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Shaping Climbers' Experiencescapes: The Influence of History on the Climbing Experience

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Abstract

Climbing is increasingly popular in certain destinations, yet there is little knowledge of the influence of history on climbing and other adventure tourism experiences. Climbing destinations renowned within the climbing community may well be unknown to the broader tourist masses. Using qualitative interviews of climbers visiting the Lofoten Islands, Norway, this article examines how the historical context of climbing has played a part in shaping the climbers' experiences. The study discusses the influence of history, authenticity, storytelling, and image on today's experiencescape for climbers. It is revealed how the climbing community is influenced by history through the dissemination of stories and knowledge about places, routes and iconic climbers. Moreover, authenticity is recognized in the perception of the place and the types of route; this includes existential authenticity, where the climbing image of Lofoten remains authentic. The climbing community together shapes the experiencescape through a mutual devotion to the climbing culture.

Keywords: rock climbing, experiencescape, history, authenticity, storytelling, image

INTRODUCTION

The popularity of nature-based adventure experiences is increasing. Knowledge of special interest communities involved in adventure experiences, as well as awareness of the co-creation taking place within such communities, is essential in order to address this form of nature-based tourism. Nature-based experiences have gained increased focus and importance in forming destination images (Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011). However, the importance of

nature and nature-based activities is nothing new in tourism. Several destinations have strong traditions of relying on nature and nature-based phenomena in attracting tourists. Some destinations have actively used nature-based activities in claiming a position, such as Queenstown in New Zealand, known as “the adventure capital of the world” (www.queenstownnz.co.nz). Other destinations, such as the Lofoten Islands in Norway, have for years maintained an image as a climbing destination in adventure activity communities (Webster, 1994). A study of the formation of experiencescapes among independent climbers in the Lofoten Islands can thus contribute to understanding the formation of climbers’ experiencescapes more generally, as it offers “the insider” perspective to adventure experiences.

Interest in tourism experiences has increased (Cheng, Edwards, Darcy, & Redfern, 2016), alongside the boom of participants in nature-based tourism activities (Adventure Travel Trade Association, 2016). Adventure tourism now comprises a significant part of the tourism industry. Even so, the independence and freedom aspect in several adventure activity communities remains (Cailly, 2006). This study deals with non-commercial adventure tourism, as the climbers interviewed climb on their own and are not on commercially organized tours. Nevertheless, the wider implications of the study have relevance for tourism businesses aiming at climbers, tourism organizations and destination management organizations (DMO).

The purpose of this article is to discuss how climbers’ experiencescapes in the Lofoten Islands are shaped today. The article will also review the historical development of climbing in Lofoten, with an analysis of how history might have influenced the image of Lofoten as a climbing destination today. In prior research, storytelling has often been studied as a firm-driven process (Mathisen, 2014); the current study takes a fresh approach by exploring storytelling from the tourist point of view, as well as through historical sources. The potential

contribution of authenticity is also discussed in an experiencescape context. The main research question of the study is: How are climbers' experiencescapes shaped? The study also debates the historical influence within the climbing community. The four dimensions of history, authenticity, storytelling and image that influence the formation of the experiencescape being debated in this article are illustrated in Figure 1, which serves as a framework model for the study. The figure illustrates how history and co-creation are influential for the meaning of authenticity, image and storytelling in shaping climbers' experiencescape.

Figure 1. Framework model of the study



The study reviews the literature of adventure tourism and rock climbing, as well as literature of the central concepts of the article (Figure 1). The study uses an inductive approach. Through semi-structured interviews of climbers in Lofoten and a review of historical literature, the study illuminates how the experiences of climbers are shaped. Study limitations, practical and theoretical implications as well as future research directions are presented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adventure tourism and rock climbing

Despite the growth in adventure tourism and experience-based tourism and research, it remains under-represented in tourism literature (Ritchie, Sun Tung, & Robin, 2011). Destination development and planning, adventure tourism operators and adventure tourism experiences are identified as three major research areas in adventure tourism literature, the latter receiving the most attention (Cheng et al., 2016). The motivation of adventure tourism participants varies (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016); it can be the search for rush (Buckley, 2012) flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993) or challenge (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016). Adventure activity participation can also relate to personality (Vespestad & Mehmetoglu, 2017). Climbers are known to score high on sensation seeking (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016) and climbing requires skill, effort and commitment (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016; Vespestad & Mehmetoglu, 2017). Despite the interest in researching adventure activities (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016) such as skydiving (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993; Laurendeau & van Brunschot, 2006), BASE jumping (Hallin & Mykletun, 2006; Monasterio, Mulder, Frampton, & Mei-Dan, 2012), surfing (Ford & Brown, 2006; Preston-Whyte, 2002), mountaineering and climbing (Pomfret, 2006, Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016; Hanley, Wright, &

Koop, 2002; Rickly-Boyd, 2012; Rickly, 2016; Rickly, 2017), there seems to be a gap in the literature with regard to understanding individual subjective experiences (Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2004) and what forms the climbing experiencescape of climbers. There is a particular lack of studies that include history as an influential component in shaping the experiencescape.

