

## **Chapter 9**

### **Polar Tourist Experiences**

Challenges and Possibilities for Transmodern Tourism

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#### **1. Introduction**

In western society, polar regions are conceptualized as the last great terrestrial wilderness, symbolizing remoteness, extreme conditions, and environmental vulnerability. This image has attracted not only explorers and natural scientists but also an increasing number of special-interest tourists. Polar tourism has its origin in the same time frame as the development of modern tourism in the early 1800s (Maher and Stewart 2007) but has always been an area for an exclusive few. However, during the last two decades, polar tourism, especially in Antarctica, has increased drastically (Snyder 2007). In the Arctic region tourists outnumber host populations in many popular destinations and Arctic communities are increasingly gearing towards tourism. In Antarctica the tourism development has been even more drastic over the last decades, when the numbers of ship-borne tourists have increased by 430% in 14 years and land-based tourists by 757% in 10 years (IAATO 2007). Still the actual number of tourists in polar regions is limited in comparison to global tourism, consisting of only 45 000 tourists in Antarctica (IAATO 2008). The drastic increase in polar tourism and its future predicted increase have evoked concerns among many stakeholders and academic researchers about negative environmental impacts by the tourism industry *per se* and the tourists' behaviour in these fragile environments. There also exists a fear for the development from the present small numbers of special interest tourists into a mass tourism enterprise and Disneyfication of the polar regions. This could imply the establishment of tourist hotels in Antarctica and entertainment constructions such as ICEHOTEL (Gelter 2008a) in pristine natural settings. This

potential development has called for long-term tourism policies as well as research in polar tourism to understand its nature and develop tools for its management and regulation (Stewart *et al.* 2005). Although many important texts have been published about polar tourism since 1990, little research has been focused on the area (Maher 2008).

In their review of polar tourism research, Stewart *et al.* (2005) identified four emerging research areas: tourism pattern, tourist impacts, tourism policy and management, and tourism development. Much effort in polar tourism research has been allocated to define polar tourism as part of tourism research's generic struggle to define itself as a legitimate area of scholarly inquiry (*ibid.*). These authors conclude that despite emerging polar tourism research we still know very little about the phenomenon of polar tourism. They also conclude that most of polar tourism research has focused on patterns of tourism, tourist demands, and tourist behaviour such as number of tourists, motivation, demographics, their routes, destinations, activities, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and the composition of the travel groups. Since the creation of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) in 1991 there has been a reliable recording of tourist data in Antarctica. In the Arctic, with a longer tourism history and more diversified destinations and attractions (Hall and Johnston 1995), such systematic data sampling is much more problematic (Stewart *et al.* 2005). Stewart *et al.* (2005) also agree with Mason and Legg (1999) that little information is available on the quality of polar tourist experiences and suggest that the next new research area should concentrate on tourist experiences. This includes the nature and quality of the tourist experience, the tourist expectations, knowledge (pre- and postvisit), on-site experience, and overall satisfaction. These authors point out the particular interest of a field of inquiry such as the effect of polar travel on the tourists' postvisit ambassadorial activities (see also Maher *et al.* 2003; Maher 2007a). They also suggest a second new research area focusing on global climate change and its large-scale influences on polar tourism. Here they propose investigations of costs and benefits to polar travel associated with changing global climate patterns, as well as the resulting adaptations required from the travel industry.

The aim of this chapter is to contribute to the suggested new polar tourism research area, the polar tourist's experience, by conceptually discussing different approaches to study tourist experiences. These frameworks will then be integrated with the emerging concept of transmodern tourism and its implications for the polar travel industry and future empirical

research on polar tourism. The aim of this chapter is not to give a full review on tourism experience, but rather to outline steps towards a deeper understanding of the study of polar experience for future research.

## **2. Analysis of Polar Experiences**

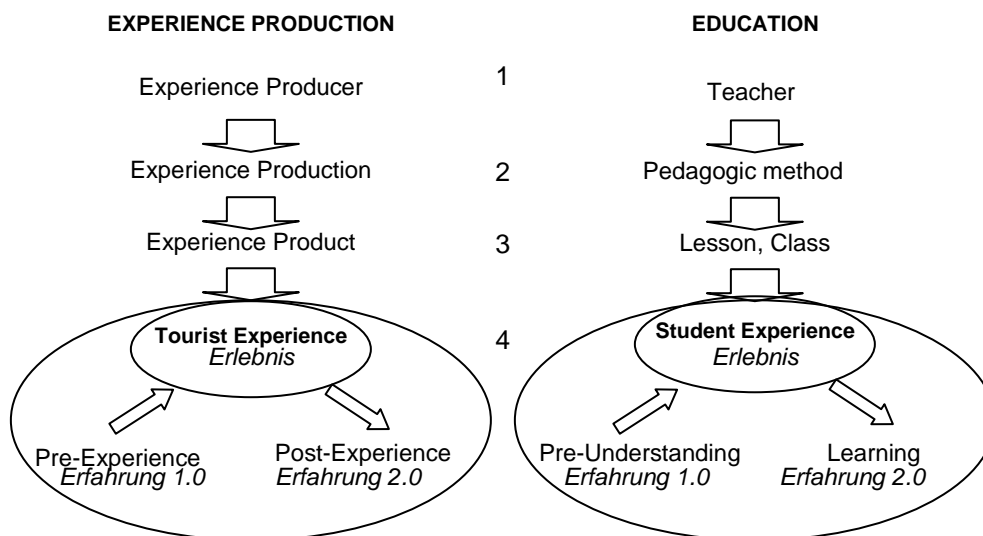
There have been many attempts in different fields such as psychology, philosophy, education, anthropology, sociology, marketing, tourism, outdoor education, medical research, ICT, etc. to grasp the qualities of the human experience. Each approach makes certain implicit and explicit biological and sociocultural assumptions about human nature and uses different theoretical constructs, applies different methodologies, and uses different conceptual factors assumed to affect the experience. As human experiences are personal subjective qualities, it is a fascinating scientific challenge to attempt to understand the concept of subjective experiences and its context, and so far no integrated framework has been developed for the analysis of the personal experience. Just to mention a few, Lash (2006) recently analysed experiences from a philosophical and pedagogic view, dividing them into ontological and epistemological experiences, with interesting bearings on the understanding of experiential learning (Gelter 2009a). Borrie and Birzell (2001) summarized the dimensionality of recreational and tourism experiences and Gelter (2000, 2009b) has analysed experiences within the outdoor concept of "Friluftsliv" and from the transformational tourism perspective (Gelter 2009a). A recent special issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* addresses research on tourism experiences (Larsen and Mossberg 2007). In the polar tourism context Maher (2007a) has summarized research on experiences from many perspectives.

