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Crossing the Finnmark plateau is an Extraordinary Experience

Important elements that need to be in place for skiers to immerse in the experience

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Abstract

Since the 1960s, there has been an increased focus in tourism research related to the study of the phenomenon of tourism experiences. Understanding this phenomenon is of great value to the tourism industry, since it might help tourism providers offer memorable tourism experiences, create positive word of mouth, and generate potential return visitors. To that end, this Master's thesis reports on a case study, which investigated skiers' extraordinary experiences while crossing the Finnmark plateau. The study was conducted using qualitative research methods including individual semi-structured interviews with 11 participants and thematic analysis.

To date, most studies of extraordinary experiences are with a guide, in a secluded environment, at an event, or cause-related, where participants often engage with others. The uniqueness of this study is that participants engaged in the experience on their own, that is, without a guide. They planned, prepared, and took all the risks themselves. As a consequence, this study sought to understand if there were different factors involved for people, who choose to enjoy and immerse themselves in the experience of skiing across Finnmark plateau by doing it alone.

During thematic analysis, three phases emerged as important. These were preparation and planning, perceived risk involved and safety, and physical exercise. The findings further suggest that immersion can be divided into shorter and longer moments, specifically, shorter and stronger moments, and longer and more meditative moments.

Keywords: The Finnmark plateau, skiing, extraordinary experience, preparations and planning, risk and safety, physical exercise, immersion.

Foreword

Entering academia at the age of 46, after having worked in the tourism industry for many years, has provided me with tools and new knowledge to be combined with accumulated work experience. Especially, it has been a rewarding exercise writing this Master's thesis. The process has been with its ups and downs, some frustration, but most of all very exciting, and a great learning experience. Engaging as a researcher, reviewing literature and interviewing people, has guided me in my understanding of extraordinary experiences. I believe it will be useful for me in my future work within tourism.

Next to studying, living in Alta for two years has provided me with increased interest in outdoor activities. The nature in the north is spectacular and has given me many memorable moments. These moments will be with me for life. Therefore, learning and understanding about extraordinary experiences, have personal relevance to me.

I am ever so grateful to all my respondents for taking their time and energy to tell me about their experiences. Further, knowing they wanted to read my work provided me with increased motivation. I owe much gratitude to my mentor Bård Tronvoll for patiently guiding me, pushing me, encouraging me, listening to my frustration, and giving me advice. You have greatly contributed to my learning process. Thank you to Gayle Jennings for proofreading and giving advice on academic writing. Thank you to beloved friends and family for strongly believing in me and giving me uplifting comments and many 'push forwards' throughout the process of writing. I am forever grateful.

I hope you will enjoy reading my thesis and be with me on the journey across the Finnmark plateau.

Caroline Laurhammer

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1 Introduction

As a topic, over the last two decades, ‘experiences’ have become more and more important, especially in tourism (Duerden et al., 2018). So much so that the topic is a key subject within tourism research (Blumenthal, 2020). People love to travel, to explore, to see new things, and tourism companies compete for these peoples’ attention. Understanding the tourist and how to attract their interest is no simple task (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). The companies that manage to create memorable, special and unique experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) have a better chance of succeeding amongst the endless competitive offers available to tourists. Understanding what an extraordinary experience is, and adding elements from such an experience, can provide a competitive advantage for some companies (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012).

Previous studies on extraordinary experiences have concentrated on situations where participants, always in groups, are followed by a guide or engage in an organised event. Examples are dog-sledging with a guide (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013), attending a music event (Carù & Cova, 2006; Skandalis, Byrom, & Banister, 2019), mountain climbing followed by a guide (Tumbat & Belk, 2011), river rafting secured by a guide (Arnould & Price, 1993), or immersing in the experience through co-creation and facilitation by a guide (Goolaup & Mossberg, 2017; Mossberg, 2008). Blumenthal’s (2020, p. 7) case study also concentrates on what is perceived by participants as within a safe and secured “experiencescape”. There seems to be a gap in the literature on extraordinary experiences where people are alone, not followed by a guide, and taking personal responsibility for planning due to the aspect of risk and safety involved in the experience. The latter is the case for the participants skiing across the Finnmark plateau, and which is the background for this thesis.