Experiencescape

The article draws upon service- and experiencescape frameworks (Bitner, 1992; Gyimóthy, 2005; Mossberg, 2007; 2015; O'Dell & Billing, 2005). Arnould, Price, and Tierny (1998) emphasized the commercial exchanges taking place in the servicescape and its representation of a subset of social rules, conventions and expectations. The social servicescape was also emphasized by Line and Hanks (2019), who identified customers, employees and social density as a significant latent dimension. Moreover, servicescapes make available meaning and value for people (Arnould et al., 1998). The experiencescape, however, in fact transcends the commercial aspect by also including the interactions taking place in such space, creating personal and social experiences. Experiencescapes can thus be seen as “metaphorical commercial landscapes of social interactions” (Gyimóthy, 2005, p. 126) and can exist in relation to all kinds of experiences and contexts (O'Dell & Billing, 2005). The social aspect (Line & Hanks, 2019), the *communitas* (Sharpe, 2005) and the connection with others are important in playful experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993) and the interactions in such meso contexts (*communitas*) create meaning. The development of *communitas* and integration with nature is essential for playful experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993; Tumbat & Belk, 2011; Webster & Rennie, 2011), which also applies to climbing. The climbers mediate and experience a cultural meaning in their actions, based on their community culture

(Karababa & Kjeldgaard, 2014) and community feeling. Climbers share the joy of climbing, an identity connected to practices, rituals, and meanings (Cova, 1997; Cailly, 2006). Thus, they share a sense of belonging to a community (Rickly, 2017) and even the freedom to withdraw from everyday life into a *communitas* (Arnould & Price, 1993) which creates meaning for the climbers through the common community codes.

In addition to the physical, cultural and social resources, Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) emphasize the resources inherent in the consumer (e.g. skills and expectations) as significant for understanding experiencescapes. Thus, experiencescapes can contain both abstract and physical components (Amrish, Courtney, & Xinran, 2017). The experience of loss of authenticity in everyday life can, for example, inspire nostalgic feelings (Kessous & Roux, 2008; Gyimóthy, 2005) towards climbing as an activity where freedom is sought. Experiencescapes can thus relate to nostalgia. Early studies of tourism identified nostalgia as the search for a previous and simpler lifestyle (Crompton, 1979). More recently, nostalgia has been suggested to support some sense of belonging, as well as playing a role in a collective experiencescape (Gyimóthy, 2005). Gyimóthy (2005) also notes that nostalgiascapes have a history as genuine or wild places and are related to emotional connections to some element, such as the authenticity of wild nature. Nostalgiascapes are constructed in a more robust and sound symbolic way (Gyimóthy, 2005), which could initiate a lasting influence on, e.g., image development. Kessous and Roux (2008, p. 193) argue that nostalgia involves the feeling of losing autonomy and individual freedom, simplicity, authenticity and emotional spontaneity in the modern “mass consumption culture”. Such distinctions can be valuable here, as they add to the understanding of how nostalgia relates to activities, as well as helping to link nostalgia to history, authenticity, storytelling and image in the context of climbers’ experiencescapes.

Authenticity

The importance of authenticity in tourism experiences is indisputable (MacCannell, 1999) and studies of its applicability and understanding are numerous (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2014; Rittichainuwat, Laws, Scott & Rattanaphinanchai, 2018). Zhu (2012) identified three main approaches to authenticity, namely constructive, objective and existential authenticity. Objective authenticity (MacCannell, 1999) refers to what is real or genuine, whereas constructive authenticity is created (Zhu, 2012). Moving beyond the somewhat narrow and conventional view on authenticity as objective or constructive, Wang (1999) proposed existential authenticity as a notion that can better explain the complexity of tourist experiences. Existential authenticity is related to the experience of an authentic self; adventures in nature can provide distance from the inauthenticity of modern society (Wang, 1999). It is also referred to as activity-related authenticity, in which intra-personal and inter-personal authenticity are essential dimensions (Kim & Jamal, 2007). Lau (2010) offered an alternative understanding of authenticity by proposing object authenticity as a concept with a wider scope than that of, e.g. MacCannell (1999).

Authenticity can be regarded as influencing the value of tourist experiences (Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2014) and provides immersion in the experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Lu, Chi, and Liu (2015) support these views, also finding that perceived authenticity and involvement in local activities contribute to the destination image formation. Authenticity is claimed to be an important attribute of, e.g. heritage tourism destinations (Lu et al., 2015), through, e.g. storytelling, thus implying relevance to nature-based tourism and the creation of the experiencescape in adventure tourism contexts such as climbing.

Storytelling

Another potentially important dimension in forming destinations' experiencescapes and images is storytelling (Mathisen, 2014). Storytelling can contribute to destination development (Mossberg, 2008, 2015), as it serves as a competitive tool in creating the experiencescape. Stories can add to the meaning of experiences, as well as enhancing the value of the consumer experience (Mathisen, 2014). Storytelling engages visitors' imagination and furthermore influences expectations and attitudes towards an experience (Mathisen, 2014). In any tourism context, participation in adventure experiences creates stories, which in turn can contribute to maintaining and remembering the experience.