Research approaches on tourism experiences can be classified in many ways (Borrie and Birzell 2001; Stewart *et al.* 2005; Maher 2007; and others). I will use five major approaches here: a production approach, the *meta-experiential approach*; a satisfaction approach, the *pseudo-experiential approach*; an experience product approach, the *product-experiential approach*; a personal experience approach, the *individual-experiential approach*; and an experience outcome approach, the *learning experiential approach*.

### **2.1. The Meta-Experiential Approach**

In the *meta-experiential approach* to the tourist experience I include approaches using a holistic view on the experience, without actually addressing the experience *per se*. Here we find

theoretical frameworks of experience production within the experience economy such as Toffler's (1970) early "experience design," Pine and Gilmore's (1999) 4E model of experience realms and their staging experiences model, the experiencescape (O'Dell and Billing 2005), the Experience Triangle (Tarssanen and Kylänen 2005), the Total Experience Management model (Gelter 2006, 2009b), the "experience design-wheel" model (Ek *et al.* 2008), and the "experience creation" model (Sundbo and Darmer 2008). Within service and marketing we have the Servicescapes (Bitner 1992), the Servuntion model (Bateson 1995), marketing management (Kotler 1994), the managing service marketing approach (Bateson 1995), the experience marketing approach (O'Sullivan and Spangler 1998), and customer experience management (Schmitt 2003). To obtain a "holistic" overview of experience production a four-step model was constructed (Gelter 2006, 2008b, 2009b; Figure 9.1), that compares experience production with education.



**Figure 9.1. A holistic four-step model of experience production in comparison with the education model**

Source: Gelter (2006, 2008b, 2009b).

All these meta-experiential approaches have in common that they have an organizer's full perspective of management and production. They are important background concepts for understanding personal experiences, but they do not contribute directly to the understanding of the subjective personal experience.

## 2.2. The Pseudo-Experiential Approach

Several approaches have been developed to measure personal opinions about the experience. I call these pseudo-experiential approaches as they use indirect or single components to approximate the subjective experience. The most common approaches have been *need-satisfaction* and *expectation-satisfaction* analyses borrowed from consumption and marketing research. Here the assumption is that the quality of the experience is based on the product/service's capability to fulfill the customer's needs and fulfill the expectations generated by the purchase (Bergman and Klevforsjö 2003). The perception of the product/service's quality is assumed to determine the satisfaction level, which assumably can be measured. The attempt is to identify needs and expectations and then measure customer satisfaction with the aim of improving the quality of products/services and as tools for managing tourist behaviour. The research perspective is still the providers who need to understand the consumer.

Techniques such as Total Quality Management (TQM) (Grönroos 1990; Dale 1998) have been applied to improve tourist experiences (Witt and Muhlemann 1994). To illustrate the problems associated with identifying needs and expectations, Kano (2001) developed the *Kano model* to understand customer needs. He proposed that needs consisted of:

- *Basic needs* are so basic to customers that they are unaware of them and you cannot inquire about them. If these needs do not get satisfied the customers will not get pleased, but by only satisfying these basic needs we only satisfy "must-be needs."
- *Expected needs* are identifiable by asking the customer. They respond to what the customer expects to get and also to what is experienced as important to him/her. If these expectations are fulfilled the customer gets satisfied, otherwise the customer will be dissatisfied. By satisfying expected needs we create "expected quality."
- *Excitement needs* also are unknown to the customer and cannot be identified by simple inquiry. By identifying and satisfying these needs, the customer will obtain something unexpected from the product, an added value, creating an "attractive quality."

A more psychological and dynamic approach to human needs was presented by Maslow (1954) in his "*Hierarchy of Needs*" that has been applied within tourism (Pearce 1988, 1991; Andersson 1999). Maslow (1954) classified human needs into five basic needs of *physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualization* needs. Pearce (1988) adapted the model

into the “*Travel Career Ladder*” with five “career steps” affecting tourist preferences. This ladder scheme consists of *biological, safety and security, relationship development and extension, special interest and self-development*, and *fulfilment or deep involvement* needs (formally defined as self-actualization; Pearce 1996: 13). In this model Pearce suggests that as tourists gain experience, they increasingly seek the satisfaction of higher needs (Ryan 1988; Pearce 1991). Maslow’s model was also simplified by Scitovsky (1985), who limited it to the categories of *human satisfaction, personal comfort, social comfort*, and *stimulation*. In a study of two charter tours to the Antarctic, Andersson (1999) tested this model by measuring need, satisfaction, and travel experience. He modified Scitovsky’s categories into the three *physiological, social*, and *intellectual* needs as general causes of satisfaction, but could not confirm this simplified model with his data.

