptions and assessment framed within the boundary and premises of business operations. Theory focuses on the characteristics, but not the character of specific consumption processes and totally disregards the true meaning of 'experience' for the customer.

Thus, there is still an urgent need to complete the 'paradigm shift' and to acknowledge the perceptual divergence between service delivery and customer experience (Figure 3.1). This implies that the point of departure needs to be the specific benefits of offerings *as perceived* by the customer, taken in the larger socio-cultural context of the consumption experience. Hence, generic quality dimensions and universal scales are inappropriate. However, there are no academic models to date which can adequately describe holistic tourism offerings as providing customer benefits in the form of extraordinary experiences and sensations.

The essence of the tourism experience would be lost if customer–provider interactions and relationships were routinised according to rigid and invariable standards. Instead of describing measurable components of the output and circumstances of service provision, a deeper understanding is needed which relates delivered offerings to human needs and cultural values. Thus, it is suggested that the structure of customers' assessment needs to be explored by qualitative and phenomenographic methods (Johns and Clarke 1997, Arnould *et al.*1998), in order to reconcile the ontological–epistemological gap demonstrated above. This was the revised scientific challenge of this study, i.e. to define the visitor's perception and judgement of integrated destination offerings, *as* the overall benefits derived from the extended leisure experience.

Figure 3.1. Completing the customer paradigm shift



3.5. Revising the point of departure

Following the lessons of the pilot study, a new point of departure was taken for this thesis, namely 'completing the paradigm shift', by assessing the integrated tourism 'product' in the context of the visitor's experience. Thus, the researcher needed to depart from the original, myopic service marketing-centred standpoints and reductionist consumption models upon which her pilot study was based. A broader perspective was taken, which assessed modern tourism consumption and behaviour as a specific socio-cultural phenomenon. The literature review was broadened to include other disciplines, such as tourism-related sociological and anthropological readings, which regard the tourism offering in experiential terms.

A number of social anthropologists have made qualitative studies of the holiday experience, typically regarding it as a social phenomenon rooted in contemporary Western culture. They emphasise the role of tourism in human life as being an out-of-the-ordinary (Graburn 1983), transitional (Nash and Smith 1991) or sacred (Morinis 1992) event. Studies paralleling leisure tourism with pilgrimage (Turner 1973, Turner and Turner 1978), play (Cohen 1985) or the quest for authenticity (MacCannell 1989) have produced useful insights into the behaviour of the leisure customer. Others (Gottlieb 1982) introduce the notion of 'vacation inversion', which describes visitors' temporary exchange of everyday living patterns and social roles for a different social status during a holiday stay. Such advances offer a broad understanding into the socio-cultural context of visitor experience; however, they are too general and weak in empirical grounding to inform the practical assessment of customer perception.

A few notable exceptions in service research acknowledge anthropological standpoints towards visitor perceptions and the assessment of extended delivery processes. For example, the research of Arnould and Price (Arnould and Price 1993, Price *et al.*1995b,

Arnould and Price 1998) describes tourists' experiences and quality perceptions in river rafting, by using qualitative methods (open interviews and participant observation). Given that the main benefits of river rafting are centred around sensations of delight, thrill and surprise, this 'product' cannot be either foreseen or standardised. Thus, the authors suggest that the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm may not be relevant to describe visitors' assessment of such extraordinary experiences and that hedonic and utilitarian product assessments may conflict in leisure settings (Arnould and Price 1993). For example, white-water rafting includes uncomfortable and dangerous situations, but these fade in relation to the emerging extraordinary natural and social experience. Later, Price *et al*. (1995a) and Arnould and Price (1998) study the physical setting of the extended service encounter, and demonstrate that customer perceptions are influenced by communicative and substantive dimensions of the *servicescape* (Bitner 1992).

These findings contradict the pervasive (cognitive) psychological standpoint of customer assessment models which infer that individuals process environmental information and events logically in order to assess them. Instead of logical deductions based on the offering (seen in disconfirmation paradigm and value-based models), it is the narrative structure of the experience that provides a rationale for the customer's assessment. This can only be approached through 'thick descriptions' (Geertz 1973) that do not detach service quality perceptions and satisfaction as discrete constructs.

The goal of this research remained the same after the pilot study, that is, to examine visitors' assessment of integrated destination offerings in the context of their episodic and overall perceptions of holiday experiences. However, the epistemological approach was changed as it was clear that the acquisition of holiday experiences could not be explored by careful mapping of consumption stages and service delivery-related factors. Visitor perceptions were not guided only by rational thinking, nor was their assessment based only on 'value-for-sacrifice' comparisons. Instead it was felt that mental activities which make sense of human experience were organised by the use of random associative processes, rather than by formal logic. That is, individuals interpretively linked similar experiences and assessed them according to positions they hold in relation to larger wholes (Polkinghorne 1988).

Learning from the lessons of the pilot study, the point of departure was revisited and the research took a more holistic and phenomenological perspective. Instead of solely focusing on service encounters and service journeys, the main study was set to address the consumption of entire visitor experiences by acknowledging the metaphoric construction of meaning. Because of the extraordinariness of holiday experiences, their acquisition is often recalled as a narrative, and this was supported by many interviews. In order to understand how visitors derived satisfaction from the 'consumption' of a destination, it was necessary to capture the plot of narratives of their holiday experiences. Only by revealing this deeper context will it be possible to explain visitors' perceptions of service providers and concrete service encounters. The next chapter demonstrates how this task was to be solved by presenting the research design in detail.

4. Research Design

The previous chapter presented the controversial findings of the pilot study and discussed its lessons from a practical, conceptual and methodological perspective. It concluded that service research still has a long way to go to complete the 'paradigm shift' and to develop a model that describes service assessment from the lived experience of customers. This has become the mission of the main study, aiming to discover the deeper socio-cultural context of visitors' consumption experiences, rather than surveying visitor expectations and perceptions according to a rigid, supply-based structure. This chapter presents the research design by identifying and demarcating the research area, formulating the research questions, and discussing the choice of methodology and methods corresponding to these goals. In addition, the progress of data collection and analysis is described and the empirical area of the study is presented.

4.1. Research domain and questions

The goal of the study was to develop an empirically rooted theory on the assessment of visitor experiences which acknowledges the socio-cultural implications of holiday consumption. To be able to do this, it was necessary to consider both demand-oriented models of tourism behaviour and *also* supply-oriented models of service provision. This section demarcates the research domain, by discussing the spheres of convergence between these two theoretical approaches as well as their overlapping empirical field of enquiry. Following this, the research puzzles and questions are presented.

4.1.1. Demarcation of research domain

Assessment of leisure-related offerings has long perplexed researchers, thanks to the controversial nature of traditional concepts in consumer behaviour when describing processes or motivations associated with leisure and tourism consumption (Dimanche and Samdahl 1994). This difficulty, as became apparent after the pilot study, arises from the divergent interpretation of the offering among service scholars (Normann 1984, Gilbert 1990 among others) and tourism anthropologists (Cohen 1979, Graburn 1983, Gottlieb 1982, MacCannell 1989 among others). Providers conceive it as a 'product', consisting of a set of objective aspects, while customers see it as a subjective experience, filled with symbolic meaning. The point of departure for demarcating the research domain thus acknowledged the differences between provider- and customer-defined conceptualisations of the tourism product (see Table 4.1).

Although the object of assessment is defined differently in these two conceptualisations, the assessment process itself may be understood similarly and thus reconciled through the theories of consumer behaviour. The broad areas of convergence between 'product' and 'experience' assessment may include a chronological temporal framework (consisting of pre-, during- and post-consumption phases) as well as some sort of direct or inferred standards, against which the objects of assessment are compared. Thus, a way to understand customers' assessment of services is to follow the research thread from an

inductive approach towards the conceptualisation of the consumption experience. This implies that the first puzzle is to delimit the customers' units of perception, i.e. to define meaningful objects and categories in their own evaluation - rather than making conjectures about them. Only after specifying the object of assessment is it valid to attempt exploring the evaluation process itself.

Table 4.1. Conceptualisations of leisure-related offerings and their theoretical background

	LEISURE AS AN EXPERIENCE	LEISURE AS A PRODUCT
Approach	Customer-based, subjective, holistic, phenomenological	Provider-based, objective, atomistic, hypothetical
Core definition of assessment	1. Individual experiences (incidents) 2. Stream of individual experiences (sequential incidents)	1. Product outcomes (discreet attributes) 2. Provision processes (discreet phases)
Nature of benefits	Hedonic/Expressive/Symbolic	Functional/Utilitarian/Factual
Comparison standards	Alternating, intrinsic standards, such as: • predicted 'journey ideals' • home environment	Stable, external standards, such as: • best brand norm • service excellence • previous experience • value for money
Main related theories of perception/ assessment	Anthropology (specific) • inversion/ritual (extraordinary time) • liminality (out of place and time)	Behavioural psychology (not specific) • disconfirmation theory • equity theory • adaptation level theory

Consequently, the theoretical domain of this research is multidisciplinary, relating to both leisure consumption (anthropology, sociology, consumer psychology) and service provision (service marketing and management). The idea behind choosing such a large research domain was to provide a flexible discussion 'forum' to explain the empirical phenomena arising from the findings, rather than constraining the results into one particular school of thought.

4.1.2. Research questions

Research questions are the backbone of any research design, as they manifest the essence of the enquiry in terms of an intellectual puzzle. In order to comply with the research goals, the intellectual puzzles of this study cover two sets of questions. The first puzzle aims to describe the object of visitors' assessment (*I. What is being assessed during the 'consumption' of holiday experiences*?), while the second puzzle is centred around the process of assessment *(II. How does customer assessment in tourism and hospitality work?*). Both puzzle areas and their sub-questions are presented below.

I. What is being assessed during the 'consumption' of holiday experiences?
This puzzle aims to explore what the tourism product consists of, whether it is conceptualised *as* the visitor's holiday experience. That is, the quest is to reveal the structure, process and dimensions of the object of assessment - as it is seen by the visitors. This can be broken down to the following sub-questions:

Q1. How do visitors perceive the 'product' of their holiday experiences? That is, how do they structure, term and categorise various episodes they have experienced during the consumption process? To what extent does this picture correspond with existing models of leisure-related offerings?
Q.2. How can the extraordinariness of the tourism product be defined? How do visitors' perceptions match leisure-related theories in anthropology and sociology (e.g. notions of inversion and liminality)?
Q3. Are there frequently recurring elements in visitors' conception of the tourism product? Can a hierarchic structure between these elements be perceived or are they equally important?
Q.4. What are the stages of the holiday experience conceived by visitors? To what extent does this structure correspond to temporally defined psychological models of consumption behaviour processes?
Q5. Are there differences and similarities among visitors, in terms of how they behave and perceive holiday experiences?

II. How does customer assessment in tourism and hospitality work?
This puzzle aims to operationalise the process of assessment in leisure-related consumption and, finally, to gain a deeper understanding of the way visitors evaluate tourism and hospitality service providers. Because of the demand-oriented point-of-departure, it was necessary to treat connected assessment constructs (such as service quality perceptions and satisfaction) simultaneously. This puzzle can be broken down to the following sub-questions:

Q.6. What is the rationale behind visitors' assessment of their experiences? To what extent do existing theories of tourist behaviour (e.g. need hierarchy, intrinsic value hierarchy, product symbolism, role congruency, etc.) explain it?
Q.7. What type of assessment frameworks do visitors use in evaluating their experiences? To what extent does the process match existing theories and operational models in consumer behaviour (i.e. external comparison standards, internal value attribution, sequential assessment, etc.)
*Q.8. Could (and if yes, how do) differences between visitor types explain divergent tourism product assessments (*in terms of how visitors behave and perceive holiday experiences)?
Q.9. What role do service providers play in the assessment of the entire holiday experience? How do various (core and peripheral) service providers contribute to the acquisition of the experience?
Q.10. Are various service providers assessed differently, depending on the real and symbolic benefit content of their offering?

By answering these two research puzzles and ten sub-questions it is hoped to provide potential solutions to the ultimate question of this study, which can be formulated as:

How can perceived service quality be redefined in the context of visitors' own holiday experience assessment?

4.1.3. Empirical study design

In order to address the two research puzzles, and given the fact that previous research has not yet treated this problem extensively, the empirical design chosen was an inductive case study. The case study was divided into two phases: (1) an exploratory, pilot project to be conducted on a limited sample and (2) a main study, to be conducted on a wider sample. In order to enhance the reliability of the findings, two cases would be studied, that is, two geographically distinct, yet comparable tourism destinations. The goal of the research phases and the connection between them is demonstrated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Research tasks and expected outcomes of the pilot and main studies

	Pilot project	Main study
Task	Generating impressions and posing questions about visitor experiences	To test, elaborate and contextualise the pilot study findings on a larger sample
Expected outcome	Preliminary conceptualisation of visitor assessment, with a few linkages between emerging ideas and existing theories and models	Integrating the findings into a model of service quality, redefined from a demand-oriented perspec-tive
Empirical case destinations	Bornholm (Denmark) Norfolk (UK)	Bornholm (Denmark)
Envisaged sample	~20 interviewees	~80 interviewees

The pilot study was designed to follow closely the cyclical process of grounded theory methodology (see section 4.2.), which is characterised by simultaneous data collection and analysis. This implies that the research process allows minor, but continuous shifts in focus as new findings emerge directly from the field. Data collection is not preceded by a massive literature review, rather it is the findings that determine further academic reading. In accordance with the purposes of the pilot study, the envisaged sample was defined as a small pool of 20 interviewees. The goal was to use these exploratory data to create a preliminary conceptual model of visitor assessment of the holiday experience which would be compared with existing theories in various disciplines.

Table 4.3. Coherence between research questions and data collection

Research questions	Data collection techniques
Q1. How do visitors perceive the 'product' of their holiday experiences?	Visitors must be asked open and broad interview questions (e.g. simply requesting them to relate their holiday experiences)
Q.2. How can the extraordinariness of the tourism product be defined?	Photo-aided projective techniques to enhance the acquisition of detailed and informal data with high affective content
Q3. Are there frequently recurring elements in visitors' conception of the tourism product?	Interview data collection may be combined with other data sources, such as participant observation and secondary data collection
Q.4. What are the stages of the holiday experience, conceived by visitors?	A cross-sectional pool of data is required, i.e. visitors must be approached at different stages of their holiday stay
Q5. Are there differences and similarities among visitors?	Several visitors must be approached, exhibiting a variation in terms of demographic characteristics and familiarity with the tourism product
Q.6. What is the rationale behind visitors' assessment of their experiences?	Instead of leading, complex questions, visitors must be asked simple and broad questions, asking what they perceived as good or bad experiences and why
Q.7. What type of assessment frameworks do visitors use in evaluating their experiences?	After each evaluative statement visitors make, they should be asked to elaborate on the reason why they made that assessment
Q.8. Can differences between visitors explain divergent tourism product assessments?	Several visitors must be approached, exhibiting a variation in terms of demographic characteristics and familiarity with the tourism product
Q.9. What role do service providers play in the assessment of the entire holiday experience?	Attempting to guide the interviews so that visitors mention and elaborate on their experiences of service providers (e.g. What have you seen? Where did you stay? Where did you eat?)
Q.10. Are various service providers assessed differently?	Attempting to guide the interviews so that visitors elaborate on different service experiences during their stay

The goal of the main study was to justify the model and propositions made in the pilot study and to extend these to a larger sample (around 80 interviewees). For practical reasons, it was not possible to conduct this phase of the empirical study at both case destinations, so the reliability of the results had to be tested by other triangulation methods (see next section). An adjusted and extended set of data collection techniques was used to investigate the preliminary model, and the findings were tested in a multi-disciplinary theoretical environment, in order to develop a new service quality model, developed from a demand-based perspective. Table 4.3 shows the intended incorporation of the research questions into the empirical data collection design, illustrating the relationship between these two.

4.2. Scientific methodology

The methodological status quo described in the previous chapter presented a challenge in the early stages of this project, which aimed to break free from the operational, supply-based logic prevailing in customer assessment frameworks. The point of departure was a rejection of the widespread assumption that general theories of consumer psychology and marketing are equally valid across all products and industries. This also meant questioning the legitimacy of models which assumed customers' service evaluation to be dependent only on objective product-related factors. A scientific methodology was sought that fully acknowledged the customer's perspective and perceptions of the entire consumption process and allowed its subjective, experiential aspects to be assessed.

4.2.1. Research ontology and epistemology

Holbrook and O'Shaugnessy (1988) propose that an *interpretive-phenomenological* approach should be used towards such epistemological problems in consumer behaviour studies. According to the interpretive paradigm (Berger and Luckmann 1971), social reality is a product of the subjective and inter-subjective experience of individuals and human behaviour is only meaningful in its specific social/environmental context. This model assumes that there is an underlying pattern and order in the world, but rejects functionalist attempts to create an objective social science. The goal of theory building in the interpretive paradigm is to reveal and describe existing, yet undiscovered structures via a hermeneutic process. Naturally, this can only be achieved through empirical study.

The present study research adopts a phenomenological approach, interpreting lived experiences in context, so as to describe the social world in a way that is relevant to the objects (informants) of study. This type of knowledge generation avoids taking borrowed theories for granted and making (false) conjectures from related scientific fields. Throughout the study, an *inductive* approach is adopted, where theory generation is grounded coherently within the data and not primarily influenced by existing theories.

This approach corresponds to the Grounded Theory methodology approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967), being based on an inductive process, where theory is generated simultaneously with empirical data collection and analysis. During an iterative and cyclical process, ideas emerging during data collection are confirmed or disconfirmed via continuous dialogues with the field. There is "no need for preconceived theorising, because all the theoretical explanations are already present in the data" (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 34). The researcher interprets and constantly compares bits of raw findings (grinds the data) in order to establish a coherent theoretical structure. According to protagonists, this methodology makes it possible to develop unbiased and coherent theories describing any social phenomenon. Theory is both created and verified and thus has a close correspondence with 'real life', which is particularly desirable in marketing and management studies (Teare *et al*. 1994, Gummesson 1991, Connell and Lowe 1997, Morrison 1995).

However, it is questionable whether researchers can be absolutely free from previous influences in their field. Nor is it desirable to embark on an empirical study without at least a minimum knowledge of the theoretical advances already achieved (unless a reinvention of theories are striven for). Thus, a grounded theory approach should be combined with an exploring–reflective approach, which openly admits personal ontological stances and the patterns of thought that underpin these. Prior theoretical knowledge and assumptions should not be suppressed, but made explicit, so they can be involved in a flexible dialogue with the findings. The author believes that theories must be generated from and adjusted to the informants' world-view, rather than that of the scientist, in order to generate valid knowledge. Therefore, the exploring–reflective

approach requires a degree of methodological eclecticism, the adoption of multiple realities, and a readiness to discuss findings in a multidisciplinary environment.

The ontological stance of this study is that human experience is derived from individuals' encounters with 'reality' (Berger and Luckmann 1971). This experience is recorded by perceptual processes and organised according to individuals' involvement with their environment. This study embraces three assumptions about human experience (after Polkinghorne 1988, p. 15).

- Human experience is enveloped in a personal and cultural realm of non-material meaning and thought. It is dynamic and cannot be regarded as a simple unmediated reaction to the environment.
- Human experience is an integrated construction, produced by the realm of meaning, an open system which interpretively links recollections, perceptions and expectations. Most often these processes take place beyond conscious awareness, but may be traced in narratives: one of our fundamental structures of comprehension.
- Human experience is not organised according to formal logic, but may be similar to the construction of poetic meaning. Experience makes connections and enlarges itself through the use of metaphoric processes that link together similar experiences, and it evaluates items according to the positions they hold in relation to larger wholes.

4.2.2. Choice of methods

Acknowledging that the research problem and question must direct the choice of research methods, it was intended to find methods that supported the understanding and interpretation of meaning in the holiday experience. The pilot study confirmed some earlier academic suggestions (cf. Holbrook and Hirschman 1982a) that traditional, positivist approaches are inadequate for this, as they focus on fragmented and distinct modelling of human traits such as meaning, feeling and emotion. Such studies view leisure consumption as a rational process, and strive for quantification of a causal relationship between decision making and price, distance or demographic variables. Brown (1992) argues that these reductionist approaches are totally inappropriate for examining the depth of tourism as a symbolic consumption. There is a need for softer, humanistic methods of enquiry that aim to attain a more holistic view of how people (as complete and complex beings) experience and interpret their surroundings.

In accordance with the philosophical stance of this study (i.e. the interpretive paradigm of socially constructed realities) and the desirability of an inductive approach, qualitative methods were found to be the most appropriate. Instead of striving for statistical generalisation and focusing on what is general, average and representative, the goal was to search for *evidence* of new, specific and unique ideas. These ideas would be generated by interpreting meaning from empirical data, exploring relationships between them and between existing theories through analytical comparison, rather than through algorithms. However, qualitative findings must be analytically generalisable, i.e. they should be able to

pass tests of corroboration, for example multiple-method triangulation. Therefore a combination of data collection methods was chosen, including semi-structured interviews and projective techniques. Furthermore, a few sessions of participant observation were also conducted, in order to get an insight into typical visitor activities on Bornholm. Textual data thus obtained were analysed using three different interpretation methods: keyword search and pattern matching, semiotic content analysis, and narrative analysis. The results of these separate data analyses are presented in three consecutive chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), that gradually elaborate the complexity of the findings. The next section reviews the tests of corroboration that were considered in this project.

4.2.3. Corroboration tests

Although qualitative methods are widely used in some disciplines of social sciences (such as anthropology and sociology), the majority of tourism research is still dominated by structured and quantifiable surveys. Qualitative research is often regarded as 'pre-scientific' and subordinate to quantitative studies, only justifiable if some preliminary/exploratory information is needed to develop a sound quantitative enquiry. Qualitative techniques are often accused of being 'bricolage' and lacking the rigour, validity and generalisability of 'real science'. This prevailing general belief may be rooted in mutual unawareness and misconceptions of corroborative criteria among researchers working with qualitative vs. quantitative methods. On one hand, quantitative researchers are unfamiliar with qualitative stances, on the other hand qualitative researchers fail to explain and justify the soundness of their methodological approaches (Decrop 1999).

Qualitative and quantitative studies often differ in terms of their underlying research paradigms (positivism vs. interpretivism) but, in spite of this, they share basic notions of what constitutes valid and trustworthy research results. Science, one might argue, is a question of reasoning, thus a qualitative study can be sound as long as it implements and complies with universal canons of corroboration. Some of these criteria are parallel with those of quantitative research, while others may be unique to qualitative research. Adapting the quantitative terminology of corroborative criteria, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify four measures against which the trustworthiness of qualitative studies can be evaluated. These criteria (dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability) and their acknowledgement in the research design are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. Corroborative criteria of qualitative research

1. Dependability (~ reliability)	Reproducibility of findings by another researcher.
2. Credibility (~ internal validity)	Truthfulness of findings, i.e. there is a coherence between the empirical phenomenon and the way it is mapped in the study.
3. Transferability (~ external validity)	Generalisability of findings, i.e. they are applicable to other circumstances, settings or groups of people.
4. Confirmability (~ objectivity)	Neutrality of findings, i.e. there is an effort to minimise bias.

In order to meet the requirements of sound research, and to minimise personal or methodological biases, various triangulation methods were implemented in the research

design. In qualitative research, triangulation implies strengthening the richness and corroboration of findings by considering the same phenomenon or research question from different angles. This may imply collecting data from various sources, or applying more than one data collection/analysis technique or more than one theoretical framework. The more it can be demonstrated that combined data sources, methods or theories converge, the sounder the research results are. The following approaches were taken to achieve internal reliability in this study: method triangulation, theory and data triangulation and investigator triangulation (Denzin 1978). These are discussed below.

Enhancing credibility via method triangulation and theoretical triangulation

The research design used multiple data collection methods in order to achieve a high degree of credibility. Visitors' perceptions of their holiday experiences were tapped by a combination of qualitative techniques, including semi-structured interviews aided by a projective technique. This latter included photo-driving (Dann 1997b), i.e. presenting respondents with visual prompts (photographs and drawings) about holidays on Bornholm. The aim of photo-driving was to facilitate the interviews by helping visitors to verbalise feelings or experiences that might otherwise have been hidden or latent. This approach yielded multiple sources of evidence (transcribed interviews and notes made during interviews), facilitating the interpretation of textual content in the interviews. Apart from primary data, secondary material, including tourist brochures, guidebooks and promotional material about the destination, was also collected and studied. As far as possible, each stream of data collection was structured in a loose temporal structure, in order to acquire pre-holiday impressions, experiences during stay and post-holiday assessment.

Multiple methods were used to interpret the various sets of data. In the initial stage of analysis, keyword search was used to fragment the data into conceptual categories, focusing on the denotation of words used by respondents. In the second stage, these categories were clustered into higher order concepts by acknowledging connotations of words. Third, entire journey narratives were explored, identifying main elements that were connected into a particular visitor story. In order to reduce interpretive bias and thus to establish an objective chain of evidence, analytical tactics of constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss 1967), pattern matching and explanation-building (Yin 1993) were applied. These processes are desirable when building new theory, where multiple sources of evidence and emerging hypotheses can be confronted with each other to define a construct or a causal framework. This was coupled with the technique of theoretical triangulation (Denzin 1978), i.e. examining every new chunk of data from several disciplinary perspectives. The present study triangulated the findings with tourism-related theories originating from cultural anthropology and sociology, consumer psychology, and services marketing and management. Thus, it can be claimed that the findings of this study are *analytically generalisable*, because they were tested against (whether they corroborate or oppose) existing theories in the literature.

Enhancing transferability via data triangulation
A typical limitation of case studies is that many of their findings may not be not readily transferable to different circumstances. However, by choosing an empirical setting that has characteristics parallel to the one in study, transferability is possible to some extent. The design of this study drew heavily on a pilot project executed at another destination (Norfolk, UK). Triangulation of the two data sets (from Norfolk and Bornholm) indicated similar findings and theoretical conclusions (Gyimóthy 1999), so that a certain degree of *external validity* can be claimed. (For replication purposes, details of data collection instruments are added in the appendices.)

Enhancing confirmability via investigator triangulation
Interpretive bias can also be reduced through investigator triangulation (Denzin 1978), i.e. by inviting another researcher to interpret the same body of data. In the solitary quest of a doctoral study, this was not an available option. However, the author drew upon her supervisor to some extent as an independent auditor to review the data - gathering and - analysis processes, regularly discussing alternative interpretations as well as conformance with research practices.

Enhancing dependability
Dependability, i.e. the reliability of findings, is not assured by triangulation methods so much as by the transparency of the research procedures. These procedures, i.e. both data collection and analysis, are demonstrated in detail in the following sections and the data collection instruments are presented in the appendices. Furthermore, the empirical area of study (Bornholm) is introduced and its choice and similarities with the pilot region (Norfolk) are justified.

4.3. The empirical areas of study

Both theoretical and practical considerations played important roles in choosing the empirical region for this study. In accordance with the initial research goal (i.e. to extrapolate successive quality perceptions of individual providers onto the entire visitor experience), the study needed to focus on a destination fragmented enough to illuminate this puzzle in detail. This destination had to have a relatively mature tourism industry, offering service encounters at diverse visitor facilities and exhibiting advanced quality management practices. In other words, if one aims to write about quality management in small enterprises, at least a part of the experience must be within the control of service providers. At the same time, the empirical choice had to reflect the general principles of the research programme at Bornholms Forskningscenter (Wanhill 1995), which focused on tourism-related issues particular to peripheral European regions. The criterion of finding a destination that is both mature and marginal at the same time consequently reduced the empirical pool of choice for this study.

Access to visitors and the practicality of conducting qualitative interviews were also of crucial importance. Thus, the destinations chosen had to exhibit insularity or other

conditions of peripherality (e.g. away from major transport corridors), as well as being distinct and limited in territory. These characteristics also provided ideal conditions for pursuing and analysing the flow of visitors. First, thanks to long travelling hours, visitors may be more inclined (and certainly have more time) to participate in lengthy interviews. At the same time, visitors to such destinations are unlikely to be day trippers, so it is possible to ask them to recount longer service journeys and enduring experiences. A limited geographic area also makes it possible to track generic visitor 'paths' within the destination and to access local service providers or visitor attractions. Considering both theoretical and practical issues, the choice of the Baltic Island of Bornholm was clear. Last but not least, it was important to conduct the interviews in the visitors' native languages, so the linguistic skills of the researcher (German, Danish, Swedish and English) were particularly appropriate.

4.3.1. Introduction to Bornholm

The Island of Bornholm is the smallest county of Denmark, situated in the middle of the Baltic Sea, about 135 km east of Copenhagen and only 36 km from Southern Sweden. The island has an area of 586 km² with a resident population of about 45,000, one third of whom live in the administrative capital, Rønne, while the rest are scattered in smaller towns (Nexø, Hasle, Åkirkeby, Allinge-Sandvig and Gudhjem) around the coastline. The tiny Ertholmerne islands (0,28 km²), with just over 100 inhabitants, also belong to the county. Traditional industries of agriculture, fishing and seafood processing have declined by roughly 20% during the past decade (Bornholms Amt 1996), which has led to a steady outflow of young people from the island. A high unemployment rate and the lowest per capita income in Denmark qualify Bornholm for 5b regional funding, and the island receives regular subsidies from both the Danish state and the European Union.

At the same time, Bornholm is one of the most renowned tourist destinations in Denmark. It boasts a temperate and sunny climate as well as an unusual diversity of natural and cultural attractions, which have made it popular among holiday visitors since the late 19th century. These include heritage sites such as the round churches, built by the Baltic Crusaders, the 16th Century Hammershus castle, the fish smokehouses, and numerous arts and crafts workshops, museums and galleries. The intact inland forests, nature reserves and clean beaches offer a range of nature-based activities, including hiking, swimming, birdwatching and angling. Natural attractions include the rugged, rocky northern coastline (unique in Denmark), sand dunes to the south of the island, the Sanctuary Cliffs, Hammer Penninsula, Almindingen forest with Ekkodalen and the Døndalen waterfall.

Bornholm has developed into a mature seaside resort with an established tourism infrastructure dominated by small enterprises. The island has a good range of traditional hotels, family-run guest-houses, farm accommodation as well as self-catering properties and camp sites. The number of visitors has remained more-or-less constant between 1980-1999. According to the local tourism marketing office (Destination Bornholm), some 600,000 visit the island in the summer months. This trend, coupled with the intense

seasonal fluctuation in employment demand, presents a real challenge to Bornholm's tourism firms in developing and marketing their products.

4.3.2. Norfolk: the control case

In order to obtain qualitative data of reasonable generalisability, the study was originally designed to be conducted at two different, yet comparable peripheral case destinations. To triangulate the Bornholm results, Norfolk, a county in East Anglia (UK) was chosen as the control destination during the pilot study. Because of practical difficulties (e.g. travel costs), it was not possible to research Norfolk as often as Bornholm. Thus, a compromise was made, taking both Norfolk and Bornholm for pilot study sites, but retaining only Bornholm to execute the main data collection.

Norfolk presents some remarkable similarities to Bornholm, in terms both of socio-economic and tourism development (Table 4.5). Norfolk's economy is also stagnating and dependent on subsidies, with declining primary and secondary industries and high unemployment. The county exhibits an ageing population and parts of it also qualify for EU 5b funding. Furthermore, Norfolk is at a similar evolutionary stage of tourism development to Bornholm, with established and slightly stagnating seaside resorts (e.g. Pleasure Beach, Gt Yarmouth) and largely intact rural areas (e.g. Broadland and Breckland). Both destinations have an over-proportionate reliance on repeat markets, but fail to attract new visitors, so that both have something of a worn-out resort image. Both destinations target their core tourism products towards leisure/holiday segments, and market the destination primarily as a place for relaxation and recreation. Both claim advantageous weather conditions: Bornholm as the island with the most sunshine hours in Denmark and Norfolk as the driest region of Britain.

The main difference between the two regions is geographic: Bornholm is a remote island in the Baltic, while Norfolk is a mainland destination (although peripheral to major transport corridors). However, this difference was considered to be an advantage, as it potentially produced richer and thus more dependable findings relating to the influence of geographic location on the totality of the visitor experience.

Table 4.5. Comparison of basic features of Bornholm and Norfolk

	Bornholm	Norfolk
Geography		
Size	586 km²	5372 km²
Distance from core city	135 km (Copenhagen)	175 km (London)
Access	by sea (Copenhagen, DK, Rügen, D, Ystad, S) by air (Copenhagen, DK)	by train by road (A11, A12)
Travelling time	Sea: 5-7 hours, Air: 30 min	Road: 3 hours. Rail:1h 50 min.
Economy		
Main industries	agriculture, fishery, tourism	Manufacturing, agriculture, services
Income per capita	~20.300 E	not available
Unemployment	11.6%	7.5%
State subsidies	~62.6 mill. E	~50 mill. E
Demography		
Population	44,748	783,000 (estimate)
Population density/km²	76.1	145
Population trends	-6% (between 1988-1998)	not available
Tourism characteristics		
Main product	SSS/Nature (relaxation, recreation)	SSS/Nature/Culture (recreation)
Tourism development stage	Stagnation, well-established industry	Stagnation, well-established industry
Tourism typology	Individual and organised mass tourists	Individual and organised mass tourists
Main markets	Domestic 32%, Scandinavian 15% German 51%	Domestic 86%, USA 5%, Germany 5%, France 3%
Overnight stays	1,691,862	not available

Source: Denmark Statistic Yearbook 1998, Norfolk County Council 1998, Rassing 1998, NATA 1993.

4.4. Research design: practical issues of data collection and analysis

4.4.1. Data collection

Primary data collection

In order to acquire a richness and multiplicity of data types, two major data collection methods were applied (Table 4.6). During the pilot study, eighteen semi-structured interviews and eight sessions of participant observations were conducted. During the main study, eighty interviews were conducted (Appendices 1-2), complemented by seven observation venues (Appendix 3). The pilot study took place in April 1997 in Norfolk and in August 1997 on Bornholm. The main data collection occurred on Bornholm, during the summer months (June-September) of 1998.

Table 4.6. Distribution of interviews and participant observations

	Bornholm	Norfolk	Total
Pilot study (April/August 1997)			
Interviews	8	10	**18**
Participant observation notes	6	2	**8**
Main study (June-Sept. 1998)			
Interviews	80		**80**
Participant observation notes	7		**7**
In total	88 interviews 13 observations	10 interviews 2 observations	**98 interviews** **15 observations**

The goal of the interviews was to obtain cross-sectional data of visitor experiences at various stages of the holiday stay. On Bornholm, it was possible to schedule some interviews exactly in the pre-arrival and post-departure phases, as 90% of all holiday visitors go to and from the island on ferries. The rest of the interviews were conducted with individual visitors in a variety of local settings, including accommodation providers, cafés and restaurants, and major attractions (Pleasure Beach and Norwich Castle in Norfolk; Hammershus, and fish smokehouses on Bornholm). In order to acquire richness and density in the data, it was desirable to interview several visitors from the main market segments. Although the study was not striving for statistical representativeness, the sample of Bornholm respondents (main study) exhibited some similarities with the general visitor profile to the island (Rassing 1999). The fit is highlighted in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7. Comparison of survey and main study respondent profiles

	Main study sample (1998, June-Sept.)	Bornholm visitor survey sample (1998, 3rd Quarter)
Sample size	**80**	**917**
Main market share		
Danish	45%	43 %
Swedish	12%	10%
German	23%	38 %
Fist time visitors	50%	37%
Individual visitors	70%	80%
Main occupation segments		
Professional and managerial	33%	24%
Administrative	12%	23%
Skilled wage earner	14%	13%
Unskilled wage earner	6%	10%
Self-employed	5%	5%
Student	4%	7%
Retired	22%	12%
Main party composition segments		
Husband/wife or partner	43%	34%
Family with children	31%	37%
Group of friends	17%	10%

Semi-structured interviews followed a loose framework, inviting visitors to talk about their expectations, experiences and assessment of their stay on the destination. Respondents were encouraged to talk about their experiences in the freest possible terms in order to provide strong opinions, phrases, comments and interesting stories. In order to facilitate

the verbalising of these, all main study interviews were assisted with a visual projective technique (Appendix 2). That is, respondents were presented with a stack of 28 photographs (which depicted visitors in various service situations and tourist activities on Bornholm) and were asked if they had any particular or similar experiences to these. The photographs were of real life situations, taken during the summer of 1997 and functioned as prompts for latent or indirect experiences. All interviews were conducted in the native language of the visitor and were tape-recorded.

4.4.2. Data treatment

Interviews were transcribed in the original languages (German, Danish, Swedish and English) and notes taken during the interviews were regularly consulted during transcribing, in order to check the sense of the written text with the recordings. English translations aimed to be literal rather than colloquial, in order to keep the original richness and structure of thought in the narratives. Consequently, the excerpts illustrating research findings in the next chapters retain 'Germanisms', 'Scandinvianisms' and other unusual linguistic constructs. Interviews conducted during the main study are numbered 1-80, pilot study interviews are numbered 81-98, so they can be identified from the respondent list in Appendix 1. Throughout the discussion of the results, these numbers are given in brackets following each excerpt.

Secondary data (such as brochures and other tourism promotional material) were mainly used in the preparatory phases of primary data collection, in order to familiarise the researcher with the destination product and image, as well to identify main visitor sites and paths (see Table 3.1 in previous chapter). Participant observation notes were used to generate ideas of visitor behaviour to be tested in the interviews. They included observations of visitor behaviour and emotions during their visits to attractions and during interactions with service providers and with other tourists.

4.4.3. Data analysis

Interviews were analysed in three phases, each time from a different methodological viewpoint. The first phase aimed for familiarity with the raw data, and focused on obtaining a general picture of a holiday visit to Bornholm. The frequency, denotation and temporal sequencing of words (especially verbs) revealed the rationale behind visitor activities and frequently mentioned aspects in the narratives. Emerging conceptual categories were built into a generic framework of holiday-making behaviour and were tested against tourism-related theories in social psychology, consumer behaviour and cultural anthropology. An example:

> *We only wanted to be lazy on this holiday. Just to have two weeks, when you simply don't <u>have to</u> do anything (81)*

This excerpt reveals the motivational goals of a Bornholm visit, bracketed by the verbs *'wanted to'* and *'don't have to do'*, which indicates a contrast between leisure time and

working time. This statement was compared with the sociological concept of holidays as 'pressure valves' in modern society (Cohen 1979), the anthropological concept of 'inversion' (Gottlieb 1982) and social psychological theory on 'variation-seeking' (Maslow 1968). All theoretical triangulations are simultaneously presented with the research findings, so as to facilitate comparison.

Keyword searches executed using NUD-IST 4 software provided a useful overview of verb usage in narratives. For example, they revealed a high frequency of sensory perception-related verbs, as well as differences between visitors on the basis of active, motion-related expressions. This provided additional evidence of the way different visitors perceived and assessed their holiday stay. Unfortunately, because of the multi-lingual data base, it was not practicable to execute more sophisticated pattern-matching searches with this software.

The second phase of analysis aimed to provide a deeper understanding of what the Bornholm tourism product and experiences *meant* to visitors. To do this, the descriptive approach of the first phase (where words were taken at denotative face value) was replaced by a semiotic content analysis of the narratives. It was attempted to reveal socio-cultural interpretations of various destination aspects, through the connotations of words and expressions used by visitors. This analysis was based on Barthes' (1984) theory of a *metalangue* underlying speech (also named *mythologies*) in which individuals elaborate denotative meanings of the words they use in their primary language. Johns and Tyas (1997) suggest that Barthesian mythologies may be ideal to service situations, because they may help to identify the perceptual frameworks guiding customers' expectations and experiences. Mythologies are defined as generalised, commonly-held visitor perceptions of certain phenomena and events and are deeply rooted in the shared culture of a social group. These mythologies often appear as central themes in written and visual destination promotional materials, being so pervasive that they can implicitly guide visitors' global assessment. Consider the following example:

> *I love Bornholm: it's chocolate-boxy and olde-worlde like…Romantic small harbours and villages…somehow, I would say it's quaint…definitely a quaint place…(23)*

Mythologies and different layers of meaning can be identified with the help of a joint connotative–denotative sign system (Figure 4.1) proposed by Silverman (1983, p. 14) and by Barthes (1984, p. 115). A word (denotative signifier), taken together with the thing it denotes (signified) generates a meaning or a *sign* for the speaker, but this thing can be a signifier in itself, upon which a new and richer meaning (a connotative sign) is built. In the excerpt above, the interpretant used the words *small harbour* and *villages* to denote these actual objects. On a deeper, connotative level, these small harbours and villages of Bornholm acted as the signifier of a *quaint, old world-like* place. This second metalingual construction reveals a mythology of *classic idyll*, which carried an important symbolic meaning for the interpretant (Peirce 1934), an elderly lady from Southampton. Her perceptions and values are rooted in Western culture and may have been influenced by the romanticism of 'lost worlds' contra the omnipresence of urban civilisations.

Figure 4.1. Denotative and connotative meanings in speech

<table>
<tr><td>1. Denotative signifier
concept of a small harbour
(word)</td><td>2. Denotative signified
image of a small harbour
(actual thing)</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">3. Denotative sign
I. CONNOTATIVE SIGNIFIER

Concept + image of small harbour</td><td>II. CONNOTATIVE SIGNIFIED

image of a quaint place</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">III. CONNOTATIVE SIGN (Mythological level)

small harbour signifying a quaint place = classic idyll</td></tr>
</table>

Findings from this second, semiotic analysis could only be triangulated to a limited extent, because of the uniqueness of the data. However, it was possible to contrast meanings underlying narrative expressions with the promotional messages communicated in various tourism information material about Bornholm. These are discussed simultaneously with the findings in Chapter 6.

The goal of the third phase was to explain visitors' assessments of individual and successive service experiences by acknowledging their personal and socio-cultural background (such as their feelings, attitudes, tastes, etc.) The way visitors construct personal meanings and order their holiday experiences may be understood as a cognitive function that is driven by *narrative* understanding, rather than by *logical-paradigmatic* understanding (Bruner 1986). Paradigmatic cognitive modes look for universal truth/reason conditions, while narratives look for particular connections between events. Narrative understanding can configure a sequence of events into a unified happening, where the ordering of individual events depends on their contributions to a larger and whole structure. As Polkinghorne (1988) puts it: "The ordering process operates by linking diverse happenings along a temporal dimension and […] particular actions take on significance as having contributed to completed episodes" (p. 18). Thus, narratives are different from *chronicles*, which simply list events according to their temporal position.

Narrative provides a symbolised account of actions, which possess an organising theme that weaves a complex stream of events into a coherent story. This organising theme is the *plot* or *story line* (Polkinghorne, 1988), which highlights the contribution and placing of each individual event in the whole experience. The narrative scheme thus serves as a lens through which the apparent random and disconnected elements of human existence (one's

own actions, the actions of others and chance natural happenings) can appear as interconnected, related parts of a meaningful whole. Narrative understanding (cognitive organisation of information) is contextually related, that is, an event is explained through its role and significance in relation to a human experience. This implies that narratives can retrospectively alter the meaning of events after the final outcome is known - unlike logical–mathematical reasoning.

Interviewees' holiday accounts were full of such narrative explanations, in which individual events were organised around a plot, illuminating the personal principles by which these events were assessed. Such was the story of a yachting couple (56), who were plagued by miserable weather during their entire stay, experienced appalling hygienic conditions in the harbour toilets and had a negative restaurant experience. If their assessment were modelled conventionally, using formal logic and assumptions as to what constitutes the *object* and *dimensions* of expectations and perceptions, the couple would have been deemed to have had a negative experience.

However, against all logic, the couple reported that they had thoroughly enjoyed the holiday. The plot of their narrative highlighted how they coped with harsh circumstances, for instance by identifying themselves with great explorers. Indeed, there was a consistency in the narrative between 1) what they highlighted from their experiences and 2) what they expressed as holiday ideals, with 3) the way they prioritised and evaluated service providers. These metaphoric processes in their thinking could only be retrieved indirectly, by using narrative as a coherent structure reconnecting visitors' values, feelings and ideas.

4.4.4. A note on the pilot results

The pilot study and its findings are not presented separately in this thesis, as they have been discussed at length in the MPhil Transfer document (Appendix 4). Its conclusions and findings (including the concepts of facilitation, holiday ideal realisation and learning processes) are incorporated and developed further in the discussion of the main study results (Chapters 5-7).

4.5. Results: structure of the thesis

The research findings are presented in three chapters, each illuminating visitors' consumption experience and the background of its assessment from different theoretical perspectives. This tripartite structure follows a funnelled path, attempting to take the reader from general and practical issues of holiday making to a more abstract discussion of service experiences in tourism. Each chapter is regarded as a step contributing to Chapter 7, in which an empirically grounded, customer-based model of service assessment is delineated.