Mossberg (2015, p. 116) presents a theoretical model where various actors take on different roles through different stages of a storytelling process as a representation of a way to build an overall concept of a destination. By contrast, this study explores the historical aspect of storytelling and storytelling within the climbing community in the formation of climbers' experiencescapes. Storytelling is known to inspire co-creation behaviour (Mathisen, 2014), and is influential in tourism (Pera, 2017). In an adventure tourism context this could initiate strong intra-community image creation. As suggested by Pera (2017), special interest communities use storytelling in creating value within the community. This would also apply to creating climbers' experiencescapes, where sharing stories and the image of a destination would make an impact.

Image

Image is an area of tourism that has received great attention (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002; Mariussen, von Ibenfeldt, & Vespstad, 2014). The importance of image for destinations is commonly recognized (Gallarza et al., 2002), such as its influence on revisit intention (Pratminingsih, Rudatin, & Rimenta, 2014). Gallarza et al.

(2002) present a comprehensive framework of the complex and dynamic nature of destination image, based on an interdisciplinary marketing perspective. The dynamics of image are evident through the space and time variables (Gallarza et al., 2002), where the image develops over time and with reference to a specific place. The definition of image is generally accepted as the sum of a person's knowledge, ideas and beliefs about the characteristics of a place, including emotional thoughts and feelings towards the destination (Mariussen et al., 2014; Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2007).

Echtner and Ritchie (1991) recognize three axes supporting destination image: the functional/psychological, the common/unique and the holistic/attribute-based axes. The image of a destination can therefore be based on attributes or be more holistically founded. Jacobsen and Dann (2003) found that tourists' images of the Lofoten Islands were largely influenced and informed by guidebooks, and nature was frequently mentioned, with mountains as the most frequent noun used to describe the image. Viken, Akselsen, Evjemo, and Hansen (2004) concluded that the image of Lofoten was very positive. Their study suggested that it was the overall experience that gave the highest score rather than any single element. Nevertheless, the one attribute that shapes the overall impression the most is the landscape (Viken et al., 2004). More recently, Seljeseth and Korneliussen (2015) argued that ruggedness, sophistication, naturalness and activeness were the key dimensions constituting the brand personality of Lofoten.

Online marketing and involvement in social media sites such as Facebook have made a well of information available to potential tourists. The difference in image representation between official social network sites of DMOs and private websites has been recognized (Shen, Song, Li, & Jiang, 2015); nonetheless, image formation within special interest communities remains under-researched. The variety in online representations of destinations can more easily result in inconsistent destination images (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007).

Awareness of consistency in the stories being told about a destination is therefore of great importance. When people actively search for information in social media, it is a more goal-oriented and engaging process than just surfing, and thus affects people's destination image to a greater extent (Kim, Kim, & Wise, 2014). The stories that people are exposed to affect the destination image formation (Kim & Richardson, 2003) and thus can be viewed as part of the co-creation of the tourist experience (Mathisen, 2014).

METHODS

This is a study of climbers and their experiencescapes. The authors have chosen to study climbing and climbers in Lofoten, an area naturally suited to climbing, and one of the most well-known and popular climbing destinations in Norway. Furthermore, the history of climbing in Lofoten goes back more than one hundred years.

Sample

An inductive approach was chosen. One researcher collected the interview data among independent climbers who were on holiday in the Lofoten Islands over a two-week summer period. This researcher had no prior knowledge of climbing or the climbing community, and therefore strove to be objective during data collection. Convenience sampling was employed. Semi-structured, individual in-depth interviews were conducted in the field in English or Norwegian, depending on the nationality of the respondent. Respondents were asked to talk freely about their climbing career, their latest climb in Lofoten, important aspects of the climbing experience, and which elements of climbing were important to them. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The climbers were contacted at campsites and were interviewed there. Twenty climbers participated; seven were Norwegian nationals and

thirteen of other nationalities (Swedish, Finnish, Danish, American, German, French, Australian and Canadian). Thirteen respondents were aged 18-28 years and seven were aged from 29 to 36 years. There were 19 males and only one female climber. Relatively young males dominated among the climbers interviewed, which naturally cannot be regarded as representative. Most climbers had travelled with at least one climbing partner (17), two were currently alone but waiting for their partners, while only one climber was travelling alone.

The secondary data collection aimed to depict the history of climbing in Lofoten. The historical description is based on a variety of sources, typically biographical and other books about climbing published during the last 100 years. In addition to these historical sources, there is historical information in guidebooks on climbing in Lofoten (for example Webster, 1994; Craggs & Enevold, 2017). Several written sources about mountaineering and climbing were used. Particularly interesting are the yearbooks of the Norwegian Mountaineering Society (Norsk Tindeklub), in which Schjelderup (1914) describes the first ascent of Svolvegeita, and Meyer (1983) wrote a chapter on climbing in Lofoten. As early as 1953, a guidebook about Lofoten was published, *Rock Climbs in Lofoten, Norway* by Prag, who himself never actually visited Lofoten. A second guidebook was written by Webster in 1994. It includes a chapter on the climbing history of Lofoten. This history was continued in climbing guidebooks published later (Craggs & Enevold, 2008, 2017). Additionally, the area is frequently mentioned in magazine articles and books (Bommen, 1939; Gjelsteinli, 1988; Lennon, 1987; Prytz, 2008), as well as in journals (e.g. Hoare, 1989; Meyer, 2016).