To measure customers’ opinion about perceived service quality, *i.e.* to measure the experience of quality, Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) constructed the SERVQUAL (SERVice QUALity) framework, a measurement consisting of a scale with nine dimensions of service (*tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, credibility, security, access, communication*), later (Parasuraman *et al.* 1991) reduced to five dimensions of *reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy*, and *tangibles* measured on a five-grade scale. In the similar SERVPERF (Service PERFormance) framework presented by Cronin and Taylor (1992), only customer experience is measured, not the expectations as in SERVQUAL. The SERVQUAL has only been applied to a limited degree in tourism research (summarized in Kvist 2005) and there is some dispute about the validity of the SERVQUAL instrument based on cultural background, difficulties in measuring differences between expectations and perceptions, and the comprehensiveness of the instrument (*ibid.*). Other problems with these satisfaction approaches are the fact that customers are not necessarily aware of exactly what they require (Witt and Muhlemann 1994) and the recent “critical turn” in tourism research (Franklin and Crang 2001), where the tourist is now regarded as a creative interactive and co-creator of the experience rather than a passive receiver of a product with its qualities (Richards and Wilson 2006; Boswijk *et al.* 2007).

Despite the limitations of this pseudo-experiential approach, most studies of polar tourism experiences focus on expectations and satisfaction aspects of the polar experiences (see Maher 2007a for a review). This can be illustrated by a recent study on the expectations of 282 Antarctic visitors based on a before- and after-the-trip survey (Vereda 2008). A very high degree of satisfaction for the polar experience was found, where 84% of the respondents felt

the experience surpassed their expectations. Among the cognitive factors contributing to the satisfaction of expectations was the ability to see wildlife in its natural habitats (53%), scenery (52%), location and remoteness at “world end” (20%), while history and the remains of the “heroic era” contributed to satisfaction to 6% and service on board to 17% of the guests. Vereda (2008) concluded that the high satisfaction depended on the ability to fulfill the expectations about the experience, which are built on the basis of perceived images or mental representations of the destination. Vereda (2008) identified the affective component as particularly important to expectations prior to the travel as these predispose visitors to the experience.

More interesting regarding the polar experience were other factors such as the learning process as gaining awareness (mentioned by 20%), indicating the important component of environmental education for the Antarctic visitor. Guests expressed that the experience made them change their minds about aspects of conservation and their will to raise other people’s awareness of Antarctica. Many agreed that lectures had largely contributed to their personal enrichment and understanding about environmental issues. Through direct experiences and specific knowledge obtained, a deeper state of mind about the meaning of Antarctic environment has been gained. In addition 11% mentioned the mystique of the place in the form of awaking their spirituality and making them think of abstract matters such as religion. Other affective components were uniqueness (11%), expressing the idea of Antarctica as “untouched,” quietness and “peaceful environment” (11%), while only 16% mentioned it as a “once-in-a-lifetime experience.” Vereda (2008) concludes that emotions appear to be an irreplaceable component of the Antarctic experience that has not been anticipated in the expectations. Another conclusion was that the feelings and sensations that the visitors experienced on this trip were unique and incomparable. From this study we may conclude that satisfaction measurements address the cognitive confirmation of perceived destination images rather than the on-site polar experience. In contrast, as Vereda (2008) shows, the unanticipated emotional and affective dimension describes the polar experience better.

An interesting improvement from the SERVQUAL approach, which basically measures “Quality of Service” (QoS), would be to borrow the idea from the ICT industry to attempt to measure the “Quality of Experience” (QoE; Cabral 2007). As in tourism, QoS and consumer satisfaction are widely used by the ICT sector in surveys and questionnaires, but recent white papers from

Nokia, Ericsson, and others express the expectation that QoE will replace both utility functions and QoS and better contribute to innovative development within ICT. But so far none has been able to successfully address the issues of how to measure QoE (*ibid.*). Can quantitative surveys capture qualitative and subjective aspects of products and services? This has been addressed in the health sector by measuring patients' quality of experience with the medical service. The Borg Scale<sup>®</sup> (Borg 1970, 2004) attempts to quantitatively measure patients' subjective experiences to be able to compare experiences between patients. The ten-step CR10 Borg Scale has been adapted by Regis (in preparation) to the QoE measurement with a view to better measure subjective experiences than the SERVQUAL five- or seven-step scale. But what exactly in the experience is to be measured still remains a puzzle in the QoE approach.

### **2.3. The Product-Experiential Approach**

Another way to approach the polar experience is to identify why people go to polar areas and what attracts them there. Many factors affect the motive for a tourist to buy a tourist product such as a polar tour. One paradigm to understand tourism motivation for travel is Dann's (1981) push-pull model, where the push factors motivate people to leave their home environment and the pull factors attract people to certain destinations. Push factors can be individual and social and pull factors can be the destination's positive associations and images as well as the benefits of a visit. In this approach, motivations and benefits to visit destinations are identified instead of needs and expectations. Among pull factors, the concept of the "tourist gaze" (Urry 2002) has been very influential in approaching the tourist experience in a visual context, suggesting that people travel to destinations that are striking visually.

Benefit-based approaches such as used by McIntosh (1999) or Booth *et al.* (2002) search for benefit outcomes of visiting special places. These benefits may be personal, societal, and economic (Kelly 1981) and thus constitute pull factors to a destination. Within recreation research many such studies are based on "hierarchical models" using concepts such as the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (Prentice *et al.* 1998) and the Recreational Experience Preferences Scales (Yuan and McEwans 1989). According to Maher (2007a), hierarchical models of experiences offer a potential for benefit segmentation of tourists, as an alternative to sociodemographic segmentation, to understand the benefits to different groups of experiencing a destination.



Beach and Ragheb (1983), based on the work of Maslow (1954), developed their Leisure Motivation Scale consisting of four types of pull motivations; the *intellectual component*, engaging in mental activities such as learning, exploring, discovery, thought, or imagery; the *social component*, involving the two basic needs of friendship and interpersonal relationships and the need for the esteem of others; the *competence-mastery component*, involving usually physical activities with the aim to achieve, master, challenge, and compete; the *stimulus-avoidance component*, involving the desire to escape and get away from over-stimulating life situations, a need to avoid social contact, to seek solitude and calm conditions.