As a result of the lessons of the pilot study, subsequent data collection and analysis attempted to avoid a hermetic view of service offerings and tourism product consumption.

However, it was also necessary to maintain a comprehensive axis about which the complex discussion of findings (related to something as broad as the visitor experience) could turn. After months of perplexity, the concept of *journey* was chosen as the main axis of the thesis. The word journey denotes "travel or passage from one place to another; trip or voyage" or "the time taken to make a journey" (The Collins English Dictionary 1989). *Journey* also has connotations beyond spatially and temporally definable movement, of dynamics, change or transition, suggesting some sort of *directional flow or progress* made in real or illusory dimensions. It is in this broad sense that the concept of journey will be used.

Chapter Five (*The Tourist's Journey*) provides a basic descriptive account of visitor activities as they were related by interviewees about their stay on Bornholm. A general discussion is conducted on the specific character and underlying mechanisms of tourism-related consumption behaviour and on the extraordinariness of holiday experiences. Chapter Six (*The Virtual Journey*) carries on with an explanatory investigation of how visitors made sense of their experiences. This discussion is based on the semiotic analysis of narrative expressions about Bornholm, and follows the interviewees' journey in mental time and space. Here, the discussion is centred around social and cultural subtleties of experiential quality perception and assessment in tourism. Finally, Chapter Seven (*The Service Journey*) analyses the visitor experience through successive encounters with service providers. It explores how tourism products and services at a destination contribute to good visitor experiences in the light of the conclusions of the previous two chapters. Taking a service management perspective, this chapter also discusses operational issues at individual provider and aggregate (destination) levels.

4.5.1. Definition of concepts and terms

This section provides a mini-glossary of the most frequent terms, clarifying the meaning in which they are used throughout the thesis.

Assessment
An umbrella term for all types of evaluative judgements made by visitors, including perceived service quality and satisfaction.

Experience
The word originates from the Latin *experientia* [act of trying], and has several meanings in the English language. There is a distinction between two different meanings of experience. It can be 1) a cognitive concept, depicting "actual and accumulated knowledge" (Longman Dictionary 1994), but it can also stand for 2) a complex personal concept of "something personally and emotionally encountered, undergone or lived through" (Longman Dictionary 1994). In other European languages, this second meaning possesses an independent morpheme, as in the German *Erlebnis*, Danish *oplevelse*, the Spanish *vivencia*, the Finnish *Elamys* or the Hungarian *élmény*, the Russian *perezhivanyie*

- which are all similar in the sense that they originate from the word *life* (*leben, live, vida, ela, élet, zhiv*). It is in this second meaning that ‘experience’ is used throughout the thesis.

Holiday (also holiday experience)
The totality of any leisure-related consumption experience in tourism exceeding 24 hours. A holiday includes not only the destination stay itself, but also transport to and from the destination as well as preparative activities before departure. In the thesis, no distinctions are made between short breaks and long-term vacations.

Offering
An umbrella term depicting all consumer products, i.e. both tangible goods and intangible services.

Service Provider (also Tourism Service Provider)
Any type of public, private or mixed organisational unit that delivers tangible or intangible benefits for visitors throughout the entire holiday consumption process. This provision may take place in the form of creating a service experience for the visitor regardless of whether it involves human interaction or not.

Visitor
Potential or actual customers of destination offerings. Their consumption activity is triggered by motives of rest, relaxation or entertainment, and realised during discretionary time and with discretionary income. The term ‘visitor’ may refer to ‘tourists’ (staying over 24 hours at the destination), ‘day visitors’ and ‘local visitors’.

5. The Tourist's Journey: Describing the Consumption of an Experience

The goal of this chapter is to conceptualise holiday making as an experiential consumption behaviour and explain its framework from the visitor's perspective. Holiday motives and experiences were explored and described on the basis of visitors' own accounts of their *activities* during and after their stay. These activities are presented in the context and conditions within which they were undertaken. The findings of the chapter are structured along a quasi-chronological order of the 'holiday experience', organising the extracted concepts of visitor behaviour under three headings: how visitors *prepare*, *experience* and *evaluate* their holiday.

The raw interview data did not naturally fall into temporally separable categories, so it is emphasised that these activities are not similar to the pre-, during- and post-consumption processes of other authors (cf. Moutinho 1987). The focus of this analysis was to highlight particular characteristics of visitor behaviour through interview excerpts and to interpret them in a multi-disciplinary context, rather than to describe the entire tourism consumption process. This chapter aims to find and explain the 'rationale' behind visitor activities and discuss it simultaneously from different scholarly perspectives, including social psychology, consumer behaviour and cultural anthropology.

5.1. Preparatory activities

This section discusses how visitors defined the essence of holiday consumption behaviour, the goals they set and the strategies they adopted in order to meet these goals. It also attempts to compare these activities to the 'information processing model' that prevails in tourism consumption models.

5.1.1. Hedonic task definition

Visitors' definitions of holiday benefits were typically centred around vaguely defined desires instead of a detailed description of their forthcoming stay. First-time visitors described holistic aspirations, for example envisioning a pleasant atmosphere sometimes as broadly as:

> *we were looking forward to some quiet and relaxing days (86)*

In most cases respondents tried to picture themselves in an idealised destination:

> *I want to find **this cosy Danish way of life**…this **'hygge-mentality'**…living in a small village and gossiping with the neighbours…**just to have a great time** (75)*

Such daydreams held no negative aspects. Overall positive attitudes towards the stay indicated that people were confident of accomplishing the holiday successfully.

*I **cannot think of any bad things** that might happen. My expectations are all of good things, there is not of anything bad. The only bad thing I could think of happening is sinking up to your knees in a bog, if you're out on walking. But this could happen to anybody. (81)*

Repeat visitors similarly envisaged very broad benefits from the holiday experience. Instead of naming utilitarian benefits, they anticipated that re-encountering the island would evoke vivid sensory–emotive gratification.

*I'm so much looking forward to coming to Bornholm every year. It is the **joy of reunion** with our daughter and grandchildren, but also a **joy of seeing** the island again. (75)*

*Actually, we have been here many times... even on our honeymoons ten years ago. We would like to **refresh those experiences** now, on the tenth year's anniversary… **Tasting** some smoked herring again, **listening** to the waves from the sea. (77)*

In these excerpts the essence of the holiday was oriented towards pleasure, and the 'task' of consumption defined as seeking amusement, arousal and enjoyment. This hedonic pursuit of gratification is believed to be an innate mental processing called *primary process thinking*, already perceptible in infants (Hilgard 1962). Holiday benefits are non-verbal, elusive, and multi-sensory experiences, and their processing is hardly based on rational thought (Ryan 1997). Therefore, primary process thinking may better describe the 'consumption' of holiday experiences, than the 'information processing model' (IPM) (Bettman 1979), by which most customer behaviour is commonly explained. The latter depicts customers as rational thinkers, who make buying decisions goal-consciously by searching for information and solving problems (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982b). The IPM may adequately describe the consumption of utilitarian and everyday products, but it seems inadequate for situations where hedonic responses and holistic sensory–emotive benefits are anticipated in a subjective state of consciousness. Leisure consumption has to be differentiated from everyday consumption, because its main goal is the acquisition of beneficial experiences (Prentice *et al.* 1998).

5.1.2. Variation as the main goal

Goal setting is the activity of defining broad objectives that visitors wish to achieve during their holidays. The root of all holiday goals is found in the quest for deviation from ordinary life and environment (cf. Cohen 1979, Urry 1990). The definition of goals simultaneously or separately emphasised two motivational forces: escaping everyday life situations and/or searching for different conditions. These were represented in either environmentally or personally oriented statements.

Escape type goals were typically about relieving stress: visitors wanted to get rid of everyday constraints, such as schedules and planning often associated with an urban lifestyle:

> *I like to be relaxed and to **get away from** my work. In daily life, we have a pretty tight and precise schedule over things we have to do and we enjoy it, too. But we **profit from change** also by not making plans for a day…and that's nice about a holiday that it's not so scheduled,…you can just get away! (71)*

> *I think we go on holidays, because **we get rid of** both telephone and television and family and all that stuff there …[laughter]. We have really worked hard in the winter, so we were looking forward to go on holidays without that stress and be just ourselves. (52)*

> *I wanted to **leave that rat race behind**… you know, in Hamburg, everything is so hectic, so loud. (94)*

Sometimes visitors wanted to escape the usual environment they encountered in everyday life:

> *[I wanted to] **get away** from the frilly curtains syndrome, where people are more concerned with how things look. (86)*

> *I think holidays normally aim at to somehow **get out of the daily treadmill**… that's what I think the most important is. (37)*

Search type goals demonstrated not only the circumstances visitors were escaping from, but also solutions directed towards changing everyday life. These could take the form either of stress-relief or of heightened, but alternative stimulation. A search for **stress-relieving** situations typically focused on tranquil environments or on minimal activity:

> *I **look for the calm**…yes, the calmness all right. I wanted to remember some places where I stayed as a child. (4)*

> *I hope to **be free, to get a break**…I hope to find some peace and quiet.[…] Really, I just want to get on with things as they really are. (85)*

> *We only wanted to be lazy on this holiday. Just to have two weeks, when you simply **don't <u>have to</u> do** anything. (81)*

In this case, the search for an alternative to everyday life was directed towards spatial or social variety that contrasted with the ordinary. The search for the opposite of the ordinary during holidays is given a functionalist explanation by sociologists, who claim it is a search for a tranquillising inner balance (Glasser 1975). The pressure to conform with society creates tensions in the individual, which may be relieved by holidays, serving as a

'pressure valve' (Cohen 1979). Holidays allow modern man to escape from environmental constraints and break the monotony of everyday routines. Tension release during holidays can be expressed by taking a reversed societal role (cf. Gottlieb 1982) or in exercising reversal activities (e.g. play or relaxation) which are in strong contrast to what people normally do at home. For example:

> *When I'm on holidays, I'd prefer to be on my own,* ***not having people talking*** *to you all the time. Here, you can be on your own, if you* ***don't want*** *to talk, nobody is going to disturb you…and that can be attractive when you live a busy life, then you'd like to* ***decide yourself*** *whether you want to communicate or whether you don't. (7)*

For most visitors holidays are opportunities temporarily to suspend schedules imposed by normal life, so that people claim to 'have time' for their lives. It is argued that the concept of holiday time is not just a chronological sequence, but also a social construct denoting special events like family bonding (Crompton 1979). Holidays are important because of this potential to experience time differently, as a sense of timelessness, the slower passage of time, or the possession of time (Ryan 1997). Because the special significance of vacations for modern people, holiday time is often contrasted with non-holiday circumstances, which are characterised by a perceived lack of time. The following excerpt (told by a visitor on the first day of his stay) reflects this comparison well:

> *I like it mostly because there is a difference between working life and vacation life. We do things differently, we wake up when we want to, we make breakfast when we want to, we don't have to be on time. There are no scheduled activities, we have all the time we need for hiking, biking and being with the kids. (64)*

These special happenings not only bring freedom from the clock and freedom from everyday constraints, but also periods of special 'external' or sacred time. Because of its extraordinariness, holiday making is paralleled either with deviance (Urry 1991) or religious rites of passage (Turner 1974). It involves the notion of departure (*separation*), as well as a temporal breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life (*liminality).* Like pilgrims, tourists engage in spatial movement, to worship 'sacred' attractions (Turner 1973). While away from home they are out of time and place (Turner and Turner 1978), where, owing to suspended or inverted everyday obligations, visitors can engage their senses with stimuli that contrast with the everyday and the mundane.

The extraordinariness of holidays can also be explained as a search for the memorable, because the memorable is lacking from most of everyday life (Ryan 1997). Hence, in parallel with the recreational, tension-relieving goals, another means by which respondents sought to contrast their normal lives was through ***heightened stimulation*** from different kinds of activity and experience:

There should be something happening all the time. We would like to ***experience something,*** *we would like to tell it to people when we got home, that…hmmm…we have seen that and that. (59)*

We come mostly to see the nature. To ***come out and see*** *a round church…to* ***come out and see****…we will attempt* ***to see as much as possible****. (73)*

Visitors hoped to find the core aspect of the holiday through the novel, different or unexpected, but they could not define them very precisely:

We ***go after different experiences*** *of different holidays…****to try something new*** *every year. We decided to go to Austria next year. We want to have 14 days in the mountains. Even though we had a wonderful experience here on Bornholm. (73)*

We seldom visited a place more than once. Because I always ***have to experience something new*** *on a holiday. And preferably a big city. Because I think travelling is about tasting* ***different tastes****, smelling* ***different smells, mixing up*** *languages with* ***different people****. (77)*

We came here because we have never been before…I think. And also to ***experience something different****. (34)*

This second type of goal setting does not (explicitly) include an opposite reference point, such as everyday life or environments from which visitors wish to escape. Rather, the general quest for variety takes form through discovering new destinations, encountering different people and understanding different cultures. This exploratory behaviour and the need to know, learn and understand the world around us is described by Berlyne (1966) as an innate, in-born motivation. This is not the simple goal-oriented search for information assumed by the IPM, but a complex exploration driven by miscellaneous motives. Exploratory behaviour is sometimes explained as a form of play, which can also be interpreted as having a restitutive role (Cohen 1985, Lett 1983), i.e. making tourists fit to return to home and work. But for some people, the search for knowledge can also be coupled with a search for adventure, a motivational force referred to as the "Ulysses factor" (Anderson 1970, Pearce 1988). Probably the best known "Ulysses-type" visitors are mountaineers or scuba-divers, who strive for excitement by engaging in extraordinary physical challenges. However, as shown in the excerpts, opportunities for novelty, uncertainty and risk were also available to many visitors to Bornholm.

We ***go after the spontaneous experience****, and the nature, very much the nature. That's why we come with our own sailing boat. It gives a* ***different view*** *on the country, because we see it from the water, otherwise, you always see it from the roads. Now, we wanted to see it from the sea, by sailing around Denmark,* ***this is a whole new experience of Denmark,*** *when you have to see your homeland from the outside before you come into land. And once you come to moor in a harbour, you* ***don't know what…****where you can eat, where you can sleep,* ***you don't know anything, there's***

***nothing planned**, and you don't know where you can moor. So it is very **spontaneous and exciting**, I think. (56)*

The simultaneous appearance of tension-reducing and arousal-seeking motives in the data reconfirm an established, dual motivation mechanism in human behaviour. This is outlined by Maslow (1968) whose revised theory of human needs is also used to describe motivation in leisure (Hartman 1979), as seeking an optimum level of activation between boredom and stress. Based on this, Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) propose a dialectical model of tourist motivation, describing parallel individual and social motives of escaping everyday environments and seeking other, intrinsic rewards. Holidays can be regarded as opportunities to change everyday life and to find a natural balance between boredom and stress. In this way, humans can achieve a mental state of absolute pleasure, also described as *flow experience* (Csíkszentmihályi 1990) which matches the hedonic task definition of holiday consumption. The flow experience is characterised by a loss of self-consciousness and complete immersion in the activity, which is therefore difficult to achieve by goal-oriented behaviour. Flow and absolute pleasure cannot be achieved through purposeful endeavour, neither can one consciously balance stress and boredom (the effort of no effort: Tao) (Hoff 1998). The next section demonstrates that visitors develop different strategies to create circumstances under which they might achieve these dialectic goals.

5.1.3. Designing strategies

The previous section explored the concept of goal-setting, reconfirming the anthropological view of holidays as opportunities where visitors can step out from their everyday environment and lifestyle. Interviewees often defined the difference between their ordinary and extraordinary life through the concept of freedom. In fact two different kinds of freedom were identified in the excerpts, one relating to *freedom from* everyday constraints and lifestyle and the other relating to having the *freedom to* encounter unanticipated or new things.

The concept of designing strategies refers to *how* visitors went about the pursuit of holiday goals by exploiting this freedom. Designing strategies are frameworks by which visitors realised their quest for variety, whether through tension reduction or stimulation seeking. The designed framework underpinned the entire decision-making and consumption process, and was reflected in phases such as information gathering, choosing and specifying activities.

Planning and autonomy

There appeared to be two strategies by which visitors could shape their holiday designing strategies: planning and autonomy. *Planning* refers to the extent to which visitors specified the holiday programme beforehand, ranging on a continuum between elaborate and unrestrained planning. *Autonomy* describes the locus of control and responsibility of the trip, being either external (a professional travel agent) or internal (self-reliant). The combination of these strategies produced a framework of four basic means of attaining

pleasurable holiday goals, each of which interpreted ‘freedom’ and ‘change’ in different ways (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1. Freedom-exploiting strategies in holiday design

Low planning (Being)	1. Freedom through independence combined with not doing anything	4. Freedom from responsibility combined with spontaneity
High planning (Striving)	3. Freedom through independence combined with doing as planned	2. Freedom from responsibility combined with guarantee
	High autonomy	Low autonomy

For instance, tension-reducing goals could be achieved through high autonomy and low planning (quadrant 1), i.e. by deciding not to decide anything. Freedom was defined in the *sense of independence* from external constraints, and was exploited in the activity “we do as we like”:

> *We **just take every day as it comes**. If it’s raining, we’ll go to town for shopping. We don’t want to be stressed over seeing everything at once, **we can finely do with** one thing per day, or **whatever we feel like**, whatever we think we have time for. (73)*

> *We have not really planned anything yet. We were talking about what we are going to feel like doing during the day. That’s why it is so special about living in your own house, I mean the summerhouse, because you can decide the planning of the day…You are **not dependent on any schedules**. You can decide whether you stay in bed until eleven o’clock or whether you get up very early. I think it’s a big advantage. (7)*

However, in most cases this independence from plans was more perceived than real. The following respondent for instance, appraised the *opportunity* of not making plans, but realised that it might not characterise the entire duration of their stay:

> *We don’t make exact plans. Today for example we decided to stay around Rønne, but when we saw the weather was nicer than expected, we came over here, but still not sure, whether we are going to go over to Christiansø or not. [Interviewer: Well, the boat has just left…] Yeah, but we can still catch one boat in Allinge, but no…no concrete plans. We never really make concrete plans. **But once in a while there will be some**. (71)*

Another strategy of tension reduction involved choosing external control combined with high planning (quadrant 2). Freedom here meant the *delegation of planning responsibility* (either to a professional organisation or to acquaintances or family members) in order to assure the comfort or security of the trip. Often this strategy was made in order to have some guarantee of accomplishing the holiday, either in terms of its basic arrangements (transport and booking) or of sightseeing:

> *It is a bit problematic if you want both a ferry ticket for the car and hotel room in the high season. You **can't really manage it yourself**, because you can risk to reserve a hotel room and then it turns out that the ferry is fully booked for that day. Or the other way round. That's why you need to use Bornholmstrafikken or one of the travel agents on the island to manage both things once. (69)*

Having a guide with them implied that visitors could get easy access to attractions and information about them without having the trouble of preparing an itinerary:

> *The good thing about such a bus tour is, that **you will get a lot of things to know** from the guides. And you **can see** things **you wouldn't have seen** unless you profoundly read after in the books before departure. The driver is also the guide and he's perfect to tell about everything. He knows Bornholm by heart and he's also funny. (28)*

> *It is a big help to have a guide who can tell about the sights, otherwise you have to take some brochures on your own, and you still you don't get as good information as with a coach trip. Here you really get your experience: **you are being transported around in a bus and the guide tells you how it happened, how things were like, how and how long time ago the houses were built and so on.***

Leaving the control of the trip to somebody else (perceived as experts) reduced visitors' anxiety about being unable to manage arrangements on their own.

> *It was my father-in-law, who always planned the trips around the island, and even after twenty years he could still show us something new. I mean, **we'd have never found** these small natural sights or tiny arts and crafts workshops in the countryside **on our own**. (3)*

On the other hand, visitors seeking high stimulation chose a combination of autonomy (internal control) together with a precise planning (quadrant 3). Freedom here was again about visitors' *independence*, i.e. doing whatever they liked, but it was *actively exploited*. This was expressed in the careful planning and preparation of activities:

> *In the guide we saw very many things…actually everything what is to be found here. I read in a book, the churches, the menhirs, and the coastal paths. We **wanted to see everything, so we prepared everything.** We planned everything from a guide book and*

saw the photos what to visit, so we have already been informed… We were also engaged a lot in reading those…brochures. (14)

*We **want to see as** much as possible. We **knew already at home** what we wanted to visit…all the attractions: Hammershus, Almindingen, the round churches and the small towns. And of course, taste the smoked fish. (34)*

*We **would like to** visit Hammershus, glass blowers, herring smokehouses, round churches, Christiansø, Brandesgårdshaven [an amusement park]… you see, **there are many things on the programme**, hopefully we **can achieve** everything. (5)*

*I would say it is a bit stressing, you really **have to make a lot of things** the first day. And we read so much in the brochures, we wanted to see everything. We **have to get to** Christiansø, but I'm **not sure we can accomplish** that. We need to clean the summerhouse, too… (16)*

Visitors whose strategies fell into this quadrant used verbs such as *want, wish* and *have to*, to describe conotative activities. Danish visitors often used the verb 'nå' designating accomplishment or achievement. Like the quadrant 2 visitors, these interviewees strove to get to know the island and they fully planned each day with activities. The excerpts below show that the over-planned holiday was a manifestation of useful and meaningful activities: visitors were unable to escape from the opinion of their peers in everyday life (i.e. neighbours, acquaintances):

*Yes, it suits me well with some active holidays, to experience something, to see something, once you are away. It would be **totally crazy** to come over here and **lay on a beach** for five days and then go home. I could do that at home, you see…*

*We would like to **experience something,** we would like **to tell it to people** when we got home, that…hmmm…we have seen that and that. (59)*

Visitors were also often concerned to arrange a useful and educational holiday for their children:

*We would like to **show our kids** Denmark, before travelling abroad. Bornholm is the last of the small islands **we have to see**… We go out every day to see something. You see, **we won't go out without …without preparation**, when you go out, **you know** that you **have to see that and that**. (33)*

This striving for 'useful holidays' can be explained by the Protestant ethic (Weber 1930), still pervasive in the thinking of most North Europeans. One must not pursue pleasure solely in itself, and even leisure time should be consecrated to something useful. However, holidays, tourism and travel are about consuming products that are in some sense unnecessary (Urry 1991), because they supposedly generate pleasurable experiences,

unlike the typical activities of everyday life. Thus, spending time off work may be justified by self-development or the education of children, assured by precisely planned holiday schedules.
A quite different approach was noticed in strategies combining external locus of control and low planning (quadrant 4). Here, instead of delegating planning tasks, visitors adopted a 'stochastic scenario', leaving the responsibility of planning and choice to chance. Freedom was exploited by relaxing control and enhancing stimulation by prompting spontaneous events and situations.

> *Yes, we just come here to book. We* ***never phone to a camping beforehand****,* ***we always go to the camping directly*** *and ask there if there's anything free we stay there. It can be a bit more difficult with children…because when you're two you can stay for a night in the car or continue until you find one, but you can't do the same with children. This time we saw a flyer from camping on the boat. So we just came in and said hello. If it had been fully booked, we would have gone to another place. (16)*

> *We really like to arrange the travel ourselves, because we really would like* ***to see something****…****not to walk in an Indian file****. Those travelling with buses* ***always go mincing*** *[imitating with his fingers on the table]…'We depart in a hour', the guide would say [laughing]. If we 'd like to see something* ***we'd like to have the time to see*** *it. That's why it's good with a caravan, you can almost do what you feel like. Because we never book anything in advance from home, we always* ***go for a real experience****. We* ***manage ourselves****. That's* ***more exciting****. (29)*

> *We like to come on our own, to see how people live and participate in their life and activities. If you go on your own****, you're 100% present****, while if you are a bus tourist, you're only taken and brought to places* ***there is an interface****. There is a lot of dead time and you are taken to shops and parking lots, where the guide gets his percentage. (91)*

> *We shall* ***hopefully*** *eat at many restaurants, but* ***we don't know yet*** *where. We will* ***just go in if we feel like****. The distances are small, so we will drive around every day and* ***maybe find one that suits*** *us. (5)*

In contrast with quadrant 1, these visitors wanted an active holiday, but without predetermining the framework of the experience. Some yacht tourists brought this to such an extreme that not even the choice of destination had been decided by the departure date:

> *We* ***did not even know we were going to come to Bornholm****, so there is not very much arrangement in it. The idea was to go to another place. It is* ***the wind that determines our holiday****, which is in one way quite nice: there is nothing planned, we take the itinerary* ***as the wind blows****. In principle we should have sailed to Øland and Gotland, but then we met a couple who gave us some maps of Bornholm, and we had a strong wind from the North…that's why we ended up here. (56)*

The role of destination in the strategy

Looking at strategies more closely it was noticed that visitors had different ideas about the role of Bornholm in their holiday. The most fundamental difference is between two specific types of holiday strategies. One strove to see and discover Bornholm (regarding the destination as the *goal* of the holiday) while the other used Bornholm to get away or to get together with the family (regarding the destination more as a *means* of the holiday). Consider the examples of striving/being strategies in respective order:

> *I have never been to Bornholm, although I have been to many places abroad. I even lived in India for a long time. But* ***never on Bornholm*** *on this wonderful island, it is a* ***flaw in my upbringing****. So* ***we just had to see the island****,* ***and see all the famous sites****: Hammershus, Gudhjem, the fish smokehouses and the rocking stones. (95)*

> *It is a beautiful island, lovely nature, nice, calm environment, the kids can play freely with other kids. But most of all* ***it is just like any other*** *holiday islands far away, we did* ***not especially come to this place****. We could have as well travelled to Øland or Gotland. Bornholm* ***only provides the frames****, we make the programmes ourselves. (64)*

Striving and being strategies could be matched by Mayo and Jarvis' (1981) description of "sightseers" and "vacationers". Their sightseers satiated curiosity by busily collecting facts and impressions about a destination, while vacationers spent little or no effort absorbing knowledge about a destination's people or culture. However, as both sightseers and vacationers can be found among visitors to Bornholm, this typology is more likely a differentiation than a distinction. In choosing a destination some visitors emphasise socio-psychological motives, while others highlight destination-related factors (referred to as 'push' and 'pull' factors by Dann 1977), yet these are complementary aspects on a motivational continuum and would be unlikely to yield distinct visitor categories. Arguably, tourist motivation and pre-holiday activities are far too complex to be predicted by dichotomous models, emphasising one or two main features. The next concept, *trading-off*, was an empirical finding which illustrated this complexity.

Trading-off: managing the conditions of strategy

The overall holiday enjoyment strategy was influenced by other personal or environmental factors, such as familiarity with the destination, socio-demographic status or temporal constraints. Visitors who initially subscribed to a certain strategy might therefore end up by trading it off for another strategy, thanks to the specific conditions of the holiday in question. The trade-off model is based on the assumption that visitors are often faced with a series of imperfect options. In arriving at a decision, an individual sacrifices (trades off) a desired level of a particular attribute in order to obtain a certain level of a different attribute (cf. Moutinho 1987). Making choices of this kind between different strategies led to a blurring of borders between the different quadrants. For instance a striving, active and

autonomous couple chose a more relaxed and spontaneous strategy because of their previous knowledge of the island:

> *We have been around whole Bornholm. But we don't plan anything, only if we feel like a driving tour. Because we* ***have come so many times****, that there's absolutely* ***nothing we have to achieve*** *or see especially this year. Things we did not make this year,* ***we can make next year****. But we have still not seen the whole island,…even though we come every year, we find something we have not seen before. We just drive around by car and* ***catch a glimpse*** *of something we have not seen before. (3)*

Other visitors traded off independence and renounced their usual, self-reliant designing strategy, because they perceived age or transport problems as restricting factors:

> *It is* ***beyond my possibilities*** *to come on my own, because I am old and don't own a car. But we did that while my husband was alive, it was lovely. We* ***really travelled around****, normally on camping tours and biking a lot. But I no longer have this possibility…(24)*

> *We have to experience something new on our holidays…Unfortunately,* ***we are not so mobile*** *as we were in our young days, we can't see as much as we would like to. (77)*

On the other hand, external factors, such as temporal constraints could make visitors trade off an originally passive, unrestrained framework for a more active strategy:

> *I have just realised that what we do here is quite American, isn't it…I mean driving around and seeing Bornholm just like that…huhh, up to some waterfall…home again…up to the Art Museum, …home again. It's fun but we normally don't like to have all our holidays to be like that. We* ***had to adapt ourselves*** *to the time we had: actually we only had four days. So it is necessary to plan everything from home. (58)*

5.2. Experiential activities

Relatively few studies in tourism and leisure research deal with the actual consumption experience itself. The majority focus on pre-purchase motivation, beliefs or attitudes as central aspects (for example, Johnson and Thomas 1992, Pearce 1993, Dann 1981), providing theoretical support and information for tourism planners and marketers. Thus, the core of the consumption process (e.g. perception, cognition and interpretation of the product) is often neglected (for notable exceptions see Arnould and Price 1993, Arnould *et al*. 1998, Prentice *et al.* 1998). This section presents an analysis of the activities that visitors actually undertook while staying on the island. It also discusses the particular mental states and processes that characterised the experiential part of holiday 'consumption' and examines how visitor perception is organised. The results are discussed in a multi-disciplinary environment, based on cognitive psychology and a cultural–anthropological perspective.

5.2.1. Journeying: spatial and temporal pacing

Experiential activities extracted from visitor accounts were often (but not solely) related to spatial displacement, and it was possible to define main visitor itineraries (corridors) on Bornholm by tracking the objects (i.e. attractions, accommodation and catering providers, etc.) of the narrated experience. Most visitors chose a clockwise itinerary around the coast, starting from and returning to Rønne. Only a few took journeys inland on the island, and these were directed either to the round churches or to the highest point of Bornholm. (For a map, see Appendix 5).

The process by which visitors acquired their experiences during their stay on Bornholm was hence coined 'journeying'. Journeying refers to the process by which visitors get to know the physical and social environment they encounter; however, it is more than just a description of physical movement at the destination. Variations in the spatio-temporal organisation of the journey often reflected different holiday strategies. For example, high planning and 'striving' visitors moved around the island a lot. A whole spectrum of different verbs were used to express this familiarisation process. For example, some visitors used only active, motion-related verbs (such as *go, visit, walk, drive around, etc.*):

> *…we **made** long trips, and saw a lot on the island. **Walked** around the whole Hammer peninsula, and been to all the other hiking places: Almindingen, Slotslyngen and Helligdomsklipperne. We **went** down to Sorte Gryde, too some days ago, a real cave on the coast. We have also **visited** Østerlars round church, the rocking stone and the ruins of Lilleborg. (37)*

> *Yesterday we **drove around** the island, so we saw Allinge, Tejn, Gudhjem, Svaneke, fantastic places. We **strolled** around, **been to** the smokehouse, bought an ice-cream. Then we **continued** to Dueodde…the kids just **ran** down to the beach and **jumped** into the water. (17)*

Other, low planning, or 'being' type visitors seemed to receive experiences in a more passive way and with less spatial movement. In their accounts, there were only a few words denoting motion. Instead they used verbs like *be, stand, sit, know, become* :

> *We are **doing nothing** really…just take it quietly and easily, you know, catching up on reading and do things like that. Just **enjoying the essence of being** here, **sitting** in the sunshine, breathing this air here. (81)*

> *We **talk** a lot with the people who operate the Christiansø-ferry. We **talk** to them every day. We are actually **getting to know** them…It is **quite cosy**…to get to know them . (98)*

*It is the **water**, I mean, the **sea**, I mean the **view**…but mostly it's about **this air** here. If you come from a big city, you **can totally cleanse your lungs** here and **hear the waves**…just **stand** here and **stare** at the sea for hours. (77)*

There were also variations in the temporal pacing and scheduling of the journey. Some 'quantity-oriented' visitors demonstrated a high intensity of experience acquisition, visiting a large number of attractions during their stay, while 'low intensity' visitors went through a process of immersion by taking the journey at a lower pace. Consider the following examples:

*I have just realised that what we do here is quite American, isn't it…I **mean driving around and seeing Bornholm just like that…**huhh, up to some waterfall…home again…up to the Art Museum, …home again. (58)*

*One mustn't drive through the island with a bus in 3-4 days. You **need to take your time**, otherwise you don't see a thing. The best way to open up Bornholm is by bike or by foot. Because you just take your time **quietly and easily…** you can **take any path**…follow the coastline or follow the valleys in the middle of the island. (92)*

Despite differences in spatial spread and temporal intensity between journeying activities, 'active' and 'passive' visitors did not necessarily match the vacationer/sightseer typology of Mayo and Jarvis (1981), in the sense that they are not exclusive categories describing the primary holiday motive (i.e. recreation–relaxation *or* visiting attractions). Rather, these represented different manners by which visitors satisfied their exploratory desires. Although some holiday makers demonstrated little spatial activity, or low intensity, this seemed to indicate just another way of fulfilling their needs to know and understand (for example, the interviewee talking about a process of 'getting to know' local people).

5.2.2. Tourist self-image and orientation

A more precise explanation of journeying can be given by the concepts of tourist self-image and self-orientation, both defined in terms of the individual's experience of, and relationship with, the destination. Tourist self-image refers to the visitor's perception of himself/herself in relation to the destination and its inhabitants. For example, 'insider' visitors identified themselves with or acted similarly to locals, while 'outsiders' openly admitted their role as tourist or visitor and acted accordingly. In the following excerpts, there was a noticeable difference between outsiders, who regarded the host–guest relationship as an adversary encounter, and insiders, who saw themselves as being 'one of the natives'. Consider the following excerpts:

*We haven't learnt any people to know… unfortunately we don't speak Danish. But you only talk very shortly to them, in the shops, anyway. And I think Bornholmians are very **closed**, the receptionist started to **greet us only after the third day**. You would*

expect that they are more open in such places…but probably they are just tired of tourists now. [end of season] (65)

The best smokehouse on the whole island is in Årsdale, Hjorth's smokehouse. You can't get a better smoked eel anywhere else. Probably it's not big and quite so fancy place, but we are not interested in those touristy places. In Årsdale, ***only the locals know this smokehouse and shop there****, that's why we go there, too. (62)*

Coming to Bornholm ***means that we're coming home****…to* ***familiar places and friends****. Every Saturday, we go to the market in Svaneke. We meet a lot of acquaintances…for example Torben Lau, the horse-wagon driver. I have been knowing him since he was a little boy. His father was a policeman and a good friend of mine. (3)*

Orientation refers to the direction of the holiday experience. Inward-oriented visitors focused on themselves or their group in their narratives, while outward-oriented visitors were mostly interested in the destination and the locals. Inward-oriented visitors centred their activities around 'getting together', while outward-oriented visitors were keen on 'getting familiar':

What I like is that you can be alone and ***you can be with your family****. There are not as many people as on Mallorca, it's sickening ! …We have already said that Bornholm is the frame that's why we came, but it's also important* ***that we are together with the children.*** *But still, it's important how the nature is, how you like the landscape. (64)*

We hoped that there are going to be a ***bit more life*** *in the evenings. We* ***wanted to talk with a few more people****, go into small pubs…such small and open pubs where you can sit and get a cup of coffee and listen to some music, and so on. But everything was closed… (95)*

These different perceptual foci are considered in a later discussion of how visitors collected and perceived their experiences, and they may help to explain why visitors attributed importance to certain elements of the holiday and how they assessed the achievement of holiday goals (see also Chapter 6). Before this, the characteristics of visitor perception are examined in detail. Perception and the incorporation of experiences provide the basis for all evaluation and judgmental processes, and thus it is essential to understand the processes of knowledge acquisition.

5.2.3. Sensory and extrasensory perception

Perception is the process by which the individual selects, organises and interprets stimuli in a coherent way, in order to produce meaningful relationships with his/her current knowledge. A stimulus is any piece of information which affects the five senses. What an individual observes and assimilates not only depends on the external stimulus object or sensations but also on personal factors, such as his or her own system of values and needs

determined by a social context (Howard and Sheth 1969, Engel and Blackwell 1982). The first stage of perception is selective filtering (Moutinho 1987) in which inputs are compared with previous information. During this process it is believed that uninteresting and irrelevant stimuli are screened out, while complex and novel stimuli are retained for further interpretation.

The verbs visitors used to describe their holidays indicated a strikingly high level of sensory and cognitive activity across all interviews. Visitors demonstrated interest in mapping, and collecting information on, every destination-related aspect, using one or more of the five senses. The perception of certain novel factors of the destination was described precisely, whether the latter were pleasant or unpleasant:

Visual perception

I think the beach in Dueodde, it was a very nice picture, very white sand. Very clean, and I liked to ***watch the shades****…the* ***different colours*** *of the water: blue, green and turquoise. (7)*

The landscape is very ***appeasing****, it's very* ***nice just to look at*** *the hills and the coastline, the colours of the island, the houses and the meadows. (4)*

Auditory perception

There was something quite strange in the evenings, during our walks. All of a sudden we ***could hear a siren screaming*** *from Nexø harbour. At the end we found out that it was the fog-horn, because there was a thick fog on the sea. (12)*

It is so ***nice to listen to the local dialect*** *when you walk on the streets, you hear the real dialect, I think it's lovely. (67)*

Olfactory perception

The ***smell from the rotting seaweed*** *down at Balka …was a bit* ***appalling****. Oh, the beach is just* ***stinking*** *… and full of seaweed. […] And those days with Eastern wind…we could just smell it far up in Snogebæk. It was terrible! (30)*

It's also the ***air*** *here…it completely* ***cleanses your lungs****,[…] and I can just stand here for hours, listening to the waves,* ***smelling*** *the water. (69)*

Tactile perception

We saw different things, but I think the most interesting was an old sawing workshop in a garden, a sawing machine that was more than 200 years old and was operated by a water-mill. And you could just walk around and ***touch these old things****, the wooden*

*parts were **smooth, shiny and worm-eaten**. And the machine was still working, amazing! (11)*

Taste perception

*We drove up to Allinge smokehouse to taste such a "Sun above Gudhjem", it was a bit disappointing. Because they keep the fish on the cool counter, so **it is icy cold**… **almost hurts on the teeth** when you eat it. (38)*

The presence of heightened senses may be explained by Langer's (1987) theory of cognitive minimising, which defines concepts of mindlessness vs. mindfulness. Individuals react mindlessly in routine situations in which stimulus information is perceived as irrelevant, or is something to which they have been exposed repeatedly in the past. Customary situations are enacted according to instinctive scripts or scenarios that are deeply rooted in our socio-cultural background (cf. Solomon *et al.* 1985) In contrast to an idle mental state, mindful activities entail active information processing, triggered by novel or unexpected situations, such as variety and surprise.

Table 5.1. Frequency of verbs denoting sensory activity in the interviews

Verbs denoting sensory activity	Text units (paragraphs) (%)	
Visual (see, look, watch)	546	(31.6%)
Auditory (hear, listen)	25	(1.5%)
Olfactory (smell)	17	(0.9%)
Tactile (feel, touch)	3	(0.1%)
Taste (taste)	120	(6.9%)

Sight was by far the most used of the five senses (Table 5.1), as reflected in extensive use of the term 'see' or its synonyms. For example, instead of 'visiting' a place, interviewees said: *We are going to **see** the other two round churches and Christiansø: some of the things we haven't **seen** last time.* This supports the notion that sensory experience is expressed and organised around visual perception in Western cultures, sight being the dominant way to acquire knowledge and to communicate (Classen 1993).

A persistent claim of Western thinking since the Enlightenment is that sensory experience is purely a physical mechanism. Locke and other empiricists suggest that all information about the physical world enters the mind through the five senses, providing the observer with objective environmental data. In other words, sensory perception is believed to be a natural/objective process rather than a cultural/spiritual one. However, the following excerpts demonstrate that visitors used more than just the five 'objective' senses during their experiences:

*Historical things became important for me lately. I mean, I was not dragged around in my childhood to see these things. But now, I feel…**ruins captivate me**…I also bought a brochure of Hammershus. One becomes very fascinated of how people lived in the past. It is just such a **powerful feeling** to go around these great buildings. You feel that **it comes very near** to you. You can't stop thinking that people once were going*

around the same place where I stand now. It is quite difficult to put a word for it. But it moves me…you can go alone and dream about these things, you can go and speculate… (97)

We have also driven around and saw the menhirs and the rock carvings. Louisenlund, for example is quite fantastic. There is ***something about*** *these stones,* ***as if they were opening up*** *for you. And they stand inside a forest, they get a relationship to the trees that grow up around them. It is a very different atmosphere, very fascinating…it is attracting us like a magnet. (28)*

Here, the distinctions between senses and feelings were blurred and dissolved in a holistic description of the subjective experience. These 'extrasensory' perceptions were different from simple cognitive responses, because visitors based them on a *personal* connection between themselves/their life and the stimulus object in an activated or aroused mental state. They demonstrated high involvement with the object of 'visual' consumption: their excitement evoked by encountering these sites shines through the narratives.

These excerpts also illustrated that sensory perceptions were ordered by emotions and cultural values, not only by a mental response to novel stimuli. Visitors described the solitary contemplation of attractions, claiming to engage in a private, spiritual relationship with these objects. This is what Urry terms romantic 'the romantic gaze' (1990, p. 45), where information gathered by a physical sense (typically vision) is processed by such inward senses as instinct, imagination and fantasy (Classen 1993). These attractions do not simply provide aesthetic pleasure, but also provoke visitors to make intuitive shortcuts in their cultural knowledge. (The object of the tourist gaze will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6.)

5.2.4. Saturation

Perceptions of novelty and difference can be expected to diminish after repeated encounters with the destination. However, some regular visitors rejected this:

We are looking forward to come here every time. It is ***different every time****, even* ***though we come to the same place****, it's cosy and a good experience. It's* ***never the same****. It is because we do not only come to see things but also to be together with the kids in a different way, we enjoy* ***each other's company in different situations****. (72)*

They retained the sense of difference, because their journeying focus was internally (group) oriented. In contrast, other, externally oriented return visitors consciously arranged their trip in order to maintain the thrill of a novel experience:

We went to Hammershus ***three times to see it from a different perspective****…we hiked around it in rain, sunshine and at sunset. And it was startling each time. (14)*

*We like Bornholm so much that we decided **to go there in different seasons**. So we have been here in spring, August and September…and **now we try** early summer. (4)*

Another type of repeat visitor carefully checked out every attraction: *We look at the map and see whether there are any small details we haven't seen. So we come back to take some extra trips to see the small, special things. (37)* Having followed up all the attractions and collected all the 'trophies' of the island (after 3-5 visits), these visitors arrived at a point of saturation, and lost all further interest in Bornholm:

*I don't think I'll ever come back to Bornholm. Having seen it for the fifth time now, I have **seen enough**. I feel in a way that I saw everything here that is **worth to see**. It is not to criticise the island, but I'd also like to see other things, other places. I **got satiated** of Bornholm, that's all. (37)*

The size of the island was often perceived as a limiting factor for visitors primarily pursuing novelty in their holidays. They perceived the entertainment value of the island only in terms of tourist sights and attractions.

*This holiday was lovely…very positive. But I think, it's not a place to come back **year after year** for those who want to see something. The island is **too small** for that. Bornholm **does not change**: we've been here 32 years ago and then 16 years ago, so now we **couldn't be bothered** with Bornholm any more, because it **does not change**…you **see the same things every time**. Probably it's good enough for people just wanting to lie on the beach. (46)*

*If you have been to Bornholm before, I think, **there are limits to how many times** you can visit Hammershus and still believe that it's exciting. Of course you could visit the exhibition to **get something out of it**. (73)*

5.3. Processing activities

The second phase in the perception process is to organise new (and relevant) information into one's own model of reality. This interpretation implies that individuals take a stance towards the stimuli, accepting, rejecting or modifying them to conform with personal meanings. The interviewees in this study also attempted to integrate their perceptions into some vague context, by creating links or distinctions based on previous knowledge. This section examines how visitors made sense of sensory and extrasensory information collected during the journey.

5.3.1. Updating by comparison

Sensory narratives often contained colourful comparisons, where the perception of specific objects or events was related to intuitive reference points such as 'home', 'other destinations', 'earlier holidays' or 'anticipated image'. The comparison basis could vary from tangible aspects, such as landscape, townscape or people to intangible factors

including lifestyles and social behaviour - even in the same interview. Comparison statements often focused on 'difference' alone, without having any explicit positive or negative evaluation:

*It is **different** than the rest of Denmark, different nature, different environment. It is **special** because it is a cliff island. For us, coming from Jutland, the nature in North Bornholm is very **uncommon**, it's **not what we are used to**. While the South is a bit more like the West Coast…it is familiar…you know, with dunes and sand. (19)*

*We tried the smoked fish. First time, we **wondered why** they put salt on it, because it's so salty anyway. I found that **quite strange**…never mind, it's **different**! (6)*

These comparative statements seemed to arise as retrospective assimilation triggered by a particular experience. Sometimes they only functioned as a cognitive correction, i.e. to systematise previous impressions or predictions of novel information:

*The people **look different …**They are **paler**, their heads and faces seems **smaller** than at home - When you think about Danes, the Scandinavians, you always imagine them as tall blond and very sun-tanned. But they are not. They are short and pale [laughing]… (85)*

Updating is about ascertaining facts, so the comparison between perceived and reference objects did not necessarily result in better/worse evaluations. In this sense, the process of incorporating novel holiday experiences was a fact-synthesising learning activity, during which individuals created cognitive responses to environmental stimuli (cf. Berlyne 1966). The perception and assimilation (updating) of novel information could be regarded as a means by which visitors adapted to, and became acquainted with, unknown or different environments.