In addition to the interview data and the written sources, one of the authors has around 30 years' experience as a climber. Much of the author's climbing experience is in the Lofoten Islands, involving familiarity with the area, the local climbers and the history. The author's knowledge and skills provide an (emic) insight into the climbing culture (Triandis, 1994). This insider's perspective (Buckley, 2012) and first-hand knowledge about climbing in

Lofoten endorses an in-depth and specialized knowledge about the climbing, enhancing understanding of the climber's experiencescape. Both researchers are familiar with the area and the climbing scene, which increases the credibility of the study.

There are some *limitations* to this study. Firstly, this case is not generalizable to other climbing destinations. However, the authors maintain that the study does provide in-depth insight into the field of adventure tourism experiences. Secondly, the representation of male and female informants is skewed. Nevertheless, the informants were representative of the climbers there at the time of data collection. According to an earlier research review (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016), there are no indications of great differences between genders in adventure tourism; however, this could be addressed in future studies. Thirdly, one of the authors is an insider in the mountaineering social world, which could have led to bias. However, the data was not collected by this author and was thus not affected. Although the analysis and discussion could have been influenced, we argue that great awareness was raised to limit such potential bias. The benefits of an emic insider perspective were argued to outweigh the disadvantages as it provided unique access to information and in-depth knowledge of climbing and its history in this region.

The data were analysed based on content analysis principles inspired by Graneheim and Lundman (2004) and Krippendorff (2004). Through qualitative interpretation of the textual material, content analysis allowed us to make "replicable and valid inferences from texts to the context of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). Retaining the informants' explanations was key to ensuring credibility. Content analysis revealed four themes that constituted the main dimensions influencing the experiencescape of the climbers in Lofoten: history, authenticity, storytelling and image. These are presented and discussed in the following sections, as they relate to the framework model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lofoten as a climbing destination: the historical context

Lofoten is a 150 km long Norwegian archipelago north of the Arctic Circle, with steep mountains rising straight from the sea. The mountains are of granite and other volcanic rocks (Lennon, 1987). The granite has perhaps contributed most to Lofoten's status in the climbing community, being hard and therefore suitable for climbing. The steep mountains in Lofoten have for years fascinated people, and the combination of sea and steep mountains makes the landscape very different from, e.g. the Alps.

Climbing in Lofoten started during the second half of the 19th century. The peaks of Lofoten (see map appendix 1) were then familiar to both Norwegians and foreigners. Tourists from Europe spent holidays along the Norwegian coast aboard ships and could enjoy the views of the magnificent mountains. Stories, photographs and articles from these tourists provided information for both domestic and foreign climbers. The period around the 1900s is believed to have been the golden age for first ascents in Lofoten (Webster, 1994). The first climbers were dedicated to climbing the tallest and most spectacular peaks. Around the turn of the century, many of the highest mountains were climbed. Although Nordre Higravtinden was climbed by Green as early as 1871, it is the ascent of Vågakallen by local climbers Ekroll and Johannesen during the summer of 1889 which counts as the first outstanding climb in the area (Webster, 1994). Nevertheless, foreigners dominated the list of first ascents during this period. The famous British climbers Slingsby and Collie made several of these, focusing particularly on the peaks in the northern part of Austvågøya. Here, they climbed the two main peaks of Rulten in 1903 (Tønsberg, 1914). Women also participated in mountain climbing

during this time. The first ascent of Store Trolltind in 1890 is credited to May Jeffrey (Lennon, 1987; Slingsby, 1914).

After the highest and steepest peaks had been climbed, attention shifted to other exciting objects. Svolværgeita, a pinnacle with two horns in the escarpment of the mountain Fløya, facing Svolvær in Lofoten, which is highly visible from the town centre, was one of these. The pinnacle is steep and naturally caught climbers' attention. The first to succeed in ascending this peak were the experienced Norwegian climbers Bryn, Rubenson and Schjeldrup in 1910, when on holiday in Northern Norway. They chose the easiest way up and ended the climb on the highest horn. Even though the first climbers could choose the easiest ascent, it was nonetheless an advanced technical climb by the standards of the time. Later, climbers found that one could jump from the highest to the lowest horn. The first person to do this is presumed to be Heen, around 1930 (Gjelsteinli, 1988). In addition to being the first to climb Svolværgeita, Bryn, Rubenson and Schjeldrup made a first ascent of Trakta (Rørhoptinden) in Austvågøya, a mountain that many years later was voted "Norway's most difficult mountain to climb", as well as Stetind in Tysfjord, Norway's National Mountain and fifth on the list of the most difficult mountains to climb in Norway (Alpin Klatring, n.d.).

Around 1930, several new routes were discovered on already climbed mountains. The most well-known is perhaps Spiralruta on Svolværgeita. This route, discovered in 1928, was climbed by Bommen and Lyche (Webster, 1994). Heen climbed a number of routes in the 1930s. In 1933, he and his nephew climbed the traverse of Småkallanryggen, and in 1939 and 1940, he climbed the north and east ridges of Vågakallen together with Nordby. In the 1940s, a local climbing community was established in Svolvær. They not only repeated well-known climbing routes but also succeeded in a number of new first ascents. Høyer and Krane established a new route on the front side of Svolværgeita in 1947. Nordbye, Pettersen, Romsloe, Høyer, Krane and Olsen climbed several new routes in Trolltindane in Northern

Austvågøy in 1948. Foreign climbers, British in particular, continued to visit Lofoten during the 1950s (Craggs & Enevold, 2008). Compared to the popular climbing areas in the more central parts of Europe, Lofoten at this time was still a peaceful region without crowds of climbers.