Another way to understand push and pull factors to polar destinations is to use a typological approach with a segmentation of individuals based on their motivations for visiting destinations. Snyder (2007) divided polar tourism into five distinct markets that attract specific visitors, resulting in distinct different visitor experiences affecting their motivation, expectations, on-site behaviour, and resource use. These are:

1. the *mass market*, composed of tourists primarily attracted to sightseeing with pleasurable surroundings and comfortable transports and accommodations;
2. the *sport fishing and hunting market*, with tourists seeking unique fishing and game species within wilderness settings;
3. the *ecotourism market*, consisting of tourists who seek to observe wildlife species in their natural habitats and experience the beauty and solitude of the remote natural areas;
4. the *adventure tourism market*, providing a sense of personal achievement and exhilaration from meeting challenges and potential perils of outdoor sport activities; and
5. the *cultural and heritage tourism market*, consisting of tourists who want to experience personal interaction with the lives and traditions of native people, to learn more about a historical topic that interests them, or to personally experience historic places and artefacts.

To this list we may add a sixth market, which probably will have an important pull effect to polar areas in the future – the *climate tourism market*. It consists of tourists who want to see and experience vanishing polar icon species and environments affected by global warming, such as the polar bear, melting glaciers, and vanishing ice sheets. Although many of these

tourists belong to the ecotourism market, they may not (in surveys) admit this ethically doubtful travel motivation. Snyder concludes that although this kind of market classification may help research approach the tourist experience, tourists themselves are not constrained by such classifications and may participate in many types of activities or have several motivations to visit polar areas, limiting the use of such classifications.

In a similar vein, a typological approach has been used as regards the visiting tourist *per se*, in order to analyse visitors' experiences. Viken (1995) categorized visitors to Svalbard into three groups: *conquerors*, who seek recognition for their achievements in their experience; *naturalists*, who seek nature and beauty in their experience; and *scientists*, who seek experiences with education and learning. Similarly, Kaltenborn (1991, 1992, 1996) obtained five typologies of polar tourists: the traditionalist, who looks for an experience of untamed wilderness; the *wildernist*, who seeks aesthetic and romantic experiences; the *expeditionist*, in search of remote experiences; the *contradictionist*, who wants a little of everything; and the *pragmatist*, who is average in his/her desire of experiences. Grenier (2000) used nine types of polar tourists: *conquerors* looking for remote destinations; *birdwatchers* looking for wildlife; *photographers* looking for perfect pictures; *naturalists* knowledgeable about nature; *experts of science* seeking academic merits; *history lovers* interested not in the nature but rather in historical experiences; *lonely travellers* escaping apparent solitude; *romance seekers* seeking social interactions; and *cocooners*, elderly passengers looking for an adventurous image. These typologies (summarized in table 9.1) may be interesting in many aspects and may contribute to the understanding of motivations and pull effects of visiting polar areas, but they have a limited use in understanding the polar experience *per se* (Maher 2007a).

**Table 9.1. Typologies of tourists and markets with the aim of understanding the polar experiences**

Viken	Kaltenborn	Grenier	Snyder	Tourist types
Scientists		Experts of science		<i>Scientists</i>
Conquerors	Expeditionists	Conquerors	Adventure Tourism	<i>Adventurous</i>
Naturalists	Wildernists	Birdwatchers	Ecotourism	<i>Naturalists</i>
	Traditionalists	Naturalists		
	Contradictionists	Cocooners	Sightseeing (mass tourism)	<i>Leisure</i>

Pragmatists	Lonely travellers		
	Romance seekers		
	History lovers	Cultural and Heritage	<i>Culture</i>
	Photographers		<i>Documentary</i>
		Fishing and Hunting	<i>Game</i>
			<i>Climate</i>

Source: Based on Viken (1995), Kaltenborn (1991, 1992, 1996), Grenier (2000), and Snyder (2007).

McCool *et al.* (2007) use a management approach to understand visitors' recreational experiences in the Arctic Auyuittuq National Park. They investigated the dimensionality of the experiences among 84 visitors to the national park and identified eleven dimensions: *adventure/challenge, Arctic setting, culture, freedom, humility/spirituality, learning, naturalness, remoteness, risk/safety, scenery, and wilderness*. They concluded that the recreational experience in the polar national park under study was triggered by its unique, spectacular, and remote landscapes, but also characterized by adventure, freedom, naturalness, and wildness – dimensions often identified by visitors studied in other wilderness research. All these dimensions are associated with the external settings of the "Arctic experience," usually identified by similar destination-oriented studies. Thus product-experiential approaches in identifying external factors (destination qualities, images, etc.) contribute indirectly to the personal experience through the motivations and benefits of experiencing the destination. In their summary of research on recreational experiences, Borrie and Birzell (2001) found four distinctive research approaches: satisfaction-based approaches (addressed above), benefits-based approaches (addressed here), experience-based approaches, and meaning-based approaches, indicating that the pseudo-experiential and product-experiential approaches by themselves do not identify the core qualities of the tourist experience.

## 2.4. The Individual-Experiential Approach

Individual-experiential or experience-based approaches address the fundamental question of what constitutes an experience. Approaching these questions has led to techniques such as the Experiences Sampling Method (Larson and Csikszentmihalyi 1983) and a rudimentary taxonomy of experiences, as no comprehensive nomenclature or taxonomy for different experiences has yet been developed.