5.3.2. Associative learning

This extraordinary learning process of visitors was different from the operant conditioning and instrumental learning depicted in information processing models. It would be difficult to extract conscious thought patterns and schemes from these excerpts, and there was no evidence of visitors using logical analytical thinking while making sense of 'pale Danes' and 'over-salted fish'. These cognitive processes were more subconscious and private in nature, and thus rarely appeared overtly in verbal narratives. There was a whole gamut of personal fantasies and daydreams hiding within tourism consumption, which could sometimes be traced indirectly, such as:

*I really like Hammershus, but I don't know why... It's the cliffs, the raw, rough nature, it's different. And the history behind these ruins…you have a feeling that there were real battles here once upon a time. We **can sense these vibrations**, we are very sensitive, both of us, so we **can feel the past** a bit. We are able to… somehow…how I could express it…**feel the soul of the island**…(95)*

Sensations, pleasures and other hedonic components of the holiday experience were frequently paired with feelings, daydreams and fantasies to evoke a stream of associations. Some associative patterns or 'hierarchies' were retrievable from the visitors' narratives, for instance: ruins => history => sensing the past => feel the soul of the island. This kind of perceptual process was evidently evoked by the personal connection and contiguity with the perceived object, rather than by reinforcement of stimuli (cf. Osgood 1957).

Such emotionally loaded and subjective statements are more characteristic of right brain thought processing described by neural anatomists. Goldberg and Costa (1981) found evidence that the brain is capable of two fundamentally different ways of processing: one mode specialises in routine tasks (left brain), while the other is better at dealing with information that is novel and of high complexity (right brain). Researchers into adult cognition suggest that these two different modes of thinking are integrated in human thought, linking psychological and cultural adaptation. Labouvie-Vief (1990) proposes that adult thinking often adopts a dialectic organisation of two mental activities: 'logos' (i.e. rational, analytical and logical) and 'mythos' (i.e. creative, emotional and subjective) forms. 'Logos' and 'mythos' forms of knowledge are complementary, rather than hierarchical; and adults adapt to their environment by balancing between them, "with a continuous back-and-forth translation between holistic complexity and logical precision" (Labouvie-Vief 1990, p. 51). Visitor perception and the interactive processing of external information are far more complex than assumed by the Information Processing Model (Bettman 1979). (See section 5.4 for a detailed discussion.) Therefore, it is necessary to address emotions and feelings in terms of a cultural, 'mythos' context, rather than in terms of an analysis of attitudes (i.e. likes and dislikes) and preferences.

5.3.3. Assessing by comparison

Comparisons also served as a basis for evaluation. It was interesting though that the mere perception of difference was often grounds for a positive assessment:

> *The food was different from German [food], with so many sandwiches, coffee and a lot of tea…**I love it, it's different from where I come from**. (87)*

> *Bornholm is very different. All the small houses, they are really old houses…but the nature is also very different from home. You **can't stop looking at it and find ever new things**. A tree growing in crack in the cliffs, I really enjoy such small things…they **are different, that's important**. (70)*

In each case, the difference between novel and reference objects was of crucial importance. However, visitors did not specify a better/worse relationship in the assessment. Instead a perceived *lack* of difference between the home environment and Bornholm resulted in a negative assessment:

I was quite disappointed coming back as an adult. This new generation of Bornholmians is ***no longer different than city people****, [they are] maybe a bit higher educated, maybe higher paid, and they* ***don't live the traditional life, with farming and fishery****. Just like in Norway, the lifestyle is the same anyway. (12)*

Thus, the interpretation and assessment of information was constructed through difference, and was socially bound and systematised. This difference could be defined through combinations of environmentally bound and/or activity-related 'non-ordinariness'. The acknowledgement of difference manifested itself in four different ways in the interviews, focusing on either non-ordinary environments or non-ordinary activities. These are presented below (a-d).

a) Seeing a unique, particular icon of the destination

There are a few particular icons of Bornholm: Hammershus Castle, the round churches and the fish smokehouse chimneys, which have become stereotypes in the advertising of the island. Hammershus Castle turned out to be a key factor in visitor itineraries, 95 % of all interviewees saying they had visited this attraction:

We have been to Hammershus Castle ***every time*** *we visited Bornholm. It is a* ***'must' for every tourist:*** *it is about the history of the island and also about the history of Denmark. Probably it's not the ruin itself, but its dramatic and grandiose setting. (33)*

b) Seeing pre-established, particular (but not unique) signs of the destination

Other signifiers appear in visual and written media about Bornholm, but are not unique. They include small, half-timbered houses, cliffs, rocking stones and fishing harbours all of which can also be found at other Danish and South Swedish destinations. However, these strongly influenced visitor perception, as demonstrated in the following excerpts:

We went for a walk in Allinge, where the ***sea*** *was just* ***beneath*** *the* ***houses****, it was wonderful! And we spent an hour just looking at the* ***boats*** *coming in and out of the* ***harbour****. [giggling] (13)*

The houses…I really liked the ***small yellow and red houses*** *and these* ***chocolate-boxy*** *villages. In Gudhjem, we stood and stared into the* ***tiny windows*** *of a house, to see all these little things and sculptures they had inside. […] We also looked into the* ***tidy gardens****, and when the owner came out, we had to apologise: 'you must excuse us that we stare into your garden, but it is so beautiful that we can't help it'…(28)*

c) Exercising non-ordinary activities

These could be activities that directly contrasted with daily routines, or novel activities that could be related to Bornholm in some way:

*We **do things differently**, we wake up **when we want** to, we make breakfast **when we want** to, we **don't have to be on time**. There's no scheduled activities, we **have all the time we need** for hiking, biking and **being with the kids**. (64)*

*We absolutely **had to try the smoked fish,** we have heard so much of this lovely warm, smoked herring. You can say that is **special for Bornholm**…so we went to a little fish shop in a small fish village and **got a 'Sol over Gudhjem'** with raw egg-yolk. (73)*

d) Routine activities in an unusual context

Visitors were also very sensitive to situations where ordinary aspects of social life were undertaken in an unfamiliar environment:

*If you are on holidays, even the **sour daily duties** are not 'sour'. For example, I really like going shopping for breakfast, it's a kind of an **adventure** to **find the baker** in a foreign place and **negotiate all the different sorts of bread** they offer. And here they are very relaxed, they have time to help and to talk to you. (38)*

It was also interesting that they noticed locals doing quite ordinary tasks on the island:

*All the buildings are very well-kept. I **saw a lot of people painting** their houses and **working in the gardens**…and once started on something, they accomplish it thoroughly. I noticed that they prepare the walls by filling in the holes and chinks and then they paint it and finish it. There were also many windows changed this year. (20)*

Finding evidence of difference not only corresponded to original holiday goal-setting, such as escaping from everyday lifestyles and environments. The positive assessments below also indicated a cognitive link between vague tension reducing/stimulation seeking goals and the actual fulfilment of these goals, in a different and *better* environment than the reference place.

*I like Bornholm, it has friendly people. It's quiet here, no stress. Only by talking to the people, I think they are working people and very friendly. That is different from where we come from [Mainz, Germany]. There people are in hurry, **here you are in no hurry, little bit slower, little more friendly**. It's not too slow, it's just quiet and not hurrying, that's my point. (15)*

*I used to go on holidays alone quite often and I found in the Northern countries that travelling alone is a **much more relaxed** thing than going to the South. (6)*

*It's **not this bloody tourism** that you see in Southern parts of Europe…nice food, it's the Scandinavian mentality, the nice mentality, it's friendly, it's polite, but it's reserved… to a positive extent… (7)*

5.3.4. Assessing by affective marking

Logical cognitive processing was only one way by which visitors made sense of perceptual information. The interviews were particularly rich in expressive statements, representing immediate affective processing of incidents or cognitive comparisons. Responses conveyed a diversity of emotions along different directions and on different intensity (arousal) levels. Positive emotions varied from moderate pleasantness resulting from feelings of fulfilment to elation and delight elicited by surprise:

> *I just like **the essence of being** here, **just sitting and seeing the world go by**…the peacefulness of the place, the weather is good. (81)*

> *We had a **wonderful experience** on the view day at Kaffeslottet. **All of a sudden**, the day developed into a party…the hosts of the Gallery laid some tables, and offered a meal…it was very spontaneous…with torches and so on…people started to sing in Bornholmian and Swedish. There was a **fantastic atmosphere**. (56)*

Negative emotions were less easy to track, but it was possible to find moderate unpleasantness caused by boredom: *We **couldn't do anything**, the weather was simply too cold for that. We haven't even gone to the beach, the whole stay was **dull**. (67)* Irritable sensory experience evoked mixed feelings of unpleasantness and negative arousal, such as annoyance, distress or disappointment:

> *The rudeness of the tourists…it's **embarrassing**. They are just milling about… aimlessly…all over the road, when there is a pavement to walk on. They are **such a nuisance**…and they're peering into the windows. Absolutely **outrageous**! They think they own the world and they can look into anything! (85)*

Even at the end of the holiday stay, visitors vividly recalled events like these, and talked about their immediate emotional reactions to them (high affective arousal). This finding is consistent with affective marking theory (Cohen and Areni 1990), which maintains that incidents provoking strong affective responses leave 'markers' in episodic memory. Thus, affectively marked episodes may crucially moderate holiday assessment (c.f. Bitner *et al.* 1990). These incidents were noticed in the first place because they upset or did not match original holiday goals. Thus, the rationale behind assessments formed by cognitive comparisons or affective responses was similar. The evidence of difference prompted mental processing, and the direction of the assessment depended on whether visitors could implement their particular freedom-exploiting strategies.

5.3.5. Adapting the assessment

Other determinants (actual personal or environmental circumstances) often biased or hindered the successful achievement of holiday goals, as was demonstrated in the interviews. However, outcomes did not result in negative assessment. Rather, visitors tried to adapt to the new situation.

*The weather was really terrible, but you **can't do anything** about it. **But we manage ourselves**, my husband, our sons and I sailed many times, **we know how to let time pass by**. And we also had the right clothes. But it's true, you don't get so much out of the holidays as we could have. You just have to get yourself together and say, such is the weather and get the best out of it. Go to the swimming pool instead of the beach. Go to museums…there are lots of things we can do. (67)*

*We have **been sick most of the time** during our stay here, my son had a sore throat and my wife got a bad stomach, so we visited Rønne hospital a couple of times. We found out where it was, right [laughing]. **Never mind**, the doctor was really nice, we had a good chat with him. (46)*

Visitors consciously attempted to moderate the outcomes of such events, by claiming to have 'made the best of it'. These retrospective corrective statements revealed cognitive dissonance in visitors (Festinger 1957), who claimed that they had had a nice holiday after all. This phenomenon might also be explained by the fact that holidays are much awaited and anticipated, special events in life, that time-constrained leisure customers cannot afford to regard them as a failure.

5.4. Extraordinariness of holiday consumption behaviour: four propositions

Consumer behaviour is "the process of acquiring and organising information in the direction of a purchase decision and of using and evaluating products and services" (Moutinho 1987, p. 5.). Several models have been developed to describe this process, all taking the point of departure as the assumption that customers are rational thinkers aiming to maximise the utility of their choice and purchase (Howard and Sheth 1969). The Information Processing Model (Bettman 1979) sees customer choice as a sequence of cognitive activities, in which customers gradually develop an attitude system (i.e. an overall evaluation) towards the attributes of a product. Customers are thought to arrive at decisions by analytically weighing the salience of all attributes (Fishbein 1963) and assess products on their composite utilitarian and economic value.

One problem with the IP model is that it is based on behaviourist principles. It depicts the individual as a mechanistic thinker who logically processes various environmental and customer 'inputs' through an intervening response system (cognition–affect–behaviour) in order to generate outputs (decisions, evaluation, etc.) through a learning feedback loop (Howard and Sheth 1969). This model does not address experiential aspects of leisure and tourism products, such as fun, feelings and fantasies. Subjective experience has no legitimacy in this 'black box' model, which consequently cannot explain apparently irrational, emotionally driven or culturally based 'customer outputs'.

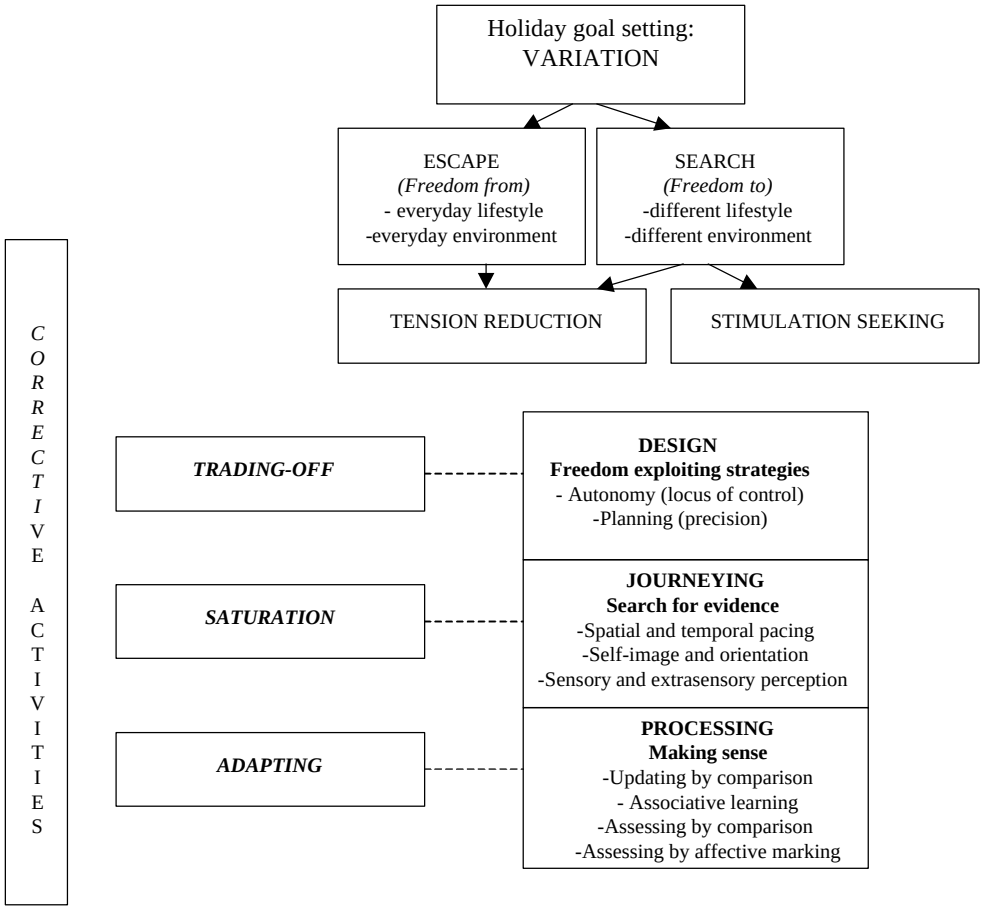
The other problem is that the IP does not acknowledge the customer's perspective of the leisure product. From this reductionist viewpoint, holiday consumption can be regarded as an irrational investment into a bundle of goods and services without material or economic return on purchase. From the visitor's point of view, the core product of tourism is the beneficial experience gained, and the return on the investment is intangible satisfaction. Yet it is dubious to describe it as goal-oriented behaviour (i.e. the pursuit of maximum satisfaction), because neither the benefits nor even the nature of these extraordinary experiences can be defined precisely before departure. Holiday visitors only express vague expectations and desires of anticipated benefits (e.g. indistinct predictions of atmosphere) because of the difficulty of verbalising subconscious flow experiences. Since symbolic, hedonic and aesthetic aspects are core ingredients in holiday products, this particular consumer behaviour must be approached from an experiential perspective that is phenomenological in spirit.

This chapter analyses the narrated experience of holiday visitors as experiential consumer behaviour, focusing on the various visitor activities that may influence evaluation of the tourism product. Four important propositions related to the phenomenon of holiday consumption can be extracted from the interviews. As this area is heavily discussed in sociology, cultural anthropology and psychology, the findings are summarised in a multidisciplinary environment. (For an overview, see Figure 5.2)

1. Holidays as sacred times, providing opportunities for change

It is a widely accepted notion that holidays, being out-of-the-ordinary events (Graburn 1983) play a specific role in human life. They offer a potential for spontaneous, unrehearsed and sometimes cathartic experiences, characterised by high levels of emotional intensity. Owing to their temporal boundaries, holidays are transitional and intense experiences (Nash and Smith 1991), implying that the perception and use of time takes potentially different dimensions. Visitors suspend everyday life routines, and thus claim to possess time for their lives (Ryan 1997) or to have experienced a curious elasticity of time (slower or faster flow of time). Morinis (1992) terms holidays 'sacred' occasions, based on a ritualistic spatio-temporal detachment from the everyday physical and social environment.

Figure 5.2. An overview of recounted holiday activities



In this sense tourism can be regarded as a modern, Western, mass rite of passage (Turner and Ash 1975). It includes a temporal break in normal life routines and a transitory stay in a *liminoid* (i.e. out of time and place) situation, and provides a licence to engage in activities that are opposite from the ordinary. This 'routinised non-routine' includes 'reversal' activities from work (hedonic pursuit of pleasure and uplifting, sensory–emotive gratification). Liminal experience also legitimises playful behaviour as well as enacting inverted socio-cultural roles contrasting with everyday social class patterns (social togetherness in communitas vs. societas relationships) (Gottlieb 1982). The adoption of different roles is often influenced by how individuals see themselves in relationship to the host community.

A modernist explanation for the universal quest of variation claims that this is a celebration of difference and diversity (MacCannell 1976). Seen from a functionalist

viewpoint, play, relaxation and reversal activities exerted during leisure time can be regarded as a 'pressure valve' for societal-environmental tensions (Glasser 1975). However, whether as a celebration of diversity or a relief through variation, the most important notion is that holidays provide *opportunities for change*.

2. Various strategies to exploit the freedom of change

Leisure-related tourism is a phenomenon of modern society: it is a marker of status and many regard it necessary for health (Urry 1990). It is made possible by discretionary time and discretionary income and provides individuals with a special perception of freedom, probably the most important achievement of modern societies. Within temporal, social and economic constraints (filters), individuals are given the opportunity to exploit this freedom by designing the framework of the holiday. During this activity, the choice of different factors will determine how visitors wish to accomplish change. This may take multiple forms, as demonstrated in section 4.1. Hence, in contrast with the early elitist critique of modern tourists as inconsiderate and superficial consumers of pristine destinations and indigenous cultures (Boorstin 1964, Turner and Ash 1975), there is no such thing as a single type of visitor.

There exists a wide variety of tourist typologies, but as each is based on a few characteristics, they are subject to limitations. Generally, they are adaptations from other contexts or highlight some parallels with other areas without empirical grounding (e.g. Cohen's (1972) modes of tourist experience is based on a correspondence with the religious pursuit of 'axis mundi'), thus their practical and conceptual value can be questioned. Because of the complexity of leisure consumption and tourism behaviour, there will probably never be a universal typology. Rather, it is the purpose of classification (motivation and choice studies, demand forecast or satisfaction measurement) that should determine which characteristics should be highlighted. This study focuses on visitors' assessment of the destination product, and thus visitors were differentiated by factors affecting perception.

3. Visitor perception is constructed through difference

Despite the multiplicity of the tourism experience, visitors all shared the feature of searching for evidence of difference. Urry (1990) claims that all touristic activity results from a basic 'binary division' between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Thus, visitors are sensitive to stimuli that in some way offer a distinctive contrast with everyday experiences:

A part of the tourism experience is to gaze upon or view a set of different scenes that are out of the ordinary. When we 'go away' we look at the environment with interest and curiosity. It speaks to us in ways we appreciate, or at least we anticipate that it will do so. In other words we gaze at what we encounter. […] What makes a particular tourist gaze depends upon what it is contrasted with, what the forms of the non-tourist experience happen to be. The gaze therefore presupposes a system of social activities and signs which locate the particular tourist practices, not in terms of some intrinsic characteristics, but

through the contrasts implied with non-tourist social practices, particularly based within the home and paid work. (pp. 1-2)

Apart from various sensory stimuli that induced pleasurable experiences, visitors expected a destination to possess features that substantially differentiated it from what they encountered in everyday life. Ways in which visitors experienced extraordinariness included seeing unique attractions or particular signs associated with the destination as well as exercising non-ordinary or routine activities in an unusual context. In all these four cases, the quality of gaze was sacred, long-anticipated and had specific notions of extraordinariness (Urry 1990).

This receptiveness to 'difference' characterised the entire holiday stay. All visitors seemed to engage in exploratory behaviour and were sensitive to novel or unexpected stimuli, which they processed 'mindfully' (Langer 1987). Active use of physical and inward senses to process perceptual and extrasensory information prompted individuals to reorganise their thought, which often entailed associative learning mechanisms. Visitors made sense of their experience by building creative associations between sensations, imagery and their feelings and fantasies. This right brain mental activity can also be termed 'mythos' thinking (Labouvie-Vief 1990). Mythos thinking treats reality subjectively from the inner self, and is typical in childhood thinking, while adolescents normally operate with an objective and universal reality, exercising analytical 'logos' processing, which rigidifies cognitive development. Later in adulthood, mythos thinking may once again become a dominant way of processing experiences (ibid.).

When visitors gaze at, immerse themselves in, or play with, 'the different', they not only observe a parallel life, but also reflect on their own life from 'outside' through comparative associations. They reorganise their 'logos' thinking in creative associations prompted by different environments and lifestyle, thus escaping from cognitive 'rigidification' (Labouvie-Vief 1990). In this sense, because of their special, mythos-dominated learning process, tourism activities may engender a mental youthfulness in customers. Cohen's (1985) and MacCannell's (1989) notions of *playful* tourists may provide further support for excessive mythos thinking during holidays.

4. Complex visitor assessment

The findings of this study demonstrate that visitors evaluated their experience on the basis of holistic perceptions of the destination, rather than on a selective assessment of choice, purchase and use of specific service offerings. This implies that the assessment of tourism service providers is more complex than assumed by the expectancy disconfirmation theory (Oliver 1980). Because expectations are vague and perceptions emotionally loaded, visitor satisfaction cannot be reduced to a chronological, cognitive comparison between expectations and perceptions of various product attributes. Furthermore, since the motivation for holiday consumption is not simply materialistic, products are not assessed by utilitarian criteria.

From this it follows that satisfaction needs to be defined more broadly for tourist experiences. For the present study, a broad conceptualisation was chosen, i.e. satisfaction was regarded as the individual's fulfilment response, which could be attributed to any aspect of the consumption experience. The general goal of visitor behaviour was the hedonic pursuit of pleasure and the search for new or different experiences, so it could be argued that visitors attributed the success of holidays by whether or not they achieved these goals. This 'matching activity' could be indirectly traced in the narratives; for example it was clear that visitors sought and perceived difference when they encountered various tangible and personal aspects of Bornholm.

It was found that covert daydreaming, anticipation and imaginative pleasure-seeking played a central role in visitors' accounts. Thus, satisfaction might depend on visitors' ability to fulfil or match pleasurable fantasies that they had already experienced in their imagination. All products and services, particularly in tourism carry symbolic meanings, and these may influence visitors' assessment of their experiences (Brown 1992, Dimanche and Samdahl 1994). However, these could not be retrieved from visitor accounts by focusing solely on psychological concepts of product choice and tourist behaviour. In order to assess what the encounter with Bornholm's artefacts and people meant to visitors, it was necessary to investigate their narratives from a particular phenomenological focus. The next stage of analysis (Chapter 5) examines the deeper symbolic (connotative) meanings of visitors' words and expressions about the destination and their holiday experiences.

6. The Virtual Journey: Symbolic Aspects of Destination Experiences

The previous chapter analysed the characteristics of visitors' activities undertaken during their holiday experience. It was found that the holiday experience was constructed from the interaction between visitors' mental organising schemes and the impact of the environment on their senses. Owing to the extraordinariness of the tourism 'product', which was constructed around liminoid experience (Turner 1974), visitor activities were characterised by the pursuit of difference, heightened sensory and extrasensory perception. The mental processing of holiday experiences was found to be often synthesised by a creative and subjective 'mythos' thinking, rather than by rational logic. Visitors' narratives indicated that they engaged in personal activities such as daydreaming and imaginative pleasure seeking and it was concluded that individuals did not buy holiday 'products' for what they *were*, but what they *meant* to them. As Dimanche and Samdahl noted (1994):

> *On a deeper level it is apparent that both leisure and consumption have a symbolic nature, that is much greater than either the activity or the purchase. (p. 121)*

The previous stage of analysis provided a general insight into what elicited the satisfaction of visitors. However, to analyse it in greater detail, a more holistic and phenomenological perspective was needed, which acknowledged socio-cultural and personal contexts of individuals' holiday experiences.

To date, only the analysis of language and image offers a virtual portal for accessing the fantasies and feelings underlying visitors' perceptions and assessment. Polkinghorne (1988) notes that stories and plots in narratives may reflect primary organising principles of human experience and reveal personal reference points used in evaluation processes. Another linguistic approach is the analysis of Barthesian mythologies, that is, the analysis of different layers of meaning in speech (see Chapter 4). A *mythology* is a second (meta-) language or system of interpretation underlying everyday language that people share in communication and perception (Barthes 1984). Mythologies can be regarded as generalised or exaggerated versions of people's perception of reality, which express commonly held views (common denominators) in the language of a certain culture (Johns and Tyas 1997). Doty notes that mythologies are essential linguistic frameworks or patterns signifying meanings in the self-expression of a society (Doty 1986).

Johns and Tyas (1997) suggest that mythological structures in visitor narratives may be appropriate for finding indications of personal experiences and meanings of service offerings. This position has been adopted in this chapter, which presents an analysis of the construction of meaning in visitor narratives, and of interpretive links among visitors' recollections, preconceptions and perceptions of a destination. The first part of the chapter (6.1. and 6.2.) presents a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of visitors' narratives about

their experience of encountering Bornholm, including various different destination mythologies. The second part of the chapter (6.3.) turns the focus of analysis to visitors' view of themselves, identifying various traveller mythologies. Finally, the importance of both kinds of mythologies is discussed (6.4.) in order to gain a more detailed understanding of visitors' product assessment.

6.1. Preconception

First, visitor narratives were searched for pre-experiential accounts of Bornholm. The comprehensive term, *preconceptions* was applied to these, to denote all kinds of subjective, vaguely defined notions and predictions about the destination. It should be emphasised that this concept is significantly different from *expectations*, as defined by researchers in consumer behaviour. Expectations are conceptualised as precise predictions of product attributes containing itemised normative standards (e.g. best brand norm, ideal and desired norm), which offer the basis for cognitive comparisons in product assessment (Zeithaml *et al.* 1993). Since visitors are unlikely to hold a common set of unanimous reference standards, more broadly shared common cultural denominators (preconceptions) were sought through the *connotation* of words.

It is known that visitors' perception of a holiday product is constructed through culturally determined and socially organised signs (Urry 1990). The preconceptions of visitors can manifest themselves in remarks about the tangible environment of a destination as well as the social context and rituals associated with holiday making (all of which are signs). At least one of these must be significantly different from the home environment, in order that visitors can claim extraordinariness (see analysis in Chapter 5). Hence, by looking at typical, recurring elements and regular comparisons with everyday settings, it was possible to identify a pattern of commonly held, idealised preconceptions of Bornholm. These preconceptions were aggregated into four basic cultural themes (*Lost Eden, Historic nostalgia, Scandinavian and Danish Mentality, and Un-Danish*) (Table 6.1). These themes or generalised images may be termed the "Bornholm Myths". Some of these were shared by all visitors, while others were held by smaller (typically exclusively Danish or non-Danish) visitor groups.

Table 6.1. The four Bornholm myths as contrasts to everyday life contexts

Bornholm Myth themes	Connotations	Contrasts to everyday life (environmental and social context)
Lost Eden	***Purity*** clean, flawless, natural, intact	polluted, displeasing, synthetic
	Calmness quiet, peaceful, have time	hassle, hectic, hurry, stressful
	Abundance varied, plenty, choice	limited, monotonous, constrained
	Simplicity compact, reliable, stable	complex, ambiguous, confused, unstable
Historic nostalgia	***Classic idyll*** timeless, traditions, old values	modern, normless, inharmonious
	Genuineness honest, real, authentic	fake, inauthentic
Scandinavian and Danish mentality	***Cordiality*** friendly, polite, gracious	impolite, unfriendly, impersonal
	Quiet tranquil, peaceful, modest	loud, vulgar, intrusive
	Orderly chocolate-box neatness, harmonic	disordered, sloppy
Un-Danish	***Varying geography*** (cliffs, hills)	dull topography (flatness, sand)
	Warmer climate (sunshine island)	Atlantic, rainy climate
	Unique aspects (round churches, smoke-houses, dialect, etc.)	un-exotic

6.1.1. The Lost Eden

Bornholm incarnates the dream of the *Lost Eden*, a romantic notion prevalent in Western cultures, ever since Jean-Jacques Rousseau claimed that society alienates itself from nature. The Lost Eden myth is constructed by contrasting natural properties favourably against civilisation and modernity. The elements of this myth appear in the tourism discourse of every nature-based destination. Written and visual advertisement is centred around connotations of a perfect Eden-like natural environment, characterised by untamedness, intactness, purity, calmness, simplicity and abundance. These concepts are powerful opposites to urban living environments, and represent something extraordinary that visitors to Bornholm (and other nature destinations) immediately adopt. The *Lost Eden* is a particularly pervasive myth, and was shared by interviewees of all nationalities.

Purity and calmness

Most visitors to Bornholm mentioned attributes of the Lost Eden myth, which they contrasted with their everyday life (see respondent profile in Appendix 1 for regions of origin). Purity and calmness were seen as opposites to congestion, crowds, pollution problems and the restricted natural spaces of 'normal life'. Thus visitors anticipated an idyllic, clean, quiet and intact destination, based on their general image of Scandinavia:

> *We heard that Bornholm is a lovely island, **well-kept** and beautiful. Like the rest of Denmark, **clean and gentle landscape,** …beautiful green forests,… fine beaches, **clean environment**. (4)*

> *Scandinavia is **quite empty**, you **can avoid people** if you want, although people are very friendly. [It is] r**elaxing** to travel alone, **more than in the south**…there is no crowd, no vulgar souvenir shops. (6)*

The purity of the countryside often held connotations of calmness. This transcended the natural environment and visitors had the preconception that locals also possessed similar characteristics.

> *We have an overall impression that it is **very quiet** here, **not hectic**, **not loud**, **no noise**. I believe that **life goes much slower** on Bornholm than in the rest of Denmark, especially in Copenhagen. They are **not so busy** here, **they have time, no rushing about**… it's lovely! (20)*

Calmness was contrasted with a hectic and confused living style, where the day is framed into a stressful or monotonous routine. Bornholm evidently offered a perfect contrast to visitors suffering from temporal and spatial constraints, since it seemed to have everything they lacked at home.

> *We think we come here, because then you **get rid of both telephone and television** and family and all that stuff there…we worked really hard the whole winter, so we **looked forward** to have holidays **without all that stress**, and just to be ourselves. So Bornholm is **ideal**, it's wonderfully **calm and quiet**. (52)*

Abundance and simplicity

Other characteristics of 'Eden' were unrestricted choice and limitless opportunities. Bornholm was often seen as offering plenty of varied activities and attractions, and thus bearing connotations of abundance.

> *This is a delightfull island, there are **many funny things** to see, I mean delightfull things to see, **many nice things** to see and do. (17)*

> *It is a very **compact** island with **lots of different** nature. A **little bit of everything** you can get, **lot of** nice walking paths and bicycle paths, accessible beaches, **many new things to see**…(20)*

> *Oh, there's **plenty to do and see**, **lots of** places to visit, and **lots of** entertainment to choose from. (81)*

Despite abundant choice, the island was preconceived as a 'manageable' area, where sights were easy to find and within the reach of everybody. The simplicity of getting around carried undertones of safety and reliability.

> *It is a special place, because it is a **small area with defined limits**, a small island. So it is **more concentrated** in some way. Compared to e.g. Northern Jutland, where you can drive around for days to see just a handful of things. Here, there are **a whole lot of things to see**, but it's **not stressing**, because it's on a small area. (31)*

Our friends came here last year and said that it's ***easy and safe****…the* ***distances are not big*** *…there are* ***few cars*** *and* ***good signposting****…I think it's* ***ideal*** *when you want to bike around with small kids. (39)*

In contrast, the modern everyday environment was fraught with complexity, ambiguity and instability:

At home, I ***always have to watch the kids****, and it's hard to manage it. At the end we chose Bornholm, because* ***there's action for the kids****, they can go out and bike or play,* ***but I don't have to look after them****. I can relax, write letters or read, and still feel quite comfortable about them. (66)*

The romantic notion of *Lost Eden* was also strengthened by geographical features of Bornholm. Its islandness, size, and location in the middle of the Baltic evoked romantic fantasies of remoteness:

Bornholm for us…is a place ***far away*** *from everything else.* ***Far away****,* ***calm*** *and* ***nature*** *and* ***the sea****. (13)*

A few foreign visitors, who had absolutely no previous knowledge of Bornholm, based their preconceptions on comparisons with other destinations. Even though these accounts were divergent, they shared the idyllic or untamed nature images previously discussed in this section:

I anticipate a ***nice*** *island, a little bit like a Greek island. I've been to Greece before, so Bornholm will probably remind me of Samos: with* ***not so many tourists****, not too expensive, nice marinas,* ***nice nature****. (22)*

I expect Bornholm to be ***stark, uncultivated…grey*** *cliffs, you know, probably like the Orkney islands north of Scotland. With* ***small trees****,* ***small vegetation*** *only, very Northern…a* ***harsh island*** *with* ***seagulls*** *and* ***cold winds.*** *(9)*

Finally, unusual natural phenomena also strengthened the 'Eden-like' image:

Bornholm is ***warmer than the other countries*** *around the Baltic. My daughter said that* ***even figs*** *grow here. And there are a* ***lot of rare flowers*** *one can* ***only*** *find here. (92)*

This excerpt revealed that visitors were conscious of Bornholm as a natural refuge for rare species, and that the endeavour of 'back to nature' also carried ideals of preserving the last outposts of the *Lost Eden*.

6.1.2. Historic nostalgia

Another intercultural, romantic notion of Bornholm derived from nostalgic feelings about a living past. While the Lost Eden myth was constructed through a contrast between nature and civilisation, the mythology of *Historic nostalgia* was based on a differentiation between contemporary and bygone living styles. Idealised connotations of the past included classic, idyllic, traditional and genuine, and this impression might already have been evoked prior to departure by tangible cues depicted in visual imagery (half-timbered, small houses, old villages, fishing harbours). This way, travelling to Bornholm offered a virtual journey into the past, associated with fantasies of experiencing a place where time had stopped, leaving values of the 'old way of life' intact. A quest for the 'bygone' is a common cultural denominator among modern visitors of normless societies (Dann 1977), since it carries the hope of retrieving 'universal' past values and norms.

Classic idyll

One of the most important elements of the Bornholm myth was the timeless idyll, communicated through romantic images of Baltic architecture, nature and locals. It appeared that a few tangible icons appearing in written and visual media were the dominating signs of timelessness and traditional old values. Geographical distance allowed visitors' fantasies to distinguish between the ordinary 'now' and the extraordinary 'once-upon a time':

> *Calmness, idyll, old-world-like idyll…It is a* ***quiet, cosy island*** *with* ***old towns****… **old houses**, **small houses**…. A very **cosy atmosphere** I think. (7)*

> *I love Bornholm: it's* ***chocolate-boxy*** *and* ***old-world-like****… **Romantic small harbours and villages**…somehow, I would say it's quaint…, definitely a quaint place… and it's **far away from everything**… (23)*

Genuineness

Descriptions of the classic idyll had connotations of genuineness, and visitors consciously anticipated a truly unspoilt destination. Sometimes genuineness was contrasted with icons of modern tourism development:

> *The island has kept its style. It hasn't attempted to adapt to any modern tourism. The island has kept its typical style, for example the houses, there are no big hotels, no skyscrapers, so the most broad image is that it's idyllic. These are the most important things about Bornholm. (7)*

> *My picture of Bornholm is that it's a homey island, an island that managed to maintain it's typical character for over twenty years now. It tries to be very Danish, there's no modern development, …It's not this bloody tourism you can see in the Southern parts of Europe. (7)*

Bornholm is very beautiful…it is calm, and even more…it is not a schicky-micky [touristy] island. There is not an invasion of tourists. (91)

6.1.3. Scandinavian and Danish mentality

Non-Danish visitors possessed a particular mythology of "Danishness", that was often derived from a romantic notion of *Scandinavian mentality*, a common set of 'outsider' beliefs that Danes, and Scandinavians in general, are friendly, helpful and polite. The cordiality of the host society is a general theme in the discourse of tourism: brochures from all over the world are filled with pictures of jovial, welcoming locals. (It is probably also the oldest traveller mythology: the ancient Greeks already had the term *Xenophilia* for it.) In the case of Danes, this general image is differentiated with prevailing connotations of quietness, modesty and order.

*A **peaceful and magnificent** island with **calm and happy** people… I also know some Danes from work, they are **cosy and nice people, not pushy** at all. (15)*

In Denmark, everything is so cosy. Quiet, relaxed, not so big, not so massy, everything is so small and modest. Not changing and so friendly. This is the Danish mentality, beautiful. (54)

*It's the **Scandinavian mentality**, the nice mentality, it's friendly, it's **polite and reserved to a positive extent**…reserved meaning that people don't start to talk to you always, coming and asking what are you doing over here…(7)*

*We saw in the brochures, that it is a beautiful place, and **orderly…very neat** somehow. Danish people **take care** of their environment…the roads, the houses are well-kept…yes,… even the hills and the nature look like a **modelled fairy tale**. (91)*

*I believe **people match with their nature**…that the **landscape gives a certain character** to the people who live there. We have seen it in many countries in Europe and especially in Scandinavia. The **Italians** are characterised by their landscape: they **are vigorous**, exuberant, the sun is shining, they always sing and so on. While **here they are more still**,… **quietness** is beautiful. (14)*

Like the first two myths (Lost Eden and Living Past), the Scandinavian Mentality was also constructed favourably by comparing the host population against people in ordinary life. For example, a visitor emphasised the convivial character of interpersonal encounters on Bornholm as opposed to the impersonality and unfriendliness of social relationships experienced at home:

*My overall impression is that it is **very human, very personal**. Everything is on a **human scale**, **every Dane** is so friendly…**not like at home in Germany** when you almost have to make a favour to get people to greet you in the shops. (62)*

6.1.4. Un-Danish

Danish visitors also had their own (and more precise) romantic mythology of the island. Many of Bornholm's features are in some way unique or substantially different from the ordinary Danish environment. Its remote location and 'un-Danishness' has given many Danes the idea that Bornholm is the 'ultimate holiday destination', which must be visited at least in once in a lifetime. That Danes regarded a pilgrimage to Bornholm as an unwritten must is demonstrated by the following excerpt:

> *I had never been to Bornholm, although I have been to many places abroad. I even lived in India for a long time. But* ***never on Bornholm*** *on this wonderful island, it is a* ***flaw in my upbringing****. So* ***we just had to see the island****,* ***and see all the famous sites****: Hammershus, Gudhjem, the fish smokehouses and the rocking stones. (95)*

Danes tend to have a handful of stereotyped preconceptions of Bornholm, emphasising the unique geographic, climatic or cultural characteristics of the island. Some of these notions are based on factual information learnt at school, while others derive from advertisement slogans that have permeated common Danish culture. The most prevailing element of un-Danishness is the concept of Bornholm as a 'sunshine island', which appears as a mantra in all tourist advertisements for Bornholm.

> *Bornholm is a* ***sun-rich island*** *and is said to have* ***always good weather*** *in the summer. That is what I thought about when I booked this tour. (19)*

> *It's a* ***sunshine island****, a* ***rugged cliff island****. It is a* ***gem*** *because it's so different from the rest of Denmark, different landscape, different natural environment. (52)*

> *We think about an island with the* ***highest number of sunny hours*** *in Denmark. It* ***rarely rains*** *on Bornholm in the summer…(32)*

> *This is the place in Denmark that has the* ***most sunny hours****. It is almost true. And then* ***Martin Andersen Nexø was born*** *on Bornholm. I have seen the movie and read the book of* ***Pelle the Conqueror*** *that is filmed on the island. (33)*

This interviewee reiterated facts about Bornholm that Danes are 'expected' to know. Others pointed out the known unique aspects of the destination that differentiated it from other places in Denmark.

> *Bornholm,* ***smoked herring*** *and* ***sunshine island****…everybody knows that. And there is* ***Gudhjem,*** *the* ***round churches*** *and the* ***rocking stone*** *and* ***Hammershus****, I mean, we hear about the sights, and of course we read a lot about Bornholm. (5)*

> *Bornholm is …* ***Water*** *and* ***rugged cliffs*** *and* ***herring****. It does not look like the rest of Denmark. There are cliffs, which no other places in Denmark have. And there are*

many attractions to see within a small area: the churches, the smokehouses… and Hammershus, of course. (37)

Stereotyped tangible aspects of Bornholm (Hammershus, round churches and smokehouses) can be considered objects of what Urry (1990) termed the '*collective tourist gaze*'. The collective tourist gaze is directed towards places of interest that are often looked upon and experienced on the surface by many visitors. As tourism involves the collection of signs (Culler 1981), these attractions were found in the preconception of most domestic and foreign visitors.

6.1.5. Bornholm myths in visitors' preconceptions

All four myths were constructed through two processes: *contrasting* and *idealising*. First, the original information that visitors possessed about Bornholm was compared with everyday life (and sometimes with stereotyped destination ideals). Second, these contrasted opposites were developed further into a (sometimes exaggeratedly) idealised picture. The importance of these myths lay in these romantic notions of a perfect or better place, which possessed idealised aspects of nature, the living past, or the Scandinavian/Bornholm culture. Visitors envisaged this ideal place as a stage where different pleasurable fantasies could be realised (cf. Clarke and Smith 1994), but they did not specify precise aspects apart from the four myths.

Although they might have had different personal and symbolic meanings for different visitors, Bornholm myths were not individual fantasies. They were rooted in common cultural themes that would only be valid in a modern Western context (such as the *Lost Eden* theme). Furthermore, these themes circulate in our everyday communication and are represented through media such as advertising, word-of-mouth, facts learnt in school, and previous experiences. Thus visitors were subconsciously predisposed towards these Bornholm myths, which could therefore dominate the interpretation of their actual experience.

6.2. Negotiation

As discussed in the previous chapter, visitors demonstrated heightened sensory and cognitive activity during their journey, as they attempted to make sense of their experience of Bornholm. Perceptions were often triggered by the recognition of differences between the everyday and the extraordinary, and were shaped by personal values and socio-cultural background. When visitors entered a destination, they penetrated the ideal setting of their mythical preconceptions, entering a different time and space. Visitor perception entailed deconstructing the holiday experience in terms of anticipated images, in other words, visitors took a stance towards their preconceptions during their encounter with the destination. This happened through an ongoing semiotic interpretation of what visitors saw and sensed. The heightened perception indicated that visitors were reading the landscape for signifiers of certain pre-established notions or signs derived from various mythical themes. As Culler (1981) argues:

All over the world, the unsung armies of semioticians, the tourists, are fanning out in search of the signs of Frenchness, typical Italian behaviour, exemplary Oriental scenes, typical American thruways, traditional English pubs. (p. 127)

In the case of Bornholm visitors attempted to reconfirm or disconfirm the four myths through their perceptions of the tangible and intangible elements they encountered and by finding some symbolic or real links between the two. Connotations of the Lost Eden, the nostalgic past, the Danish mentality and un-Danishness reappeared in many remarks, observations, evaluations and complaints about Bornholm and its people. This continuous perceptive dialogue with myth was termed ***negotiation.*** Visitors engaged in a negotiated dialogue with tangible, substantial aspects as well as (intangible) social and communicative aspects during their journey. Negotiation could be divided into two different visitor activities: negotiating by observation (gazing) and negotiating by participation (doing), both characterised by adding personal meaning to the myth through one's own, concrete experience. These negotiation activities involved taking a stance towards a particular myth, and could result in either acceptance or rejection of it (see mythological sub-themes in Table 6.2).