In the mid-1960s, a new generation of young local climbers was established in Lofoten, led by Meyer. In the early 1970s, climbing activity increased as a result of climbing courses in Lofoten (Craggs & Enevold, 2008). The first courses were arranged by the Red Cross alpine group. Later, a climbing school was founded (Prytz, 2008). New training areas were discovered and developed, the most popular being named Paradise (Meyer, 1983). Over the years, the school expanded geographically from the Kalle area to the Djupfjord area, near the village of Henningsvær. Activity at the climbing school diminished during the 1980s, but around 1990, Enevold and Fagerli took it over and revitalized it. Today, it includes a café, accommodation, the course facilities and a shop. The school has a comprehensive course programme in climbing and mountaineering, and it also offers short guided climbs and tours. The significance of this institution for climbing in Lofoten and Norway can hardly be overstated. The courses have trained several people in climbing and familiarized them with Lofoten. The climbing school's café is known as the social gathering point for climbers in the area.

Historical and current climber profiles

Climbing in Lofoten has undergone a democratization process, in line with what Beedie and Hudson (2003) consider a trend in adventure tourism. Climbing tourism in Lofoten today encompasses a variety of nationalities. Historically, the demographic profile of the climbers in Lofoten was mostly upper-class men with a certain freedom to explore and

travel. The climbing was more of an expedition (Schjelderup, 1914; Slingsby, 1914) with an explorative character, compared to today's activity for less extreme climbers (Puchan, 2004). It is now regarded as an adventure tourism activity (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016) where most climbers climb well-defined short routes.

In recent years, the split between male and female participation in adventure tourism has narrowed (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016), and several informants mention that both genders are well represented in the sport, although males dominated in the sample. Most (11) of the climbers define themselves as experienced climbers with a high skill level, three belong to the intermediate level, while six climbers say they are inexperienced with this kind of traditional climbing. Climbers appreciate not only the technical grading of a route but also the length of the climb, the quality of the route and the level of crowdedness (Hanley, Koop, Alvarez-Farizo, Wright, & Nevin, 2001). In this study, the uncrowdedness of Lofoten is appreciated. One climber addresses the attributes of climbing in Lofoten by saying:

The rock is solid, few loose rocks, solid crevasses and granite, which makes the whole experience good. It also dries up fairly quickly even if there's been a lot of rain; it dries up in two hours with some wind and sun. (Informant 1)

Informant 2 emphasizes the lack of crowding compared to Chamonix in France, and the variety of routes (e.g. Informant 20). Moreover, in line with the overall characteristics of outdoor adventure tourists (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016), the tourist climbers in this study are well educated, have professional careers and seek authentic experiences.

Authenticity

Most climbing tourists in Lofoten camp in tents or cabins. This is perceived as authentic accommodation for these tourists. It thus relates to the authenticity of managing on

one's own, being free and leading an authentic life, as in a pact with nature. This seems to promote the connection between authenticity and individual freedom (Kessous & Roux, 2008), as perceived by the climbers. The mountains and the routes are also perceived as authentic, as they are naturally secured without any bolted routes. In accordance with Ferrero Camoletto and Marcelli (2019), the climbers perceive this to be the traditional way of climbing, and thus more authentic. Climbing such unbolted routes makes it feel more like “real climbing” and a more natural and authentic experience as climbers have to place their own gear to make themselves secure.

Moreover, the spectacular nature of Lofoten was and still is highlighted as a reason for visiting (e.g. Informant 6), and this nature is also perceived as authentic. This may be seen in how Informant 18 addresses the natural and picturesque in relation to objective authenticity (MacCannell, 1999):

... the fact that the cliffs are just down the sea. That's really awesome, and you go up there and the landscape is fantastic. That is really important also. Not to be in a deep valley or, sometimes you don't care, you just see a perfect wall. The surroundings can be horrible, but still okay, but sometimes it is all landscape, it is all place (like here). Like a picture in your head. I saw many pictures of Lofoten before I came here, so I imagined that I wanted to be inside something like this.

The sense of belonging to a place could be related to whether the climbers are returning to Lofoten or are new to the place (both groups are represented in the study), yet there seems to be a connection to the place or activity regardless. For example Informant 20 says he keeps returning to Lofoten and still has not climbed all routes, and he also emphasizes the variety of climbs for all skill levels. Some climbers emphasize that they value different aspects of life from those typically emphasized as important in modern life. The lifestyle thus

represents an argument for climbing. This in line with what Kessous and Roux (2008) argue is the search for the authentic as opposed to the mass-consumption culture. In this way, the authenticity seems to extend beyond that of heritage destinations, as noted by Lu et al. (2015), because authenticity in this context also relates to the activity of climbing. Climbers today express a form of existential or activity-related authenticity, in line with Kim and Jamal (2007) and Wang (1999). Hence, they not only have a sense of belonging to a place (nostalgiascape) as Gyimóthy (2005) suggests, but also a sense of belonging to an authentic climbing community and an authentic climbing activity. This seems to portray a perception of the climbing community as more in touch with an authentic lifestyle, by distancing themselves from “the others” outside the community (Cailly, 2006). This can be illustrated by the reference by Informant 6 to society as:

All kind of centred around supporting that sort of economic social structure rather than a sort of human capital structure, where more value is placed on human interconnection and connection with nature and those kinds of things.