The word experience has its origin from the Latin word *experientia*, meaning “knowledge gained by repeated trials,” and is also related to *experiri*, “to try, test” (Gelter 2006). This meaning is expressed in the German word *Erfahrung*, which corresponds to the English “having experience,” meaning the skills, practices, familiarity, know-how. This corresponds to the *epistemological experience* according to Lash (2006) – our accumulated skills, familiarity to places, artefacts, and methods – and constitutes our entire empirical knowledge. The second meaning of experience, commonly applied in tourism, is expressed in the German word *Erlebnis*, the English “to experience” as an incident, encounter, event, happening, etc. as well as the English verb “I experience,” as feelings, emotions, what we come in contact with, what we face, are subject to, and/or come across. This is, according to Lash (2006), our *ontological experience* – a cognitive happening restricted in space and time resulting in a physical or physiological stimulation of the brain – our phenomenological interaction with the world. These two conceptualizations of experience that build up our “Life World” and “Lived Experience” (Gadamer 1976) are closely interlinked and mutually interdependent and correspond to the two ways we experience the world with our two brain hemispheres: as a right-brained phenomenological comprehension (*Erlebnis*) and a left-hemisphere analytical apprehension (*Erfahrung*) (Kolb 1984; Damasio 1994; Gelter 2006; Pink 2007). This dual phenomenological approach to experience is uncommon in tourism research, as experience in tourism mostly is associated with extraordinary events (*Erlebnis*), events that have high significance and will be remembered, such as travelling to an exotic place. Such experiences have been labelled “extraordinary experiences” by Arnould and Price (1993) who, in the context of whitewater rafting experience, defined the *extraordinary experiences* as consisting of an active dynamic and context-dependent process, with strong social dimensions creating meaning and feelings of enjoyment, resulting in absorption and personal control, having some uncertainty and novelty, and contributing to life satisfaction. The more generic concept of *extraordinary experiences* has now become a popular expression for staged experience offerings within the experience

economy and is most often used highly undefined. In a similar way, “meaningful experiences” (Boswijk *et al.* 2007), with an unclear definition, has become a buzzword in the experience industry.

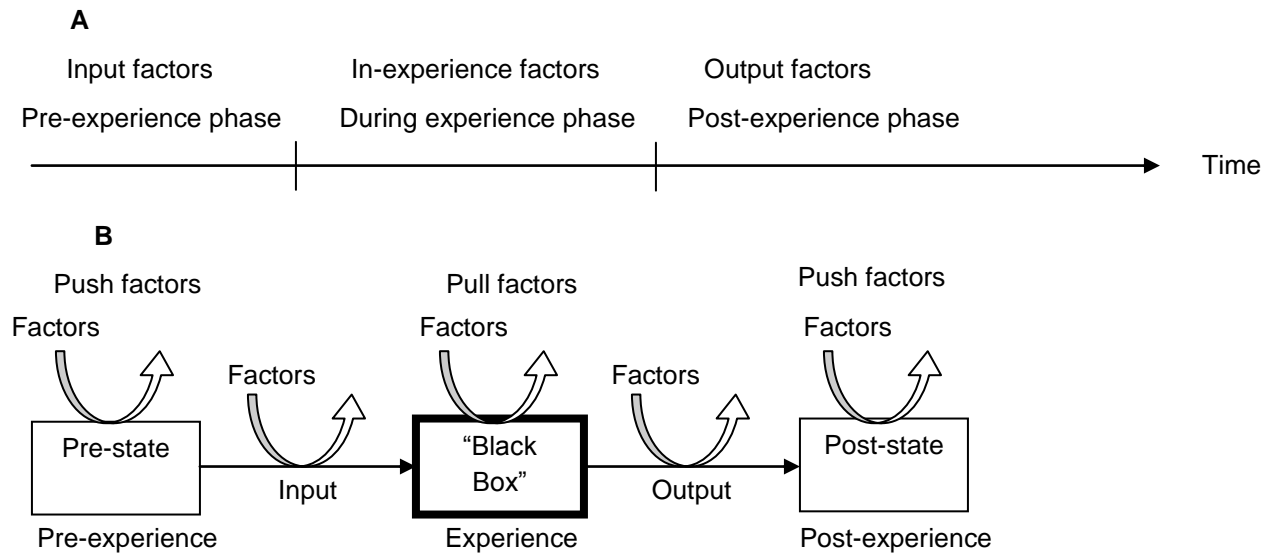
A more meaningful taxonomy of experiences is presented by slow experiences (Gelter 2006, 2009a), flow experiences (Csikszentimihalyi 1991), Naess’ deep experiences (Sessions 1995) and peak experiences (Maslow 1962). *Slow experiences* are associated with the Slow Movement attempting to escape modern fast-living *Kronos* time, reaching out for *Kairos* quality time (Gelter 2009a), while *flow experiences* similarly “stop time and erase space” by becoming totally involved with an activity, creating a holistic sensation where self evaporates (Csikszentimihalyi 1991). Maslow’s (1962) original *peak experience* describes similarly a rare state of mind where in some brief moments, from seconds to minutes, one feels the highest levels of happiness, harmony, and possibly temporary moments of self-actualization. It is primarily an emotional experience with spiritual dimensions, but in the postmodern society it has evolved from its original meaning towards a more adrenalized, action-oriented, sportified meaning (Gelter 2009a). This spiritual feeling of interconnectedness to the landscape in the peak experience is probably the *deep experience* that Arne Naess described in his philosophy of *Deep Ecology* (Sessions 1995). Naess, himself a mountaineer and outdoor person, proposes that a deep experience of nature creates deep feelings that lead to deep questions and result in a deep commitment for nature.

An interesting approach not yet applied in polar tourism but gaining strong interest in marketing is the attention approach to the experience (Davenport and Beck 2002). Using findings from eco-psychology regarding mechanisms of our attention and their contribution to our experiences (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989), we may gain insights in how and why our surrounding world attract our attention and contributes to our momentary experiences (*Erlebnis*). All these psychological approaches attempt to describe qualities and outcomes of specific experiences (*Erlebnis*) and may function as a base for a typology of personal experiences such as QoE. The lack of a more elaborate taxonomy indicates the difficulties in scientifically conceptualizing the subjective experience.