Table 6.2. Sub-themes of the Bornholm mythologies in the holiday experience

Bornholm myths	Subscription (sub-themes)	Rejection (sub-themes)
The Lost Eden	Soothing and restorative nature Unrestrained freedom Reunion with nature	No control over upsetting nature Eden is lost forever Insignificant
Historic nostalgia	Time has stopped Guardians of heritage	Touristy Inauthentic
Scandinavian mentality	'Hygge' Reservedness Environmental consciousness	Cold and indifferent Non-Viking appearance
Un-Danishness	Having time Danish pride Pastoral nostalgia	Not local Rain island

6.2.1. Subscribing to myths by observant and participant negotiation

This section analyses how visitors specified the four Bornholm myths, by adding a personal interpretation through observing (gazing) or participating (interacting) with tangible and personal signifiers of those myths. These personal interpretations yielded some new sub-themes, which either reconfirmed or disconfirmed the main connotations of the original, generic myth. During observation or participation visitors matched perceptions with preconceptions, which enabled them to take a stand towards and subscribe to a particular myth.

The Lost Eden

Nature as soothing and restoring

By using cues from the perceived environment and landscape, visitors were able to refine their vague images of purity and calmness and add several sub-themes to them. These

included observations of nature as having beneficial, soothing and restorative functions for both physical and mental health:

> *It is the **water**, I mean, the **sea**, I mean the **view**…but mostly it's about **this air** here. If you come from a big city, you **can totally cleanse your lungs** here and **hear the waves**…just stand here and stare at the sea for hours. (77)*

> *The **calmness** is very important, especially when you want to get away from a stressful life. **Not too hot**, **not too many tourists**, **no fast cars** and everything is **quiet**. So this climate and place matches perfectly to **relax** myself. (66)*

> *[Bornholm]…is something **for the eyes and the soul**. The **landscape** of the island is very **appeasing** … just to look on the **hills**, the **flowers** and the **coastline**…I think that's the main point. …and well, **beautiful colours**… the colours of the **houses** and the **meadows**. It is a **nice place for recovery** you see, a green **Paradise**… (4)*

The sub-theme of the healing power of a calm, natural environment was often negotiated in a participatory, active way, rather than an observant one. The following example of negotiating restorative settings combined reflections on *being away* from the ordinary and unhealthy environment:

> *After spending two weeks on Bornholm, I think I'm **reborn**…I enjoy this non-hectic life… the **total awayness from the hassle** here. I can spend all my time walking on the beach, riding on the bikes, **picking mushrooms** and **see these wild flowers**… you know, just **taking it easy**. (7)*

Unrestrained freedom

Another sub-theme of the lost Eden was unrestrained freedom. For example, the absence of road signs was interpreted as freedom:

> *Yes, there is something very special for me because I'm Swedish, …there are **no signs** saying 'drive 50 and 80 km/h and so on'. Sometimes, coming into a town, you can see some tables with 50 km/h, but **not all the time like in Sweden**, where the country roads are full with signs: 'drive so and so much', slow down, etc. It's **irritating** especially when you drive a motorbike. (44)*

Visitors' freedom to do whatever they wanted and freedom from everyday constraints were also found in participant negotiating. Visitors happily subscribed to the Lost Eden myth by linking the act of living in a natural environment with a different and freer way of life. The following excerpt demonstrates a re-living of a primeval freedom from societal norms and rules.

> *For me the **nature is important**, because I live in an apartment, so as long as I can I go to camping, a hotel is also something you live in, a house or a summerhouse, it's*

*the same.. To **live in a tent it is more important**, you are **closer to nature**. There are **no people living next door** to you or above you, so you can be **more alone** and near to your family. And we can see the sky, so the weather is not that bad when you live in nature. But it's also **that you can do what you want**, you have breakfast when you want, you **don't have to be there on time**. And I'm really **enjoying not having to eat with knives and forks** all the time. (64)*

Reunion with nature

Another sub-theme that visitors used to build upon the Lost Eden myth was developing a personal relationship with nature. This involved feelings of connection with the elements of the environment, and of an organic belonging to a larger universe. Excerpts depicting reunion with nature were filled with awe and fascination:

*The first day we drove from Rønne to Vang and stopped at the coast several times to see the waves…because there was a westerly wind and the **waves** were really **huge**…**breaking and spraying** on the cliffs…You could really feel the elements of **sheer nature** …the wind, the cliffs and the sea. It was **fascinating**. (19)*

*I think, it's really nice here, and I really like the nature and the cliffs and to be able to **live out here on the edge** of the island…because I can **keep up with the weather** in the morning and the evening. We always take a walk in the morning, before the tourists come, it's lovely and quiet…and we **enjoy small things**. For example to see how the **trees** are growing and struggling **in the crevices of the cliffs**…such small things. And I love watching the **sun emerging** directly from the sea, as a **big red ball**. (70)*

Historic nostalgia

A place where time has stopped

From the symbolic cues of Bornholm's built environment, visitors deciphered more sub-themes relating to classic and genuine idyll. One of them was a reconfirmation that Bornholm was indeed an island where time has stopped, that does not change:

*We visited an **old windmill** around Svaneke and saw what they had. Although it was not very special, they **still** ground flour according to the **traditional fashion**. (37)*

Although Bornholm was perceived as a stable and unchanging destination, its timelessness was not always appreciated:

*Bornholm **does not change**, we have been here **32 years ago** and then **16 years ago** and now **we don't bother any more**, because it does not change, **we see the same** every time. It does not change, neither the houses or the nature…It is accurately the same, even the people. (53)*

Guardian of heritage

Another sub-theme emerged from different observations of town architecture and planning. Visitors liked the fact that Bornholm had kept its original style and that old buildings were maintained:

> *Svaneke is a great town, where* ***nothing is imported*** *from outside, everything is* ***genuine*** *and* ***belongs to its atmosphere****, there are galleries and pottery workshops, and everything is* ***so little*** *we really liked it. They really managed to* ***keep*** *the town* ***intact****, as it was…They* ***value to stay as they are,*** *and don't try* ***to build giant tourist attractions,*** *discotheques or anything like that. (60)*

> *I* ***was waiting in suspense to see Bornholm*** *again, since I was here as a schoolgirl in 1954, I was curious to know* ***whether it has changed****. But luckily not,* ***Bornholm resembles itself****…well, of course there are some new things, but the* ***old buildings****, they* ***have been preserved****, it is* ***lovely that they are preserved*** *and* ***not levelled with the ground****. It was fun to see them again as they were. (44)*

> *We saw different things, but I think the most interesting was an old sawing workshop in a garden, a* ***sawing machine that was more than 200 years old*** *and* ***was operated by a water-mill****. And you could just walk around and* ***touch these old things****, the wooden parts were smooth, shiny and worm-eaten. And the* ***machine was still working,*** *amazing! (11)*

> *We haven't been to all villages, but we have the impression that the houses are* ***maintained*** *so nicely here. Bornholmians* ***hold on tight to their culture****, they* ***make so much out of those lovely old buildings****. […] I* ***saw a lot of people painting*** *their houses and* ***working in the gardens****…and once started on something, they accomplish it thoroughly. I* ***noticed that they prepare the walls by filling in the holes*** *and* ***chinks*** *and then they paint it and finish it. There were also many windows changed this year.* ***Bornholm is better kept than the rest of Denmark****, but I don't think it's for the tourists' sake…No****, it's for their own sake****, people want to* ***keep and live in old houses*** *and they are proud to show it. (20)*

Scandinavian and Danish mentality

Visitors attempted to get an impression of Bornholm's people by observing their behaviour or directly interacting with them. Intangible cues from different incidents communicated something about the Scandinavian mentality myth, producing three sub-themes.

'Hygge'

Hygge is a Danish concept, which no English words can fully match in meaning. The *Xenophobe's Guide to the Danes* (Harris *et al*. 1999) defines 'hygge time' as 'social nirvana', and indeed, the word provides connotations of a cosy, warm and reassuring atmosphere and people. German visitors in particular were fascinated by this sub-myth, and confirmed it both by observant and participant negotiation:

We did not really speak to the locals, because we don't speak Danish, unfortunately. Bu when we bought some ice-cream in the towns, we watched what people did: ***they were just sitting in the sun*** *and* ***drinking beers*** *and then* ***departed again*** *on their bikes…they* ***went so cosily*** *in groups, it was really nice. (54)*

[We] went to a circus with the kids, and there was a merry-go-round, where the parents had to help the kids to get on and off…and I really find it great that when the kids ran in front, ***the Danes standing there just helped them with a bottle of Tuborg in their hands*** *and you know****, everybody is so easy-going and quiet****, not fussy or bad-tempered.* ***Everything was so 'hygge', quiet****,* ***relaxed*** *so friendly! (62)*

The feeling of togetherness, camaraderie evoked notions of *communitas* relationships, that is a social anti-structure, where each member of the group possessed equal status. This was most likely to occur when individuals were in a liminoid situation (c.f. Turner and Turner 1978; Gottlieb 1982) away from everyday social roles and status. The spirit of communitas emerged from a shared sense of values and ritualistic experiences, "which transcend those of status striving" (Turner 1973, p. 391). Furthermore, this informal, 'hygge' spirit characterised social contact between many visitors and Bornholm people, resulting in a flow of excerpts praising the sincere hospitality of locals:

It is so positive how friendly everybody has been since the first day. We rented an apartment at a Danish family, and they are so ***casual*** *and so* ***near****, I was surprised at their* ***immediate kindness****. The owner of the house came down to the harbour to meet us, and he* ***greeted*** *us in a very* ***amiable****, nice and* ***personal way****. I have not expected so much warmth and* ***friendliness****. He and his wife are really sweet, and so are* ***everybody else in Denmark****. We* ***don't have any negative experiences*** *from this country Very kind…very* ***obliging****, therefore the tourists are also kind. That's the little secret. (15)*

Scandinavian countries traditionally have a close relationship with each other. A stream of positive interactions made some Norwegian visitors reconfirm the slogan with which Denmark advertises itself in Norway ("Det er dejligt at være norsk i Danmark", i.e. "It is lovely to be Norwegian in Denmark"):

It is more personal here, ***people are very near****. We asked someone for the direction to a book-shop, and he just listened carefully and asked whether we came from Norway. When we said yes, he* ***started to smile****… even his* ***eyes twinkled****… and then he* ***escorted us all the way*** *to the shop at the end of the street…****'It is nice to be Norwegian in Denmark'*** *[imitating the intonation of the advertisement]…they prefer us to Swedes. We meet kindness everywhere in Denmark, just because we are Norwegian, it's very simple. [laughing]. (79)*

Reservedness

Along with acknowledging the friendliness of locals, visitors observed another sub-theme of Scandinavian mentality, that of being non-insistent and humble:

*It's a kind of **polite reservedness** among these people…If you walk along the beach **nobody is going to bother you** and **bother about you**. But when you stay in Germany or in the Mediterranean country, people start to talk to you. So if **you** **don't want** to talk, **nobody is going to disturb you**… and that can be attractive when you live a busy life, then you want to stay in a country where **you** **can decide whether** you want to communicate or whether you don't.. But if you want to communicate with somebody, it's no problem…For example you go to a shop and you start talking German and then people react in a very polite and very very friendly way. So it's a **mixture of politeness and friendliness**. (7)*

Environmental consciousness

There is a common perception of Scandinavia as a centre of 'green' consumption. Thus, visitors gazing on the clean and green natural areas of Bornholm immediately reconfirmed their preconception of Danes as environmentally concerned people.

*What I really found surprising, that the area around Hammershus was really **clean and preserved**. I haven't seen any dirt or disorder, but not even a single handkerchief thrown away. The whole Castle was so **clean and neat as if the tourist season started yesterday**. And **nobody throws away litter**, because it would strike the eyes immediately. No, they would take it back with them. (91)*

This was often contrasted with the polluted or displeasing character of the urban environment at home:

*It is really **clean** here, we really liked the **cleanness** of the island, there's no sh-sh-sh [imitating the sound of spray cans], **there's no graffiti, like in Germany**…Oh, Hamburg is **full of that crap**! (92)*

Un-Danishness

Having time

For Danes, negotiation with tangible and intangible signifiers brought two more sub-myths of un-Danishness. One of them was the observation of a slower speed of life or 'having time':

*They are **not so busy** over here as in Copenhagen, for example. We are from Southern Jutland, but people are also too hurried there. Life **goes much slower** on Bornholm, it's lovely, **that they have time**. (20)*

*There are **almost no people** here, it is **sleepy**, **life goes slower** here, it is nice. …The bus driver stops for you, for example there was one who wanted to get on, but there was no bus stop. Or if you want to get off, he would stop the bus **anywhere** if you asked. We **would never have it like that at home**, there you have to stand on the bus stop. And they are always smiling, the drivers, they are **helpful** and **taking care** of us, crazy tourists, telling us where to get off, and so on. (77)*

Danish pride

Looking at the (for Denmark) extraordinary features of the island, many Danes felt a particular pride that Bornholm was a Danish possession:

> *I think it is very special to be on an island that is Danish, and still so different. But no matter which way you look you are always close to nature, and you are always* ***reminded, that once upon a time it was all like this****. It is lovely, but different from being on a Greek island, when you are just away. But* ***this…this is Danish****, (I don't know, maybe it's pride), but it is* ***lovely that we also have something*** *ourselves,* ***we also have*** *an island* ***that is worth visiting****, which has attractions you don't see every day. (73)*

> *One could say that there are not many attractions in Svaneke, but I* ***see the whole town as an ultimate attraction****. It is true,* ***when you walk along these streets, it's so different from Denmark****… there are still cliffs here and very old houses, it's lovely that* ***it's still Danish****. It is* ***as exotic as running around on the Riviera*** *or other places. And the best thing is that* ***there are not as many people****. (98)*

> *Wee* ***always admired*** *the building structure and the way houses are built on Bornholm…and the* ***harsh circumstances people had to cope with*** *from the start. Because* ***there is nothing else just cliffs and granite****…not too much earth. So in the old times it was really a* ***superhuman achievement*** *to build roads and houses on this hard ground…It is* ***amazing*** *people could do that! (26)*

Pastoral nostalgia

The last sub-theme of un-Danishness was defined through interacting with local people, who were found to be easy-going, cheerful and friendly. While foreigners associated this notion with 'Danish hygge', domestic visitors interpreted it as togetherness, a natural attribute of living in the countryside. The opportunities of participating in 'pastoral' events provided some visitors with real delight:

> *We were at the* ***opening ceremony*** *at Gallery Kaffeslottet, it was a real special building and there was live music and* ***all those people who buzzed*** *around there and looked at the paintings…there was a fantastic atmosphere. The evening developed itself incredibly spontaneously, all of a sudden, the tables were laid* ***and people came with torches and started to sing in Swedish and Bornholmian****…it was very spontaneous and very cosy. And* ***we just sang along, hand in hand with all those old Bornholmians.*** *(56)*

> *There was an old man at the market in Svaneke who told about the* ***old tradition with the Kildefest*** *[Holy Source feast: a residual of a pagan solstice fête, only celebrated on East Bornholm]. I never heard it before, so it was lucky that we just arrived the day before. Every kid in the village puts up their own holy source with blossoming branches and fresh water in front of their house, and there is a* ***big feast in the***

***Kildegård in the forest**. And when it was about to get dark, the children's **torch-parade** started from the village …they were walking up to the Kildegård to light the bonfire…and we **were walking along and singing with them**. It was very special and totally different from Funen, where St. Hans [solstice celebration with bonfires] is about big crowds, enormous amount of drinks and drunk people. (29)*

Participation in local activities and the cordial atmosphere also heightened the feeling of integration with the locals. These events were perceived as authentic by visitors, because they provided "peepholes" into the everyday life and traditions of locals (cf. MacCannell 1976). Shorter interactions with 'Bornholmians' could also reveal whether natives were "real" or friendly. For example, the local dialect was an important cue of authenticity:

*It is lovely to **hear the local tongue**, when you walk in the street, **then you hear the real dialect**… I think it's lovely. We have also talked to some…the wife of the hotel owner was **native in the highest sense**, and she was just so sweet. But it was **difficult to understand** them **when they talked real Bornholmian among each other**. (20)*

*We **talk to many Bornholmians**, when we take a walk in the harbour. We **talk** a lot with the people who operate the Christiansø-ferry. We **talk** to them every day. We are actually **getting to know** them…It is **quite cosy**…to get to know them. (98)*

*Bornholmians are **most obliging**, **not so sulky**, whenever you ask for something **you get a kind answer**…oh, yes, **they even show it on the map**! We were going out to see this butterfly farm, but it was a bit difficult to find it. So we went into a shop to ask, and the guy there took up a map and explained which way to go. **He was a real Bornholmian**…with a bit of **singing accent** and he really **paid attention** to us. (70)*

6.2.2. Rejecting the myths by observant and participant negotiation

There were also several incidents and sensory experiences that contrasted with generic preconceptions. This section reveals how visitors disconfirmed and rejected sub-themes within the four Bornholm myths during the interpretation of their experiences on Bornholm. As in the previous section, these perceptions may also be divided into observant (gazing) and participant (acting) negotiation.

The Lost Eden

No control over upsetting nature

Perceptions of natural features sometimes spoiled visitors' illusions of an idyllic, lost Eden. These experiences included unpleasant smells and sounds which conflicted with the ideas of purity and calmness:

*It was **quite bad** on the day when the weather all of a sudden changed and there came **a violent rain**. We came from Hammershus and it rained and the **wind was blowing so***

much…*and I know that there is nothing to do about that, but there was a* ***penetrating smell*** *from the sea, and* ***the sea was almost red****! It was* ***disgusting****! (46)*

The ***smell from the rotting seaweed*** *down at Balka …was a bit* ***appalling****. Oh, the beach is just* ***stinking*** *… and full of seaweed. […] And those days with Eastern wind…we could just smell it far up in Snogebæk. It was terrible! (30)*

We stayed here for three nights, of which ***it was thundering*** *for two nights in a row. It was* ***like at New Years' Eve****, the* ***lightning*** *crossed the sky every minute, followed by some* ***proper bangs****! I* ***couldn't sleep*** *at all and I must say I did not really enjoy it. (48)*

These unpleasant experiences were direct opposites to the mythical sub-theme of healing and restorative nature. Furthermore they reminded interviewees, that to some extent, people (as living beings) were still exposed to natural phenomena that they cannot control. As (46) expressed it: *I know that there is nothing to do about that: it is the course of nature.*

Eden lost forever

Visitors also identified some missing features of the 'Lost Eden', grieving over the loss as an irreversible affliction in nature:

Bornholm has changed to the negative. For example, I noticed, that year by year ***there are less mushrooms****. But there are* ***more and more tourists*** *in the forests, sometimes they just* ***raid*** *the area. They* ***would pick*** *even the* ***smallest mushrooms with tweezers****. So maybe next year there will be no more! (61)*

A growing volume of visitors was often held responsible for this perceived imbalance. Furthermore, the presence of other people was regarded as a barrier to solitary contemplation and reunion with nature:

The forest around Hammershus was full of tourists and a lot of noisy kids…they were just ***walking around all over the place****…and you know how kids are…very* ***strenuous!*** *Many people think that it is so lively with so many tourists, but I prefer where there are no so many. For me, Bornholm is the loveliest in October,* ***when all the tourists have left****, so* ***I can just enjoy going alone****…it's better to* ***dream and speculate over things*** *when you are alone in nature. (35)*

Insignificant

Although Bornholm is advertised as a nature destination, it cannot compare with Norwegian or Alpine wilderness environments. A few visitors anticipated a rugged landscape on the basis of the tourism literature and were disappointed by the insignificance of natural attractions on Bornholm:

We had a guidebook that described all the attractions very exaggeratedly. I mean, really, I like Bornholm, it is a nice island but ***there aren't high waterfalls once you've been to the Alps…****I mean* ***it must be quite big for Denmark****, but* ***in fact they are quite small****…and the guide says that the Døndalen* ***waterfall is … "huge and enormous amounts of water rush down the mountainside"*** *[giggling]. And when we went there, it was a* ***little source that almost dried out!*** *And the book said about everything:* ***it's big,.. it's important,… it's the wildest nature*** *we've ever seen,* ***but it isn't!*** *(7)*

Well, coming from Norway, I ***was not very impressed by the nature*** *around Bornholm. Because* ***everything is so tiny****, even the cliff towers. I don't think that Helligdomsklipperne or Jons Kapel* ***was really worth it****…And the forest and the coastline is full of biking and walking paths,* ***it is very neat and civilised****. But it's not because of these things we come anyway. (49)*

Historic nostalgia

Touristy signifiers

Visitors interpreted sensory experiences negatively if they did not live up to their nostalgic anticipation of Bornholm. The presence of 'touristy' signifiers (tangible or intangible) contradicted the preconception of classic idyll.

Gudhjem is ***too loud****, it* ***stinks of fried chips****, it is* ***too American****. You see, it's* ***vulgar*** *and* ***discount*** *and* ***industrial****. I'd rather wish that Bornholm did not change itself and kept it's quality and did not become* ***mass-touristy****. (61)*

A heightened attention towards the German market was perceived as undesirable by both domestic and German interviewees:

But we have seen that tourism has become very important in Denmark in these 12 years. For example we loved this island here, but now they have started to ***write everything in German*** *and make* ***German specialities and meals****. I think, you shouldn't do that, you know,* ***eiswein*** *and* ***sauerkraut****, what <u>they</u> think the Germans want. Because the tourist comes for a country's distinctive character. You should not do too much for them. (15)*

We visited some smokehouses and I think they are far ***too touristy****. I don't know how many* ***became industrial****, rather than just smokehouse…there is* ***no longer*** *that cosy* ***atmosphere*** *that one may expect. Also, it's irritating to see that all the* ***menus*** *and* ***prices*** *are first* ***in German****, not Danish. We were quite disappointed. (11)*

I believe it's ***kind of a cheat*** *to eat smoked herring on Bornholm that comes from Skagen. In the old times you could only eat smoked fish in August, that was the 'høst-sild' [Harvest Herring]. But no, they absolutely* ***<u>have to</u>*** ***cater*** *for the* ***tourists****! I'm disappointed, because then I might have as well travelled to Jutland! (16)*

Touristic events that had no traditional roots on the island were also negotiated in the light of the 'classic idyll' myth, and were sometimes perceived as pitiful:

> *There were some **touristy activities**. For example a **harbour fiesta** in Snogebæk, and that was so **sad**, **so little and modest** (even though most people thought it was funny) that on a windy evening people **danced salsa** in **pullovers** on the beach, and you had to watch not to step in the rotting seaweed. It was really **absurd, it just did not belong there.** (54)*

Inauthentic

Other visitors were concerned about Bornholm losing its genuine character and becoming a staged, contrived environment (cf. MacCannell 1989, Cohen 1984):

> *I think that Bornholm has become…a **bit too ornamented**…I don't know… they made **pedestrian zones**, when you don't really need any strolling areas on Bornholm. There are so few cars ! [laughing]. And now you can also see a lot of that **Øland-stone**! You know, those big lumps of **red granite stones**, to **decorate** the streets. And those **elegant shops** on the stroll…it is for the new generation…for the **nouveau-rich**… (12)*

> *[…] you see all those **flower pillars** in the harbours…I think it's **too fine,** too **pretentious**…for a fishing island, isn't that true? My opinion is that harbours should not be filled with **jars** and **flower pots**. It's not that they are not nice, but that's **something that does not stand for Bornholm**. (16)*

This respondent (16) protested about what Jakle (1985) called 'commonplacedness', i.e. the deliberate construction of standardised and unifunctional tourist landscapes that have the same appearance all over the world, and the elimination of distinctive and original places.

> *Bornholm has **changed to the negative**. It is **not so cosy** as it has been before, its is far **more touristic**. No, once Bornholm was a **place full of fishermen**, and their **harbours** were lively. Now there are **almost no more smokehouses left**, and everywhere you go you find these local shops with these '**gemütlichkeit-things**, it is simply done **for the tourists' sake**. Everything is **'Made in China'** and it's **expensive** and… **rubbish**. For me who came here for many years it is no longer attractive, it is **no longer as cosy as it could be**. (62)*

Key symbols in Bornholm's tourist brochures are the fishing harbours and fish smokehouses, which can be regarded as central to the collective tourist gaze and to the negotiation of genuineness (Urry 1990). Visitors often based their observations of inauthenticity on operational appearances, i.e. large business size or volume of visitors, which detracted from the symbolic value:

*This is a **businesslike** smokehouse, **not very original**, not for me at least. There are so **many people** coming here to eat, the **place is too big**, with **so many tables** and **signs**. I would like to see something smaller, natural…but most of them are closed nowadays. (16)*

*The **big** places are all **industrial**, I'm sure they are **cooking** the **herring first** and then smoke it for a short time, because it **has to run swiftly**. They probably **must do** it that way in order to be able to **supply all those buses** with smoked herring. So it's a bit more **factory-like**. (77)*

Urry (1990) proposes that the character of social relationships between hosts and guests influences the perceived artificiality of tourism attractions. (He suggests that the organisation of the tourist flow (spatial and temporal packing of visitors, mass services, facilitation of immersion or instant tourist gaze) may communicate messages about the attractions being contrived or genuine. Thus in the present study, visitors sought further signifiers to assess what could be considered a "real smokehouse", and in this sense, native Bornholm people were deemed opinion leaders. For example the following interviewee assured herself of an authentic smokehouse experience by following local people:

*I prefer to go the same **places where the locals go**, **because they know** which smokehouses treat the raw materials properly and which don't. It is not unthinkable that places **frequented by so many people** slightly **jump over** the procedures and cook the fish before smoking them! (77)*

Scandinavian mentality

After repeated negative interpersonal experiences with local people, visitors would replace their original myth of cordial and polite Scandinavians with an alternative judgement of *cold and indifferent people*:

*The Bornholmians were **not that eager to talk** to us. They are **like their cliffs**: **difficult to get close** to them. If you asked something in cafés or restaurants, they said 'so and so' but nothing more. They **would rather not engage in a conversation**, although there were many things we would have been interested in to know. (66)*

*It **irritates** me and it's **hard** that people start to **greet you** first **on the third day**. Many **people are cold**, you can feel some sort of a wall…and it's sad, because I'm used to friendlier people in Denmark. People tend to be **reserved towards tourist** in general, probably because there are so many of them. They are **friendly** but **only to a certain extent** …if they can help, that's nice, but **they don't want to** talk… (65)*

*We almost did not get to know any people, I think they were all **very closed,** even the guests in the hostel. I hoped for to get to know some people and spend some time with then, but they **don't even greet** each other, **it's not the custom**. When you go on*

*holidays, you are more open, I **expected** that we are going to **talk** to each other and tell stories to each other. (68)*

Some foreign visitors claimed that a lack of community spirit was the fault of campsite arrangements:

*I am the manager of a family camping myself, so I wondered **why isn't there any communal areas in this campsite**, you know a fireplace or a playground or just a TV-room, where **people could come together**. In this camping, **everybody is minding his or her business**, it is not really possible to **be together with others**…or probably it is **not even desired by the manager**. He might be worried about that it gets more complicated when many guests are coming. But it **irritates me**, because **communal areas would make it easier to get into contact** with other people, who have kids. (68)*

Rejection of the myth of friendly Scandinavians could also take its evidence from commercial service environments. Other visitors complained about the impersonal atmosphere experienced in restaurants:

*We have experienced it for the second time now that the waiters were **totally ignoring** the **customers**, they were cold and cynical… as long as we supplied them with our money, so they could use it…many places on the island are **only interested in our money**. (69)*

Non-Viking appearance

One visitor observed that Bornholm people did not match the stereotyped Scandinavian or 'Viking' look. Although not strictly a part of Scandinavian mentality, it was interesting that appearance mattered so much in visitors' perceptions:

*The people look different…I mean, when you **think about Danes**, the Scandinavians, you always imagine them as **tall, blond and very sun-tanned**. But they are not. They are **short and pale**…[laughing]. They are **paler, their heads and faces seem small**, even smaller than the people at home. (81)*

Un-Danishness

Not local

For Danes, Bornholm is associated with a handful of unique features, of which fishery and smokehouses represent strong romantic images. If they did not find these, or observed aspects that did not match their preconception of Bornholm, visitors rejected the 'local pastoral' myth:

*I have seen for example the harbours, there are **almost no more fishing boats**, that sail. The fishery has come up in a higher dimension …I don't know what to say to that. Well, I **really miss the** fishing boats. The harbours are **all too neat** with those **flowers**, they **look expensive**. I **miss the life** down there, it was more lively when I was a child. I*

*love the **sound of fishing boats**, but I can't hear them. There are only jazz concerts. For me, **Bornholm is an island with fishermen and boats**, in other words, with **the maritime character**…when **in the evenings**, the fishing boats come back to the **harbours to land the haul**. I **understand that they have to earn their money**, where is but from tourism they can live, but for me, coming since I was a child it is not very attractive. Those who come here for the first time, they think it's great and all right, but they did not know the island before! (46)*

This visitor experienced an inner struggle about how she related towards tourism. On one hand, she disapproved of the negative effects of tourism upon pre-existing (and hence, genuine) industrial activities, such as fishery, but she also understood that tourism might be the sole opportunity for maintaining the local economy. It was interesting that other, first-time visitors separated their empathy between local and non-local attractions:

*The **glass blowers**…well, they were **Americans** to start with, which is quite **suspicious**…You know…They are **not locals**… Perhaps if they were Danes and it was their traditional way of life, then fine, but…Having Americans coming to set up a rather pretentious glass blower… And some of the stuff is very clever but you feel somehow it's imported. […] The **smoked fish feels local**, and you see those the **fishing boats going up and down feel local** but the **glassblowers**… no, that's something **that's coming from outside**…No, if you want to see great glassblowing, you go to Italy. (81)*

"Rain island"

The tourist season was particularly wet and chilly in the summer of 1998. Thus, many visitors made joking or serious remarks about the 'sunshine island' image:

The weather was not at all as good as we expected. It is not because we couldn't do anything…but you hear that Bornholm is the Sunshine island, and when you come here, it's raining and cloudy for the whole week. This is just a marketing trick!

The weather is different… wet and cold…Bornholm mustn't do that, because we heard about that it should have so and so much sunny hours…and do you know what: the sun is shining in the rest of Denmark! I just called my brother in Middle Jutland. We are bit disappointed, but we have rain clothes…and anyway, such is the Danish summer! (16)

Well, we couldn't notice that Bornholm was 'The Sunshine Island' this year, that's for sure! I even read in the papers that the island has changed its name…it was renamed to Rain Island! [laughing] (77)

The weather was really bad, it was too windy and rainy. And if it's not good weather, so the holiday experience is not so good either, there is no chance for long evenings. This year we couldn't sit outside and enjoy the light evenings. (37)

6.2.3. The importance of Bornholm myths

Destinations are complex products that are 'consumed' during a longitudinal process, an intangible consumption which involves visitors' personal experiences. Visitors can become familiar with the destination through their own perceptions and interactions with locals. It was found that destinations were symbolic landscapes permeated with cultural significance (cf. Tuan 1977), to which various customer groups might attribute shared meanings. The meanings of Bornholm myths were shared because they were rooted in a common European or Danish culture. Culture has its own system of semiotic interpretation, which is expressed in the language and the particular stories visitors were telling.

The narratives demonstrated that Bornholm myths were used as organising schemes (generalised mental representations of objects, people and situations) during the assessment of individual experiences. In other words, Bornholm myths were common frameworks providing markers that establish the affective values of destination symbols, and at the same time permitting visitors to make distinctions and relative rankings among these symbols. Although holiday experiences might vary from individual to individual, the underlying meanings of their symbolic consumption were shared, thus destination myths might provide a general guideline for understanding visitor evaluations.

6.3. Traveller mythologies

In the previous chapter it was found that visitor perceptions could differ greatly, depending on the tourist's self-image (insider or outsider) and orientation (5.2.2.). Various authors maintain that individuals may possess several self-images (beliefs of themselves), including actual, expected and ideal self-concepts (Sirgy 1985, Solomon 1988, Clairborne and Sirgy 1990) Tourism choice and behaviour may also be influenced by particular roles that visitors adopt, which in some way match their ideal self-image. Thus, the following section sheds light upon interviewees' various self-images from a cultural perspective. Respondents' narratives were examined for evidence of different roles with which visitors wanted to be identified during their journey. These self-concepts were scrutinised to see how they matched visitors' images of the destination.

Visitors not only negotiated mythologies about what they encountered at the destination (tangibles and people), but also about their own identity, as travelling individuals or groups. People inscribed themselves into various cultural discourses of travelling, which enabled them to fantasise and enact role sets different from those of their everyday self (Cohen 1979, MacCannell 1989). These themes were termed *traveller mythologies***,** because they were centred around activities related to the journey. It was possible to extract four such mythologies (not exhaustive or mutually exclusive) from the interviews: the roles of *Explorer*, the *Vagabond*, the *Grand Tourist* and the *Colonist*. Each theme justified travelling by defining a particular 'mission'. Furthermore, each traveller mythology possessed its own way of laying claim to the destination. These claims could be territorial, i.e. having access in order to undertake various activities, or social, i.e. expecting locals to

be partners in the traveller mythology. Connotations of these self-directed mythologies are presented in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3. Traveller mythologies appearing in interviews

Traveller mythologies	Identify themselves with ideal role sets of	Mission	Claiming right to the destination as	Expecting locals to act as
Great Explorer	fearless, coping pioneers, scout spirit	to discover and penetrate the unknown	Territory to explore	helpers, assistants in the endeavour
Vagabond	light-hearted tramps	to enact a 'real life' drama	a stage to enact a road movie	supporting characters/co-stars
The Grand Tourist	noble voyageur	to 'learn' foreign cultures	Authentic object of unrestrained gaze	actors in an authentic stage
The Colonist	conquerors	to claim or reclaim foreign ground	Territory to access and possess freely	caretakers of the conquered area

The Explorer

Explorer-type visitor narratives are about departing for the great unknown, and may recall the endeavours of heroic explorer figures (Edmund Hillary, Magellan, Captain Cook, Marco Polo, etc.) These figures all share the features of fearless travellers, who have a mission to fulfil or a concrete geographical goal to achieve. The travel is therefore carefully prepared and carried out as planned. These features were typically exhibited by yacht tourists:

> *We already start planning our sailing trip in the winter, looking at maps and things like that. It is not as complicated as sailing around the world, but it requires a good knowledge of navigation and a good knowledge of weather conditions in the Baltic. Sometimes you are in absolute control, but sometimes you have to take chances, otherwise you'd never leave the harbour. (56)*

These visitors were oriented towards the tangible environment, claiming the right to the territory *to be explored*. Local people were regarded as assistants to achieve the mission of the trip, but they were not the centre of the Explorers' attention. The following excerpts illustrate an Explorer's mission and provide evidence of self-inscription into the idealised role set:

> *We go out every day to see something. You see, **we won't go out without …without preparation**, when you go out, **you know** that you **have to see that and that**. (33)*

> *The most important in a holiday is that **you have an idea what you want to see** and do and **this is being accomplished**. I **have a lot of plans in the back of my head**, that I want to do: go up to Rytterknægten, see the Rocking stones and the cliffs around Gudhjem, and of course there are some new museums…. (77)*

The Vagabond

Visitors inscribing themselves into the Vagabond mythology adopted an identity of wandering figures, living outside social norms (there are numerous fictional role and real

models, cf. the film *Thelma and Louise*). The mission of the journey was a 'road movie' itself, rather than any specific discovery. If there were several members in the Vagabond group, the journey could be anticipated as having a moulding effect on the group. The journey was largely or completely unprepared, relying as far as possible upon spontaneous (and thus, 'real life') experiences. These visitors were oriented towards wandering itself, laying claim to the destination as a stage for enacting a play that had not been scripted beforehand. Local people might be regarded as supporting characters in the 'road movie', adding a stochastic generator to the traveller's story. The following excerpts demonstrated the Vagabond mission and provided evidence of self-inscription into this idealised role set:

> *The good thing about* ***caravanning*** *is that* ***you can do almost anything you fancy****…we* ***never book anything from home****, we always take off to get some experiences. We* ***manage ourselves****. That's* ***more exciting****…We also found that* ***it is fun to get lost****. It always gives a* ***real experience****, because* ***you will see or experience something*** *that* ***you did not plan*** *to do and did not go after. It might sound strange but it gives an experience. When you just drive along and all of a sudden you say: 'where the hell am I?!'…but then* ***you might bump into somebody who will help*** *you* ***or tell you to leave*** *his property. (30)*

> *We* ***go after the spontaneous experience****, and the nature, very much the nature. That's why we come with our own sailing boat. […] And once you come to moor in a harbour, you* ***don't know what…****where you can eat, where you can sleep,* ***you don't know anything, there's nothing planned****, and you don't know where you can moor. So it is very* ***spontaneous and exciting****, I think. (56)*

Grand Tourists

Visitors adopting the Grand Tourist mythology wished to identify themselves with the travelling aristocrats of the romantic age, departing for a foreign place with the reassurance of hired guides and connoisseurs. They shared romantic and "noble" journey missions of getting to know foreign cultures and people. Responsibility for trip preparation was typically delegated to a professional travel agent or local organiser. These visitors claimed the right to gaze unrestrainedly upon the tangible environment and local people, who were expected to possess 'authentic' features of previously held notions about the destination. The following excerpts provided examples of the Grand Tourist mission:

> *It always interested me to* ***travel abroad and to see how other people live.*** *But we seldom visited a place more than once. Because I always* ***have to experience something new*** *on a holiday. And preferably a big city. Because I think travelling is about tasting* ***different tastes****, smelling* ***different smells, mixing up*** *languages with* ***different people****. (77)*

> *We did not have the possibility to meet others than our hosts at the guest-house. They are sweet, but do not give an impression how Bornholmians are like. In fact, it's a pity*

we don't meet any real Bornholmians. Because when you travel away to experience other places, then you may also want to meet the local inhabitants. (55)

The Colonists

Visitors of the Colonist type adopted the identity of 'conquerors' either of foreign territory or of a place that was perceived once to be theirs (for example people returning to childhood holiday haunts). Their mission was to claim and reconfirm their ownership of parts or the whole of the destination, which could take form either in travelling around or staying in one place. They did not generally prepare their stay in detail, but planned to visit some key attractions which were considered to be crucial for claiming ownership over the destination. Local people were regarded as caretakers of the area and were expected to provide full access to the territory. The following excerpts demonstrated the Colonist mission and showed evidence of self-inscription into this idealised role set:

*Bornholm **means home**, that **we come home**. Aalborg is just another home. But before moving to North Jutland, we had been living in Hasle. So it has **stayed ours**…When we come to Bornholm, it means that we have arrived home…to familiar places and friends. (3)*

*We have been up to Allinge today, a **bit futile excursion, because the ceramist workshop was closed**. So **to get something out of it,** and to see something, we drove up to Hammershus and to Jons Kapel. And today we **have to go and see** Oluf Høst, the new museum, and **we also have to see** the round churches and other things… **They'd better be open**, because we want to show them to our children! (33)*

6.3.1. Negotiating travellers' mythologies

Visitors negotiated their traveller mythologies similarly to their preconceptions about Bornholm during the acquisition of their experiences. However, in this case the emphasis was not on whether the symbolic interpretation of perceived tangible and intangible destination aspects reconfirmed previously held mythologies. Rather, visitors were interested in whether they could lay claim to the destination in order to explore/possess/get to know it, and whether local people would act as partners in the enactment of the idealised role. This section demonstrates how visitors of the four traveller types related to tangible and personal aspects of the destination.

Explorers

Visitors adopting the self-image of Explorers were not particularly interested in local people, and if they noticed them it was only in acknowledgement of their role as 'helpers', 'bearers' or 'assistants' to achieve their mission.

*The **people are friendly**, there **was no problem** there…all **the information we needed we could get**. There was also a little banal thing **that I needed a thread to make a fishing net,** you know a catch-net on a racquet-system. So we drove a little around in Rønne harbour and **asked the locals**…if **they could show us the way to a sail-maker**,*

*but it was almost an impossible task (strangely enough for an island that has water all around it)…anyway**, finally we got some thread for free from one of the fishermen, he was nice.** (19)*

*We **haven't had a personal contact with Bornholmians**, we **only talked briefly** with those we meet **while being outside**. There are probably not that many [tourists] who talk with locals in the summer…well, yes, if you want to. But **actually we come for the nature and the sights.** We are not for people, we are inclined towards the nature and there are neither bad or good experiences being in the nature. (30)*

Explorers did not assess every negative incident as a problem during their stay. Their narratives were often constructed along the lines of a heroic endeavour, where factors such as bad weather or poor facilities were perceived as *challenges* that had to be coped with during the course of exploration:

*The weather was really terrible, but you **can't do anything** about it. **But we manage ourselves**, my husband, our sons and I sailed many times, **we know how to let time pass by**. And we also had the right clothes. But it's true, you don't get so much out of the holidays as we could have. You just have to get yourself together and say, such is the weather and get the best out of it. Go to the swimming pool instead of the beach. Go to museums…there's lots of things we can do. (67)*

*We were a bit **unhappy** about the **sanitary conditions** in the harbour of Gudhjem, because **there is only one toilet** for all the yachts and tourists. So you could hear the other boats pumping out their waste in the water because they did not feel like walking up to the other harbour. But **it is such a little irritation compared to all the fun** we have had…we **would have never quit the harbour** for sleeping in a fancy hotel! (56)*

On the other hand, 'Explorers' were put off by incidents that obstructed the discovery of the destination. For example, bad signposting denied visitors' claimed right of free access:

*There were sometimes **problems with signposting** on the cycling roads. We missed especially a **sign for Rytterknægten**…when you get into Almindingen all of a sudden the signposting stops, and you have no idea which way to carry on. I think, signposting **should be better**, especially around Rytterknægten, **because** it **is an important site…** (72)*

Vagabonds

Vagabonds negotiated tangible and personal aspects of the destination, not only as 'Bornholmian' cues, but also as stage scenery and actors facilitating their travel around the island:

*We have been here last year with my girlfriend and **lived on natural campsites** [campsites provided by farmers] for 20 Kr per overnight. That means we spent 120 Kr.*

*on accommodation, and **just biked around the whole island**, **stopped** to eat a smoked mackerel **if we felt like** or **ran down anywhere** to the beach to have a swim. And we **really got close to some farmers**…**we had a great time chatting in the evenings**. I think they were ready to give something of themselves. And **the sun was shining ceaselessly**, there was not a single cloud in the sky for a whole week, it's clear that beat a charter holiday with several lengths! (73)*

Vagabonds were not critical even towards the oddest incidents, probably because every problem encountered on the journey was assessed as having epic, authentic qualities. These special events could later (in the post-holiday phase) serve as anecdotes:

*We walked through Nexø Torv [marketplace] and then **all of a sudden a bucket of water was emptied** from one of the windows…**right on our heads.** [laughing]. A big flush from above…**we became soaking wet**. We looked up, but nobody seemed to notice or say anything…**so we just shrugged our shoulders and broke into laughing**. It was a nice day… (9)*

Grand Tourists

Visitors subscribing to the Grand Tourist role claimed the right unrestrainedly to observe anything at the destination that could be attributed to 'real Bornholm'. For example, the following interviewee thought it was absolutely natural to stare into the houses and gardens of locals:

*The houses…I really liked the **small yellow and red houses** and these **chocolate-boxy** villages. In Gudhjem, we stood and stared into the **tiny windows** of a house, to **see all these little things and sculptures** they had inside. There were three sweet wooden monkeys sitting in the window. And then a man came out to mow the lawn and **it turned out that it was his window we stared** at. He told us he was an artist and lived in Africa for some time and he made these monkeys. **We had a long chat with him…**We also looked into the **tidy gardens**, and when the owner came out, we had to apologise: 'you must excuse us that we stare into your garden, but it is so beautiful that we can't help it…(28)*

Tangible aspects served as a stage set and locals were regarded as natural actors to be gazed at by visitors. Thus, many visitors claiming to get to know local people and culture, adopted the institutionalised right of visitors to look into things. For example, the following interviewee shamelessly observed Bornholm people at their work, as if they were rare species in a nature reserve:

*I **saw a lot of people painting** their houses and **working in the gardens**…and once started on something, they accomplish it thoroughly. I **noticed that they prepare the walls by filling in the holes** and **chinks** and then they paint it and finish it. There were also many windows changed this year. (20)*

These visitors strongly recall MacCannell's "tourists", who, striving to escape from the superficiality of profane modern life, engage in a quest for authenticity in "other" spatio-temporal dimensions. (MacCannell 1989). This author suggests that all tourists can be regarded as contemporary pilgrims, who not only worship 'sacred' attractions, but also become fascinated by the 'real life' of other people. The most authentic 'real life' can only be found backstage (i.e. in spaces not directly constructed for the tourist gaze), to which private gardens and windows may offer a keyhole to peep into. Furthermore, Grand Tourists also expected locals to interact with them and, for instance, talk about their work, in the manner of documentary actors:

> *Fortunately most people here speak German. We always ask 'Sprechen Sie Deutsch?' and then most speak. I* ***asked a woman*** *in a candy workshop* ***how they were making the sugar mass****, and she was very friendly…****telling me how they prepare*** *it, and* ***what kind of ingredients they put*** *in and* ***explaining the different names*** *of the candies. (6)*

Not only the authenticity of the setting, but also the authenticity of the people gazed upon was crucial to the Grand Tourist myth. Thus, visitors were slightly unhappy about not being able to meet 'real', native inhabitants of Christiansø, only incomers:

> *We sailed over to Christiansø…it is quite primitive, you feel that you have travelled back in time…I think you must be born there to enjoy living over there. But we had a* ***really bad weather so we were sitting in the pub*** *for most of the time. Unfortunately, We* ***did not see any of the Christiansø-islanders****, and those serving in the pub* ***were not native****. But they have been living there for some time and recounted about that…(20)*

Grand Tourists strove to know foreign people and cultures in a rather neocolonialist way, and in this sense they can be paralleled with Poon's (1993) old tourists or Cohen's (1972) organised and individual mass tourists. Grand Tourists were typically desirous to reconfirm Bornholm mythologies of 'historic nostalgia' and Scandinavian mentality (see negotiation excerpts below in 6.2.2. and 6.2.3.). They also found it important to identify themselves with the 'noble voyager' role, expecting to receive a certain standard for their money. Hence incidents of not being treated as their status deserved were assessed negatively:

> *We have experienced it for the second time now that the waiters were* ***totally ignoring*** *the* ***customers****, they were cold and cynical… as long as we supplied them with our money, so they could use it…many places on the island are* ***only interested in our money****. (69)*

Colonists

Visitors following a Colonist mythology claimed the right of ownership of the destination, as well as unlimited access. In this sense they were similar to Explorers, but their narratives lacked the feeling of heroic endeavour and the mission of discovery:

*It was a good experience that you **can stop at many places and sit down.** To sit down and **just enjoy the view** over the water or the cliffs **without having a bonfire or a flagpole** or something like that on the coast…..…They **keep it somehow…intact**. There are a lot of places here on Bornholm you can **sit down and enjoy alone** and be with **your own thoughts**. (59)*

***I'm amazed about this lovely nature**, **where I can wander around everywhere**. There are no signs, that you mustn't do this or mustn't do that… And it was especially great to climb up to the **Helligdomsklipperne**, because I really like to climb. (30)*

Local people only appeared indirectly in Colonist's accounts, typically as caretakers of tourism-related facilities:

The other nice thing we saw that there is so many…these parking lots…which is probably not an experience, but they are naturally accommodated with benches, so that you can sit and eat your picnic in a pleasant environment. (14)

Denial of access, such as closing of attractions was interpreted negatively, as with Explorers:

We visited many churches, and wanted to see all the round churches, but the one in Nyker was closed, we could not come in…we were quite disappointed. Because this is a tourist island, they live from the tourists, so they ought to keep open the round churches. I know it can be risky, but then why don't they remove the silverware? (20)

6.3.2. The importance of traveller mythologies

As discussed in the previous chapter, tourism offers a *liminoid* situation (Turner 1973), where the individual is out of time and place and conventional social ties or everyday obligations are suspended. There is a licence for playful behaviour, and, as was demonstrated above, many take the opportunity to inscribe themselves into a role that is different from their everyday life personalities. This ludic role-enactment may be based on a temporary inversion of social status (king/peasant for a day) (Gottlieb 1982), on the quest for *axis mundi* (Cohen 1972) or on a search for authenticity (Cohen 1979), but also on a variety of other culturally rooted traveller roles.