The existential authenticity also relates to who one is in relation to the climbing and what climbing does for one as a person compared to who one wants to be, as informant 4 puts it. He continues:

Climbing, to me, became a measuring instrument that really made me think through life ... you use your whole body and mind ... it's communication, vulnerability, humility, courage. And you have to know yourself in relation to the climbing. You have to know what you're doing. You have to know where you are in relation to what you're doing there and then. If not, I think it could end pretty badly.

Through knowledge of the places and routes that carry traditions within the community, climbing in Lofoten can represent a nostalgiascape. The vigorous nature of the

nostalgiascape (Gyimóthy, 2005) is clear in the case of Lofoten, as it maintains a position in the climbing community as a destination for traditional (authentic) climbing. Earlier climbing in Lofoten was more about exploration and conquering the mountains (Informant 2), whereas current climbers seem to relate more to the freedom sought through climbing:

There might be an element of freedom. Actually, I guess there is, there's absolutely a certain element of that too, that freedom. Not necessarily of a control thing, but more of the fact that you can make your own decisions. (Informant 6)

The loss of authenticity in everyday life relates to nostalgia, as commented by Informant 6, who talks about existential authenticity in that climbing is part of a lifestyle which has taught him to prioritize differently from society's expectations:

I think that climbing is a type of sport that kind of creates that lifestyle where these are the things you value. And, to me, I feel much more strongly bonded to those than I do to the other social values that are more typical in city life.

Nostalgia thus relates to authenticity in the experiencescapes of climbers. The authenticity also lies within the history of Lofoten as a climbing destination. History provides an authentic image of the place among climbers and its authenticity was always part of the attraction to climb in Lofoten. Furthermore, it attracts climbers today because it has "legendary climbing" and is a "mecca for climbing" (Informant 15). Authenticity therefore contributes to the experiencescapes of the climbers in several ways: it refers to an authentic experience and activity, the authenticity of the place and existential authenticity, and it works through nostalgia. Nevertheless, Lofoten is currently facing challenges related to increasing numbers of tourists, which could negatively affect its authenticity. This could subsequently lead to a negative effect through stories of human pollution and litter, which could, in turn, affect climbers' storytelling and image of Lofoten.

Storytelling

Storytelling affects the experiencescapes of climbers through the stories told in the camp or at the climbing café. This is exemplified by Informant 7, who highlights the climbing café as a place for climbers to have beer and tell stories about climbing experiences. The stories are not necessarily connected to the place but rather to the activity, as can be illustrated by one informant saying that stories are told:

... but they haven't been related that much to Lofoten, but yeah, I've heard some really good stories and it was great to hear those. Because I'm just a beginner so far, I hadn't heard the stories before, so it was really nice (Informant 9).

The fact that stories have their place and can be repetitive (and passionate) in the community is also mentioned by a more experienced climber who is getting tired of the same stories and conversations:

To be honest, I try to talk about things other than climbing. I've spent a lot of time climbing over the last decade and it's one of the subjects I can talk about a bit and I'll enjoy talking about it a bit, but if you talk about it constantly it's kind of like the same conversation. Like no matter who you talk to, it's the same old story sort of thing. I mean, I guess we have tons of stories, but usually they are just like, oh I went and climbed this rock. (Informant 13)

Stories can also be told on Facebook or Instagram, representing documentation of the climbs. Some say they may post a picture and a short text about a recent climb or choice of route (e.g. Informants 3 and 6). Moreover, friendly bragging is a natural part of it, as Informant 1 puts it. Stories on social media can thus help to build the image of the experiencescape of Lofoten within the climbing community.

In the case of Lofoten as a climbing destination, storytelling as depicted by Mossberg (2015) has not taken place in a deliberate way through a planned process. Rather, the climbing destination has developed based on different kinds of actors with undefined roles within the climbing community. The climbing experiencescape of Lofoten is not planned at the meso or macro level: it has developed from the historic traditions of the climbing community, through storytelling and climbers' guidebooks. The actual development of the experience takes place through practice; it builds in the camp, through conversations with fellow climbers and, of course, throughout the actual climb. O'Dell (2005, p. 15) states that experiences can be "planned in one place, developed in another, and staged for consumption in a third". In the case of Lofoten, the planning of the climbing experiencescape seems to take place within the community. Direct staging or experience development from a provider is not present in the interview data, as all informants were independent travellers who arranged their own experiences. However, one can see that, historically, the climbing school and café have played a role in shaping the experiencescape in Lofoten. The climbers (e.g. Informants 3 and 5) mention the climbing café as a meeting place during their holiday and some of them have taken courses or bought guidebooks there.