Many studies of the leisure and tourism experience have argued that the experience should not be considered as one-dimensional, but rather as a multi-phase entity. Traditionally this has been conceptualized as the experience “onsite” interacting with many previsit (anticipation) and

postvisit (recollection) factors (Maher 2007a, 2007b). This one-dimensional input  $\Rightarrow$  behaviour-on-site  $\Rightarrow$  outcome time dimension of the experiences conceptualized as before, during, and after phases of the experience is a common concept in research areas such as marketing, learning theory, experience production, etc. But from a phenomenological standpoint, even a well defined experience in time and space (*Erlebnis*) should be regarded as being part of a continuum of *lived experiences* like “strings of pearls” of the accumulated *life experience* (*Erfahrung*) (Gelter, 2006, 2009b), instead of being conceptualized as separate “extraordinary experiences” as described by Arnould and Price (1993) and others. Every *Erlebnis* is constructed and interpreted in relation to all other previous experiences (*Erfahrung*), thus the multidimensionality of experiences is much more complex than traditionally understood, such as in the multiphase models.

I therefore would propose at least five basic dimensions in conceptualizing personal experiences. The first is the *time dimension* – the experience as a process as discussed in the multi-phase experience models (figure 9.2a) with the basic phases of before, during and after the experience, which then can be extended in any number of experience phases and sub-phases, such as Clawson and Knetch’s (1966) five sequence phases of *anticipation, travel to site, on-site activity, return travel home, recollection*; or others (Arnould and Price 1993; Bauer 2001; Grenier 2004). When applying a system theory approach to this dimension (figure 9.2b) we can attempt to identify the many factors influencing the different states and processes in the experience system.



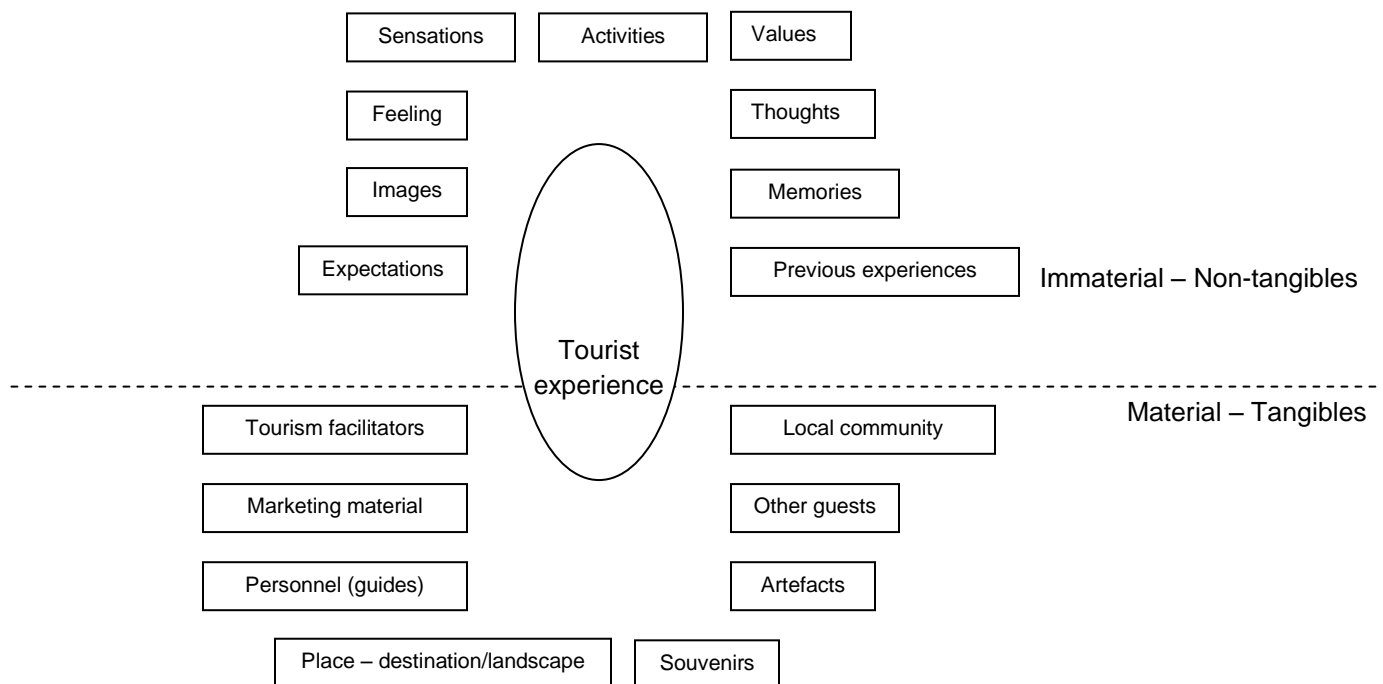
**Figure 9.2. A one-dimensional-phase approach to analysing the experience (A) and a system theory approach on the same experience system (B)**

In a polar experience context this may include all the push factors that influence the pre-state to the decision to purchase a polar experience and the anticipation before and during travel. In the on-site phase, the black box of the *Erlebnis*, we can identify the how, why, when factors of the actual polar experience and, in the post-experience phase, all factors that influence the "bringing-home," remembrance, and use of the polar experience.

The second dimension is the *spatial dimension* as an experience takes place in a physical setting – the experiencescape (Gelter 2009b). In tourism contexts this means being away from home, moving from the ordinary to the non-ordinary life situation, the *Erlebnis* as escapism. This dimension involves interconnectedness with the landscape, transforming destination images into living experiences and the absorption and immersion into the physical setting of the experience. Here we need to identify all the tangible (physical) factors and their interactions during the experience and analyse them beyond the "tourist gaze" approach.