Most of these liminal role-sets include behaviour patterns that are restricted or even taboo within everyday social norms (e.g. claiming ownership of others' possessions). Thus, visitors find pleasure not only in the reconfirmation of mythologies about a destination, but also in the multiplicity of tourist games and scripts they can adopt and play, while being in a "normless" situation (Dann 1977, Cohen 1985). From the evidence presented of four exemplary traveller's roles, it can be argued that there is a variety of visitor types that interpret the 'holiday product' in different ways.

6.4. Mythologies: an alternative explanation to visitor assessment

This chapter acknowledges the notion that postmodern consumption takes place in a cultural context, where individuals are meaning-centred (Levy 1981). Central to this approach is the idea that customers do not make consumption choices based on products' functional utilities but on the symbolic meanings they may carry. This notion is particularly apparent in tourism and leisure, as Holbrook and Hirschman (1982a) recognise:

> *Entertainment, the arts and leisure activities encompass symbolic aspects of consumptive behaviour that make them particularly fertile ground for research (p. 134).*

However, conventional approaches in consumer research are based on behaviourist and cognitivist studies of choice and post-consumption behaviour (cf. Johnson and Thomas 1992) and only address a small fraction of the phenomenological data that compose the entire consumption experience (such as colours and sounds, impressions, feelings, fears and disappointments). Thus, in order to reveal the effects of the holiday product on visitors' experience, this chapter analysed the unstructured narratives by linguistic methods proposed by Barthes (1972) and Polkinghorne (1988). These included extracting visitors' reflections from the connotation of words and the network of ideas.

The findings in this chapter confirm that the consumption of holidays is a longitudinal process, during which visitors have time to reflect on and build bonds with the places they encounter. Visitors acquire their experiences by attributing symbolic meanings to the tangible and intangible aspects of the destination. This is the act of *negotiation*, involving a continuous manipulative interaction between preconception and perception. Preconceptions guide visitors to perceive meaning in the objects they encounter, and the meanings of those objects affect the original preconceptions. In the previous two sections it was demonstrated that the negotiation of meanings involved the interpretation of signs and symbols and could operate in two directions. Negotiating Bornholm myths was outwards-oriented, attempting to construct the meaning of external reality, while negotiating various traveller roles is directed towards the construction of self-identity while "playing a tourist".

In both cases, the narratives were centred around a sense of appropriation towards Bornholm. Visitors perceiving the 'right' tangible and intangible signifiers of Bornholm myths felt they entered into a space which until then only existed as an external reality. By connecting and reconfirming perceived objects with their symbolic meaning, visitors subscribed to Bornholm, making it a part of their own, personal experience, over which they were able to claim ownership. In this case, Bornholm's symbols (people and artefacts) functioned as *mediators* between preconceptions and the actual experience. Similarly, by connecting and reconfirming activities and events congruent with their traveller roles,

visitors were able to affirm their own identity in (and inscribe themselves into) ideal tourist roles. In this case, Bornholm's symbols functioned as *facilitators* of various role enactments.
Mediating and facilitating functions are simultaneous and overlapping, and thus destinations play a double role in the visitor experience. This may be one of the reasons why tourism consumption is so cumbersome to describe. Focusing on environmental symbolism, it is a pursuit of authentic and romantic place/culture ideals, while, focusing on self-symbolism, it is a quest for identification with ideal role sets. Thus, a destination provides *referential settings* for individuals' experiences, that on one hand allow social reality in a particular, meaningful material space, and on the other hand provide a framework for behaviour patterns appropriate to that reality (Solomon 1988). Although there exist various mythologies of Bornholm as a place as well as of ideal traveller selves, visitors' feeling of fulfilment (i.e. satisfaction) may be related to whether or not their experience is allowed to enter fully into the spirit (and thus, possess) these mythologies.

In the light of these findings, it is important to outline some differences between visitors' stated fulfilment responses (such as delight, happiness, joy, contentment, etc.) and existing theories of satisfaction. In consumer behaviour and service quality studies it is maintained that customers' assessment of a product depends on expectations and perceptions. Expectancy disconfirmation theory is the underlying paradigm behind both satisfaction and perceived quality constructs. Satisfaction with an offering is conceptualised as a function of disconfirmation arising from discrepancies between prior expectations and actual performance (Oliver 1980), while quality is seen as the gap between expected and perceived performance levels (Parasuraman et. al. 1985). In these models, expectations are defined as precise predictions of product attributes (Zeithaml *et al.* 1993), containing normative standards (e.g. best brand norm, ideal and desired norm). These 'should-expectations' are thought to offer the basis for cognitive comparisons during product assessment. However, the vague, idealised preconceptions of Bornholm and of ideal traveller roles bore no resemblance to Zeithaml *et al.'*s (1993) normative expectations. Because of the extraordinariness of the holiday experience, it would be inherently impossible to anticipate exact future outcomes or to possess particular, well-defined reference standards of touristic products or service providers.

Furthermore, disconfirmation of preconceptions is a far more complex and lengthy process than simple comparison. It is proposed that visitors develop bonds with a destination in a long-term involvement that can be illustrated by Tuan's belief: "it takes time to get to know a place" (Tuan 1977, p. 179). During negotiation, preconceptions and perceptions mutually refined and modified each other. Preconceptions filtered perception and perceptions altered generic mythologies. Thus a dynamic matching process occurred, which entailed observing (gazing at) and experiencing a myriad of tangible and intangible symbols. Disconfirmation (rejection) of Bornholm mythologies was only evaluated negatively if the destination was not congruent with the traveller's self-image. For instance, Explorer-type visitors did not care about perceived inauthenticity in Bornholm smokehouses, but Grand Tourists could be disappointed by this. It has long been known

that, when visitors purchase a service, they buy a particular social or sociological experience (Leidner 1987). Symbolic meanings conveyed by service providers and the environment were all part of a setting that mediated Bornholm myths, while the social interaction itself facilitated the visitors' self-inscription into traveller roles. Thus it can be argued that these mythologies also underlay visitors' perceptions and assessments of service providers. The next chapter returns to the original point of departure and investigates holiday experiences in terms of visitors' service journeys and service encounters

7. The ‘Service’ Journey: Describing the Role of Service Providers

The previous chapter studied how visitors interpreted their experiences during the longitudinal encounter with Bornholm. It was demonstrated that both their preconceptions and perceptions were oriented towards Bornholm artefacts and people, whether they were related to service providers or not. The destination was found to play a double role. It *mediated* tangible and intangible signs that visitors could attribute to commonly-held preconceptions (mythologies) of Bornholm. It also *facilitated* visitors’ self-inscription into various traveller roles. The propositions of Chapter Five concerning visitors’ assessment (i.e. that it depends on pursuing evidence of difference from the everyday context and on imaginative pleasure seeking) were developed further. It was suggested that satisfaction (conceptualised broadly as the visitor’s fulfilment response) was also dependent upon visitors’ *sense of ownership* towards the destination, achieved through negotiation of their mythologies.

This chapter narrows down the analysis to tourism service providers and their the role in the visitor’s experience. First, an overview is given of how providers appear (both directly and indirectly) in the narratives, and visitors’ understanding of destinations and services is contrasted with academic concepts and models. Second, various facilitating and mediating functions are identified and assessed in terms of their roles within different visitor discourses. This analysis considers visitors’ accounts of neutral service features as well as positive and negative service episodes. In order to assess how these episodes contributed to the total evaluation of the holiday experience, they are matched against the ‘plots’ of individual narratives and also against destination and traveller mythologies identified in the previous chapter.

These areas are examined in order to clarify the nature of the product that is actually assessed by visitors and to identify the elements and aspects crucial in its assessment, providing the foundation of the discussion in Chapter 8.

7.1. Visitors’ concept of the destination product

The complex nature of destination offerings is acknowledged in the tourism literature as “an amalgam of different goods and services offered as an activity experience to the tourists” (Gilbert 1990). Nevertheless, these fragmented and unbounded ‘products’ are still depicted in simplistic terms, generally based on a functional, core–peripheral component structure (Normann 1984, Gilbert 1990). For instance, Cooper and his colleagues (1993) define the destination offering in terms of its functions: “the focus of facilities and services designed to meet the needs of a tourist” (p. 80), and identify its elements as the four *A*s: *a*ccess, *a*ttractions, *a*menities (accommodation, catering, retailing), being the ‘core’ of the offering, and *a*ncillary services (local marketing organisations) deemed more peripheral.

However, as the previous chapter demonstrated, destinations offer much more than just service experiences for visitors, which may imply that their concept of destinations offerings is at odds with the four As mix or other supply-oriented models. They may perceive destination elements and service experiences in quite a different way. This section examines how visitors identified various *product elements* and *services* they 'consumed' during their journey, in order to gain a 'visitor-centred' view of the destination 'product'.

7.1.1. Identifying product elements

Elements of the four As mix were present in visitors' accounts, typically referred to by common nouns (e.g. hotel, restaurant, smokehouse, ferry, round church) or by proper nouns (e.g. Hammershus, Dueodde, Gudhjem). Statements could consequently be categorised within Cooper *et al.*'s (1993) model. The following excerpts show how access, attractions, amenities and ancillary services contributed to the visitor experience:

Access

*Yesterday we visited Hammershus and when we wanted to go home, the **bus** no. 1 just arrived. So we said fine, but then the **driver** changed the number to 2, which goes in the other direction, towards Sandvig. But there was no problem, the driver said that there was going to be another bus in the village that we could catch to Hasle. (26)*

*It is a bit problematic if you want both a ferry ticket for the car and hotel room in the high season. […] That's why you need to use **Bornholmstrafikken** or one of the travel agents on the island to manage both things once. (69)*

Attractions

*We come mostly to see the nature. To **come out and see** a round church…to **come out and see**…we will attempt **to see as much as possible**. (73)*

*The new **Art Museum** was a great experience…and also the **Oluf Høst Museum**…it has just opened some days ago. The paintings that are exhibited there matched us and the atmosphere very well, and the house was located finely in that little valley…so even its geographical situation was perfect. (6)*

Amenities

*We went to a **restaurant** yesterday, it was excellent…down in Snogebæk, The Little Mermaid. Somebody recommended it when we were out playing golf in Dueodde. It was lovely, they were quite pleasant there. (34)*

*We stayed at **Allinge Hotel**. It was all right, and we got such a delicious food, for example, home-baked rolls in the morning…real nice, yeah. And when we came back yesterday evening after the St. Hans torch parade, they waited us with coffee and delicious, warm apple doughnuts. They made it themselves in the hotel… lovely! (28)*

Ancillary services

*The **tourist information centres** were quite fine, you just go in, check out the brochures they have, take what you need and leave. Or, if you have time, you can wait in the queue to talk with someone. The day we went a lot of people were waiting, so we just took some leaflets and got off. (33)*

Although it was possible to find both common and proper nouns across all the four categories, visitors typically used proper nouns for attractions and common nouns for access, amenities and ancillary services. This differentiation may indicate a specific order of importance among these product elements. Apart from the four As, other aspects in visitors' accounts, which are not normally regarded as parts of the tourism product in destination models, also seemed to be central to the experience (see Chapter 5). For example, local people and private houses:

*Bornholmians hold on tight to their culture, they make so much out of those lovely old **buildings**. […] **I saw a lot of people painting** their houses and **working in the gardens**…and once started on something, they accomplish it thoroughly. (20)*

*We asked **someone** for the direction to a book-shop, and he just listened carefully and asked whether we came from Norway. **When we said yes, he started to smile… even his eyes twinkled**… and then he **escorted us all the way** to the shop at the end of the street…(28)*

This implies that the visitors' product concept is more all-embracing and comprehensive than models that are based on the tourism provision system. Furthermore, visitors make different judgements from tourism scholars and practitioners about the importance of different components in the destination mix. Aspects deemed by academics to be peripheral or ancillary in a supply-based model may play a central role in the tourist experience, while 'core' aspects or amenities (lodging or catering) may not even be mentioned in the holiday account. Consider the following excerpts:

*People are so lovely, even the **custom officers are nice** and **witty**. The first experience when we drove off the ferry (we came via Germany), there stood a Danish officer and said: 'Now then!', and rubbed his hands with an evil smile, [as if] suspecting that we were smuggling alcohol from the tax-free shop. But then he laughed and waved us to move on, so we could just drive away. It was quite amusing. (29)*

*I think that people coming to Bornholm like to stay in an **area that has kept it's very homey atmosphere**…. **They do not want to have a perfect meal or a perfect service, or first class entertainment, they just enjoy** that there's an **island that has kept it's character**. And that's a big advantage, and that's something that you will not find in Germany, you will not find on other islands. Well, there are islands and they are quite nice, but they have not the special charm that you have over here. (7)*

If visitors' do not break the holiday product down in terms of the four As and do not differentiate between core and peripheral offerings in the same way, their assessment would not be expected to follow these categories and hierarchies either. As the amalgamated offering is the holiday experience itself, which humans use to embellish and add meaning to their lives (Graburn 1983), it seems likely that the various product components will be evaluated according to the role they play in it.

Because of the extended temporal and spatial dimension of the tourist experience, Danaher and Mattsson (1994) suggest that it should be studied according to the sequence of events perceived by the visitor, rather than in terms of multiple, static supply-defined components. Before continuing the analysis of product design and delivery along the visitors' service journey (section 7.2), it seems necessary to discuss just how interviewees defined *service* itself.

7.1.2. Identifying service

Service is an elusive concept that is used extensively in various contexts both in technical and everyday language. In contemporary English, the word '*service'* may have a wide variety of meanings, indicated by a five-page list of definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary (1989, pp. 34-39). Academics, practitioners and customers attach different meanings to this word, which yields misunderstandings and ambiguities in a shared understanding (Johns 1999). Thanks to Anglophone dominance in the international environment, 'service' has also permeated other languages during the 20th century, resulting in even more equivocal use of the word.

This was apparent in the visitor accounts. Fifty-five (69%) German and Scandinavian interviewees used (*unsolicited*) either the word 'service' or the native term ('Bedienung' or 'betjening'), sometimes even simultaneously in the same context. Consider the following Norwegian, German and Danish statements, respectively:

> *We stayed at [Hotel] Griffen…in Rønne. It was quite all right, fine…nice room, good food,* ***cosy and kind betjening*** *…****good service****. That's it…yeah, no matter what we asked, they helped us, so it was* ***good service****. (10)*

> *We have known Bornholm for 30 years now. And we still keep coming back, always to the same pension, because there was never any problems. It is always very good, hospitable people and friendly…* ***neat Bedienung****, everything is* ***prima****,* ***good service****, it is wonderful. (76)*

> *For example the hotel we live at…Gudhjem hotel…it is an old merchant house, which has been rebuilt…there are fantastic good conditions…both in the bathroom and the toilets and there's even a swimming pool. So that is* ***fine service****…And the hotel is run by two brothers, it is a family enterprise, very cosy. You get good food and* ***polite betjening****. (28)*

It was noteworthy that interviewees used different adjectives and qualifiers for *service* and *Bedienung*/*betjening* (Table 7.1). This difference may be rooted in the etymological derivation of these terms. German '*Bedienung'* and Scandinavian '*betjening'* have been used in these languages over centuries with a meaning similar to the Latin *servitium*, thus bearing connotations of a personal interaction. Therefore, adjectives applied to *betjening* were always related to a concrete and comprehensible interpersonal event. However, it is becoming an outdated concept: it only appeared in twelve cases compared with service, which was mentioned forty-three times. One reason for the limited use of betjening/Bedienung might be that it is still fraught with connotations of differential status between the customer and the 'servant', which the newly adopted "service" is not.

Table 7.1. Different connotations of the words 'betjening' and 'service'

	Bedienung / Betjening	**Service**
positive	cosy and kind, neat, polite, discreet, nice, smiling, friendly, honest, simple and not stressing, obliging hospitable, welcoming	Excellent, good, high, fine, in order, okay, perfect, prima
negative	not very forthcoming	not good, poor, average, worse
Total cases	12 (22%)	43 (78%)

Although more visitors used the term 'service' than 'Bedienung/betjening', they did not seem confident with such an abstract concept. Unlike the native term, 'service' took only a few, neutral qualifiers, such as good, fine, okay. This form (e.g. good service, poor service) is a hollow description, but was used to refer to both interpersonal encounters and provided facilities. In order to clarify the particular meaning of 'service' in concrete cases, visitors tended to elaborate on their descriptions. For example:

> *We live in a hotel in Gudhjem, with **very fine service and all that**…we are very happy with it. We have some **lovely rooms**, we get **three-course meals** in the evenings and there is a **TV-room** and **benches** in the garden. It is a family that runs the place, **they are very friendly**. (70)*

> ***Good service, people are not overwhelming**…and **they are not grudging**: you get a big coffee and a cake and you can go back several times to refill your cup. (60)*

Etymologically, the word '*service'* originates from the Latin *servitium* [slavery] depicting the action of a subordinate person working for another person. When 'service' was adopted in Danish a few decades ago (mediated by French and English) it was primarily used in technical language, meaning an extra, and often free offering added to tangible goods (such as car maintenance, pizza delivery, after sales service). Since then this word has gone through several commutations in meaning, both in Danish and English, and now for instance describes personal service concepts (room service), abstract services (public services) and utilities (electric supply services). Today, this thinking is reflected in clumsy sentences encountered in everyday Danish speech:

We were unlucky with the transport yesterday. The cab let us down, there was definitely ***no service on*** *[it]. We called a cab to get to the harbour, but it came forty minutes late. So we missed the ferry. (77)*

Furthermore, when visitors were prompted about their opinions of *service*, they were often confused and uncertain as to how the word should be interpreted:

We ***don't use any service****. Neither restaurants or smokehouses. Well, okay, we've had a* ***single burger*** *one day. So we've been tourists in that sense. But* ***we use the nature*** *instead, we prefer the nature: the forest around Ølene, the Svinemose swamp and* ***these natural places…if you want to call them service****. (80)*
Service and service*…****it's the old acquaintances and friends*** *we meet during the holidays. We have known the couple who manage the holiday park for twenty years. They* ***bring us*** *the* ***Jutlandish papers*** *every morning, and we* ***have a good gossip*** *every time we meet, but I* ***wouldn't call that service.*** *Probably we are not the right people to ask about service, because we came here so many times. (3)*

For us, ***service*** *is* ***not something we really look for****…it is* ***not so important****. We come for the quietness, so we don't go to* ***shops*** *or* ***other places****. But for example it* ***can be a good service*** *that there is a* ***clean beach*** *and* ***there are information tables*** *on the coastal paths…I don't know really. (9)*

We have ***not experienced any service****. It is not important when we are on holidays, because* ***we drive ourselves****, and* ***we manage everything*** *by ourselves. We* ***stay at a campsite, we prepare our own food****. We don't need any service in relation with our holidays. (57)*

These excerpts revealed that both Danish and foreign (German) visitors regarded 'service' as something abstract and non-personal. Nevertheless, all these people actually used services on Bornholm, at least those related to infrastructure and retailing.

Tacit conceptualisation
Because they could not name what exactly it was that they 'consumed', visitors were more at ease referring to services and products indirectly. Service personnel encountered in interactions were often referred to as 'they' or 'people':

They *are all right, people have been very pleasant. Though…well,* ***they*** *don't know how to use the till! Or the till keeps breaking on them. (82)*

People *were welcoming and very kind. In the hotel and the shops we visited, on the whole island in fact…they have been very hospitable. (67)*

All the people *were so helpful and friendly, it was fantastic. We felt it was very easy to become more personal with them. Just very friendly and positive. (4)*

Many visitors identified service personnel interchangeably with Bornholm people, and it was difficult to know whether they were actually talking about service providers or just local people.

> ***They** have been smiling and friendly. We also liked that **so many** spoke German, because we don't speak Danish. (6)*

Service outcomes were often referred to in the passive voice, acknowledging an impersonal "someone" behind service situations:

> *The restaurants **are not run down**, they are clean and **well-decorated**, the food is good…**well-made.** There is a good menu. They've got a really good variety…(81)*
> *The Castle was **well-kept**, all the papers and the pictures in the exhibition…and it's **well-explained**. (88)*

> *You should not go too late in the shops, because there won't be anything on the shelves. Last evening, the supermarket was **emptied** and **not filled up**…there was a lot of **things** you couldn't get. (73)*

In an analogous way, tangible elements of the offering were sometimes referred to as "things":

> *We had an excellent bus driver, who told us about Bornholm's history and pointed out different **things** on the way. (27)*

> *We have often stopped for different **things**, while biking: for a pølser [hot-dog] or fish or something like that… or for an ice-cream. (6)*

These findings suggest that thinking in terms of 'service' was alien to most of these visitors. Despite the frequency with which the word was used, its meaning was so vague that individuals found it necessary to explain the context in which they used 'service'. Alternatively, they used 'proxies', such as *they*, *people*, *things* or the passive voice in commenting on certain aspects in service situations. This confusion is partly a result of the etymological commutation and multiple meanings of the word 'service', but it can equally be attributed to the complexity of the service–goods continuum (Sasser 1972), on which most offerings consist of inseparable tangible and intangible parts.

In the following sections, the analysis is turned around180 degrees. Instead of attempting to fit visitors' perceptions into academic models and concepts, narratives are used to extract and assess facilitating and mediating functions of service providers. This is done by merging two different methodological approaches. First, interviews were searched and content analysed for *service episodes*, identifying service encounters (with a service employee or system) throughout the entire holiday stay which had led to positive or negative visitor experiences. Second, these specific service episodes were assessed

according to *visitor logic and 'plot'*. That is, episodes were analysed in the context of visitors' real activities, such as preparation and experiencing (Chapter 5), as well as compared with main destination mythologies (Chapter 6).

7.2. Service providers as facilitators

This section discusses service episodes and incidents related to the facilitation of the visitor journey. Visitors' narratives were not constructed chronologically, so it was impossible to reconstruct a generic *service journey* (Johns and Clark 1993) in terms of pre-arrival, arrival, sojourning and departure phases. However, it was possible to identify qualitatively different facilitator roles and to analyse why and how incidents arose. In the following, two types of facilitator roles are presented and discussed in comparison with service journey concepts.

7.2.1. Facilitation of movement

Facilitation of movement refers to the provider function which assists visitors to plan, organise and accomplish their journey on the island. This role can be played by various service providers, such as travel agencies, transport companies, visitor centres, guide bureaux and different attractions. Movement facilitation may already play an important role in preparatory phases, but it can also be identified throughout the entire duration of the visitor's journey. Two different movement-facilitating functions were identified from the interviews: gatekeeping and connecting. These are presented below.

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping refers to the facilitation of admission to destination territory and making information available. Service providers playing a gatekeeper role controlled visitors' right of access, and thus provided crucial conditions for the accomplishment of the journey. The following excerpts shed light on gatekeeping episodes, referring to travel agents' gatekeeper role, through booking, information searching and planning activities.

> *We decided quite late to come here, and then **it was fully booked everywhere**…it was not possible to **get hold of a place for ten days**. Finally, we talked to North Bornholms **Tourist Centre** to arrange our stay. She said it was going to be hard, but then **she found a solution by booking at two hotels** and we had to move between them. That was no problem, we are used to moving anyway. (58)*

> *We **called a travel agent**, because I wanted to have a campsite with a night-watch…I wanted to have safety because of the kids… or if anything happens in the middle of the night, I know that there is somebody to contact. The **agent had a list of all the campsites** and booked us to a family camping in Gudhjem. (65)*

Incidents related to travel agents or tour operators typically arose when there was a lack of flexibility in tailoring the product according to visitors' requirements. For example:

*In order to book the hotel, we went to a **travel agency** in Sweden, but were quite annoyed by them. They **only had package offers,** which were quite **expensive**, and you couldn't get **anything for less than a week**. But we only had five free days. I also got a **brochure about summerhouses**, but I **couldn't understand the different pricing**. At the end we just called a place ourselves and got through. (22)*

Cliff and Ryan (1997) also discuss the gatekeeping role of tour operators, who they feel to have a critical role in developing access (and thus holding the key) to destinations. The findings presented above support this idea. However, travel agents are not the only gatekeepers of the visitor's journey. For example, highly autonomous visitors prepared their stay more independently and consulted tourist literature rather than operators:

*We have been already **informed beforehand** through **guidebooks and brochures**. So we were engaged in reading those **to get an impression** of this island. We **prepared everything**: the hiking and the biking trips and the visits to Sandvig, Hammershus and the round churches. We also talked about trying the smoked fish… (14)*

*Probably the **best information** was from a **newspaper article** my mother sent to me, where somebody told about their trip to Bornholm: what they have seen and where they hiked. That was a really good article, **providing an overview on everything** we needed to know. So we **planned what we wanted to do based on that article**, but also on some brochures and **the material we collected from the Internet**. (59)*

Guidance and effective information provision were particularly important for these high-planner visitors. The negative episodes they reported tended to refer to ineffective or unusable information material:

We called the Welcome Centre and received two leaflets, which were not particularly helpful. There was some missing information… for example I missed a proper map over Bornholm. There were some sketches here and there, but not very useful. (59)

We are thinking about doing a bike round tour from Rønne to Gudhjem and back, which is in this guide, too. The guide describes complete tour proposals, which are fortunately not too long, but… it does not show the entire cycling path network…It does not show interesting round trips. The attractions are very nicely described, but they are on the same line, so you won't know how to get back to Rønne by a different itinerary. So…instead of taking the same road back, we have to think of other ways of returning to the hotel. (15)

Service providers could control the right of access, not only to information, but also to physical space. Because of Bornholm's geographical location in the middle of the Baltic Sea, ferry companies were bottleneck gatekeepers, on which visitors depend to reach the island. The majority (92%) of visitors used one of the two ferry companies servicing Bornholm (Denmark Statistic Yearbook 1998), and for many 'low planner' or repeat

visitors, these are the first and unavoidable gatekeepers to the destination. Narratives were fraught with remarks about this critical link, criticising complicated and/or expensive access to the destination:

> *It is **so difficult** to come here. It **must be easier also by ferry**, not only by plane. First, there are **too few possibilities** to come to Bornholm, especially via Germany. But I could imagine **an easier booking system**, too: for example, that **I only have to call one telephone number for a combined ticket** from Zealand or Jutland irrespective of the ferry company. Otherwise more and more people will go to Jutland, now that the [Storebælt] bridge is open. (5)*

> *I think it's **very expensive** to come to the island. Therefore **we really welcome the competition** by Scandlines, because it yielded lower price offers in the middle of the week. (38)*

> *It is **difficult to come to Bornholm and it is expensive**. Not because it's long: it's 100 km driving from door to door Copenhagen-Vestermarie, the petrol bill isn't the problem. But it is extremely **complicated with all those ferries**. And it is a bit problematic if you want both a ferry ticket for the car and hotel room in the high season. You **can't really manage it yourself**, because you can risk to reserve a hotel room and then it turns out that the ferry is fully booked for that day. Or the other way round. That's why you need to use Bornholmstrafikken or one of the travel agents on the island to manage both things once. So I could easily imagine that many avoid coming to Bornholm because it's so complicated and expensive to come here. (69)*

Admission was important not only in the entry phase, but throughout the entire sojourning time. The facilitation of physical or visual access (to attractions or natural sites) was a recurring element in the narratives, which visitors often praised:

> *It was a great experience to go around in the nature, especially the long walking trips along the coast. There are marked paths you can go along…like at Randkløve, you know, in that style…really nice fields, just to be in sheer nature, and not that many tourists actually. Even in Ekkodalen, you don't feel that is invaded by tourists, because they are scattered in such a large area. (36)*

> *It was a good experience that you can stop at many places and sit down. To sit down and just enjoy the view over the water or the cliffs without having a bonfire or a flagpole or something like that on the coast…They keep it somehow…intact. There are a lot of places here on Bornholm you can sit down and enjoy alone and be with your own thoughts. (59)*

> *I'm amazed about this lovely nature, where I can wander around everywhere. And it was especially great to climb up to the Helligdomsklipperne, because I really like to climb. (30)*

We saw glass-making in Svaneke …Pernille Bülow. We saw them working, it's really interesting. Quite a lot of room, so if there is a lot of people, you don't really have to… well, there's not really a crowd… so you can see very well. (6)

As discussed in the previous chapter, all visitors claimed a right to unlimited access to the destination territory, although they placed different interpretations on it (exploring, getting to know, colonising, etc.) Thus, visitors reported negative incidents if access was not granted or if it was restricted by entrance fees. Consider the following excerpts:

We were not aware that the season ends already in September…there are a lot of things closed…most of the restaurants and museums. So you can see all these beautiful houses but you can't get in the inside…you can't talk to the people…there is no life in the evenings. (95)

We were walking from Gudhjem to Helligdomsklipperne on the coastal path, and got surprised by the rain. So we thought we might as well get a cup of coffee in the Art Museum's bar, and wait until it's over. But it turned out that the bar is reserved for the visitors of the museum, and you can't go there to get a cup of coffee, unless you've paid the entrance fee. It is really silly, because there is a long way to any other cafés, and they could earn some extra if they let the hikers in, too. (4)

I think the Bornholmians (or at least the places we have been to) are a bit too quick in asking for arrival fees. And it's relatively expensive compared to other places. It costs 55 Kr. per person to look at a farm, Melstedsgård. Allright, there were some workshops inside, like a bakery, but not too many. And we couldn't try these crafts ourselves, we were only allowed to watch the baker working. I hoped that we could bake our own bread…it would have been more amusing for the kids if we knead our pastry and bake in that old oven. But that was all… we were only allowed to watch and we paid 55 Kr. for that I think that's too expensive. (59)

Negative remarks about the pricing of access were not always related to a perceived value-for-money mismatch, but sometimes to the mere idea of charging for certain intangible, but still essential aspects for visitors. For example, accommodation providers on Bornholm differentiated room rates on the basis of sea view, which was regarded as overpriced:

There was one thing that I found a bit hard, ***that we had to pay 300 Kr. extra if we wanted to have a room with a sea view****. 300 Kr. for the view, that means* ***we paid 600 Kr. over the normal price****. Of course we wanted to have the view and we enjoy it every day, but I think it's expensive. I asked the woman in the travel agency* ***when are we going to be taxed for fresh air****…, but of course she can not be held responsible. This is a* ***shameless price 300 Kr. in 11 days… only for the view,*** *I think it's a bit too much. (70)*

Connecting

Connecting refers to the facilitation of links between two or more service providers during the visitor's journey. Most providers focused only on their own offering, neglecting its 'fit' into the entire destination product. Like gatekeeping, connecting functions were crucial to the accomplishment of the journey. At the beginning of the visitor's stay, typical incidents included missing or ill-matched links between ferries and accommodation provision:

> *When **we arrived to Rønne** and went to the Welcome Centre as the first thing, **there were so many people**, doing exactly the same! We **waited three quarters** of an hour …standing a long queue **to get served**. And I mean, they could have figured that out…**they could have organised it better… or could have put in more people when the ferry just arrives**. (15)*

> *There was poor service at Allinge Tourist Centre…**if you arrive by the ferry after noon [12.00] on Saturdays, the tourist centre is closed**, you **can neither ask anything or get anything**. I believe it is poor. We **just arrived to Bornholm and hurried there to get our keys for the summer house**, and we could hear the clock on the church tower striking twelve, and the slamming of the door at the tourist centre. Luckily, we managed to catch the girl and got in, but **there are a lot of others who come later or on Sunday and cannot find their summerhouse**…**how can they get on if the tourist centre is closed?** (69)*

Connections between accommodation and transport providers could also go wrong in the departure phase. For example, visitors often experienced a negative incident at the very end of their stay, because of providers' ignorance of the next link in their journey:

> *The service [Bedienung] in the hotel was good during our entire stay, but today…we could not get any breakfast. I don't know if the young lady at the reception knew how to handle situations when people must leave early morning. She told us that we could have breakfast from 7 o'clock on. This was too late, because our ferry was going to leave at 7.30. But she said it was not possible…I think they should have given us a lunch packet or something… or maybe a coffee only, a coffee! In a thermos flask or whatsoever. But we couldn't get anything at all. (8)*

> *There were some agreements that were not fulfilled as we counted on they would…for example concerning the hired bus' arrival to the ferry… we almost missed it. It could have been organised better. (72)*

Visitors' accounts of getting around the island also highlighted poor facilitation, which included connections between local transport providers, tourist guides, maps and signposting. For example, faulty travel information and ineffective public bus schedules could hinder visitors in their attempts to get around the island, and hence impede accomplishment of the journey:

*They **gave us the wrong bus timetable**. The **guy at the camping** told us how to come here to Gudhjem, but he **gave us the wrong times**…because the buses drive according to the summer plan after the 1st June. **There was no bus**. So instead of waiting, we walked some of the way, but became quite tired…and wet. At the end we took a taxi. (16)*

[…] there is one bus missing from Gudhjem to Rønne connected to the arrival of the last ferry from Christiansø…there is none according to our timetable at least. It is a little impractical with more than three hours' break. It is kind of a long stretch. (71)

These occurrences in the connection of service providers are comparable with the sequential incidents of Stauss and Weinlich (1997), and result from the particular chronological design of the visitor's journey. In order to avoid these mismatches in the complex service offering, service providers at holiday destinations need to co-ordinate their activities across the boundaries of individual firms.

Apart from unfavourable links between providers, insufficient orientation, such as bad cycling guides or a lack of signposts, could also hinder visitor's journeying around Bornholm:

We also got this… 'Cycle paths on Bornholm' guide… but I thought the maps were too small… you had to turn all the time… you go for 5 or 8 kilometres and then you have to stop and turn around. And you know, it's a good thing for cyclists to know if the road is easy or not. And there's not a lot of information on that here… and another problem is that when you try to follow the cycle paths the other way around, well, the steep hill is not a steep hill any more, but there are other steep hills, so I would really like to have more information on that. Normally, when you have a real cycling map, there are sort of arrows to show, whether there is a hill or not… which I would find very helpful. (6)

There are some signposts missing. There is an arrow towards the Rocking Stone in the car park, but there is nothing further on…only a signpost to something called 'Stenrøret' [Stone-pipe], but no indications to the Rocking stone. We could have risked to go several kilometres and still not find it. And finally, when we wanted to drive on the ferry, the signposting was poor again. We came into Rønne from Hasle, and they directed us to the terminal of pedestrian passengers. Luckily we had ample time, so it did not matter that we had to drive around in the harbour twice to find out how to get on the ferry by car. Then we also realised that if we came from the other direction, we wouldn't have been in doubt, the signposting was there. (58)

On the other hand, excessive signposting of insignificant attractions confused visitors, rather than facilitating decisions about journey directions. Consider the following visitor complaints:

There are enough things to see on Bornholm. But there are small signposts saying 'sight' all the time, it is almost irritating, because you can't drive off the road every time there is a signpost. And sometimes we drove off to see what is there and it turned out that there are just some stones in the middle of a field. (58)

The road is full of signposts towards tomb hills and barrows and she [partner] wanted to see some. So sometimes we tried to follow the signs… and it was just hopeless. Because we were never quite sure whether we've found them or not… I mean, there was something sometimes, but…not very visible. Well, if I go alone, I always avoid Bronze Age…cemeteries or whatever…because there is nothing to see. The big deal is that there used to be some people to put these hills up and there used to come some other people to dig them up again and took all the gold and all the interesting stuff out of them. Now there is a hill again, and you can't see whether it is just a dune or a hill where somebody was buried. (6)

Overstatements about attractions in guidebooks were evaluated as downright untrue by some visitors, although these were not deemed critical negative incidents:

We had Du Monde ***guidebook****, and we sometimes thought* ***it was much exaggerated****. I mean I really like Bornholm it's a nice island, but there aren't high waterfalls when you've been to the Alps or … I mean it must be quite big for Denmark, but in fact they are quite small … and why doesn't it tell? It says…well…* ***it's big and enormous amounts of water rush down the mountain side*** *[giggling] and when we got there,* ***there was a tiny little stream that has almost dried out****! I thought* ***the guide was much exaggerated … it said: it's enormous, it's big, it's very important it's the finest we have ever seen.*** *[…]But well, at the end we got used to it and didn't trust the guide anymore, and we didn't visit all those 'important' attractions. (7)*

Visitors became far more disappointed when first-hand, personally given information turned out to be untrue:

We had a little problem with the museums in Gudhjem. I was told at the Railway Museum ***that if you pay the entrance fee there then you are entitled for a free entry to the Oluf Høst Museum.*** *But they did not seem to know this at the other place,* ***it was a bit suspicious****. I don't have anything against paying at both places, but* ***they shouldn't claim something that is not true****. (34)*

The findings above demonstrated that service providers were critical facilitators of visitors' movements. By controlling access, availability and information, they played a key role, providing optimal circumstances to discover and get to know the destination. These optimal circumstances might depend on one or several service providers. In the latter case it was important for the different suppliers to be aware of and to facilitate the next 'link' in the journey. Typical incidents arose either from bottleneck situations (i.e. when a single provider was responsible for the accomplishment of the journey) or from mismatches

between different providers. Bottleneck situations occurred if the provider denied or delimited access, through poor flexibility, overpricing or overcomplicated organisation. Mismatch situations arose when providers were unaware of, or careless about adapting their offerings to, other suppliers in the destination, or gave insufficient or untrue information about others.

7.2.2. Facilitation of stay

The previous section examined various facilitator roles directed towards visitors' physical movement around the island. This section presents a different provider function which facilitated visitors' staying and *being* on the island whilst away from home. 'Facilitation of stay' refers to making the sojourn easier by taking care of visitors' basic needs or relieving them of everyday duties such as child-care. This role could be played by various service providers, but mostly by those offering accommodation or catering. Two different stay-facilitating functions were identified from the interviews: *substituting* and *child-orientation*. These are presented below.

Substituting

According to a Maslowian hierarchy of needs, visitors need to satisfy basic needs of resting, eating/drinking and safety when away from home. 'Substituting' occurred when service providers temporarily took on the responsibility of totally or partially satisfying these needs for their guests. Accommodation and catering establishments can be seen as 'threshold' factors in facilitating the visitor experience, since visitors can not engage in so many leisure-related activities without them. The following excerpts show examples of substituting, where service providers took over different home functions:

> *We spent a fortnight in a caravan at Hasle family camping. There* ***are clean conditions in the bathrooms, the toilets and so on****. Fine shower rooms and good facilities…there is* ***even a washing machine…so you don't have to pile up clothes.*** *And there's a nice loungy area you can go and sit all day. (63)*

> *We stayed at* ***Allinge hotel****. It was all right, and* ***we got such a delicious food, for example, home-baked rolls in the morning…real nice, yeah****. And when we came back yesterday evening after the St. Hans torch parade, they* ***waited us with coffee and warm apple doughnuts****…lovely. They made it themselves in the hotel… delicious! (28)*

> *They are polite and friendly in this hotel …and* ***take care that you should be okay. They look after you****. For example, we could* ***prepare our picnic lunch-packs after breakfast****…as a part of the half-pension offer. There was a* ***whole lot of different kind of laid (sausages and cheese) and rye bread was put out*** *as well as some packing paper. So we could prepare what we wanted ourselves and did not have to bother about to find a place for lunch. (28)*

Incidents arose when service provision did not meet basic needs of rest, shelter or safety. The following excerpts illustrate situations where providers failed to facilitate everyday comfort and safety or neglected visitors' schedules:

> ***In the bathroom there was no bath mat*** *and* ***there wasn't anything to hold*** *onto. No handle or grip… and I have difficulties to go so* ***it was a bit upsetting****. They should have had it, it is important to old people like me… (48)*

> *We were* ***bothered by loud Swedes every single day****, three days in a row. We* ***couldn't fall asleep because they were singing****…then the next morning a new group arrived at half seven and made a lot of noise. So we woke up early again.* ***At the end we changed hotels****, because we couldn't bear it. (61)*

> *It's a bit* ***lousy*** *that you wake up at half past five in the morning and you* ***can only get coffee and breakfast at eight,…from eight to nine o'clock****. Well, we can't really demand an earlier breakfast,* ***but at least they could have put tea service in the rooms****. So what we do is to gather together for a little snaps at seven and chat until they open the restaurant. (24)*

Basic facilities of this kind (i.e. comfort or functional provider aspects) from a parallel with 'hygiene' (Herzberg 1969) or 'dissatisfier' factors (Johnston *et al.* 1990). That is, they were evaluated neutrally, if provided at an adequate level, but impacted negatively on visitors' assessment if they were absent or inadequate. However, aspects deemed unsatisfactory by the respondents above were completely irrelevant for others staying at the same hotel:

> *We stayed at a hotel in Hasle that is just being restored.* ***Not a fine hotel, only two stars and a bit old-fashioned, but it suited us****. We only paid for half pension and* ***got lovely breakfasts and dinners****. We* ***did not need more****…we left right after breakfast every day and came back only late in the evenings. If* ***we have to spend money, then we prefer to use it for travelling, not for luxurious comfort****. There are some people who stay a lot in their hotels. We didn't do that: we travelled around the whole island by bus. (20)*

These visitors also provided the rationale for their milder evaluation, stating their preference of travelling contra comfort. They may be considered Explorer or probably Vagabond type visitors, who were not put off by poorer facilities, as long as they could trade these off against an extraordinary experience. The next excerpt showed a similar case of compromising basic comfort and hygiene standards:

> *We were a bit* ***unhappy*** *about the* ***sanitary conditions*** *in the harbour of Gudhjem, because* ***there is only one toilet*** *for all the yachts and tourists. So you could hear the other boats pumping out their waste in the water because they did not feel like walking*

*up to the other harbour. But **it is such a little irritation compared to all the fun** we have had…we **would have never quit the harbour** to sleep in a fancy hotel! (56)*

This excerpt revealed that poor comfort did result in an initial negative evaluation, but was re-evaluated in the light of the total adventurous experience. Interestingly, not every case of incident reassessment was supported by an explanatory narrative. Sometimes negative happenings were just played down at the end of the stay:

There are so many students at Æblehaven, the place we stay at…and in the start we were disturbed by them. They jumped on their beds and we could hear it all night: bang-bang! [imitating], because the walls are so thin. We couldn't sleep at all. But then we told to the reception and he talked to the teachers, because the other guests had problems with sleeping in that noise, so since that it hasn't been so bad. Anyway, they are kids and they are wonderful…one of them even apologised to us. (14)

The excerpts above demonstrated that the assessments of different provider aspects (whether dissatisfiers or not) were not universal. They not only varied from visitor to visitor, but also within the different phases of the individual visitor's journey.