Image creation

The Rockfax guidebook to Lofoten climbs makes a distinct contribution in several ways. Climbers clearly express the importance of this book, as it is used as a guide to the peaks and different routes (e.g. Informant 8, 19 and 20). It also serves as entertainment throughout their holiday and maintains a position as their "Bible", as Informant 9 puts it. He also sees the humour in that "everyone's reading it every day... and they're almost fighting over it, like, can I have it now?" He further points out that this happens even if they already

know the book. As he expresses it: “For example, this bloke who’s waiting his turn, I think he knows so many routes by heart already, like, he doesn’t need the book.” The guidebook has also helped to shape the image of Lofoten within the climbing community since it was first published, as it includes stories and thus functions as an outlet for storytelling.

The climbing community has formed an image of Lofoten as a natural and accessible climbing destination through the establishment of climbing routes and storytelling of the place as a “climbers’ mecca” (e.g. Informant 15 and 18). Visits by several renowned climbers from Norway and abroad established new routes that have come to be known as classics, such as Dosethrisset, Rasmusekspresen, Minnerisset and Butter Arms. These routes, together with several easier routes, have helped to place the area on the climbing map. The image is communicated through, e.g. the stories told by the climbers, the climbing guidebooks, history and stories in the community. Climbing destinations naturally exist because they provide possibilities for climbing. Contrary to many destinations, but similarly to what has been found at BASE jumping destinations (Hallin & Mykletun, 2006), the image of Lofoten as a climbing destination is not to any great extent formed by tourist organizations or DMOs; rather, it evolves within the special interest community. This is not to ignore the role of DMOs in marketing the destination in general, which has been highlighted in other studies (Trunfio, Della Lucia, 2019). As proposed by Gyimóthy (2005), a strong connection to an activity perceived as authentic can also indicate a more lasting image of the destination. To maintain an authentic image is important in order not to destroy what initially attracted climbers. They call for measures to maintain the sustainability of Lofoten as a climbing destination:

.. The paths are getting worn out...with the growing numbers of tourists here in Lofoten, it’s important that the authorities prepare for this and prevent it a little, especially the paths...and they could put up some toilets. Some places there’s too much litter... (Informant 14)

This highlights the importance of upholding the authenticity of the place by safeguarding the uniqueness of the routes and the areas surrounding it. Involvement by private or public actors is called for in the further development of sustainable climbing tourism in the area.

Historical development

Both international and Norwegian climbers were part of forming the climbing experiencescape of Lofoten. Although the early beginnings were dominated by foreigners' first ascents (Webster, 1994), local climbers created a climbing community that was influential through some central institutions, such as the climbing school and the climbing café. The café is still an important meeting point for tourist climbers. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the different eras of climbing in Lofoten, and shows that over time there has been an increase in the variety of climbing routes. Originally, it was all about finding the easiest way up. After the peaks had been climbed, more difficult routes on existing peaks grabbed climbers' attention, as well as minor non-climbed peaks. The last 50-60 years have seen a focus on doing shorter, more difficult climbing routes (Craggs & Enevold, 2017). These routes seldom end up on the mountain peak, rather the walls and steep sections drive the climb. Although Lofoten can be considered a more remote area than, e.g. Chamonix, paradoxically the climbing routes in Lofoten are on average more easily accessible.

Originally, ascents in Lofoten were published in yearbooks, but only occasionally, often with 10-15 years between each publishing. Since the mid-1970s, a Norwegian climbing journal has been published, an important source of information for climbers. In 1994 the first detailed climbing guidebook was published, which was a great step forward in the systematisation of information about climbing routes. This guidebook was followed by two

new guidebooks in 2008 and 2017. In addition to these books, publication online has become increasingly more important in recent years. There has thus been a progression from occasional publication to continuous online publication of information.

Table 1. The characteristics of the eras of Lofoten climbing

Period	Who?	What is being climbed?	Information sources	Content of stories
Up to 1920	Mostly foreign and Norwegian visitors. The foreigners were typically British, and the Norwegians were mainly from other parts of the country.	Typically alpine climbing and ascending mountain peaks.	The stories were published in books, particularly in foreign and Norwegian climbing yearbooks.	Tour and expedition stories
1920–1960	More Norwegians are active. From 1940 onwards, local climbers also become more active.	New and more difficult routes on smaller summits, and new routes on already ascended peaks.	As before, but in addition the first guidebook for Lofoten was published in the 1950s.	Tour stories
1960–2000	Local climbers become the driving force. Particularly important is the community in Svolvær, and the people engaged in the North Norwegian Climbing School.	During this period, shorter routes are being developed.	Hand-drawn route descriptions. In 1994, a guidebook for Lofoten was published, containing valuable information. Since 1975, a Norwegian journal of climbing has been published, in which, over time, a number of articles about climbing in Lofoten have been published.	Tour stories and route descriptions
2000–today	Many climbers, both Norwegian and foreign.	New routes are constantly developed. Sports routes and bouldering areas.	Publications, internet, social media, more guidebooks.	Tour stories, pictures, personal unedited stories