The third dimension of the experience is the *relational dimension* – the guest relations and interactions with all material and immaterial aspects of the experience. This includes the physical setting of the place (environment), artefacts, other guests, memorabilia (souvenirs), locals and local community, tourism personnel, marketing, other tourism facilitators (books,

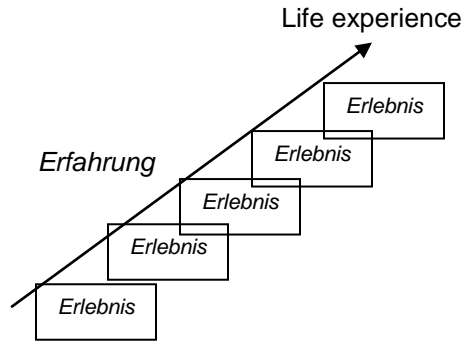
media, tourism agencies, etc.), as well as immaterial aspects of the experience such as images, expectations, feelings, sensations, activities, memories, *Erfahrungen*, etc. and their interaction with each other and the experience (Figure 9.3). This approach includes mapping these factors, identifying their interactions, and, in the best case, measuring their contribution to the quality of the experience.



**Figure 9.3. The interactive dimension of the experience consisting of both material and immaterial factors interacting with each other and the tourist experience**

The fourth dimension of experience is the *epistemological dimension* – the consequences and outcome of the experiences where the experience events, *Erlebnis*, contribute to the accumulated life experience, *Erfahrung*, and lived life world (Gelter 2009b). It can be conceptualized as the Life Experience Ladder, where each *Erlebnis* contributes to the growth of the personal *Erfahrung* and life experience (Figure 9.4). In a polar experience context, this approach means identifying the learning aspects of the different experience components, *Erlebnis*, during the polar trip and relating them to previous experiences (*Erlebnis*), the accumulated experience and knowledge (*Erfahrung*), and how it contributes to the new life experience (*Erfahrung 2.0*), a challenging but most interesting pedagogic approach to tourism experiences.





**Figure 9.4. Illustration of the epistemological dimension of the experience where the individual events, *Erlebnis*, build up the cumulative *Erfahrung* and life experience.**

Source: adapted from Gelter (2009b).

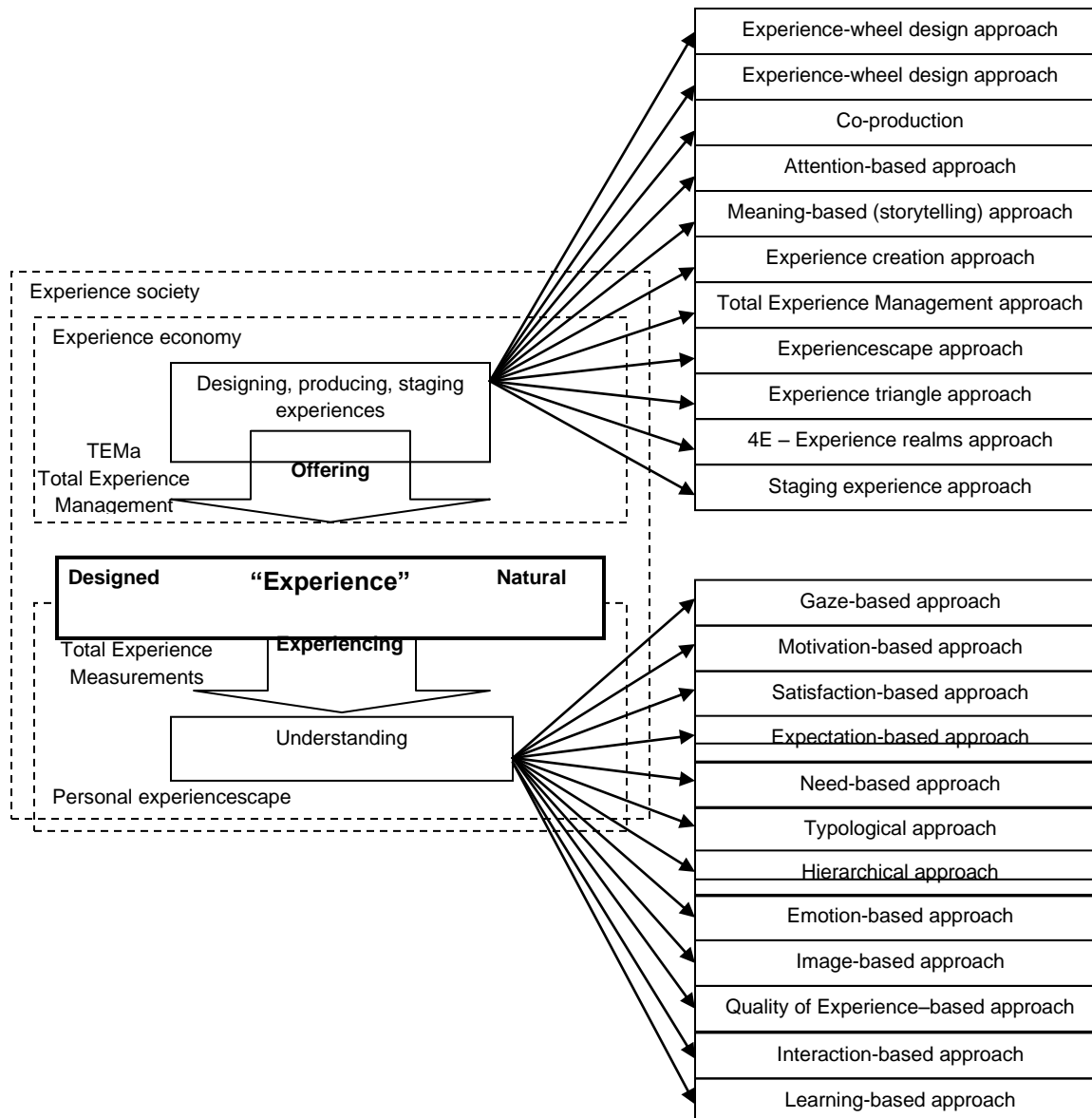
The fifth dimension is the *experience typological dimension*, which includes cognitive-psychological dimensions of the experience as expressed in typologies such as *slow, flow, peak*, and *deep* experiences. As this field has attracted limited research attention, the typologies of experiences are still limited.