Child-orientation

In order to have a relaxing holiday, visitors expected to be able to delegate some aspects of everyday duties to service providers. This was crucial for families, for whom the success of the holiday was dependent on providing a good time for children and also a relaxing time for adults. Thus, another sub-theme of stay-facilitation was child-orientation and child-care. The following examples revealed that providers could exhibit both planned and spontaneous children-mindedness:

*We went to Hammershus today because **there is guiding for children**. And **the guide was excellent, easy to understand …with an angelic patience**. He was so **lively in his storytelling**, that he managed to keep Henrik [son] shut up for a whole hour! (32)*

*We have been lucky to come to this farm at last. It is lovely… clean and nice, he [the host] takes care of it …without making us feel that we should make something special. For example, **our son is welcome to join him in his duties and watch what he is doing**. It was **just so natural, and he said: of course he can go into the barn and the gardens, he's just like all the other boys**. And there is a wonderful cherry-tree in the garden, that Anders [their son] can climb and pick cherries from… (59)*

For many parents, it was also important that children were allowed to move unrestrainedly and safely around attractions:

*We went to the **Medieval Centre**. It is **not a big place** and there are only a few venues, but it's okay, because **you can let the kids run freely** and we can still find each other.*

*The **puppet theatre was good and they loved the canon-shooting** and that they could grind their own knives at the blacksmith's workshop. (34)*

*I liked that the **kids could spend hours at the different venues** in Brændesgårds-haven, for example there was a merry-go-round you could turn it yourself, **there was nobody standing there saying how many people can come in and then closing it**…here the parents could also do something, controlling the speed, deciding to join the kids on the jumping mattress. It is lovely that everybody at all ages are allowed to play as they like, and when you pay the entry, it's all paid, you don't have to pay at every venue. (27)*

Child safety and the ability to leave children unattended was another important aspect facilitating a carefree holiday for families:

*The camping was very good. We only wanted to be lazy on this holiday and that is what we could do. It was good. We came with two **kids and there was a playground, where we could leave them alone…they could play with the other kids, and we did not have to look after them, it was safe**. It was very relaxing for us. They went to the beach or to the playground. (54)*

*We stay at a **family camping** in Dueodde. If you go with family and small kids, it's ideal. They are really friendly…and the **campsite is in good condition, and does a lot for children: there's a playground, tennis site, mini-golf**. And I can just relax and read, while **there is some action for the kids.** (66)*

Even catering outlets were praised for child-mindedness in their food and service provision:

*We **always went to eat at Arne's smokehouse** in Årsdale. We have got some favourite smokehouses on the island, and I think this is one of the better ones. Probably because they smoke according to the old tradition, and **they always have fish rissoles especially for my children, knowing that fishbones are a big problem, when you are in that age.** (36)*

Children-related incidents arose if children were ill-received or not adequately catered for at service providers. Consider the following examples:

*We were in Restaurant Stemmegaffel [Tuning Fork] where the Vest Brothers are playing. The restaurant itself **was not that good**. Because…it did not focus on children at all… **there was no remoulade, no children's menu, you could only get red sausages with chips**. **And they had no flutes, only ordinary bread**. But maybe it was our fault, because this is not a children's restaurant anyway. And okay, I accept that some places don't focus on kids, while others do. But **we went there mostly because we heard that they are going to play music at 9 o'clock**. And then you think, you pay*

a bit extra for the food because there is live music, ***but the guys came very late, around 10 o'clock****. And then* ***I really get annoyed because my daughter should go to bed around 9,*** *and now she had to sit for an extra hour, she couldn't carry on until that. (35)*

This Fyrtøjet ***was not very hospitable to children****, either. You could see on the waiters' face that* ***they can hardly bear kids****. As* ***if it was a favour to let them stay there and pay half price for lunch****…(but they don't even eat half portion, when they are under 6). Maybe* ***we should have just gone to Pakhuset instead****, where there's a children's menu and every one of them gets a colouring book. (77)*

The findings above indicated that service providers could be critical facilitators of visitors' stay. By satisfying basic everyday needs and taking over everyday duties, service providers played a key role in providing optimal circumstances for the holiday experience. Typical incidents arose from inappropriate assessment of visitors' basic needs or a reluctance or inability to fulfil them. Sometimes providers assessed adult visitor's needs correctly, but ignored the children's needs.

7.2.3. Comparing the concept of facilitation and service journeys

Various service scholars acknowledge the holistic complexity of service experiences, suggesting that they are longitudinal processes entailing several phases. The sequence of these service encounters (also referred to as 'moments of truth' by Carlzon 1987) make up 'service journeys'. Johns and Clark (1993) claim that service journeys have a universal structure, consisting of finding and approaching the service, interacting with personnel/physical facilities and departing from the service. The idea of sequential service processes is developed further by Mattsson and his colleagues, who suggest that temporally lengthy service processes can be broken down into generic sequences that are common to all customers (Danaher and Mattsson 1994).

For example, at holiday destinations visitors would go through a service journey consisting of transport, accommodation, attraction and catering provider stages (Chadee and Mattsson 1995), while a hotel guest's stay can be broken down into check-in, room, breakfast and check-out stages (Danaher and Mattsson 1995). These studies suggests that the service encounters listed above are central to each destination or hotel visit, and propose that overall customer satisfaction may be modelled as the sum of accumulated episodic evaluations along the service journey.

Although these approaches acknowledge the dynamic temporal flow of complex offerings, they still conceptualise service experiences in terms of discrete phases corresponding to operational systems. Similarly to static, multi-attribute models (e.g. the 4 As), they imply that the customer's thinking follows an atomistic logic, which rationally evaluates each single phase in the consumption process. What such sequential models fail to acknowledge is that visitors do not simply look for suppliers of transport, hotel rooms or meals, but at

the same time seek to realise holiday aspirations and fantasies through encounters with different people or new environments.

It is questionable to what extent the service journey approach is appropriate for explaining visitors' assessment of holiday experiences. Mapping the visitors' journey in this way results in a generic chronological blueprint, which aims to identify numerous service functions during the pre-arrival, arrival, sojourn and departure phases. This approach could reveal all service encounters which catalyse the typical service journey on a destination, but is unlikely to be able to explain how they contribute to an individual visitor's holiday experiences. Service journeys attempt to redefine the visitor experience in terms of provider-oriented phases and functions. In contrast, the concept of facilitation helps to identify what role service providers play in the holiday experiences and only extracts those episodes that were important to the visitor (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2. Facilitating roles of service providers in various phases of the holiday experience

	Sub-themes	Facilitating what ?	Typical providers	Typical problems
Facilitation of movement	**Gatekeeping** **Connecting**	access and availability to physical space and information	Travel agents Visitor centres Transport firms	*Bottleneck*: restrain and deny access *Mismatch*: ignore next link in journey
Facilitation of stay	**Substituting** **Child-care**	basic needs and delegation of everyday duties	Accommodation Catering Attractions	*Misjudgement*: of visitors' or children's needs

Although visitors *all* encountered services during a destination or hotel stay, they showed no signs of breaking the holiday experience down in terms of provider-defined episodes or of attributing equal importance to each stage of the service journey. This is consistent with criticisms of existing service quality models (Pieters *et al.* 1995). As shown in the previous chapter, the visitor's journey was more than a passage through space and time. It was also an *experience*, frequently with connotations of adventure, change and learning, which made a profound impact on physical and inward senses. From the visitor's point of view, the service journey was a chain of facilitation encounters which built up the holiday experience, rather than a sequence of consumption stages. Although most of the experience was beyond the control and scope of service provision (e.g. watching a sunrise), visitors needed assistance to have a smooth journey (e.g. in making decisions, making arrangements, gaining access, etc.).

Thus, the way service organisations facilitated the visitor's journey is only half the story. The previous chapter demonstrated that tangible and intangible aspects of the destination were also assessed by visitors whether or not they mediated particular cultural or traveller mythologies. The following section discusses this other, mediating role of service providers.

7.3. Service providers as mediators

In the previous chapter it was found that tangible and intangible cues of the destination played a semiotic role in visitors' experiences. Visible aspects of the service environment, such as clothing, decor, or order could communicate significant messages about intangible qualities of service providers and colour visitors' quality perceptions. Bitner (1990) notes that the physical environment can serve as symbolic evidence in visitors' assessment of service failure and hence their service satisfaction (cf. Schneider 1980). Consciously designed service environments were termed *servicescapes* by Bitner (1992), denoting the physical site where the service encounter takes place.

Like all other parts of the visible world, servicescapes communicate meanings and values for people (Tilley 1994). On one hand, they may represent unwritten rules and conventions in a given service encounter, while, on the other hand, they provide information, for instance about a destination's culture and people. Servicescapes can be produced through substantive and communicative staging (MacCannell 1989). Substantive staging refers to the physical creation of commercialised and contrived environments, while communicative staging stands for the intangible, interpersonal rituals taking place in a service interaction. For example, the internal decor of smokehouses (fishing nets, buoys, buffet served on a boat) provided substantive staging for the purchase and consumption of traditional food, designed specifically for tourists. Eating smoked herring also involved communicative staging, in the form of purchase and consumption rituals. These acts communicated meanings that transcended the service context: for example, the employee's Bornholm accent might confirm the authenticity of the setting.

This section has discussed service episodes and incidents which supported Bornholm myths through tangible and intangible signifiers of service providers. It was found that visitors' assessments of incidents were directed by two different types of commonly-held perceptions: mythologies related to tourism services in general and mythologies related to Bornholm. Both types are presented below.

7.3.1. Communicating service mythologies

Service mythologies refer to general, unwritten 'rules' about tourism-related service offerings. These are such obvious aspects of the service delivery that visitors would not notice them unless they were missing. This could be demonstrated in some negative incidents, where visitors used phrases such as "they ought to" or "they have to". For example, attractions and other tourism related businesses "ought to" stay open all the time:

> *We visited many churches, and wanted to see all the round churches, but the one in Nyker was closed, we could not come in…we were quite disappointed. Because this is a tourist island, they live from the tourists, so they ought to keep open the round churches. I know it can be risky, but then why don't they remove the silverware? (20)*

I don't like Rønne… Well for a start it was all shut. It was a holiday or something…but we were not the only tourists who expected Rønne to be open […]. It was beautiful but there was nothing open, only one sweet shop. Even the ice-cream kiosks were closed. And it's the same on the weekends: everything is closed on Saturdays and Sundays… for ordinary tourists it must be absolutely a nightmare! I think they have to decide whether they want to be a tourist destination in which case they have to cater seven days a week, and that includes opening the shops… or if they just want to be an ordinary small Danish town in which case they close half of the Saturday and the whole Sunday. (84)

These excerpts echo the findings of Chapter 6, confirming that visitors claimed unlimited access to destination territory. They also reveal visitors' preconceptions that a tourist destination must provide this access, if it wants to make a living from visitors. On the other hand, perceived high prices on Bornholm were also attributed to the island's status as a tourist destination. Interestingly, most visitors found this a natural explanation for elevated prices:

There is nothing to be negative about…except for the prices…they are higher than at other places. We have just been discussing it, that we paid 32 Kr. for a small smoked mackerel and some potato salad…and over 20 Kr. for beer. While if you go to a shabby fishing port, you can get twice as much food for half price…well, more or less. But it's clear, this is a touristy place, so it's demand-supply, they are aware, that they can ask so much. (73)

Sometimes high prices were acknowledged more as an observation than as a negative comment:

I think many of these restaurants are based on the tourists, and the prices are fairly screwed up, or at least that's what we noticed in Vang. But it's not that disappointing, one can expect that…this is the high season and the most visited destination, so prices are going to be higher. (19)

We've been charged 10 Kr. for tap water. But it was all right, they do it at home too. Particularly touristy type places are doing this: pile 'em high and feed 'em cheap. (84)

When talking about individual providers, visitors expressed some vague mythologies about hotels, which were expected to have a "better than home" standard:

A comfortable hotel is very important, therefore I always choose the better ones and not the cheapest ones. Because I want to have it better than home. They have to be clean, nice, and friendliness is also very important. Now, having come to Bornholm in all these years, we know exactly where to go, which places have nice rooms or good food. And if there was a lousy place or bad food, we don't go there any more, that's clear. (61)

The word *hotel* itself evokes certain standards, superior to those of other types of accommodation. For the following respondent, this mythology of hotel standards was communicated inadequately by tangible cues of decor and menu:

> *We were put in a two star 'hotel'…which is clean and nice to stay at, but it is not very high standard. The rooms are quite outdated with an almost Spartan interior… quite dreadful, isn't it? It's more like a B&B…there is no menu, you can't choose your meals, and normally there's only one course for dinner. It is not a real hotel, it is a bigger pension that is run by a family. (95)*

Restaurants were also expected to conform to certain standards. Sometimes even a few inadequate tangible signifiers (such as plastic cutlery or smaller portions) were enough to cause a general restaurant myth to be rejected:

> *We went to Snogebæk to a restaurant which had a big buffet table with self-service. I only ordered smoked herring, so I didn't get real stainless steel cutlery for those, only disposable ones. Paper plates, plastic knives and forks…It is rubbish! My daughter kindly lent her knife, because she ordered some "real food", a steak. It's all right if you are served like that in a smokehouse, but not in a restaurant! (30)*

> *Fyrtøjet was not as good as its reputation…you know 'paper is thankful'… with this big self-service table and salad-bar. And you order a steak and the waiter comes with a teeny-weenie meagre lump of meat on the edge of the plate, that is…shameless! So we might have as well bought smoked fish or fish balls and eat it at home, because we would have got the same service and better food. At least you know how that tastes. (77)*

Ordinary food served at restaurants was often criticised for not reaching a "better than home" standard. However, this again was explained by the *touristy place-myth*, which was also signified by the presence of mass tourists:

> *The meals are quite…ordinary in most restaurants here…nothing special. They serve everyday food, food that we eat at home. It is for tourists, and you can taste that… the places which are frequented by many tourists. The question is whether you can get local or home-made meals contra fast food. Deep-frozen potatoes, put in the microwave oven, and so on…Canned béarnaise sauce and canned mushroom, they are not fresh raw materials, you see ? You can earn a lot on this kind of food, if you have a lot of tourists. But it's not home-made, the béarnaise sauce is not home made. It is Knorr, you see… But I mean, the restaurants here are okay, they are just a bit conventional. (97)*

> *I think that Danes here generally don't eat out too much, they do more picnicking. Probably because their restaurants are not very good and very expensive. The cuisine of other countries like France, Italy, Spain, Portugal is much more interesting. But in*

these restaurants, it's only the tourists who eat, that means they have fast food, I don't use that, I don't like it… (14)

In order to find 'real Danes' and to avoid tourist crowds, some visitors went to unknown, local restaurants, but even this could involve linguistic problems:

We went to this restaurant and had a wonderful time. I loved it because it ***was principally a Danish restaurant for Danes and there were no concessions to visitors****, tourists or whatever.* ***There was only Danish menu****, yes…no German, no Swedish menu, nothing. Only Danish. And* ***we did not feel as though we've been treated as tourists.*** *Yes,… we thoroughly enjoyed* ***being able to find something that was Danish, that the Danish people were doing****…****rather than lumping along with all the Germans and Swedes****. Because if the place is full of Germans, the Danes are not going to be there. I don't think the islanders would willingly frequent a place if it was always full of Germans. And I also think,* ***food would be biased towards German taste****. The waitress was very kind.* ***We tried what little bit of Danish we'd got*** *and when we couldn't manage any more, we spoke English, and she was quite happy with that. But* ***we did actually made an effort and she really appreciated*** *it. (85)*

This section presented some general service mythologies, defined through commonly hold perceptions of *touristy places* or *"better than home" standards*. However, most service-related perceptions were directly connected to more precise Bornholm mythologies. These are discussed in the next section.

7.3.2. Communicating Bornholm mythologies

A hotel stay and meal consumption were only a part of the destination experience, and visitors' assessments focused not only on such 'core benefits' (a night in a hotel or a restaurant meal) but also on the entire multi-sensory experience. Service providers could simultaneously play a facilitator role (gatekeepers or food and shelter providers) and a mediating role, communicating messages of Bornholm and its people. Consider the tangible and intangible signifiers appearing in the following excerpts:

We went to a very cosy little restaurant in Sandvig, ***it is located on the beach promenade****…you know where there is flea market every Tuesday. We were there and we can only recommend it. […] Because* ***you are served by two very sweet elderly ladies and because it has got Bornholm's best view over the sea.*** *It is situated very close to the bay up there…Osen bay. I think this is one of the restaurants* ***with the best view, it lies totally perfect…completely open to the sea…with a view to white beaches and granite boulders and of course the whole bay and the water****. It is wonderful. And the food was also good: we had a very tasty turbot in cream sauce. It was very pleasant…good cuisine and* ***the service: polite but discrete…and it was in order, clean and nice****…lovely table arrangement and this extraordinary view. (53)*

*We **were also in the smokehouses: it was festive, folksy and delightful…a banjo player was singing, there was space for both adults and kids, it was very cosy**. There was **chalk graffiti all over the woodwork**, we loved it! We really liked **to come and sit it just like that**, and the **food was really nice**: we had prawns and fresh salad. (56)*

Both excerpts echoed Bornholm myths identified in Chapter 6. The two sweet elderly ladies, the good table arrangement and the turbot signified the *traditional and authentic* in Bornholm catering, while banjo players, graffiti, cosiness with adults and kids symbolised the *informal and 'hygge'* qualities of Scandinavian spirit. Of course, both "traditional" servicescapes were constructed and designed artificially, specifically for tourists, in what MacCannell calls staged authenticity (MacCannell 1976). However, staged authenticity, where elements of traditional life are reinvented and reorganised in a commercial setting can be found in every culture, so most visitors would hardly notice it.

Fish and traditional meals

Tourist promotion of Bornholm often features fishery, fish meals and fishing villages. Thus, in their quest to find something of *typical* Bornholm, visitors felt it a 'must' to try the regional cuisine, symbolised by seafood and the obligatory smoked herring:

I always tried smoked herring, every single time I came to Bornholm. In all cases the most important is to see a smokehouse and to taste herring, it is very characteristic for the island. You can see smoking chimneys everywhere…some are closed now, but there are still some that are open. So this time we were also in Gudhjem smokehouse to have a fish buffet …you know, a fish buffet with ten different kinds of herring and there was also salmon and prawns. It was excellent. The service [betjening] was nothing special, it was average, but I'm not that sensitive on that. (37)

Fish meals were naturally anticipated at a marine destination, and were sometimes pursued irrespective of whether individual visitors liked them or not.

The food is wonderful in this hotel, maybe a bit too much for us in the evenings. Otherwise it is really good, …but …We both eat fish, we really like fish…but it is only once a week that there's fish on the menu. Before coming to Bornholm I thought that we were only going to be served lots of fish and seafood. You know, I expected that food in the restaurants would be somewhat similar to what you get around Åland…(92)

I only came to this smokehouse, because the others want to…and because it is a regional speciality. It's okay if you like it. …The worst thing is that I have to eat the fish [whispering]…I don't like fish, but the others told me that there's no day without fish if you are on Bornholm. It's hard. (34)

For some visitors it was also important to taste *authentic* Bornholm specialities, such as fish meals, prepared and served according to the old tradition. Thus, they were disappointed not to find regional fish specialities or to be given foods that they felt were

not the 'real thing'. Consider two similar episodes described by first-time and regular visitors:

> *We ate good fish in the Svaneke smokehouse, which was nice and the restaurant yesterday evening was also good food,* ***but I missed a little bit some typical Bornholmian meals****, some* ***traditional fish meals****. It's not that the food wasn't good* ***but there was no Bornholmian speciality that we could order. Something with FISH****. In the smokehouses for example, you* ***can only get fish with bread or potato salad****. And though it tastes good, there are so many other possibilities to prepare fish.* ***I just can't believe that this is the original method or the only way they can do it.*** *(50)*

> *We have been to many of the herring smokehouses here,* ***both to look and to eat smoked herring, of course****. The first day we drove with Per's sister, who has never been to Bornholm, up to Allinge smokehouse and* ***got such a "Sol over Gudhjem", it was a disappointment****. Because* ***they don't smoke themselves****, they get the fish from Gudhjem, because the owner of the two smokehouses is the same person. And all the* ***fish stood on a cold counter, so it was icy cold, it nearly hurt on our teeth to eat it****. I haven't experienced this before, to eat herring so cold. It was disappointing especially because she had to taste it for the first time : 'now you should try this…!' we told her, but it was not like that. It's* ***really nice*** *when they made it* ***in the old way****…we counted on to have a* ***warm, freshly smoked herring,*** *there's nothing that beats it. (58)*

The first-time visitor was not familiar with the traditional Bornholm specialities, but was disappointed with the lack of variety in the fish meals offered. The repeat visitor knew exactly what to expect from a "Sol over Gudhjem" [Sunrise over Gudhjem] and was unhappy about the inappropriate serving. Interestingly, both respondents mourned the "traditional old, Bornholm way" of preparing fish in their narratives.

7.3.3. Communicating Bornholm myths

Encounters with service employees were a rich source of negotiating Bornholm myths. Service providers can be regarded as ambassadors of the destination and its people, and they were often evaluated upon how well they communicated mythologies of Scandinavian mentality or Un-Danishness. Front-line staff at accommodation and catering outlets were particularly mentioned in narratives:

> *It is so positive how friendly everybody has been since the first day. We rented an apartment from a Danish family, and they are so* ***casual*** *and so* ***near****, I was surprised at their* ***immediate kindness****. The owner of the house came down to the harbour to meet us, and he* ***greeted*** *us in a very* ***amiable****, nice and* ***personal way****. I have not expected so much wa****r****mth and* ***friendliness****. He and his wife are really sweet, and so are* ***everybody else in Denmark****. We* ***don't have any negative experiences from this country*** *Very kind…very* ***obliging****, therefore the tourists are also kind. That's the little secret. (15)*

This positive episode, where the provider initialised a personal relationship from the start, was enough for the visitor to reconfirm the Scandinavian mentality-myth and to conclude that every Dane is like that. Furthermore, visitors were even happier if there were 'real' Bornholm people among the front-line personnel. For example, native guides and hostesses were thought to be more professional and better able to communicate local history and customs:

> *We had a very, very fine guide, a lady, who showed us the shops and the ceramists' workshops. The best about her was she was from the island, she lived next to Hammershus all her life. So she knew Hammershus and its history by heart, but she was also good to tell about other things. She also told us some lovely stories in the round church, where we went the first day. (23)*

> *We were lucky to have a native guide who drove us on the small roads only and told about quite a lot of interesting things. I think, that it's best to see Bornholm with a local guide who was born and grown up here, so he really knows the place…and he can point out things that are not written in the brochures. (77)*

On the other hand, incidents in which service personnel did not live up to this generalised friendly and welcoming picture were evaluated in a negative way:

> *The Bornholmians were* ***not that eager to talk*** *to us. They are* ***like their cliffs****:* ***difficult to get close*** *to them. If you asked something in cafés or restaurants, they said 'so and so' but nothing more. They* ***would rather not engage in a conversation****, although there were many things we would have been interested in to know. (54)*

> *It* ***irritates*** *me and it's* ***hard*** *that people start to* ***greet you*** *first* ***on the third day****. Many* ***people are cold****, you can feel some sort of a wall…****and it's sad, because I'm used to friendlier people in Denmark****.* ***People tend to*** *be* ***reserved towards tourist*** *in general, probably because there are so many of them. They are* ***friendly*** *but* ***only to a certain extent*** *…if they can help, that's nice, but* ***they don't want to*** *talk…(68)*

This section has demonstrated that tourism service providers, particularly restaurants, are complex servicescapes on Bornholm. They not only facilitate the visitor's journey by food provision, but also expose various artefacts and behavioural aspects that communicate general service myths as well as Bornholm myths. Episodes of both substantive and communicative staging were found, though sometimes it was difficult to separate the two from each other.

7.3.4. Comparing mediation and communicative/substantive staging

A few scholars approach the assessment of services from a sociological–anthropological perspective (cf. Arnould and Price 1993, Price *et al.* 1995b, Arnould *et al.* 1998). Instead

of mapping visitors' evaluations through operational aspects and phases, these authors attempted to take into account the cultural context and personal meanings of the service experience. Central to their approach is the recognition that visitors make consumption choices and judgements based on symbolic meanings rather than on the usefulness of the product (cf. Solomon 1988, Dimanche and Samdahl 1994, Brown 1992). In the service marketing field, this is reconfirmed by Bitner (1990), who found that visitors look for both extrinsic and intrinsic cues in the servicescape in order to interpret their consumption experience. The provision of servicescape cues is termed *staging* by anthropologists (MacCannell 1989, Cohen 1988).

Anthropologists differentiate between substantive and communicative staging, referring to the conveyance of meaning from service providers to visitors through tangible and intangible cues, respectively. The effectiveness of staging depends on the active participation of both sides and the shared cultural understanding of the service context. However, this common cultural background does not provide fully scripted service rituals, as suggested by Solomon and his colleagues (Solomon *et al.* 1985). Rather, it provides a platform that is loosely framed by unwritten, general perceptions or *mythologies*, which steer the social rituals of the service encounter.

In terms of the communicative staging of wilderness experiences, Arnould *et al.* (1998) emphasise the primacy of the social construction of meaning in the perception and interpretation of the service environment. They found that the service process and outcomes of rafting can be moderated by situational factors beyond the provider's control (such as weather conditions, wildlife sightings, etc.). In this extremely heterogeneous service delivery context, visitors organise their perception and judgements according to specific, culturally shared themes, such as romantic notions relating to the wilderness and the frontier experience (Arnould *et al.* 1998). Arnould and his colleagues suggest that these cultural themes are evoked by communicative staging, where both providers and visitors use the natural servicescape as a dramatic interpretation site.

The findings of the present study reconfirmed the importance of service environments as a mediator of cultural themes and mythologies. However, visitors assessed them in a holistic, rather than atomistic fashion, and it was not always possible to separate substantive and communicative staging. It was found that complex servicescapes or behavioural settings evoked both service-related mythologies and mythologies that transcended the 'limits' of commercial service encounters. For example, service mythologies were found about 'touristy places' which "ought to be open", and "should have" a certain standard but may therefore be overcrowded or overpriced. Furthermore, service providers could also communicate commonly-held themes about Bornholm's inhabitants and culture. The mediation of different mythologies seemed to add unique, spontaneous and expressive qualities to the visitors' experience, and thus may influence the evaluation of service encounters more significantly than the functional facilitation of the journey.

7.4. Evaluation of the role of service providers in visitors' experiences

This chapter's analysis of service episodes during the holiday stay has revealed a variety of services, both those that are considered central to the destination product (accommodation providers, catering outlets, attractions and transport companies) and those that are classified as 'peripheral' (travel agencies, guides, signposts, tourist literature) in system-based models. It is suggested that, instead of using static or dynamic (procedural) frameworks, the assessment of service providers may better be understood in the context of the ongoing visitor experience. Regardless of core and peripheral status or service journey phases, all service providers facilitated the movement and stay of visitors.

Four different facilitating roles were identified. *Gatekeeping* referred to facilitation of admission and availability and it controls the right of access to information and destination space. *Connecting* was about co-ordinating two or more service offerings, so that visitors had an optimal sequence of the service journey. *Substituting* referred to taking care of visitors' basic needs or relieving their everyday duties whilst away from home. The delegation of *child-care* was also an important facilitation of the visitor's stay. Although visitors mentioned some positive episodes for all four facilitation roles, there were typically more negative remarks relating to gatekeeping, connecting and substituting. This may be because most visitors perceived facilitator roles as functional/hygiene aspects and only became conscious of them if they were missing or were provided inadequately.

Table 7.3. Visitors' overall impressions of Bornholm (Survey results)

Evaluation (Base: All visitors)	**1996 (2324)**	**1997 (2041)**	**1998 (1460)**
Excellent	73%	73%	71%
Good	23%	24%	23%
Average	3%	4%	5%
Not good enough	*	*	*
Poor	*	*	*
Average score	**4.69**	**4.69**	**4.65**

Source: Rassing, 1999.
Note: The range was Excellent (5) to Poor (1). * means less than 0.5%.

Because of the fragmented, complex nature of the destination product, some scholars suggest (Danaher and Mattsson 1994, Stauss and Weinlich 1997) that even a single delivery failure at one service provider may negatively influence the visitor's overall holiday evaluation. However, the majority of overall positive evaluations of Bornholm among survey respondents seem to contradict this (Table 7.3).

This phenomenon may be rooted in the fact that holiday consumption is regarded as more of an experience and less of a utilitarian transaction by visitors. Unlike the offerings of other industries, leisure services and products are related to extraordinary periods of life, which are anticipated and awaited with pleasure:

*As a tourist, you are **positively minded from the start**, you don't go on holidays with a negative attitude. And that **sets the mood for the whole stay**. (20)*

The extended consumption process also gives the opportunity of balancing service successes and service failures during a holiday stay. As one of the interviewees stated:

*Of course, it is nice to have a sensible service, to have kind and friendly and smiling people. **But they must be mean bastards altogether to make an entire holiday disappointing. And they are not.** But it's obvious that you can experience some situations when you think that that was not a particularly good service. **But in the whole we don't take notice of that,** because most people are smiling and kind, welcoming, explaining things if you're in doubt. (73)*

Although there were no major complaints, there were a handful of negative incidents that could break the smoothness of the holiday experience. Critical failures in facilitating access, connections or basic needs temporarily dissatisfied visitors, but the latter either played down the importance of these episodes or gave a *post-hoc* explanation that matched their traveller mythologies.

Simultaneously with facilitation, there exists another provider role which influenced visitors' overall evaluation of the holiday stay. This role was termed mediation. Service providers communicated messages about the offering and the destination through signs and artefacts in the servicescape as well as through staff behaviour. These aspects were negotiated in a symbolic 'consumption' process similar to the way Bornholm myths and traveller roles were negotiated in Chapter 6. For instance, the level of comfort and competence in a catering establishment was assessed through tangible signifiers such as cutlery, decor, or a bilingual menu. Service personnel were often seen as ambassadors of the destination and mediated cultural mythologies about friendly and informal Bornholm people, Danes, or Scandinavians in general.

Having defined the dual role of service providers in holiday experiences, the next step is to create a model of assessment, linking the visitor experience, perceived service quality and satisfaction. This is undertaken in the next chapter, which integrates the findings of the three result chapters (i.e. the tourist's journey, the virtual journey and the service journey), discussing them in the light of existing models of service quality and visitor satisfaction.

8. Discussion: Linking Holiday Experiences, Perceived Quality and Satisfaction

The previous chapters presented the findings of this study from three different standpoints. Chapter 5 revised the characteristics and particularities of the holiday consumption process, Chapter 6 examined socio-culturally bound frameworks and themes through which visitors assess destinations, while Chapter 7 explored the role of service providers and the assessment of service episodes along the visitors' journey. In this way the destination offering was approached from both supply- and demand-oriented perspectives, i.e. both as a particular 'product' and as an out-of-the-ordinary 'experience'. This chapter intends to turn a full circle and return to the original point of departure, which was to provide a deeper understanding of visitor assessment in tourism, which is also operational and practically relevant.

The discussion is organised in three sections. 8.1. systematically discusses the research questions posed in Chapter 4 and compares the answers to alternative and parallel propositions in related literature. Section 8.2. integrates the contributions of the findings and answers the main puzzle of this study with a demand-oriented model of service quality in tourism. This is done by introducing light and shade into already existing models using novel notions, such as the dual function of facilitating and mediating extraordinary visitor experiences. Finally, section 8.3. assesses the findings in terms of qualitative corroboration criteria of dependability, credibility and transferability.

8.1. Discussing the research questions

Chapter 3 divided the intellectual questions of this study into two puzzle areas. The first group of questions was related to defining the object of visitors' assessment (*I. What is being assessed during the 'consumption' of holiday experiences*?), while the second group was centred around the process of assessment *(II. How does customer assessment take form in tourism and hospitality?*). The following sections discuss both puzzles as well as their sub-questions.

8.1.1. What is being assessed during the 'consumption' of holiday experiences?

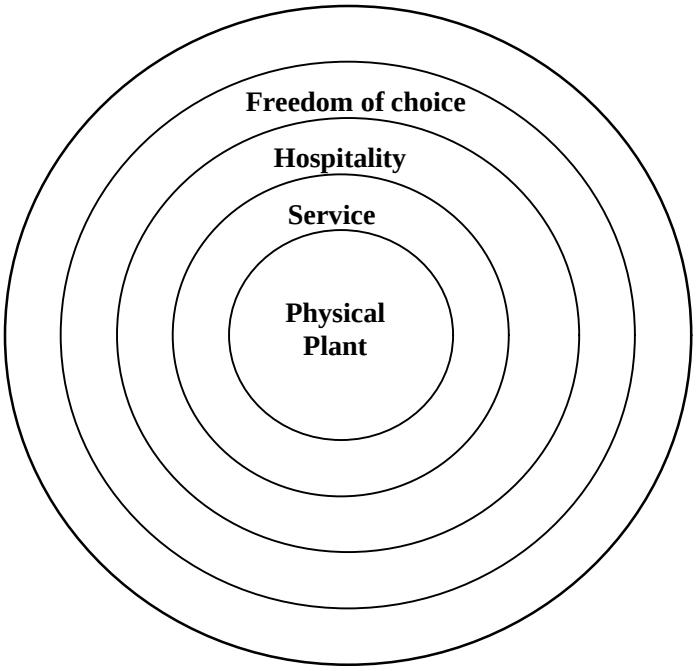
The first puzzle aimed to explore what the tourism product consisted of, as seen by visitors. The quest was to reveal the structure, process and dimensions of the object of assessment throughout visitors' reported holiday experiences. Five auxiliary questions were posed, dealing with the perception of holiday experiences (Q.1.), the extraordinariness of the tourism product for the visitor (Q.2.) and its main features (Q.3.). Furthermore, it was intended to identify the stages of the holiday experience (Q.4.) and to detect similarities and differences between various visitors (Q.5.). These five questions are discussed below.

Q1. How do visitors perceive the 'product' of their holiday experiences?
Visitors perceived the 'product' of their holiday consumption far more broadly and in a different way than that described by destination models. The findings showed no evidence of an explicit, generic 'product', defined along the lines of some sort of provided commodity or commodities. Tourism scholars have long supported the notion of tourism as an unconventional and fragmented industry, where there is "no single production process, no homogeneous product and no locally confined market" (Tucker and Sundberg 1988, p. 145). However, current models (Gilbert 1990, Cooper *et al.* 1993, Medlik and Middleton 1973) all try to settle clearly definable components within this unbounded offering, in order to facilitate tasks related to tourism planning, development, management and service delivery. Such objectives are justifiable from a supply-oriented viewpoint, but no single model can outline the complex structure of tourism by treating simultaneously the product, the production process and its consumption as inseparable elements (Smith 1994).

The idea that customers are co-producers of service offerings has become commonplace in service marketing studies and is emphasised in textbooks (e.g. Gummesson 1992b, Bateson 1995) and conceptual papers (e.g. Booms and Bitner 1981, Normann 1984). However, the actual nature of the 'customer input' in the 'production process' is rarely acknowledged. Customer inputs can encompass a variety of features, including customer involvement, autonomy, choice and control within different production and delivery processes as well as mood and affective states. The findings of the present study suggest that these inputs are inherent parts of the 'product', and may therefore also influence its assessment.

Smith (1994) attempts to create a comprehensive tourism product model by integrating existing supply- and demand-oriented perspectives from the existing literature (Figure 8.1). His model explicitly acknowledges the role of human experience together with several other components of the tourism product, in the form of five concentric circles. From the core to the outer shell these circles represent declining management control, increasing customer involvement and decreasing potential for empirical measurement (Smith 1994). As a result, he perceives the tourism product to be "a constellation of businesses, public agencies and non-profit organisations that create products to facilitate travel and activity for people away from their home environment" (p. 593).

Figure 8.1. Smith's model of the generic tourism product (1994, p. 587)



Smith's is probably the broadest definition of the tourism product which acknowledges the customer's participation and (thanks to its generic scope) it can be applied to both specific as well as integrated offerings. However, the empirical findings of the present study suggest a need for an even broader definition. Visitors' concept of Bornholm as a product was all-embracing and much more comprehensive than those of models based on tourism provision systems or processes. In the present study providers and products were often referred to indirectly (as 'they' or 'people'), and visitors used a similar terminology when they talked about Bornholm people, often making it difficult to differentiate between service providers and other locals. Furthermore, different visitors did not appear to share the unequivocal hierarchical perception of various product elements that is assumed in supply-based conceptualisations (see also Q3.).

Thus, from the visitor's perspective, the integrated tourism product can be defined as *the synergistic sum total of all (people, businesses and organisations) who support the visitors in the extended consumption process of their holiday experiences*. This adopts Smith's approach in the sense that it conceptualises the product in terms of a *function* rather than a sum of various components. However, it moves beyond his definition by *not* differentiating

explicitly between ‘professional’ tourism providers and ‘ordinary’ locals, which both belong to visitors’ understanding of the destination product.
Another important implication is that there is a synergy effect among all people and organisations, whether assisting visitors on their journey or simply encountered on the way. The ‘total’ product (as seen by visitors) is more than just the sum of the parts - not merely because there is a customer input, but also because visitors assemble, and participate in, the final product. Therefore it is not possible to create a customer-based generic model, consisting of definite, discrete and mutually exclusive categories, components, stages or episodes, which is valid across all visitor segments. However, it is possible to depict certain socially and culturally defined common characteristics of this boundary-less product, which are shared in the perception of all modern tourists. These are reflected in the next part of the discussion.

Q.2. How can the extraordinariness of the tourism product be defined?
The extraordinariness of the tourism product (and of the visitor experience) is centred around its difference from everyday life, and is manifested in symbolic, hedonic and aesthetic aspects particular to leisure consumption. The present findings reconfirmed several theoretical suggestions from tourism-related anthropological studies. It was found that most visitors regarded the final tourism product as an out-of-the-ordinary event in human life (Graburn 1983, Ryan 1997) containing spontaneous and emotion-laden experiences. Respondents in the present study organised the accounts of their experience using comparison with home environments, everyday routines and social roles, and their main quest was to temporarily celebrate the opposite of these settings. In this sense, the notion of holidays as sacred occasions (Morinis 1992), or a ritualistic spatio-temporal detachment from normal life (Turner 1974), was empirically supported.

The celebration of difference and diversity is the universal quest of tourism (MacCannell 1976) and it may take a number of forms. Visitors may engage in playful, physically demanding or relaxing activities simultaneously or solely during holidays. They may also invert everyday social roles and be ‘kings or peasants for a day’ (Gottlieb 1982) or adopt other idealistic roles related to travel (e.g. that of “Explorers”). All these activities can be explained from a functionalist sociological perspective as ‘pressure valves’ for releasing societal–environmental tensions. Whichever way visitors choose, they pursue *opportunities for change*. This is one of the most important general notions about the extraordinariness of the tourism product.

In the present study, covert daydreaming, anticipation and imaginative pleasure seeking also played a central role in visitors’ accounts, and symbolic meanings were of crucial importance in the perception of tourism products. These symbolic meanings could operate in two directions: either as an outwardly-oriented construction of external reality (Bornholm myths), or as an inwardly-oriented construction of self-identity (traveller myths). These findings support the postmodern understanding of consumption as a culturally bound and meaning- (rather than utility-) centred process (Belk 1988, Bourdieu 1985). In addition, evidence was found that visitors underwent an extraordinary learning

process during tourism consumption, using physical and spiritual senses actively to process novel perceptual and extrasensory information. The altered spatio-temporal and social circumstances of the holiday prompted individuals to reorganise their thoughts and provided them with an *opportunity for self-reflection* and redefinition of their own sense of identity in the world.

Q3. Are there frequently recurring elements in visitors' conception of the tourism product?
As was demonstrated under Q1, visitors have a holistic perception of the tourism product and do not break it down in terms of scholarly models (destination mix, core vs. peripheral service models, etc.). In the present study they mentioned various aspects which could be related to provider tangibles and intangibles as well as to experiences beyond the control of tourism practitioners. However, visitors were not found to perceive these things in a hierarchical structure or to differentiate between core and peripheral offerings. Aspects deemed peripheral or ancillary in a supply-based model might play a central role in the tourist experience, while 'core' aspects (lodging or catering) might not even be mentioned in the holiday account. As the amalgamated offering is the holiday experience itself (Graburn 1983), it can be argued that the different product components are evaluated according to the role they play in enabling visitors to embellish and add meaning to their lives.

There *were* frequently recurring elements in visitors' conception of Bornholm, but these were broader than the discrete components of any tourism product model. These recurring elements were culturally shared, idealised notions about the destination, that underlay most anticipatory and experiential remarks about its tangible and social environment. These could be organised around four broad themes, specific to Bornholm, such as: 'Lost Eden', 'Historic nostalgia', 'Scandinavian and Danish Mentality', and 'Un-Danish'. In the present study these themes or generalised images were termed the 'Bornholm Myths', some of which were subscribed to by all visitors, while others were shared by smaller visitor groups, typically of one specific nationality.

Q.4. What are the stages of the holiday experience, as conceived by visitors?
It was not possible to find a universal structure that corresponded to temporally defined models of consumption behaviour processes in consumer psychology. These established models, such as the Information Processing (IP) Model (Bettman 1979) are built on a chronological logic of acquiring and organising information in customer decisions and evaluations (Moutinho 1987) and depict the consumption process as a sequence of cognitive activities. These approaches also maintain that customers make judgements by analytically weighing the salience of attributes (Fishbein 1963) and assess products on their composite utilitarian and economic value.

The IP model is based on behaviourist and cognitive principles only. It depicts the individual as a mechanistic thinker who logically processes various environmental and customer 'inputs' through an intervening response system (cognition–affect–behaviour) in

order to generate outputs (decisions, evaluation, etc.) through a learning feedback loop (Howard and Sheth 1969). This reductionist approach may be useful in the assessment of utilitarian and tangible products, but can not adequately address the experiential aspects of leisure and tourism experiences, which include fun, feelings and fantasies. It cannot handle an apparently irrational investment in a bundle of goods and services, where the sole return on purchase is subjective holiday experience and hedonic satisfaction.

The findings confirmed that holiday visitors' cognitive understanding is driven by narrative rather than logical and chronological processes. Thus, instead of rational thinking, visitors' assessment was organised according to a story line, which highlighted episodic experiences in a particular order. This story line or *plot* (Polkinghorne 1988) could connect apparently random and disconnected elements (visitors' own actions, the action of other visitors and chance natural happenings) into a complete and significant story, in which the meaning of individual aspects may be retrospectively changed after the final outcome is known. Thus, needs, motives and expectations may not necessarily affect perceptions and evaluations, but may be subject to *post-hoc* change (cf. Pieters *et al.* 1995).

This finding is at odds with the behaviourist notion of customer assessment, which depicts individuals as cumulating and averaging multi-attribute experiences on a chronological, solely cognitive basis. This implies that there is no definite chronological structure and stages in the holiday experience - as long as it is perceived and recounted by the visitor. Although it was possible to trace a very loose temporal framework of the journey in some interviews (relating to pre- during- and post-holiday phases), visitors did not conceive their holidays in terms of these chronological stages alone.

Q5. Are there differences and similarities among visitors?
Respondents of this study demonstrated some similarities in the way they behaved during holiday experiences and these were highlighted in terms of the verbs they used. A general, universal behavioural theme was the pursuit of difference and of freedom related to the extraordinariness of holidays. This was also reflected in the fact that visitors exhibited heightened sensory and extrasensory perception, indicating 'mindful' mental processing (Langer 1987) during their stay. However, there were considerable differences in the ways visitors designed, planned and accomplished their general holiday goals. These variations related to planning, autonomy, spatial and temporal pacing, and were further affected by temporal, social and economic constraints. This confirmed the initial notion that there was no such thing as a "single type" of visitor.