Climbers’ experiencescapes are then shaped by the climbers and their social interactions. The social aspect (Line & Hanks, 2019) is important to the climbers and the co-creation within the community is essential in the climbers’ experiencescapes. The co-creation

takes place both amongst climbing partners and within the broader climbing community, in a joint sense of *communitas* (Arnould & Price, 1993). The experiencescape for the climbers is not only physically related to the place Lofoten, it also includes individual climbers' perceptions of the experience, the setting and the atmosphere created in connection to climbing, along with the historical influence upon the different dimensions of authenticity, storytelling and image.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to shed light on climbers' experiences in the Lofoten Islands. The long history of climbing in Lofoten has clearly made its mark on the experiencescape today through shared information from guidebooks, stories told, and mutual image formation within the community. The historical influence provides meaning and existential authenticity. The climbing café has been and remains an important institution for the climbing community in Lofoten and for tourists arriving there. The search for authenticity also shapes the experiencescape of climbers, and climbing in Lofoten is still perceived as traditional in a genuine and natural way (a *nostalgiascape*). Moreover, the meaning of authenticity has changed from a 'conquering the mountains' type of thinking to more 'being at one with the mountain' (existential authenticity). The search for authenticity also relates to the climbing activity itself, suggesting a more lasting image of Lofoten as a climbing destination.

Historically, the image of Lofoten as a climbing destination emerged from the earliest climbers' writings, hand-drawn routes and photographs. Even a person who never visited the place made an impact. Through increased visiting and written sources about the climbing routes of Lofoten, an image of an authentic climbing destination evolved within the international climbing community. Therefore, the experiencescape of the climbers developed

within the special interest community. The image developed over time and space and in relation to activities. Feelings towards and emotional connections with the activity are tied to the image of the place. In turn, this creates a stronger and perhaps even more sustainable image of Lofoten as a climbing destination. As with other tourists in Lofoten, the climbers' image of Lofoten is heavily influenced by the influential Rockfax climbing guidebook to Lofoten, referred to as the "Bible" in the community. This guidebook is primarily centred on climbing; thus, the image is connected to one activity, which stands out as the most significant, contrary to how other tourists create their images (Viken et al., 2004). The image formation thus seems to differ from that of tourists in general. The climbing community has jointly created the climbing destination, which maintains a strong position within this special interest community. The Lofoten nature is a natural foundation for adventure tourism such as climbing. Nevertheless, the stories and image a place maintains are decisive for how it develops and gain popularity, and for its chances of survival as an adventure tourism destination.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it provides valuable insights into how history, authenticity, storytelling and image shape climbers' experiencescapes. Second, the study shows empirical evidence that authenticity (MacCannell, 1999; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2014; Rittichainuwat et al., 2018) is an important attribute in nature-based tourism in several ways, relating to the activity, the place (nostalgiascape), the community and the authentic self (existential authenticity). Moreover, this shows that the dualism between nature-culture and what is socially or culturally constructed is not necessarily constructive in an adventure tourism context, as these elements are intertwined

and coexist. Third, the study adds to the literature in introducing history as a vital dimension that can influence an experiencescape through, e.g. the stories of the community, as well as inspiring the image formation of the destination and its impact on revisit intention (Pratminingsih et al., 2014). Finally, the study expands upon the meaning of social *communitas* (Arnould & Price, 1993; Line & Hanks, 2019; Sharpe, 2005) in adventure experiences, as the experiencescape is co-created among various actors, predominantly by the members of the climbing community.

Practical implications

The image of Lofoten is currently undergoing a change, where tourists are experiencing overcrowding and littering issues. Regardless of this, the image of Lofoten amongst climbers seems to be maintaining its position as an authentic climbing experience, partly due to its strong historical foundation. This is important for tourism employees, particularly those working closely with tourist climbers as it demonstrates a potentially more resilient image among climbers. The possibility to use history in marketing efforts towards climbers would thus be a viable approach. Moreover, authenticity for climbers relates to traditions of camping and sharing stories within the community, indicating that image within an adventure tourism community might be stronger and more sustainable. This is relevant knowledge for tourism marketers and DMOs, as well as for businesses involved with tourist climbers, because it implies the importance of knowing the insiders' stories. For marketing purposes, it is valuable to recognize the intra-community image formation based on history and storytelling, in order to use and communicate these in, e.g. climbers' online forums, social media sites, magazines, etc. In addition, history adds to the perceived authenticity of Lofoten as holding a unique position for traditional climbing and authentic experiences. The

raw and untamed nature remains a unique selling point for businesses and destination marketers today; these can benefit from understanding the factors that shape climbers' experiencescapes in their efforts to plan and develop adventure tourism experiences.

Further research

Further research could examine more closely new climbing destinations or other types of adventure tourism to compare the findings. Developing a more general understanding of adventure tourism experiencescapes, e.g. related to how special interest communities' destination images emerge, would also be interesting. Such studies could also explore how such images are built, using which channels, as well as how the process might differ from that of destination image formation in general. When image is largely created outside the sphere of commercial actors, the authors propose the destination image formation of special interest communities as a concept for further exploration. In light of the current debate on tourism in the Lofoten Islands, with reference to the importance of sustainable tourism (NRK, 2017a, 2017b), an area to be considered would be to study the potential of adventure tourism as a more sustainable form of tourism than other tourism which is currently overwhelming the area. It would also be possible to address special interest community image building as a more sustainable way to maintain the uniqueness and character of a destination, due to its strong ties to authenticity and history.

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