For many, skiing from Alta to Karasjok is seen as an adventure. It can also be said to be an extraordinary experience. The route is rated by the Forbes travel guide as one of the world’s most beautiful cross-country skiing experiences (Bergans Adventures, n.d.; Den Norske Turistforening, n.d.). Several adventure companies offer this experience and introduce it with headings such as “wild and exotic, and the closest you get to a polar expedition” (Hvitserk & Eventyrreiser, n.d.).

Extraordinary experiences are personal and meaningful (Arnould & Price, 1993), they are rare (Duerden et al., 2018), they happen outside of everyday life, and are memorable. They are

emotional and give moments of intense happiness and joy (Arnould & Price, 1993). Experiences that are extraordinary happen outdoors in nature (Arnould & Price, 1993; Jefferies & Lepp, 2012), such as the cross-country skiing experience across the Finnmark plateau. Duerden et al. (2018, p. 199) says these “experiences require both physical and mental presence”. Extraordinary experiences are often shared with friends and family (Arnould & Price, 1993) because they share the same interests, have similar motivations, and similar physical strength as well as compatible knowledge and skills (Skandalis et al., 2019). An extraordinary experience is known to be transformational (Duerden et al., 2018), which Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) argue is open for discussion. Extraordinary experiences often happen as a result of being both physically and mentally present (Duerden et al., 2018). People immerse themselves in such experiences and are truly present in the moment and forget about time and place (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013). This relieves people from the concerns and thoughts of everyday life and provides a break from the ordinary. Such experiences leave you rejuvenated, with new skills, increased knowledge, and often lead to personal growth (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012).

Frequently, people often have low expectations prior to an extraordinary experience. This is due to the newness or perceived level of risk of the activity, which can lead to associated feelings of uncertainty (Arnould & Price, 1993). This in turn can impact on feelings of happiness and the outcome of such adventure experiences. Skandalis, Byrom and Banister (2019), on the other hand, argues that there is a stronger link between expectations and the outcome of an adventure. This results from peoples’ previous familiarity with similar activities and knowledge of what to expect. Arnould and Price (1993) purported that an extraordinary outdoor adventure is mostly linked to positive feelings, while others (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012; Tumbat & Belk, 2011) mentioned that there may be negative elements such as moments of pain, concerns, fear, and interpersonal conflict. An experience being extraordinary is known for lack of planning (Arnould & Price, 1993), but due to the nature of the activity and if there are concerns and fear involved, the nature of the adventure might still require some pre-planning and preparation (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015).

In this case study, people ski on their own, they go without a guide, and do not participate in an organised event. The nature of the adventure means you need to do quite a lot of planning and preparation before embarking on this crossing (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015). The level of risk is quite high, and people are personally responsible for their own safety while crossing the plateau. Certain issues need to be considered and planned for before participants are able

to enjoy the physical exercise of skiing the long distances between the cabins from Alta to Karasjok. The crossing facilitates being outdoors, enjoying nature, sharing the skiing experience with friends, and testing limits both physically and mentally. Although people anticipate the long stretch across Lake Iešjávri, people perceive it as both a challenge, and an opportunity to transform into immersion with the environment.

1.1 Research question

Through qualitative research and thematic analysis, I will learn about the nature of the extraordinary experience crossing the Finnmark plateau. Specifically, what attracts people, what is their experience being away in this vast landscape skiing for several days, and do they manage to immerse in the experience. The target group was people, who had dreamt about this tour and was courageous and tough enough to do it on their own without a guide. Being alone and personally responsible for their own safety, as already mentioned, is different in this case study compared to previous studies in extant literature. At first, interviewees were not easy to find. Looking for people to interview, I came across many living in Finnmark that would never dream of embarking on such a crossing because of the length, the nature of the environment, and the physical exercise. Finally, I ended up with 11 interviewees who were all eager skiers and with a certain level of knowledge and skills. I started by reviewing extant literature on the subject, studying what is known about extraordinary experiences. That provided me with background to study what would be different in this ‘doing it on your own’ experience compared to previous case studies on guided extraordinary experiences.

My research question was:

When alone and personally responsible, what are the important factors enabling people to transform into immersion in the extraordinary experience of crossing the Finnmark plateau.

1.2 Background

I have been working in the tourism industry for 20 years. I have worked mainly in the Hotel industry. The last three years I have been a manager for a destination company.

Understanding more about the content of peoples’ experiences is personally and professionally valuable to me. It might make me better equipped for when I return to working in the tourism industry. Further, I was going to ski this distance with two friends in Easter 2020. Due to Covid-19, we were prevented from doing this. We were all very disappointed

when we were unable to do the crossing. I have heard so many stories about the plateau and wanted to learn about this skiing experience across the Finnmark plateau. I decided to interview other skiers instead.