On the other hand, so many different and overlapping aspects influenced visitor behaviour, that in hindsight the legitimacy of tourist typologies with mutually exclusive segments is questionable. Clear visitor categories, or clusters based on a few characteristics, might shed light on certain features of visitor motivation or choice, but they were insufficient to describe the complexity of holiday leisure consumption - particularly because visitor behaviour can only be explained *beyond* the boundaries of leisure consumption. Thus,

although the findings provided empirical evidence of similarities and differences in visitor perception and behaviour (highlighted in Chapter 5), it was not possible to develop these further into any kind of distinct visitor typology.

However, an alternative approach was possible, since it can be argued (Sirgy 1985) that customer choice, perceptions and judgements are consistent with the customer's self-concept (beliefs about him or herself). Thus, similarities and differences in visitor behaviour might stem from particular roles visitors undertook during their holidays. It was found that visitors ascribed various identities to themselves related to travelling, which enabled them to fantasise and enact role sets different from their everyday ones. Evidence was found of four different discourses or *traveller mythologies* – the Explorer, the Vagabond(s), the Grand Tourist and the Colonist – vague role-sets which were culturally constructed with different ideas of the mission of travel or of the "natives'" role. However, these traveller myths were neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive.

8.1.2. How does customer assessment in tourism and hospitality work?

The second group of research questions aimed to explore and operationalise the process of perceptual assessment in leisure-related consumption, and thus to gain a deeper understanding of the way visitors evaluated tourism and hospitality service providers within the framework of their entire holiday experience. Owing to this customer oriented point of departure, related assessment constructs (such as service quality perceptions and satisfaction) were treated simultaneously. This problem area contained five sub-questions: the rationale of visitor assessment (Q.6.), types of assessment frameworks (Q.7.), diverging product assessments (Q.8.), service provider roles (Q.9.) and assessment of real and symbolic content of service offerings (Q.10.). These are discussed below.

Q.6. What is the rationale behind visitors assessment of their experiences?

In order to understand the rationale behind visitors' assessment of their experiences, one should acknowledge their way of thinking, capturing aspects that are important to *them* in the first place and not imposing upon them the terms of provider logic. What individuals perceive in many situations is determined not only by the nature of stimulus objects and environments, but also on their intrinsic system of values and needs, determined by the social context. Visitor experience is necessarily a personal construction that interpretively links perceptions and memories in a particular context, so the rationale of their assessment lies in their personal and socio-cultural background. This rationale can be traced back through narrative, which is one of the fundamental structures of human comprehension. Narratives allow an account of apparently random and disconnected happenings and actions to be organised around a plot into a coherent story (Polkinghorne 1988). The narrative understanding of a service experience may be quite different from logical or chronological understanding, because it does not focus solely on the provisional system and performance.

Acknowledging the socio-cultural 'baggage' of visitors (that is, taking demographic attributes, personality and attitudes into account), it was clear that the unifying and shared theme underlying all visitor experience is that it is constructed through difference. As all touristic activity results from a basic 'binary division' (Urry 1990) between the ordinary and the extraordinary, visitors are sensitive to stimuli that in some way contrast with everyday experiences. For a specific destination this theme could be subdivided into a range of culturally shared themes, which substantially differentiated Bornholm from visitors' everyday environment and which were closely associated with the image of Bornholm. These Bornholm Myths provided imprecise, but consistent yardsticks in visitors' assessment of their experiences. Another important rationale behind visitors' assessment was the enactment of various traveller roles.

These findings are consistent with a range of existing theories related to general consumer behaviour (Sirgy 1985, Malhotra 1988, Solomon 1988), which, however, have not so far been integrated to describe empirical phenomena in tourism. For instance, theory relating to need hierarchies (Maslow 1962) has been developed further and applied to tourism, but with little predictive value. Thus the travel career ladder (TCL) (Pearce and Caltabiano 1983, Pearce 1996) provides a career goal-oriented model of tourism behaviour, suggesting that tourists increasingly seek satisfaction of higher needs (i.e. fulfilment and self-actualisation) as they become more experienced travellers. However, empirical studies (Ryan 1998) relating to the TCL model provide ambiguous evidence. Holiday experiences do not necessarily contribute to a psychological maturing process in visitors. In a large case study Ryan (1998) found that tourists jump back and forth between different levels of the TCL, rather than continuously moving upwards over time. The reason for this may be that there are too many other intervening and moderating aspects in tourism behaviour, which a model based on motivational hierarchy alone cannot account for.

A different hierarchical system of values developed by Hartman (1967) suggests that all judgements can be simmered down to three value levels. These assessment models are developed from humanistic psychology and are thought to be generally applicable to all kinds of human experiences. Nevertheless, they have never been juxtaposed with later theories in consumer psychology such as role theory (ideal self, role congruency) (Sirgy 1985, Clairborne and Sirgy 1990) or with symbolic consumption (Dimanche and Samdahl 1994) or product symbolism (Brown 1992). On the basis of the empirical findings of this study, it can be argued that visitor assessment is dependent upon intrinsic value systems and self-concepts as well as contextually–culturally bound product symbolism. Consequently, these streams of theory can be beneficially combined into a new model of customer assessment (see Section 8.2.)

Q.7. What type of assessment frameworks do visitors use in evaluating their experiences?

Existing customer assessment frameworks (such as service quality and customer satisfaction) are based on atomistic or cumulative approaches, both of which imply discrete, provider-defined units of assessment. Atomistic approaches focus on static

attributes of the offering that are thought to be judged using cognitive disconfirmation of expectations or other reference standards. Cumulative approaches based on the service journey concept (Johns and Clark 1993) focus on sequential satisfaction responses to a series of service encounters. Danaher and Mattsson's (1994) and de Ruyter *et al.*'s (1997) studies are more customer focused in the sense that they intend to capture holistic assessments along three value levels (E>P>L), rather than a list of aspects. However, they also delimit the object of assessment as discrete stages that "are thought to comprise main parts of the service delivery process" (Danaher and Mattsson 1994 , p. 8).

The findings of the present study reconfirmed the inherent inconsistency between these provider-based assessment frameworks and the way visitors described their evaluations, rooted in inadequate acknowledgement of the experiential nature of visitors' tourism product concept. The findings indicated that the object of visitors' assessment is neither a sum of discrete product/service outcomes and attributes, nor a sequence of main stages in the delivery process. This seemed to be because mechanistic, system-based product models are incompatible with the demand-oriented definition of the tourism product, as an extraordinary, holistic experience which only exists in the customer's mind (Otto and Ritchie 1996).

Thus, it is arguable that visitors base their assessment (quality perceptions and satisfaction) on the holistic destination experience, rather than on a selective assessment of choice, purchase and use of actual products. This experience integrates a series of encounters with different products and services, each of which provides visitors with varying levels of hedonic and utilitarian benefits. Thanks to the complexity of this integrated product, visitors' assessment frameworks could not be modelled along a single set of comparison standards based on product attributes or service stages. The findings demonstrated that visitors arbitrarily chose from a wide spectrum of comparison standards in their assessments, including external product norms, previous experiences, vaguely anticipated benefits, internal value systems or direct affective responses. Use of these reference standards was context-specific, i.e. visitors matched their frameworks to directly experienced situations.

Furthermore, comparisons did not always yield better/worse evaluations, sometimes their sole function was to conceptualise the difference from everyday life, and thus confirm the extraordinariness of the holiday experience. The perceived presence of difference could then already contribute to a positive assessment. In other cases, disconfirmation of an anticipated or predicted aspect was only a tool to make sense of cognitive information. This is supported by the fact that visitors underwent a large number of 'extra-ordinary' and novel experiences during their holidays, that needed interpretation in a meaningful way. The process of acquiring and 'synthesising' extraordinary experiences seemed to take place in a heuristic learning process, driven both by responses to environmental stimuli and by a more profound need to understand and to 'search for meaning' (Maslow 1968). This implies that comparison and disconfirmation of reference standards during holiday

making were ways of assimilating novel information and thus means by which visitors adapted to, and became acquainted with, unknown or different environments.

In a sense, the findings supported the disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver 1980) as a framework for describing customer assessment, because visitors used different sorts of comparisons to evaluate particular experiences. However, reference standards for these comparisons varied from visitor to visitor and from experience to experience and included vague preconceptions, predictions, intrinsic values and affective marking. Thus it can be argued that the visitor's assessment of different aspects of the holiday was mostly dependent on personal factors, not on a list of provider attributes or service journey stages. This implies that satisfaction and quality perception frameworks need to be defined more broadly, taking as their point of departure the individual's fulfilment response to customer-relevant aspects of the consumption experience. Although this seems a very broad conceptualisation, it is a long way from the statement that *any* random incidents (Bitner *et al.* 1990) would affect the evaluation of the holiday experience.

In planning for a satisfying holiday, visitors are envisaged as "trying to achieve a good fit between their own aspirations, needs and the opportunities that a particular destination offers to attend them" (Moutinho 1987, p. 5). Visitors' acquisition of holiday experiences can be regarded as a striving to *realise goals of journey ideals*, defined generally as the hedonic pursuit of pleasure and the search for new or different experiences. Although individual journey ideals might vary from person to person, the present study indicated some shared 'common denominators' for visitors visiting the same destination, which can be generalisable within similar cultures (see Q.6. above). Thus, it can be argued that visitors attributed 'success' to holidays whether or not they achieved these goals, and their mental matching or confirming of reference standards could be understood in terms of this logic. This concept can be described as *holiday ideal realisation*, already mentioned by Cohen (1979). In a tourist typology based on various modes of visitor experiences, he suggests that the ease and chances of realising holiday goals will differ among visitors: "generally speaking, the more profound the mode of experience, the harder it becomes to realise it" (p. 194).

Realisation of holiday ideals could be clearly traced in the narratives of the present study, as visitors recounted their encounters with tangible and personal aspects of Bornholm. Not only was it possible to detect the pursuit and achievement of general goals such as the perception of difference and of hedonic pleasure, but more specific holiday ideals were also reflected in the enactment of traveller roles or in the appraisal of destination-related myths. This implies that the perceived stimuli of disconfirmed or unexpected incidents can be regarded as comprising signifying or symbolic cues of holiday ideals. Tangible or intangible cues (e.g. product attributes or human encounters) in the narratives functioned as pieces of *evidence* in the *negotiation* of vague holiday ideals (such as the 'Lost Eden' or being 'Vagabonds' for a week), indicating whether or not these were realised.

Episodes that fitted the anticipated experience were tolerated and synthesised in instrumental learning processes, even if they provided physiological or psychological distress (cf. Arnould and Price's research on white-water rafting, 1993). However, experiences inconsistent with the prior image were not only processed as novel information, but could also cause dissatisfaction. Such was the case of a noisy hotel that contradicted the envisaged 'quiet and relaxing days' or a restaurant serving fast-food that had previously conveyed an old-fashioned cuisine image. Consequently, the rationale of visitors' assessment could be defined as the degree of fit between the experience and the predicted holiday ideal. In parallel with this, visitors' 'fulfilment response' was dependent on whether they could achieve a *sense of ownership* towards the destination (embodying their holiday ideals) during the mental negotiation processes. There were some parallels with disconfirmation theory (Oliver 1980), in the sense that assessment was based on some sort of a comparison between pre-purchase anticipation and post-purchase perceptions. However, a crucial difference is that predicted holiday ideals were not stable over time during the negotiation process. They were often vague or implicit before the experience, were prompted by concrete episodes or events and might be prone to changes depending on the sequence of visitor experiences.

Q.8. Can differences among visitor perceptions explain divergent tourism product assessments?

The answer to this question follows from the discussion in the previous section. Visitors arrived at a destination with varying holiday goals, which were already reflected in their planning. (They choose different ways to realise their holiday goals, exhibiting high or low levels of planning and autonomy.) These behavioural characteristics already framed the visitors' relationship with the destination and its people during their stay. The findings demonstrated that the experience acquisition behaviour (journeying) was influenced by personality-bound conditions, such as visitors' self-image and the orientation of their experience. Self-image could relate to various traveller roles as well as to the standpoint (insider vs. outsider) from which visitors perceived the destination. Orientation (also a consequence of traveller roles) refers to the direction of the holiday experience. Inward-oriented visitors focused on themselves or their group in their narratives, while outward-oriented visitors were mostly interested in the destination and locals.

These different perceptual foci strongly influenced evaluation and judgmental processes and thus were important for explaining differences in visitors' assessment of holiday experiences, such as why visitors attributed varying importance to different aspects of service providers. For example, 'insider' visitors identified themselves with locals, while 'outsiders' openly admitted their role as tourists or visitors and acted as such. 'Outsiders' tended to regard the host–guest relationship as an adversarial one and were strict in assessing negative incidents. 'Insiders', in attempting to claim that they were "just one of the locals", were more likely to be tolerant towards the same situation. In a similar vein, inward-oriented visitors centred their perceptions and assessment on the party they were travelling with and were less sensitive to adverse service incidents than outward-(encounter-) oriented visitors.

Q.9. What role do service providers play in the assessment of the entire holiday experience?

The previous chapters demonstrated that both visitor preconceptions and perceptions were centred around Bornholm's artefacts and its people, whether they were service providers or not. However, it was possible to identify a variety of services in the narratives, both those considered central to the destination product (accommodation providers, catering outlets, attractions and transport companies) in system-based models and those that are classified as 'peripheral' (travel agencies, guides, signposts, tourist literature). Since visitors' assessments were not divided into core and peripheral provider status, it is suggested that the roles of service providers might better be understood if they were approached in the context of the holistic holiday experience.

Individual service providers (and in fact, the entire destination) were found to play a dual role in the visitor experience. They acted as *facilitators* in the realisation of visitors' holiday ideals, making it possible to stay on the island and engage in various tourist activities. By exhibiting tangible and intangible signs, service providers were also *mediators*, in the sense that they personified and enhanced commonly-held preconceptions (myths) about Bornholm. Furthermore, they also acted as supporting characters in the four different traveller roles. As facilitators, service providers (regardless of hierarchical models) took over some of the practical day-to-day functions of visitors' normal life (such as housekeeping, preparation of meals, child-care) and thus made visitors' 'super life' (i.e. holiday stay) *easier* (or even possible). As mediators, service providers were ambassadors or representatives of Bornholm and (regardless of whether they provided accommodation or sold ice-cream) all had the potential to make visitors' super life *richer*, giving spontaneous (unanticipated) qualities to the holiday experience.

Because visitors underwent a roughly similar service journey (in terms of comparable pre-holiday, entry, destination stay and exit stages) and there were commonly held mythologies about Bornholm, their perceptions tended to share both facilitating and mediating dimensions of service provider roles. Service providers could mediate the four Bornholm myths (Lost Eden, Historic nostalgia, Scandinavian Mentality and Un-Danishness) both through tangible signs or artefacts in the servicescape and through behaviour towards visitors. At the same time, these cues communicated cultural messages about the 'service' itself and the quality of the facilitation. For instance, the level of comfort and competence in a catering establishment might be assessed through tangible signifiers, such as cutlery, bilingual menu or decor. In this sense, the mediating role was equivalent to communicative staging (Cohen 1988), because service environments are designed to convey these messages and service encounters are also fraught with culturally shared role plays and rituals (Solomon *et al.* 1985). This is what visitors 'make sense of' in the symbolic negotiation process during service consumption.

Facilitation on the other hand was concerned with the *function* of making the holiday stay easier and possible. This could be defined as: gatekeeping, connecting and substituting functions. *Gatekeeping* refers to facilitation of admission and availability and it controls

the right of access to information and destination space. This function is crucial particularly in the preparatory phase and at the beginning of the holiday stay (cf. Cliff and Ryan 1997). *Connecting* refers to co-ordinating two or more service offerings, so that visitors have an optimal sequence of the service journey. *Substituting* refers to taking care of visitors' basic needs or relieving their everyday duties. This function is crucial through the entire destination stay, as visitors are away from home. Also, the possibility of delegating *child-care* or other duties may be important for families. Apart from being facilitators of the holiday experience these three provider roles also incorporate some generally shared conceptions of service providers. For instance, visitors know that restaurants *should* provide a menu with a list of meals, but the menu does not simply facilitate their choice, it also mediates the 'eating-out' ritual. This implies that in some cases mediation and facilitation overlap to such an extent that visitors can only assess them simultaneously, as a holistic experience.

Q.10. Are various service providers assessed differently by visitors, depending on the real and symbolic content of their offering?
In terms of mediating/enhancing roles, visitors tended to judge various service providers similarly, i.e. they assessed the symbolic content of their offering along the lines of commonly held Bornholm myths. There was no difference between the assessments of accommodation, catering, attraction or transport suppliers, because they were all equally perceived as representing (and thus, communicating messages of) "*the"* Bornholm people, traditions and "*real"* Bornholm things. Although assessment of the same service providers could differ from visitor to visitor (for example, the same smokehouse was praised by first-time visitors for its cosiness and authenticity, while regular guests criticised it for being touristy and vulgar), the yardstick of their judgement was exactly the same (in this case, the Historic nostalgia myth).

Looking at the 'real', functional content of various offerings, it is suggested that different service providers were assessed differently, depending on their facilitating role in the visitor's stay. Service providers fulfilling a gatekeeping function were assessed on a digital basis by all visitors. They either granted access (positive or neutral assessment) or not (negative assessment). Evaluation of substituting functions was, however, more complex and differed from one visitor to another. Some visitors regarded catering only as a functional aspect and, for example, were indifferent about the comfort of accommodation, while others were demanding about hotel comfort levels or the symbolic features of hosting and catering facilitation. It may be that the unequal assessment of facilitation depends on visitor characteristics: whether they are self-reliant, inward- or outward-oriented or whether they identify themselves with a particular traveller role.

Having studied and discussed the two initial research puzzles and the ten sub-questions, it is now possible to contribute some insights to answering the ultimate question of this study, which was formulated as: ***How can perceived service quality be redefined in the context of visitors' own holiday experience assessment?*** This is discussed in the next section.

8.2. Redefinition of the quality concept in complex tourism products

The discussion in the previous section suggests a model that integrates individual visitor experience, perceived quality and satisfaction of tourism offerings. From the research findings, it can be claimed that the object of visitors' quality perceptions is dependent on the goal of their holiday experiences and on the extent to which they could realise it. Holidays are periods of living a 'super-life', and it has long been acknowledged that they are characterised by the pursuit of extraordinary experiences. During the pursuit of extraordinary experiences visitors still need to undertake activities and satisfy needs related to their normal life. Hence, service providers in tourism are facilitating both normal life activities and the enhancement of 'super-life', in order to make the extraordinary experience realisable. Furthermore, through every activity and physical artefact service providers are also communicating messages about their local area, their culture and the service ritual they provide.

Facilitating and meditating provider roles both contribute to easing and enriching visitors' super-life experiences. As discussed before, the holiday experience represents a realisation process of journey ideals, which can be broken down into three phases. In the *preparatory phase*, a vague frame of references (journey ideals) is created, which is influenced by various general motives (rest, relaxation, recreation and entertainment) and conditions of planning. These motives yield a number of overlapping visitor clusters, characterised by the different ways in which they envisage and realise the experience. In the *experiential phase*, visitors attempt to realise their anticipated ideals, by going through an extraordinary learning process. This entails making sense of environmental information via mindful (Langer 1987) and affective (Cohen and Areni 1990) processing mechanisms. In other words visitors are getting acquainted with the destination and its people, and the cognitive process takes form in different degrees of intensity and depth. In this *evaluatory phase* visitors synthesise and match these mindfulness-provoking, unexpected or novel experiences via affective marking or retrospective comparisons (disconfirmation). Most of these stimuli are only processed as neutral novel information, and are not evaluated. Only those incidents that fall beyond the vague frame of reference, thus hindering the realisation of journey ideals, will significantly modify overall holiday evaluations.

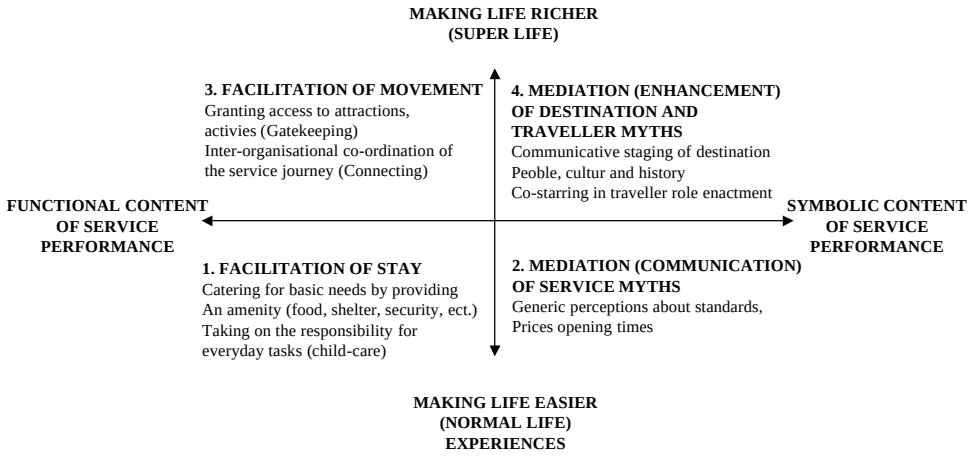
It was found that visitors have different requirements and perceptions of 'service', depending on their holiday ideals and traveller roles, their self-images, their delegated responsibility and their destination-orientation. This gives service providers a complex challenge. They have to face multiple requirements from different visitors, and they are assessed simultaneously according to a range of different expectations, which seemingly alter from one visitor to the next. In order to cater adequately for visitor needs, service providers must identify and rank these aspects along a customer-defined scale. Previous attempts to create a perceived service quality model have all recognised that service performance is assessed along multiple dimensions (Grönroos 1984, Parasuraman 1985),

but they fail to pin down exactly how these dimensions contribute to the consumption experience.

The findings of this study have given rise to a different definition of customer assessment, defining it as *the perception of service provider performance based on how it contributed to the fulfilment of visitors' holiday goals.* Figure 8.2 below shows the different dimensions along which service performance can be assessed in the light of the visitor's extraordinary experience. This section discusses this model in the light of existing models proposed by other authors.

The model in Figure 8.2 takes its point of departure as a demand-oriented logic, that is, in the benefits visitors gain from purchasing a service. It divides tourism-related service dimensions along two axes. The vertical axis defines the *function* of the service performance in the context of visitors' ordinary and extraordinary life experiences: differentiating between the function of 'making life easier' (i.e. taking over everyday tasks from the visitor) and 'making life richer' (i.e. providing the visitor with extraordinary experiences). The horizontal axis defines the *content* of the service performance, based on the outcome/benefit for the visitor. It differentiates between functional content, the 'palpable', basic *raison d'être* of the concrete offering and the symbolic content, which refers to an offering's additional, socio-culturally attributed messages and meanings.

Figure 8.2. A customer-oriented model of service provider assessment



The juxtaposition of the two axes produces four quadrants, describing four different dimensions along which visitors perceive and assess tourism-related services. *The facilitation of stay* (quadrant 1.) is a result of combining functional contents with assisting in everyday life duties, which may refer to catering for basic needs by providing an amenity. Facilitation of stay is a typical function of accommodation and catering providers, attending to basic needs (e.g. hunger, thirst, shelter, security) or taking over

responsibilities such as child care. Furthermore, service functions which aim to 'make life easier' also have a symbolic content. Apart from a functional role, tangible artefacts and intangible service rituals also *mediate* (i.e. communicate) service myths (quadrant 2). For example, a visitor entering a hotel would expect to be checked in and shown to his/her room. This functional activity is built around the check-in ritual and a general script, *mediated* by a reception counter and member(s) of the front-line staff. The common aspect to the facilitating and mediating components of this encounter is that both refer to attending an ordinary, everyday need (that is, shelter and rest). One can identify these dual roles in non-leisure related services, too. For instance, grocery shops, kindergartens and service centres in supermarkets all try to make normal life easier and each has its own service rituals and myths.

What makes tourism-related service performance so complex is that it plays a qualitatively different role as it caters for customers' (visitors') everyday needs. This second role can be defined as 'making life richer' and, as such, it is related to the out-of-the-ordinary experiences of the holiday visitor. *The facilitation of movement* is a functional aspect (quadrant 3.), granting access to destinations, visitor attractions and activities, thus having a 'hygiene' (all or nothing) effect upon visitors' lives. This role is typically played by transport companies and travel agents that are gatekeepers to a destination (cf. Cliff and Ryan 1997). But other service providers may also be directly or indirectly responsible for granting access to extraordinary experiences (e.g. visitor guides, attractions, destination marketing companies). In the case of a destination, the facilitation of movement during the service journey often needs inter-organisational co-ordination between transport and accommodation providers, or between tourist information centres and attractions. The present findings have shown that smooth connection facilitation is crucial for the visitor: a missing link or a piece of incorrect information in the service chain can actually make it impossible to achieve the holiday experience. For instance, on Bornholm most accommodation providers book their guests in from Saturday to Saturday, causing overbooking and congestion on the ferries at the weekends. Another example is provided by the badly co-ordinated transport connections. The public bus departs from Gudhjem harbour exactly fifteen minutes before the Christiansø ferry arrives.

Tourism-related offerings also have a symbolic, mediating content relating to the function of 'making life richer', which is different from communicating ordinary service myths and rituals. This aspect is closely connected with the spatio-temporal displacement of travelling individuals in their pursuit of difference and opportunities for change. Combining the functions of 'making life richer' and symbolic elements of service performance yields the role of *mediating destination and traveller myths*, which enhances the holiday experience. Visitors may not only access service providers on this basis, but also other, broader aspects of the destination offering (for example local inhabitants, their behaviour and customs). This enhancing mediation may operate in two directions: either as communicating symbolic messages about the destination or assisting visitors in the enactment of their own particular traveller myths. Communication of both destination- and individual (traveller)-oriented myths helps visitors to construct meaning from their

holidays. They are different from the communication of service myths (quadrant 2.), because they may contain aspects that are unknown to, or unexpected by the visitor. This type of mediating role is central to the visitors' assessment. The findings demonstrated that visitors extensively negotiated both destination and traveller myths throughout their entire holidays.

The four roles presented in the model are different, because they focus on qualitatively distinct benefits and functions of tourism-related service performance. It is therefore suggested that visitors evaluate them according to different frameworks and that each contributes differently to the final assessment of the holiday. Functional aspects of stay and movement facilitation are conditional thresholds during the holiday, and may be assessed using a mono-polar framework. That is, if the basic needs of shelter hunger, etc. are met, or access to the destination or attractions is granted, visitors will be content; nevertheless, these aspects *alone* will not cause delight in the final assessment of the holiday stay. On the other hand if basic needs and access were not facilitated, this would result in dissatisfaction. In this sense, these aspects are similar to the concepts of hygiene factors (Herzberg *et al.* 1959), instrumental satisfaction (Swan and Combs 1976) or 'dissatisfiers' (Johnston and Heineke 1998). If the facilitation of movement and stay are compared with general service situations, they correspond to the technical (what?) dimension of the offering (Grönroos 1984). As these aspects define the 'tangible core' of a service, they are most likely to be assessed using the universal trade-off framework which compares costs against received value or benefits.

If service providers only *facilitated* normal life and super-life visitor activities, entire offerings would be assessed as 'hygiene factors'. However, the symbolic content of tourist services makes visitors' assessment more complex, because the latter have to *negotiate* their perceptions with their individual preconceptions during an extended temporal framework. Mediation of service, destination and traveller myths is not a standardisable provider function, as it is dependent upon the visitor's contribution as an interpretant. This implies that the same service performance can be assessed negatively or positively, depending on its congruence with a particular visitor's cultural values, holiday ideals and ideal traveller myth(s). However, visitor preconceptions and anticipation relating to service providers or to the destination are vague and undetermined (since they look forward to a novel, different and hedonic experience), and thus cannot be defined as a list of precise expectations.

In this sense, mediating functions are similar to Grönroos' (1984) functional (how?) aspects and may be assessed similarly to motivating factors (Herzberg *et al.* 1959) or expressive aspects (Swan and Combs 1976), that is, on a 'bipolar scale' between dissatisfaction and delight. In Johnston and Heineke's (1998) terms, mediating functions are "critical factors", because service providers are assessed positively if they match the visitor's preconceived destination and self-image, and are assessed negatively if they disconfirm these images by conveying opposing symbolic messages. Assessment of mediating aspects is different from that of facilitating aspects, because the former is made

in a lengthier and dynamic matching process, within which a range of socio-culturally defined comparison standards is present.

It should be emphasised that the model presented above is not hierarchical, and that mediating functions are not proposed as higher order aspects than facilitating ones. This is because different visitors may emphasise different aspects in their assessment, depending on their holiday ideals. As was demonstrated in Chapter 5, some focus on the functional value of service performance, while others focus on the symbolic values and experiences they get in return for monetary and non-monetary sacrifices. Different holiday stays may also differ from each other in their degree of realisability. Thus, visitors' perceptions and assessments are also influenced by the 'risks' built into their holiday design, including destination choice, degree of autonomy and planning, and the degree of local interaction. Furthermore, it can be argued that no temporally stable or universal assessment model can describe the perception of even the very same individual, because of the narrative-driven organisation of experiences.

This model has several advantages. It emphasises the multidimensionality of customer assessment from the role tourism-related offerings play in the holiday experience. In contrast to previous models (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988, Parasuraman *et al.* 1991, Johnston *et al.* 1990), these dimensions are not provider-defined aspects. The model does not attempt to define a range of discreet or continuous factors, because they may be overlapping and simultaneous in the perception of visitors. In this model there are no core and peripheral parts, blueprinted delivery processes or operation-based attributes. Service providers are *both the means* (facilitators) *and the goal* (mediators/communicators) of the visitor's holiday experience. Thus the visitor's assessment (quality perceptions and satisfaction) will depend both on the degree to which service providers contributed to (made possible) *and* on how far they were a part of *realising*, a beneficial (extraordinary, learning, enriching) experience. Another advantage of this model is that it can be applied to individual and integrated service providers as well as to entire destinations, solving the difficulty of pinning down exactly what the product or service *is* for the customer.

8.3. Assessment of the study

In connection with the contributions of this study and their relevance to service quality and tourism research, the scientific 'credibility' of the findings must also be discussed. This final section attempts to evaluate this using corroboration tests for qualitative studies; it also assesses the limitations of the present study.

8.3.1. Validity and generalisability

Qualitative studies and inductively developed models are often targets of criticisms made from a quantitatively-oriented standpoint. Because qualitative findings are based on inferences from relatively small samples, they may be denounced as lacking rigour and predictive power for making general conclusions. However, these accusations are not legitimate, because the assumptions of qualitative and quantitative studies depend upon

differing scientific paradigms (see Chapters 2 and 3). Although these approaches share basic notions as to what constitutes trustworthy research, tests of corroboration must be adapted to the methodological fundaments of the study in question. The present study was assessed against four measures of trustworthiness adapted by Lincoln and Guba (1985) from the terminology of quantitative corroborative criteria. These are: credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability, corresponding *in sense* to the quantitative norms of internal and external validity and objectivity, and reliability, respectively. Fulfilment of these criteria is discussed below.

Credibility (internal validity)
Credibility refers to the truthfulness of findings, assessing whether there is a coherence between the empirical phenomenon and the way it is measured in the study. From the pilot study experiences, it was realised that service quality research must break free both from prevalent assumptions about customer perceptions and from supply-dominated models of tourism offerings. Thus, the revised goal of the study was to describe perceived service quality as far as possible in terms of the personal experience of visitors, rather than from manufacturing logic or from deductive conjectures based on service perception models developed for other industries. Consequently, an interpretive paradigm was chosen as the philosophical stance for this study, where human behaviour is meaningful in a social/environmental context and can only be explained through the subjective and inter-subjective experience of individuals.

This resulted in an inductive research design, which aimed to contextualise new theory directly from empirical data describing subjective visitor experience. In order to gauge this experience as faithfully as possible, qualitative and non-numerical data sources were used, including in-depth interviews, participant observation and visual projective techniques (see Research Design in Chapter 4.). As far as possible interviews were conducted as informal conversations about the holiday stay, of the same kind that might have taken place between visitors and their family or friends. In contrast to quantitative research practice, the data collection was as free as possible of academic jargon and a priori theory and also from specific questions which would break the holiday narrative, such as: “Would you return to this hotel?” As far as it was possible, respondents were not led or ‘misled’ during the conversation, but were allowed to relate the experience in their own terms. (Although photographs were used at times to prompt accounts of experiences, visitors were free to use or leave them as they liked.) Hence, the colourful narratives were credible and unconstrained ‘measurement tools’ which accurately captured visitors’ perception and experience in a phenomenological sense.

Transferability (external validity)
Transferability refers to the generalisability of findings, that is, whether or not they can be applied in other circumstances or settings, and to other groups of people. Because of the non-numerical nature of the data themselves and of the data analysis, the findings of the present study cannot claim statistical generalisability. This means that specific results from Bornholm and its visitors may not readily generalise to a larger universe. However,

statistical significance was not the intention of this study. The goal was to conduct an exploratory, pioneering work, searching for *evidence* of new concepts and ideas. In such cases, a strict representativeness of the population is not a focal issue. Nevertheless, it can be said that these new concepts and ideas are *analytically generalisable*, because they were tested and compared against existing related theories in a broader, multi-disciplinary environment (e.g. learning, extraordinary experience, mindfulness, etc.). Thus, emerging categories and concepts earned their way into this study not via algorithms, but as a result of theoretical triangulation. From this, it follows that it is the conceptual advances that can be transferred to other settings. For example, the idea of dual provider roles (facilitation and mediation) may (indeed, should) now be applied in studies of different service situations, beyond tourism and hospitality.

Confirmability (objectivity)
Confirmability is a criterion gauging the neutrality of findings, for example whether there is an effort to minimise bias in data collection or interpretation. This can be achieved through method and interpreter triangulation. The present study used multiple, but synchronous, data analysis methods (keyword search, semiotic content analysis and narrative analysis). In order to reduce interpretive bias and thus to establish an objective chain of evidence, analytical tactics of constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978), pattern matching and explanation building (Yin 1993) were applied. This inductive process is desirable during new theory building, and involves confronting multiple sources of evidence and emerging hypotheses with each other to define a construct or a causal framework.

One of the most reliable ways to assure the objectivity of qualitative findings is investigator triangulation (Denzin 1978), where the same body of data is interpreted by another researcher who is familiar with, but not inherently involved in, the research project. Although the author discussed alternative interpretations of the data with her supervisor during the data gathering and analysis processes, it cannot be said that the interviews were systematically analysed by another independent auditor (thanks to the solitary quest of the PhD project). There were also some practical difficulties with using another auditor, such as the language barriers presented by Scandinavian interview data. Consequently, the confirmability criterion is only partly met by the study.

Dependability (reliability)
Dependability refers to what is called reliability in quantitative terminology, that is, whether or not the findings are reproducible by another researcher. In the case of qualitative studies this criterion is assured not so much by triangulation methods, but rather by the transparency of the research procedures. These procedures, i.e. both data collection and analysis methods and instruments, are demonstrated in detail in Chapter 4 as well as in the appendices. Although it is always troublesome to compare case studies, the two successive data sets from the pilot and main study cases (Norfolk and Bornholm) indicated some similar findings and theoretical conclusions. Thus, it can be stated that the findings are dependable, at least within their analytical boundaries.

8.3.2. Limitations

The limitations of this study follow logically from the discussion above. The sample can be said to be quasi-representative for Bornholm (see correspondence with survey, Chapter 4); however, the data analysis methods do not grant statistical generalisability to the results. This means that the study justifies new theoretical concepts through the evidence of detailed findings (such as mythological themes related to Bornholm or to traveller roles), but it cannot prove that *these and only these* mythological themes exist in visitors' minds. Maybe future research will test these by deductive, quantitative methods, but it is unclear what type of instrument might adequately capture these subjective, symbolic aspects and contexts. Another shortcoming of the study is the limited confirmability (objectivity) of the findings, which are prone to the individual interpretation of the author. However, this may be improved in subsequent, similar studies by adopting a research design where a team of independent researchers can interpret and audit the collected qualitative data.

9. Conclusions

This chapter summarises the significance of the study in the light of the original problem formulation and the findings. It identifies theoretical contributions that have been made to service and tourism research and highlights potential new avenues for future research. It also makes some broad recommendations concerning the improvement of the tourism offering on Bornholm and at other peripheral destinations, for the benefit of practitioners.

9.1. Theoretical contributions to service research in tourism and hospitality

Academics in tourism and hospitality management have long been challenged by the problem of managing complex offerings that differ substantially from other types of customer services. There is still a perplexing ambiguity regarding *what* exactly is provided to visitors, and *how* to measure the quality of this 'product'. Tourism and hospitality offerings are characterised by high personal contact and high customer involvement, so that visitors can be regarded both as service 'outcomes' and service 'co-producers'. Furthermore, tourism and hospitality service providers supply visitors with more than just hotel rooms, meals or sightseeing tours: they also provide them with a particular social or sociological experience.

The present study approached tourism offerings from a demand-oriented perspective exploring how visitors' perception of this social experience was related to their judgement of purchased services. It was found that visitors conceptualised the offering in a different way from that described by either static or dynamic academic models. Their perceptions were holistic rather than atomistic and were centred around the extraordinary experience, rather than around core providers or main service delivery phases. This may suggest that visitors probably did not base their assessment on supply-defined, standard elements of the offering.

In service quality and satisfaction literature customers' assessment is often modelled according to the disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver 1980), which states that customers base their product judgements on some sort of comparison. Perceptions are typically matched against expectations, which are thought to be precise predictions of what the service provider should or would offer (Zeithaml 1988). These expectations may be based on a range of factors, including prior experience, recommendations, beliefs, provider prices and promises (Liljander 1996). This study found that visitors did not possess precise and explicit expectations before they encountered the actual service experience. What they did possess were vague, commonly-held preconceptions of the destination and its people, which have here been termed mythologies. Concrete perceptions of service episodes or other visitor experiences were then processed during *negotiation*, in which tangible and intangible cues were interpreted and matched against the preconceived mythological image. The negotiating process was often prompted by particular or novel sensory experiences and was characterised by high affective involvement.

The most important contribution of this study to tourism and hospitality-related service research is the discovery that providers played a dual role in the visitor's experience. They not only facilitated the visitor's journey and stay at the destination, but also communicated different mythologies and cultural messages via service environments and staff behaviour. Thus, total visitor evaluations of tourism offerings were much more than just the sum of service provider judgements added together. The discovery of dual provider roles gave rise to an empirically based model of service assessment, providing a more detailed picture of perceived quality. Facilitation referred in the present study to functional aspects of service delivery, aimed at making customers' life easier: a functional, utilitarian aim, which can be found in all service offerings. What makes tourism offerings unique is that they also contribute to hedonic and symbolic consumption, and thus to making visitors' life richer. Mediation of extraordinary holiday experiences was observed as taking place when service providers communicated destination-related and traveller mythologies.

The goal of the study was to understand the consumption processes of tourism in a broader socio-cultural context. Thus, rather than following the positivist tradition prevalent in service research, this study adopted an inductive, phenomenological approach. Visitors' narrated experience and its live context became the focus of research instead of theoretically developed, purified concepts. The resulting data showed a richness which greatly exceeded the potential of quantitative studies. Data analysis included multiple methods and an interdisciplinary background, using theories of service management, marketing, consumer psychology as well as cultural anthropology. This approach has demonstrated its capability to develop new, empirically based theories in tourism.

9.2. Implications for further research

The present study can be seen as a pioneering effort to make service research more customer-oriented and multidisciplinary. It focused on entire visitor experiences and whole destination offerings, and as such, the results are very general. Therefore, further research is needed in this direction, for example to focus on individual service providers, such as specific accommodation or catering establishments. In the present study it was possible to distinguish between a number of different destination-related mythologies, but more work is needed to identify culturally shared service mythologies.

An interesting area of further research could be the expression of power relationships in tourism and hospitality-related service mythologies. Service encounters presuppose an adversarial relationship between providers and customers. Just think about Carlzon's (1987) bullfight metaphor of moments-of-truth, or theories of service equity and fairness. The historical background of service, where 'servants' were in a lower hierarchical position, may also contribute to power-related service mythologies. This approach may shed new light on the commercialisation of feelings in customer services, too (cf. Hochschild 1983).

On the other hand, classic tourism images, particularly in destination marketing, carry convivial mythologies of Xenophilia. Natives are always depicted as hospitable, friendly people, who welcome (or at least tolerate) the intrusion of visitors. Thus, visitors trust guides or 'local experts' to help them become familiar with the destination and its culture. Clearly, adversarial and convivial service mythologies have the potential to blend or conflict in tourism and hospitality offerings. Cross-cultural differences in service mythologies and global standards in international organisations may be another attractive topic for future research.

Another interesting direction for further study is that of traveller roles (Explorers, Grand Tourists, Vagabonds and Colonists), perhaps using quantitative studies. In a study of historic houses Frochot (1999) confirmed that benefit clustering can reveal visitor segments which possess different behaviour patterns and quality preferences. It would be intriguing to identify typical visitor segments at destinations by a similar method and compare whether they matched culturally defined traveller roles identified in qualitative studies.

9.3. Recommendations for practitioners

Tourism and hospitality businesses have long had difficulties defining the exact nature of the product they are selling and identifying its crucial elements for customers. It has been known that restaurants sell more than meals and food service, but it is difficult to define or measure the quality of the customer's meal experience. Large organisations have developed standard operational systems, but most of them realise that the rationalisation of intangibles (such as personal service, ambience) is difficult to implement. As a result they may fail to provide customers with a unique experience.

The present findings suggest that visitors to a destination base their assessment of service providers upon tangible cues and interpersonal encounters, which (apart from making the consumption experience possible) also act as signifiers in a semiotic sense. These signifiers may communicate messages about the island, its inhabitants and their culture, which crucially influence the customer's perception of their entire stay. The goal of any holiday visit is to gather pleasurable, novel and unexpected experiences, implying that visitors value stimulation, delight and spontaneity in service encounters. The findings showed that the perceived sincerity, personalisation and originality of a provider may weigh more in customers' assessment than a professional but predictable conformity to standards.

Hence, in order to delight visitors, small hospitality firms have to provide more than physical comfort and mechanistically correct service. They must be aware what they particularly contribute to customers' holiday experiences, in terms of both functional and communicative aspects. Service providers should identify relevant destination mythologies and integrate them consciously in marketing activities and daily operations. On Bornholm, for example, providers could design symbols to evoke sub-themes of Lost Eden, Historic

nostalgia and so on. They could also instruct their personnel to become aware of their 'Bornholmian' and Scandinavian identity and convey semiotic messages about this mentality while attending customers. Using destination mythologies and communicative staging consciously could be a primary source of competitive differentiation, which might also be emphasised in promotional activities.

The present study also found that customers' perception of service/product performance was holistic. Each service provider visitors encountered at a destination contributed to their total perception of and satisfaction with Bornholm. This implies that individual providers and umbrella organisations should co-operate to identify and optimise service itineraries that visitors undertake in the area. The findings showed that most service providers on Bornholm did not think beyond the boundaries of their own firms and were unaware of inter-organisational links that might facilitate or hinder visitors' spatio-temporal movement. Tourism service providers should work more closely together with destination managers to map visitors' service journeys and to revise disfunctional or non-existent links between various service providers.