## **2.5. The Learning Experiential Approach**

Most reviews of tourist experiences omit or just briefly touch on the importance of learning in understanding experiences. As I have shown, *Erfahrung*, the accumulated life experiences, is the outcome of uncountable learning processes and any experience event, *Erlebnis*, without learning will not be remembered (Gelter 2006, 2009b). This is because memory is a consequence of a learning experience. It is therefore a bit surprising that the pedagogics of tourism is an unexciting research field. However, the study of learning processes based on experiences is a well explored field dating back to the earliest pedagogic prophets such as Comenius, Dewey, and others. Such a learning experiential approach involves areas such as experiential education (Warren *et al.* 1995), experiential learning (Kolb 1984), outdoor-based environmental education (Palmer and Neal 1994; Jicklings 2006), and Tildenian interpretation (Beck and Cable 1998; Gelter 2007, 2008b), as well as transformative experiences (Gelter, 2009b). All these aim, in a normative way, to change people (students, tourists) through the experience. For polar tourism this has interesting applications regarding the issues of

ambassadorship – tourists as messengers for anthropomorphic induced processes in the polar region. This concept has been adopted by many tour operators as the benefit to bring tourists to these remote areas. As expressed by tourism pioneer Lars-Eric Lindblad, “you can’t protect what you don’t know” (Landau 2002: 35; see also Maher 2007a, 2007b). Tourists seem not to see themselves as ambassadors, but tour operators rather like this label to justify their actions in bringing tourists to these areas (Maher 2007a). Some preliminary studies of ambassadorship have been initiated (*ibid.*), but this area needs deeper explorations in regard to the pedagogics and educational programs used by tour operators, guide pedagogics, and learning outcomes of the tourist experience.

Another issue in the same line is the concept of “normative tourism” as applied in Tildenian interpretation, with has specific goals of transforming the guest according to cognitive, emotional, and behavioural goals. Such transformative tourism (Gelter 2009b) has been suggested as a tool for transforming society into transmodernity (Gelter 2008b, 2009b). The concept of transmodern tourism was introduced by Marc Luyckx Ghisi (2006). His core idea was that the emerging transmodernity could reorient the techno-scientific machinery towards the survival of humanity. Luyckx Ghisi argued that tourism has to shift towards transmodernity and could thereby have an important impact in assisting societies and the citizens in this transition. It involves a sociocultural shift in value and global ecological awareness and concern towards environmental sustainability and a desire to live more sustainably. According to Luyckx Ghisi, the essence of transmodernity is being for something, *i.e.*, taking active action towards sustainability and interconnectedness. Transmodern tourism could be the theoretical concept many polar tour operators need in their arguments for tourists as ambassadors. This line of experiential learning in polar environment for sustainability values and transmodernity thus needs further studies. In the same line is the work of the “Student-on-ice” (SOI) concept of bringing students to polar areas to make them aware of climate change and other sustainability issues, transforming them into *Generation G* according to Geoff Green (personal communication), founder of SOI. SOI offers a rich resource for further studies of experiential learning with normative goals (see Figure 9.5).



**Figure 9.5. Different theoretical research approaches (described in the text) for the study of experiences and experience production in the experience economy resulting in two major research approaches; the TEMa – Total Experience Management and the TEMe – Total Experience Measurement approach**

### 3. Conclusions

Why should we analyse the polar tourist experience? The George Mallory approach towards climbing Everest could also apply to this question – “because it’s there.” Should we really dig deep into unique personal experiences such as the polar experience? Probably, as many stakeholders have interests in the tourists’ polar experiences. These may be tourism managers, tourist companies, educational programs, and various scientific interests. I have presented

some of the approaches that have been or could be used to grasp the polar experience, summarized in Figure 9.5. I have shown the many approaches and the complexity of the issue.

There may be several more unexplored approaches such as using the concept of Howard Gardner's nine intelligences to approach the quality of the experience. Research is struggling between a quantitative approach, to obtain generic results that can be applied for management and experience production, and qualitative approaches, to understand the specific qualities at the personal phenomenological level. We may never reach the full understanding of personal experiences, but maybe, at least, we could obtain conceptual maps, taxonomies, and typologies and identify dimensions and factors affecting the experience. To illustrate the beauty of a personal polar experience, I will use the image of a student from SOI University Antarctica expedition 2009 interacting with a chinstrap penguin (Figure 9.6).



**Figure 9.6. An unexpected Antarctic experience in Whalers Bay, Deception Island: a student from the Student-on-ice University Antarctica Expedition 2009 interacting with a chinstrap penguin**

This girl met a solitary chinstrap penguin on the beach and sat down. The penguin approached her and then they sat together for about 25 minutes looking at each other. What is her experience, its outcome, its meaning, and how has it affected her? In a interview the girl expressed great surprise over the experience: "*I was like wow, this is..., this is amazing, I can't believe this is happening.*" She expressed her feeling about the episode as: "*I don't even think awe and wonder would begin to explain it, it was just ... curious, but at the same time I felt like probably one of the luckiest people ever, because you don't get to interact with wildlife like that, that close... so I felt really, really lucky.*" The experience was overwhelming: "*I was actually about to cry, I couldn't believe ... he was ... right there ... staring at me, then he felt so comfortable he felt asleep, he fell asleep and then he wake up and do like ooohhh, hey you, then he got back to sleep, ok, hahaha (laughter), so totally cool.*" Students like her with similar experiences expressed they experienced awe, extreme exclusivity and a connection with both the animal and the polar nature, and several spoke of becoming motivation and energy to share the experience and engage in the quest of making other people more aware of what's happening in the Polar Regions with global change. They transformed into Generation G!

I conclude that the polar experience is much more then traditionally concluded as the scenery, wildlife, remoteness and history, and more then confirming perceived images of polar icon species and icon features as measured by satisfaction studies. In my opinion it is more according to Arne Næss concept of Deep Experiences - getting deeply involved, deeply connected and deeply affected. How can we measure this?

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