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12. Appendix

Appendix 1. Respondent profile

Main Study Interviews, Bornholm, June-September 1998

#	Who	Date	Origin	Job	Age group	Arrange-ment	Transport	Number of visits
1.	Couple	4.6	Växjö, S	Retired	60-69	Organised	Bus	1
2.	Group of friends (6)	4.6	Växjö, S	Retired	60-69	Organised	Bus	1
3.	Couple	4.6	Aalborg, DK	Retired	69+	Individual	Car	21-50
4.	Couple	4.6	Aachen, D	Insurance manager	35-49	Individual	Car/bike	4
5.	Couple	4.6	Copenhagen, DK	Marketing manager	25-34	Individual	Car/bike	2
6.	Group of friends (2)	11.6	Hessen, D	Student	25-34	Individual	Bike	2
7.	Couple	11.6	Göttingen, D	Medical doctor	25-34	Individual	Car	2
8.	Couple	11.6	Zürich, CH	Secretary - technician	35-49	Individual	Car	1
9.	Couple	11.6	Münster, D	Florist- gardener	25-34	Individual	Car/bike	1
10.	Tourist group (15)	14.6	Malmö, S	Musician-teacher	50-59	Organised	Minibus	1
11.	Tourist group (40)	14.6	Copenhagen, D	Gardeners	35-49	Organised	Bus	2
12.	Family/children	14.6	Malmö, S	Architect	35-49	Individual	Car	6-10
13.	Couple	14.6	Lund, S	Retired	69+	Organised	Car	2
14.	Couple	16.6	Hamburg, D	Retired	69+	Individual	Car	1
15.	Couple	16.6	Stuttgart, D	Insurance managers	50-59	Individual	Car	1
16.	Group of friends (5)	16.6	Copenhagen, DK	Prisoners	35-49	Organised	Taxi/foot	2
17.	Family/children	16.6	Mainz, D	Physiotherapist	25-34	Individual	Car	1
18.	Tourist group (38)	19.6	Oslo, N	Retired	60-69	Organised	Bus	1
19.	Couple	19.6	Kolding, DK	Sales assistant	25-34	Individual	Car	1
20.	Couple	19.6	Sønderborg, DK	Static engineer	50-59	Individual	Foot/bus	2
21.	Group of friends (25)	19.6	Malmö, S	Diverse	25-34	Organised	Car	4
22.	Couple	19.6	Warsaw, PL	Economist	35-49	Individual	Foot	1

23.	Group of friends (2)	22.6	Southampton, UK	Retired	60-69	Organised	Cruiser/bus	1
24.	Couple	22.6	Cape Town, RSA	Retired	69+	Organised	Cruiser/bus	1
25.	Individual visitor	23.6	New York, US	Retired	69+	Organised	Cruiser/bus	1
26.	Group of friends (3)	24.6	Kalundborg, DK	Retired	69+	Organised	Bus/foot	2
27.	Family/children	24.6	Stavanger, N	Sociologist - nurse	35-49	Individual	Car	1
28.	Family	24.6	Odense, DK	Retired	69+	Organised	Bus/foot	2
29.	Couple	24.6	Odense, DK	Trade union secretary	35-49	Individual	Car	1
30.	Family/children	24.6	Roskilde, DK	Social worker	35-49	Individual	Car	3
31.	Family/children	24.6	Ballerup, DK	Sales assistant	25-34	Individual	Car	1
32.	Family/children	24.6	Frederiksberg, DK	Sales manager	69+	Individual	Car	1
33.	Family/children	3.7	Mors, DK	Schoolteachers	35-49	Individual	Car	2
34.	Group of friends (4)	3.7	Sønderborg, DK	Farmers	25-34	Individual	Car	1
35.	Family/children	3.7	Kolding, DK	Physiotherapist	35-49	Individual	Foot	1
36.	Family/children	7.7	Fredericia, DK	Textile designer	35-49	Individual	Foot	2
37.	Family/children	7.7	Maribo, DK	Student - politician	16-24	Individual	Car	3
38.	Couple	7.7	Herslev DK	Vocational teacher	50-59	Individual	Car	1
39.	Family/children	7.7	Skåne, S	Engineer	35-49	Individual	Car/bike	1
40.	Group of friends (2)	17.7	Stående, DK	Baker - housewife	50-59	Individual	Car	3
41.	Couple	17.7	Jels, DK	Engineer	50-59	Individual	Car	2
42.	Couple	17.7	Stavanger, N	Psychiatrist	25-34	Individual	Bike	2
43.	Individual visitor	17.7	Viborg, DK	School secretary	60-69	Organised	Bus	2
44.	Couple	17.7	Kalmar, S	Mechanic	35-49	Individual	Motorbike	1
45.	Family	17.7	Gladsaxe, DK	Hairdresser	25-34	Individual	Car	1
46.	Family/children	24.7	Sabro/Århus DK	Technician - housewife	34-49	Individual	Car	4
47.	Couple	24.7	Viborg, DK	Shop assistant	34-49	Individual	Motorbike	2
48.	Couple	24.7	Kristiansand, N	Retired	69+	Organised	Bus	1

49.	Group of friends (6)	24.7	Hönefoss, N	Defence	35-49	Organised	Bike	1
50.	Couple	28.7	Annaberg, D	Engineer - pediatrist	25-34	Individual	Bike	1
51.	Couple	28.7	Stavanger, N	Fisherman - ceramist	50-59	Organised	Car	1
52.	Couple	28.7	Åbenrå, DK	Sales assistants	35-49	Individual	Car	3
53.	Family/children	28.7	Stånholm, DK	Medical consultant	35-49	Individual	Car	2
54.	Family/children	28.7	Neumünster, D	Sociologist	35-49	Individual	Car	1
55.	Couple	30.7	Uppsala, S	Sales manager	50-59	Individual	Car	1
56.	Couple	30.7	Copenhagen, DK	Dentist	34-49	Individual	Yacht	3
57.	Family/children	30.7	Borup, DK	Factory worker	34-49	Individual	Car	1
58.	Couple	30.7	Norköping, S	Engineer	50-59	Individual	Car	1
59.	Family/children	30.7	Samsø, DK	Ergotherapist - teacher	34-49	Individual	Car	1
60.	Couple	31.7	Chelmsford, UK	Retired	60-69	Organised	Cruiser/bus	1
61.	Couple	4.8	Dortmund, D	Teacher - judge	50-59	Individual	Foot	7
62.	Family/children	4.8	Hannover, D	Retired - architect	50-59	Individual	Car	11-20
63.	Family/children	4.8	Flensburg, D	Carpenter	34-49	Individual	Car	1
64.	Family/children	48	Hamburg, D	Stage-walker	25-34	Individual	Car	3
65.	Family/children	6.8	Frankfurt, D	Camping manager	35-49	Individual	Car	2
66.	Family/children	6.8	Prenzlau, D	Social consultant	25-34	Individual	Car	1
67.	Family/children	6.8	Dragør, DK	Marketing consultant	35-49	Individual	Car	3
68.	Family/children	6.8	Rostock, D	Dental technician	3549	Individual	Car	4
69.	Couple	13.8	Copenhagen, DK	Union representative	60-69	Organised	Car	3
70.	Family	13.8	Hornbæk, DK	Retired	69+	Organised	Bus	6-10
71.	Couple	13.8	Basel, CH	Chiropractor	25-34	Individual	Car	3
72.	Tourist group	13.8	Nykøbing F, DK	Teachers - students	25-34	Organised	Bike	5
73.	Family/children	13.8	Copenhagen, DK	Consultant	25-34	Individual	Car	4
74.	Group of friends (4)	11.8	Budapest, H	Engineers	50-59	Individual	Car	1
75.	Couple	22.8	Harwich, UK	Retired	60-69	Organised	Cruiser/bus	1

76.	Couple	27.8	Lübeck, D	Retired	60-69	Individual	Car	3
77.	Couple	27.8	Copenhagen, DK	Retired	60-69	Individual	Bus	4
78.	Couple	4.9	York, UK	Retired	69+	Organised	Cruiser/bus	1
79.	Group of friends (2)	9.9	Trondheim, N	Housewives	60-69	Organised	Bus	1
80.	Couple	9.9	Copenhagen, DK	Nurse - painter	35-49	Individual	Car	6-10

Pilot Study Interviews, Norfolk, April-May 1997

#	Who	Date	Origin	Job	Age group	Arrange-ment	Transport	Number of visits
81.	Couple	16.6	Norwich, UK	Professor - housewife	50-59	Individual	Car	1
82.	Couple	9.5	Birmingham, UK	Computer systems managers	25-34	Individual	Bike	1
83.	Group of friends	9.5	Yorkshire, UK	Teacher	50-59	Organised	Bike	2
84.	Family/children	9.5	Hampshire, UK	Nurse for disabled	25-34	Individual	Car	5
85.	Couple	24.6	Hethersett, UK	Housewife	50-59	Individual	Car	1
86.	Couple	18.4	Loughborough, UK	Retired	69+	Individual	Car	1
87.	Couple	8.4	Heilbronn, D	Students	25-34	Individual	Foot	1
88.	Group of friends (2)	8.4	San Francisco, US	Retired	60-69	Individual	Bus	1
89.	Tourist group	8.4	Paris, F	Students	16-24	Organised	Bus	1
90.	Family/children	10.4	Bradford, UK	Gardener	60-69	Individual	Car	6-10

Pilot Study Interviews, Bornholm, October 1997

#	Who	Date	Origin	Job	Age group	Arrange-ment	Transport	Number of visits
91.	Family/children	28.9	Budapest, H	Engineer	50-59	Individual	Car	1
92.	Couple	10.10	Lübeck, D	Teacher	50-59	Individual	Bus/foot	1
93.	Couple	10.10	Søborg, DK	Retired	69+	Individual	Car	5
94.	Couple	12.10	Frankfurt, D	Medical doctor	50-59	Individual	Car/foot	11-20
95.	Family	12.10	Odense, DK	Retired	60-69	Individual	Bus/foot	1

96.	Tourist group	12.10	Vig, DK	Retired	60-69	Organised	Bus	2
97.	Family/children	12.10	Copenhagen, DK	Housewife	25-34	Individual	Car	1
98.	Couple	15.10	Hellerup, DK	Retired	60-69	Individual	Car	3

Appendix 2: List of visual prompts

Number of photograph	Description
1.	'Det Hvide Hus' - a popular half-timbered thatched-roofed craft-shop, with visitors
2.	Årsdale Windmill and some cycle tourists
3.	Bornholm Art Museum, with the sea-view cafeteria and visitors
4.	Open-air concert on Nexø Torv (marketplace) with Danish flags
5.	A receptionist checking in arriving visitors at a smaller hotel
6.	Gudhjem harbour milieu with visitors
7.	Counter of a fish smokehouse - a visitor is being served, others queuing
8.	Open-air tables at smokehouse, a couple enjoying smoked herring and beers
9.	Inside a glass-blower workshop. Artists at work, visitors watching
10.	A bus sightseeing tour - visitors (with children) getting off the bus
11.	Hammershus Castle, full view, some visitors walking down the path
12.	Cafeteria and exhibition centre at Hammershus - with visitors
13.	View of the Hammer peninsula and lighthouse, with some hikers
14.	Indoor restaurant milieu - a group of six is being served
15.	The boat to Christiansø about to leave Gudhjem harbour
16.	Helligdomsklipperne (Sanctuary cliffs) with visitors on the Sorte Gryde bridge
17.	Visitors eating at the Christiansø pub - with view over the Ertholmerne
18.	Walking in the Almindingen forest - with Christianshøj tower in the background
19.	Bicycle tourists picnicking at a table in a nature setting
20.	Textile and silk-print workshop in Nyker
21.	The horse wagon ride at Svaneke market with small children
22.	Children having a taste of freshly made candy at the Svaneke Bolcher workshop
23.	Dueodde beach milieu with the ice-cream shop 'Krølle Bølle'
24.	Brandesgårdshaven Amusement Park - the Boating Lake and the Flower Park
25.	Snogebæk harbour milieu in the evening - with the restaurant Søren's Værtshus
26.	Østerlars Round Church with visitors
27.	Guests checking out at a campsite
28.	Cars rolling on the ferry in Rønne - leaving the island

Appendix 3: Participant observation sites and venues

Main study, Bornholm, 1998

#	Date	Site (Venue)
1.	23.6.98	St Hans Eve and Kildefest at Svaneke [Solstice Feast]
2.	25.6.98	Medieval market at the Medieval Centre, Østerlars
3.	27.6.98	3-hour guided coach trip around Bornholm with cruise visitors
4.	4.7.98	Veteran Car Rally around Bornholm
5.	30.7.98	2-hour guided walking tour in Almindingen Forest, Christianshøj Restaurant
6.	16.8.98	3-hour guided walking tour in Rønne with dinner at Restaurant Fyrtøjet
7.	22.8.98	3-hour guided coach trip around Bornholm with cruise visitors

Pilot study, Norfolk and Bornholm, 1997

#	Date	Site (Venue)
1.	10.4.97	Pleasure Beach, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk
2.	16.4.97	Castle Farm and surroundings, Dereham Pub, Norfolk
3.	12.8.97	Svaneke town and glass blower, Ibsker Church, Brandesgårdshaven Amusement Park, the Apotheker's Garden
4.	13.8.97	The Maritime Hasle (Museum and Smokehouse) Hammershus (Medieval performance for children)
5.	14.8.97	'Kunsthåndverkerbussen' - day trip organised by BAT visiting 7 craft workshops and a fish smokehouse, Øster Sømarken Beach Café
6.	15.8.97	Svaneke market, sightseeing boat trip to Helligdomsklipperne, Bornholm Art Museum and Café
7.	16.8.97	Østerlars Round Church, Kobbeå-valley hiking tour Melstedsgårds Farm Museum
8.	17.8.97	Boat trip to Christiansø with guided sightseeing

Appendix 4: MPhil Transfer Document

Linking Visitors' Holiday Experiences, Service Quality Perceptions and Satisfaction. A Case study In Peripheral Areas of Europe

28 February 1998

Background

The present study began in July 1996, as the first part of an extended research project, which aimed to describe visitors' appraisal of holiday service offerings (i.e. perceived service quality and satisfaction with hotels, restaurants etc.), in the context of their own judgement of holiday experiences. Despite the proliferation of studies and models of consumer behaviour, traditional product and service assessment frameworks borrowed from other substantive areas seem hardly applicable within the holiday scenario (Otto and Ritchie 1996; Arnould and Price 1993). From a literature review it became clear that the inconsistency between existing models and visitors' description of holiday evaluation is the result of paradigmatic differences in the conceptualisation of the tourism product.

Accepted quality assessment frameworks are built on manufacturing logic, where the holiday offering is considered as a bundle of core and peripheral products or providers (Normann 1984, Gilbert 1990). These are represented as distinct elements in a mechanistic clockwork system, through which customers are processed like raw materials. Within this paradigm, the measurement of the customer evaluation focuses either on product/service *outcomes,* breaking them down into discrete attributes (Parasuraman *et al*. 1985), or on service production *processes*, focusing on distinct stages of the delivery (Danaher and Mattsson 1994, de Ruyter *et al*. 1997). This is, however, incomptatible with the demand-oriented definition of the 'holiday product', being an extraordinary, holistic *experience*, only existing in the customer's mind (Otto and Ritchie 1993). It implies that visitors might not break their complex experiences down in terms different services and products and would be unlikely to pay equal attention to each aspect they encounter during the extended temporal framework of holidays. Thus, in order to understand the customer's holiday assessment and to give meaningful definitions to perceived service quality and satisfaction in the tourism context, it is necessary to adopt a demand-based perspective and methodology.

Research work achieved in the initial part of the study

Since the goal of the exploratory study was to create a grounded, customer-oriented model of the holiday assessment, the visitor's narrated experience became the focus of research. It was intended to explore the experience acquisition process and to identify aspects that

influence holiday evaluation. In this way, it was hoped to illuminate another puzzle: whether and how visitors' perceptions of different service providers affect satisfaction with their holiday experience.

In order to describe the subjective, lived experience of holiday visitors, a hermeneutic approach was thought to be appropriate. Building knowledge within the interpretive paradigm (Berger and Luckmann 1971) is entirely inductive, implying that data generation is not predetermined by existing theories; rather, new knowledge is contextualised in the data from which it emerges. Hence, a grounded theory approach was taken (Glaser and Strauss 1967), where theory generation is simultaneous with data collection and analysis. During an iterative and cyclical process, ideas emerging during data collection were confirmed or disconfirmed via continuous dialogues with the field. By using the constant comparison method (Glaser 1978), each concept earns its way into the integrated mid-range theory, which will then have a straight correspondence with reality. Grounded Theory is especially useful in creating theories bearing managerial implications, and has lately become widely applied in business research, too (Gummesson 1991, Lowe 1996).

Data collection took place in three phases at two comparable peripheral holiday destinations (Norfolk, UK and Bornholm, Denmark). First, 100 open questionnaires were posted to potential visitors, who had requested information at the Norwich Tourism Information Centre in order to create pre-holiday expectations. Second, observations and open interviews were conducted with Norfolk visitors at different locations, at the beginning and end of their stay. The purpose was to map visitor expectations, experiences and impressions in their own terms and categories. By identifying crucial, satisfaction-related elements from the accounts, it was hoped to illuminate whether and how perceptions of service providers influenced their holiday assessments. Third, supplementary observation and interviews were made on the Baltic island of Bornholm to validate the Norfolk results (Table 12.1). Visitor interviews were conducted as literally as possible, in four different languages (English, Danish, German, and French), and were translated into English for analysis purposes. Interview and observation data were interpreted using grounded theory techniques (Glaser 1978).

Table 12.1. Respondents of the study

Mail respondents	Norfolk interviewees		Bornholm interviewees	
	domestic	Foreign	domestic	foreign
20	10	5	4	6

Findings

This section introduces four conceptual areas relating to the structure of the narrated holiday experiences. First, antecedents and the acquisition process of holiday experiences are presented, followed by a discussion of their evaluative consequences. The possibility of creating meaningful visitor clusters according to experience modes and their assessment is

also examined. Finally, the conceptual findings of the holiday process are summarised and analysed in a graphical model, with special focus on service providers' role in it.

1. The antecedents of holiday experiences

Motivation

In order to understand the customer's experience acquisition and assessment, the multiple motives of holiday making should be acknowledged. Respondents talked about two general motivational forces, that often appeared simultaneously in the narratives. Relieving stress was a typical driver of visits to a peripheral area: visitors wanted to get rid of everyday constraints, such as schedules and planning (*"you don't have to do anything"*), urban lifestyle (*"to leave that rat race behind", "in Hamburg, everything is so hectic"*) and certain social environments (*"get away from the frilly curtains syndrome, where people are more concerned with how things look"*). In contrast to what they were escaping from, respondents hoped to *"be free, to get a break*", to find *"peace, quiet and friendliness"*, and to *"get on with things as they really are"*. Narratives often contained hopes of gaining more time in a calm environment (*"having more time for ourselves and the kids"*). The pursuit of spatial and social variety, differing from ordinary days, is given a functionalist explanation by sociologists. According to the Parsonian scheme, modern individuals conform with society and this adaptation generates tensions. Tourism thus serves as the pressure-valve for modern man (Cohen 1979), it gives a chance to escape environmental constraints and to break the monotony of routines. Tension release during holidays is often expressed by taking a reverse social role (Gottlieb 1982) or in exercising reversal activities (e.g. play, relaxation), which are in strong contrast to what people normally do back at home. The notion of extra-ordinariness already implies that the customer's assessment of holidays may largely differ from the evaluation of everyday situations.

However, the notion of inversion presents only one facade of tourism motivation. In parallel with the recreational, tension-relieving motivation, a heightened need for arousal was also perceivable. Some visitors aspired to get to know a destination and visit all the attractions. For example: *"This is the first time we are here. […] Many of our friends and our daughter talked about this wonderful island, so we had to come and see it"*, or *"We must visit the Hammershus Castle and the round churches: they are unique in Denmark"*. These visitors had acquired very thorough knowledge about the destination by consulting maps, guidebooks and acquaintances and they still aspired to know more. *"We ordered some brochures about the island to read and see what would be interesting to visit. We also asked the people in this guesthouse for advice"*. Here, the general motivation of 'quest-for-variety' is expressed in exploratory, *novelty-seeking* human behaviour, the need to satisfy curiosity through discovering new destinations, meeting different people and understanding other cultures. The need to know, learn and understand the world around is described by behavioural psychologists (Berlyne 1966) as an innate, born motivation. For some people, the search for knowledge is coupled with a search for adventure, extraordinary physical challenges and risks (e.g. mountaineering, scuba-diving, etc.), a

motivational force referred to as the Ulysses factor (Anderson 1966). Although peripheral areas like Norfolk or Bornholm offer only moderate opportunities for uncertainty and risks, they might still appeal more to Ulysses-driven visitors than mature, urban destinations.

The simultaneous appearance of tension-reducing and arousal-seeking motives in the data reconfirm the already known, dual motivational mechanisms in human behaviour, probably first outlined by Maslow (1968). His revised theory of human needs was later applied to describe the motivation for leisure (Hartman 1979), presenting individuals as seeking an optimum level of 'activation' between boredom and stress. Based on this, Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) created a dialectical model of tourist motivation, describing parallel individual and social motives of escaping everyday environments and seeking other, intrinsic rewards. Still, all holiday experiences have a common aspect, that is, of playing a particular, out-of-the-ordinary role in life. This implies that the customer's assessment of holidays may largely differ from the evaluation of 'everyday situations' and thus evaluation constructs (such as service quality and satisfaction) have to be redefined accordingly.

Expectations

Expectations are generally the focus of customer assessment literature, as prevalent evaluative concepts are mostly explained by the disconfirmation of expectations. Satisfaction with an offering is conceptualised as a function of disconfirmation arising from discrepancies between prior expectations and actual performance (Oliver 1980), while service quality is conceptualised as the gap between expected and perceived performance levels (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985). Thus, it is assumed that customers update attitudes towards an offering on the basis of cognitive comparisons.

The data obtained in the present study revealed several dimensions of expectations, but these are different from those applied in service quality schemes. There was a group of comments representing abstract *predictions* of the destination itself, based on previous experience and word-of-mouth. All respondents, but particularly first-time visitors, were concerned to position and picture the region geographically: *"We didn't know where it was exactly, so we looked at the map to locate ourselves, and we saw it was quite far up to the north"*. Estimations of topographical characteristics were nurtured by commonly-held perceptions of East Anglia: *"it's everybody's image: Norfolk is flat, nothing special"*, or by word-of-mouth of acquaintances: *"we knew there was a walk along the water, [otherwise] we really had no idea…just that the place we were going to stay was lovely,…that's what our friends had told us"*. Often previous visits to similar types of destinations replaced the missing mental image: *"I knew it was a seaside place…I put it down as something like Blackpool"*. Among these vaguely defined predictions, I found a returning pattern of idealistic elements (*calmness and purity of the countryside,*

friendliness, freedom of choice, traditional values), which envisaged a destination where time has stopped and values of the old way of life have been retained. (Table 12.2.)

Along with predictions there was another group of expectations, which *anticipated* benefits of the holiday. Visitors described holistic aspirations, sometimes as broadly as: *"we were looking forward to some quiet and relaxing days"*, anticipating the destination atmosphere, rather than a detailed description of the forthcoming stay. The vaguely defined desires often matched predicted images of the destination: *"I wanted to find the English way of life…old and small houses, but nothing special about Norfolk"*. It seemed as if visitors pictured themselves in the imaginary destination described above and attempted to predict future gains of the holiday experience. In the idealised destination lifestyle (human pace, no constraints, etc.), they were unable to foresee negative things *("I cannot think of any bad things that might happen")* or to specify particular aspects, such as beach, food or service providers.

Table 12.2. Recurring idealised elements in the Norfolk and Bornholm image

	NORFOLK	***BORNHOLM***
Calmness and purity of countryside	relaxing, slower pace of life, no rushing about as it is further north, cleanliness, calm way of life, nice scenery, away from it all, quiet countryside, lovely quiet holidays, ideal for children.	Lovely and beautiful nature, clean, not hectic, mild climate, intact forests, quiet, tranquil, peaceful fascinating landscape, more green, more forest, clean fresh air.
Friendliness	friendly people, nice people, warm and friendly local people, pleasant and hospitable people, friendly environment, nice beaches, attractive countryside.	friendly people, helpful locals, open, quiet Bornholmian race, wonderful and cosy people, entertaining.
Freedom of choice	plenty to do and see, lots of places to visit, plenty of countryside, lots of entertainment going on at seaside resorts, plenty to chose from at night time, lots of things to visit close to each other.	A little bit of everything you can get, lots of nice walking paths and bicycle paths, accessible beaches, many new things to see.
Value judgement	excellent facilities, good value for money, love to come back for good, good accommodation, good food, fine beer.	Very good food (smoked fish), looking forward to wonderful holidays, the finest time in our lives.
Old	old English way of life, ancient towns, old houses, one of the better traditional UK resorts.	Old and pretty fishing towns, ancient churches, historic setting, everything is kept as it was 100 years ago.

Neither the predictive nor the anticipatory expectations conform to Zeithaml *et al*.'s (1993) 'should'-expectations, i.e. they do not contain norms for certain products or service providers. But having precise, normative expectations would be inconsistent with the very nature of the phenomenon of leisure tourism. As described earlier, customers' holiday product is the extraordinary experience, perceived and assembled by the visitors themselves. Thus, it is inherently impossible to anticipate the future outcomes of such experiences in detail or to possess particular, well-defined reference standards.

Planning

The narratives suggested that the way visitors plan their holidays might be an important determinant of the final assessment. Different visitor types emerged by looking at two determinants of planning: pacing and autonomy. *Pacing* describes the way visitors design their trip beforehand. Some high-pacing respondents, for example, made careful plans to visit all sights: *"we wanted to get to know Bornholm, and visit new things: Hammershus Castle, the glass blowers, the round churches and Christiansø"*. Low-pacing visitors, on the other hand, preferred more flexible schedules: *"We just take every day as it comes. Today, for example is rainy, so we go to town for shopping"*, or even a total freedom of future decisions: *"In general, we never book a hotel in advance"*. In addition, different remarks on individual vs. institutionalised holiday arrangements reflected the importance of planning *autonomy*. Autonomous planners preferred to be responsible for their choices, and often revealed travel agencies and guides as imposing their blueprint on customers: *"you must always go on and on", […] We'd rather like not to know the plan of the whole week beforehand"*. Conversely, 'organised' or low-autonomy visitors, felt secure having somebody else making holiday choices: *"we took the arts and crafts bus, because we didn't know where the workshops were. We'd never have found these small things on our own"*.

2. The acquisition process of holiday experiences

Perception

There was strikingly high sensory and cognitive activity towards the destination in respondents' accounts. They carefully collected and mapped interesting aspects on the journey, using all the five senses, e.g.: *"… we had an amazingly noisy deer outside the fence the other day, there was a lot of snuffling and grunting!"*, or *"The scents of the countryside are much stronger here."; "The floors in the old inn are quite repellent. You think you're drunk, when you walk on them"*. Particular novel factors of the destination (landscape, architecture and food), that differed from a home environment or the predicted image were described very precisely. The presence of heightened senses may be explained by Langer's (1987) theory of cognitive minimising, defining concepts of mindlessness vs. mindfulness. Individuals react mindlessly in 'routine' situations, in which stimulus information is perceived as irrelevant or is something to which they have been exposed repeatedly in the past. Customary situations are enacted according to instinctive scripts or scenarios that are deeply rooted in our social-cultural background (Shank and Abelson 1977, Solomon *et al*. 1985). In contrast to an idle mental state, *mindful* activities entail active information processing, which is triggered by novel or unexpected situations, such as variety and surprise.

The active cognitive mapping described above rarely took place without affective, expressive statements. Some responses conveyed emotions of moderate *pleasantness*, resulting from feelings of fulfilment (e.g. *"I just like the essence of being here"*). Unexpected or surprising incidents often elicited positive arousal. For example: *"We found*

this amazing restaurant where only local people go, quite by chance. We just couldn't believe that you could just walk in without booking!". Irritable sensory experiences evoked mixed feelings of unpleasantness and negative arousal: *"I found that the sea was dirty and appalling. The smell of the rotting seaweed was dreadful!"* Increased interest in situations, such as breathtaking natural or historic experiences and the excitement of discovery resulted in catharsis-like emotions: *"The Hammershus Castle is a thrilling experience! Like a fortress that opens up for you…One becomes fascinated by how people lived in the past. It's just a strong feeling to go around among these huge walls. It moves me,…it imprisons me"*. Such events could not be foreseen before they actually happened, and their evaluation was more likely to emerge during the processing of experiences. Previous research (Cohen and Areni 1991) has shown that incidents provoking strong affective responses leave 'markers' in episodic memory. Stored 'with distinction', these events are vividly recalled even at the end of the holidays and may crucially moderate assessment.

Updating

In order to digest the newly acquired information, individuals tend to organise their perceptions and previous knowledge by creating links or distinctions between these two. Not surprisingly, the colourful sensory narratives of holidays often contained some sort of comparison. In such cases, the perception of specific objects or events were related to intuitive reference points, like 'home', 'previous experience', 'predictive image' or 'reference destination'. Reference bases altered, even within the same interview. For example: *"The countryside is prettier and more attractive [than I expected]. Very easy on the eye, very nice to look at. I thought it was all flat. It's not, 'cause when you go on the bikes it's hard work, there are some hills."* or: *"Most of the food has been more salty than I would have at home!… but it was such tasty stuff that we ate it all"*. These comparative expectations were not articulated in the pre-journey phase, rather, they seemed to be triggered by a particular experience and then were assimilated retrospectively.

Disconfirmative comparisons, albeit often appearing in the accounts, seldom provided a basis for holiday assessments. In some instances, they reflected an acknowledgement of difference: *"The food was different from German [food], with so many sandwiches, coffee and a lot of tea…I love it, it's different from where I come from!"*. Disconfirmation also functioned to update previous impressions and predictions, without grading the new information: *"I will go back and think, Norfolk is varied: there are some flat bits and some rolling bits."* or: *"I thought Bornholm was like all the North Frisian islands: flat and sandy… […] the island is much bigger and far more varied…than I imagined… But it's not negative or positive in any way."* Hence, the disconfirmation process might not play a direct role in evaluations.

Individual differences in the cognitive process

While heightened sensory activity and updating was common for all respondents, significant differences and patterns were found in the way visitors' experienced their holidays. One important aspect was the *intensity* of the acquainting process, distinguishing between visitors who were actively looking for experiences and those who received them passively. Both the usage of verbs (*know, make, see* as opposed to *be* and *feel*), and the length of the description revealed characteristic differences. Consider the following excerpts: *"…we made long trips, and saw a lot on the island."* as opposed to *"We are doing nothing really…just take it quietly and easily, you know, catching up on reading and doing things like that"*. Another determinant of experiencing was *depth*, describing horizontal and vertical dimensions of experience acquisition. Horizontal-type visitors were quantity-oriented, aspiring to visit a large number of attractions. Despite an enjoyable stay of checking out the destination, they had little or no intention to return, "*because [they] have to experience other places"*. On the other hand, vertical types recounted a process of immersion: "*one can only open up Bornholm by bike or on foot. One mustn't drive through the island with a bus in 3-4 days"*. or: *"We talk a lot with the people who operate the Christiansø-ferry. We talk to them every day. It is quite cosy…We are actually getting to know them"*. These visitors would not necessarily cease returning to the destination, even after having seen all the attractions, as they *"can cope with seeing things again… And anyway, one cannot avoid encountering something new for the tenth time, either."*

The variance in the acquaintance process represents different ways in which visitors satisfy their innermost 'Ulysses' desires (cf. Cohen 1979). Although some holiday makers may seem to be utterly passive during their stay, it might just be another way to fulfil their needs to know and understand. Vacationers, for example, spend less effort, but more time absorbing knowledge about a destination's people and culture (Mayo and Jarvis 1981), while sightseers can only satiate curiosity by busily collecting facts and impressions and by shifting between destinations relatively often.

3. Evaluative consequences of holiday experiences

The existing customer assessment frameworks (such as service quality and customer satisfaction) are influenced by atomistic or cumulative approaches, both using discrete, provider-defined units of assessment. SERVQUAL-type approaches (Parasuraman *et al*. 1985) focus on static attributes of the offering that are thought to be judged upon cognitive disconfirmation of expectation. Those applying the service journey concept (Danaher and Mattsson 1994, de Ruyter *et al*. 1997) measure immediate and cumulative responses to a series of service encounters, that "are thought to comprise main parts of the service delivery process" (p. 8). Thus, it was expected that either the disconfirmation of expectations or a bundle of critical incidents would affect the overall evaluation of the holiday experience.

However, only a fraction of comparisons or notable experiences influenced decision making or assessments. Disconfirmation, albeit compared with some standards did not yield direct, 'better/worse than…' evaluative statements. Rather, it appeared to be the way visitors made sense of all the novel cognitive information. By interpreting and categorising new experiences, visitors became familiar with the different aspects of the destination: *"Once you know that they do that [in the restaurant], that's fine;… If you just want to be left alone and talk most of the evening, you go and eat there"*. Similarly, most mindfully processed incidents had a low impact on final evaluations. For example, pricing for service was accepted without a complaint: "*They charge you for the tap water. But there was nothing wrong: pile 'em high and sell 'em cheap. Particularly touristy type places are doing this."*

Still, some statements of disconfirmation or incidents carried significant evaluative consequences. As illustrated below, the assessments of the narrated experiences were heterogeneous, entailing both static aspects and dynamic events, which were evaluated against a mix of different frameworks. In the simultaneously appearing quality perceptions, satisfaction judgements and value descriptions, there were overlapping examples for all three dimensions of instrumental (technical), expressive (functional) and sacrifice (cost/benefit) aspects, which are known from the service quality and satisfaction literature (Swan and Combs 1976, Grönroos 1984, Singh 1991). Consider the following excerpts: "*The room next to us had an enormously creaking door, which kept us awake. It was terrifying in the middle of the night! […] and ruined our stay"*. Assessments often focused on subtle values, like the authenticity of the offering*: "This is paid friendliness, which is a part of the service. It is not real."*, or: "*The American glass blowers have some clever stuff, but you feel somehow it's imported…something coming from outside, you know*". or: "*You can taste the places frequented by many tourists. Deep-frozen potatoes, canned sauce, micro-waved fast food. It is not home made."* So what do these particular incidents have in common, and why are they crucial to final assessment, unlike the previously discussed ones?

Discussion

The findings of the present study reconfirmed the inconsistency between accepted supply-oriented assessment frameworks and the way customers described the holiday evaluation process. The narratives included various randomly recalled process and outcome-aspects, of which many were unrelated to service provider attributes or incidents. Visitors combined frameworks of both disconfirmation and immediate value attribution; however, comparison-based or immediate responses seldom had evaluative consequences. These anomalies are probably the result of the objective conceptualisation of quality perceptions and overall satisfaction, which disregards the importance of the 'eye of the beholder' concept. That is, to take the point of departure from customers' perspective and to define the object and structure of holiday assessment in connection with their subjective value system.

A demand-oriented conceptualisation regards the tourism offering as an extraordinary 'product'. First, it only exists as a whole in the customer's mind: it is a holistic experience (Otto and Ritchie 1996). Anthropologists have also emphasised the particular role of holidays in human life; being out-of-the-ordinary (Graburn 1983), transitional (Nash 1991) or sacred (Morinis 1992) events. This explains the finding, that visitors underwent and processed a large number of novel experiences during their holiday. These stimuli affected the senses and induced the individual's mind to select and interpret them in a meaningful way. The process of knowledge acquisition and incorporation of experiences during holidays may be considered an *extraordinary, cyclical process of learning,* that is dependent on both internal and external factors. Learning refers to a 'fact-synthesising' mental activity, during which individuals create cognitive responses to environmental stimuli (Moutinho). On the other hand, this process is also triggered and sustained by a more profound human need to understand or "search for meaning" (Maslow 1968). Thus, the perception and assimilation of novel information during holiday making is most often the only means by which visitors adapt to and become acquainted with unknown or different environments.

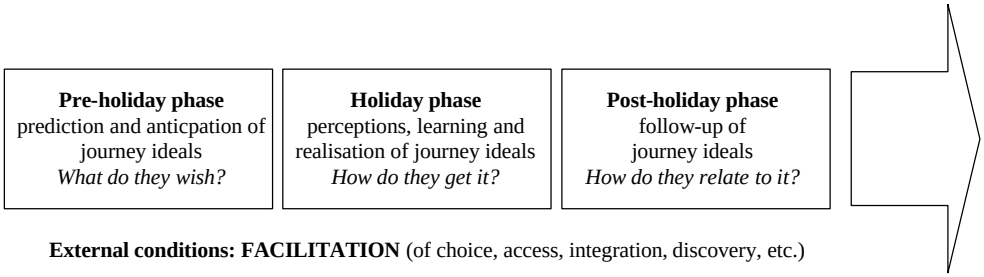
In order to understand customers' assessment of different aspects of their holidays, we should acknowledge that the perception of objects is mostly dependent on personal factors. What individuals perceive in many situations is determined not only by the nature of the stimulus, but also by the individual's system of values and needs, determined by social context. Thus, any incident that is irrelevant or unrelated to the individual's intrinsic values (along which humans are understood to carry out assessments) (Hartman 1973), will be insignificant in the evaluation. In planning for a satisfying holiday, visitors try to achieve a good fit between their own aspirations and needs and the opportunities that a particular destination offers to attend to them (Moutinho 1987). Visitors' acquisition of holiday experiences can be regarded as striving to realise goals of journey ideals, which vary from person to person. The concept of *holiday experience realisation* is not new, yet it has not been applied since its emergence. In 1979, Cohen was already suggesting, that the ease and chances of realisation differ according to various modes of tourist experiences: generally speaking, the more profound the mode of experience, the harder it becomes to realise it."

In this line of argument, the perceived stimuli of disconfirmed or unexpected incidents can be regarded as information that comprises significative or symbolic cues of the anticipated experience. Tangible or intangible cues (e.g. product attributes or human encounters) in the narratives functioned as puzzle-pieces to realise and give precise meaning to vague holiday ideals (such as the 'English way of life'). Incidents that fitted the anticipated experience, were just tolerated and synthesised in instrumental learning processes - even if they caused physiological or psychological distress (cf. Arnould and Price's research on white-water rafting,1993). However, experiences inconsistent with the prior image were

not only processed as novel information, but also caused dissatisfaction. Such was the case of a noisy hotel that contradicted the envisaged ‘quiet and relaxing days’ or a restaurant serving fast food, that previously conveyed an old-fashioned cuisine image. Consequently, the rationale of the visitor’s assessment is the degree of fit between the experience and the predicted holiday ideal.

These findings gave rise to a preliminary model of customers’ holiday assessment (Figure 12.1). As illustrated below, the holiday experience represents a realisation process of journey ideals, broken down into three phases. In the pre-holiday phase, a vague frame of reference (journey ideals) is created, which is influenced by various general motives (rest, relaxation, recreation and entertainment) and conditions of planning. This yielded a variety of visitor clusters, characterised by different modes of envisaging and realising the experience. In the holiday phase, visitors attempt to realise their anticipated ideals, by going through an extraordinary learning process. This entails making sense of environmental information via mindful (Langer 1987) and affective (Cohen and Areni 1991) processing mechanisms. In other words, visitors are becoming acquainted with the destination and its people and, depending on the holiday modes, the cognitive process can take form in different degrees of intensity and depth. The handling of mindfulness-provoking, unexpected or novel experiences takes place via affective marking or retrospective comparisons (disconfirmation). Most of these stimuli are only processed as neutral novel information, and not evaluated. Only those incidents that fall beyond the vague frame of reference, thus hindering the realisation of journey ideals, will significantly modify overall holiday evaluations.

Figure 12.1. The holiday as the realisation process of journey ideals



One of the final concerns of the study was to illuminate the role of tourism providers in holiday experiences. Smith (1994) explicitly defined the function of generic tourism offering as: “*facilitating* the travel and activity of individuals away from their usual home environments” (p. 582). However, striving to realise non-everyday goals in the form of a holistic experience, visitors do not simply look for suppliers of transport, hotel rooms or meals. Rather, they seek to enrich their lives through encounters with different people or new environments. Consequently, tourism providers are ancillary means to realise the anticipated experience, consisting of “many institutions that humans use to embellish and

add meanings to their lives" (Graburn).[3] The data generated clearly justified this notion: among the many heterogeneous perceptions of service providers, only those incidents that facilitated or impeded the realisation process affected holiday assessment. The most important function of tourism firms is thus not the literal service/product provision, but the catalysing activity through which visitors may acquire holiday experiences. Some examples of the facilitating function are demonstrated in Table 12.3.

Table 12.3. Examples of facilitation functions of service providers

Facilitation of choice	*I said I'd like water, so she [the waitress] showed me a new bottle of water they'd got in, which is Canadian spring water flavoured with fruit. So she was making a move towards me, rather than just waiting for me to pick up something from the menu.*
Facilitation of access	*The most wonderful thing is, that everything is kept as it was 250 years ago, and you can just walk along there. It's like a dream come true.* *Well, we've got a chance to look inside the old buildings, otherwise we're always on the outside. […] Some were really old, and they have just been charming!*
Facilitation of integration	*I've spoken to the woman in the fish shop on the pier, not much, just buying fish, but she was very friendly and pleased to explain everything…the different fish on the slab.* *The people who run this place are very friendly, very outgoing... We all sort of muck in, really. We have got the run of the place [a farmhouse accommodation], you can go to the dining room or use the kitchens at night. We can use the washing machine and drier so we don't have to pile up a lot of clothes[…]. That improves your stay.*
Facilitation of discovery	*"All the papers and the pictures in the museum were well explained.* *We wanted to know more about the round church…so we asked for a guide. But it was not possible*"[…] *There should also be more description and orientation on the roads.*
Facilitation of basic needs	*The facilities are good. They've got good showers and a nice loungy area you can go to sit all day.* *The restaurants are not run down, clean and well decorated, the food is good, varied.*

Conclusions

The goal of the first stage of the research (i.e. to MPhil) was to redefine the conceptualisation of the leisure customer's complex assessments of holidays and to derive likely hypotheses and models relating to the holiday experience and its assessment. Adopting the demand-oriented perspective, a phenomenological methodology was applied; hence, the tourism offering was explored in terms of the visitor's narrated holistic experience. Here, the issues raised for discussion will be summarised. First, it was reconfirmed that rational, supplier-oriented frameworks do not entirely explain the assessment of holidays, primarily because the visitor's focus of evaluation conceptually differs from system-based models. From a demand-oriented viewpoint, discrete static or dynamic components, such as service providers, service attributes or service encounters are not meaningful units of assessment. Visitors do not possess an implicit concept of any provider-defined service elements, as these are dissolved in the *meta-product* of experiences.

3 In fact, this understanding corresponds closely to the description of services as special products, delivering benefits to the consumer through an activity or a process (Bateson 1955, p. 8).

Anticipating a hedonic experience, visitors are only able to draw a vague image of the benefits of the forthcoming journey. They are prepared to experience something new and different, which is impossible to predict precisely beforehand. Each novel piece of information acquired may sharpen this picture, which has led to the notion that visitors undergo an extraordinary learning process during their holidays. Learning refers to processing and updating new information, which is triggered partly internally (by a born need to know the 'unknown or the different'), and partly externally (by novel stimuli). Experience composition appeared to be a highly mindful activity, by which visitors build or refine their own destination image. Within the uncountable events of the holiday, only those incidents, which bear significative cues related to the anticipated experience become objects of the visitor's assessment. The concept of holiday realisation (Cohen 1979) was re-introduced, depicting the visitors' striving to achieve goals of pre-holiday journey ideals. If the realisation of the vague ideal is damaged, visitors are likely to evaluate the destination in a negative way.

Last, but not least, it is proposed that service providers act as facilitators of 'realisation', catalysts of the extraordinary learning process. The evaluation and importance of service providers will depend on how they contributed to or hindered the acquisition of experiences and the realisation of anticipated ideals. As the findings revealed distinct patterns of journey ideals and acquisition (learning) processes, it can be presumed that different visitor clusters will appreciate various facilitating functions in a different ways.

Development of the PhD study

The next phase of the work is set to probe and contextualise the results of the initial part of the study and will attempt to relate them to, and thus to redefine, the concept of service quality from a demand-oriented perspective. First, this will involve further exploration of the role of service provision in the experience, using concepts of *facilitation*, holiday-ideal *realisation*, and *learning processes*. The consequences of experienced service quality on total holiday assessment will be examined by identifying different (facilitating) functions of the provided tangibles and interpersonal encounters. In order to describe the structure of visitors' assessment of service providers, relationships between realisation, learning and the perception of provided catalysing activities will be examined. Finally, a further study of differences among individuals' holiday realisation and the quality of providers experienced is hoped to have useful implications for future segmentation of holiday visitors.

In order to achieve this, similar interpretive methods will be used to those applied in the exploratory study. Again, data collection will be focused on visitors' actual experiences, which can be tapped by qualitative methods (such as open interviews and participant

observation). The study will be conducted in the high season of 1998 on the Baltic island of Bornholm, structured as follows:

- Antecedents of experiences will be mapped by further in-depth-interviews with arriving visitors in order to obtain more information about their intended use of service providers during the realisation process. These will be conducted during 3-hour long ferry-trips, by which the majority of visitors arrive.
- The influence of service providers on realisation and learning processes will be captured during different stages of the experience acquisition process in the destination. This will include participant observation of various tourist activities as well as informal conversation with visitors at most visited attractions.
- Quality perceptions of service provision and facilitation, as well as their consequences for total holiday evaluation, will be captured by in-depth interviews with visitors leaving the island, either at the accommodation provider, or on departing ferries. These will be induced by visual prompts, such as photographs or drawings projecting various service provision situations.

Data collection and analysis will take the grounded theory approach, applying qualitative analysis techniques. First, the interview data will be explored through text analysis and keyword search. Second, the emerging ideas from the three data sources will be cross-tested and triangulated using the constant comparison method (Glaser 1978). It is believed that, by taking the visitors' perception and assessment of the complex holiday experience into consideration, it will be possible to make useful recommendations to tourism managers in this and other destinations.

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Appendix 5: Map of Bornholm