The distance between Alta and Karasjok is 85.5 kilometres and you ski between 15 to 34 kilometres a day. The season for skiing is normally between March and May, but some ski earlier depending on weather conditions. You spend four days skiing and sleeping in three different serviced cabins along the route. The route is marked from the 1st of February until start of May, foremost for snow scooters, so you ski in the scooter tracks and follow the marks. The second day of skiing you need to cross Lake Iešjávri. It is the largest lake in Finnmark county and the 15th biggest in the whole of Norway. It is 68.19 square metres and has a length of 14 kilometres from north to south. The crossing is between 8 and 10 kilometres, the route slightly changes from year to year, due to environmental impact from wind and snow.

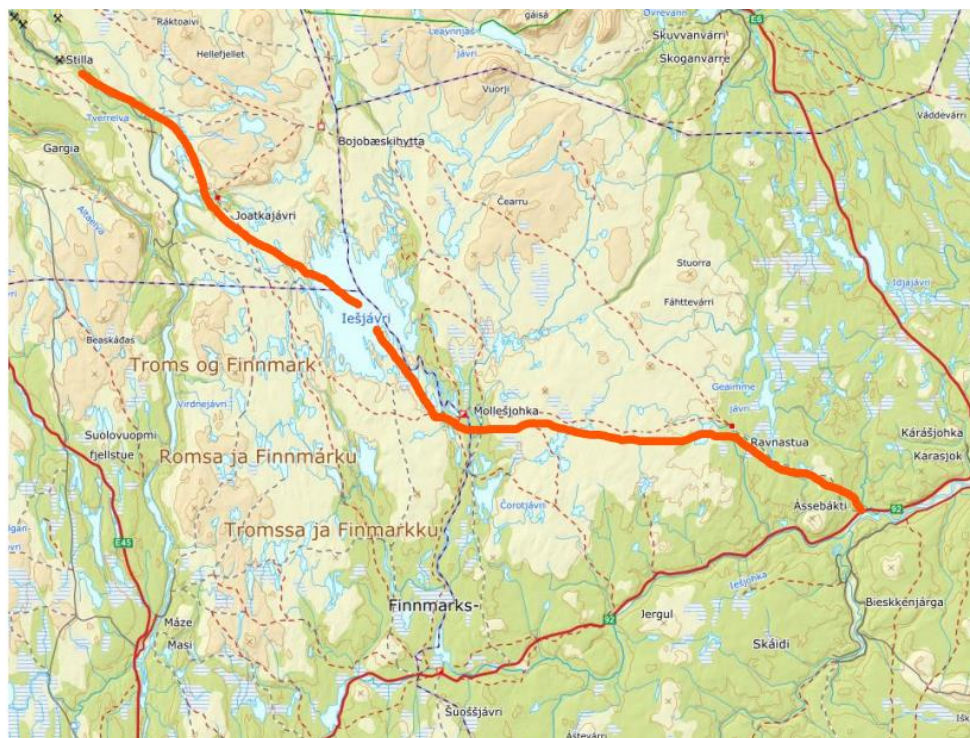
Starting from Alta, the four mountain cabins are, Jotka, øvre (upper) Mollisjok, and nedre (lower) Mollisjok, these last two are 5 kilometres apart from each other, people stay at either one, and the third and last cabin is Ravnastua. Three of the cabins are among the few last remaining Norwegian governmentally owned state cabins (Rapp, 2011). Originally the cabins were set up in the 1800s to give shelter and warmth from the weather, which is still part of their purpose. The crossing is the old postal route between Alta and Karasjok, and now also the official path for snow scooters across the plateau. The cabins are primarily used by people, who are looking after reindeers. However, the use of the cabins for tourism has now become a main income generator and such usage is a prominent part of their operation. Regardless of season, the hosts are living and working at the cabins all year around.

For those wanting to engage in the Finnmark plateau cross-country ski experience, there is quite a lot to plan and prepare in advance. For accommodation, you need to call or email each cabin separately and be aware to book dinner and breakfast. There is no scheduled transport at either end. You need to arrange transport to Stilla, where you start skiing. This is 40 minutes out of Alta by taxi or you get someone to take you. The fourth day, when you arrive at Ássebákti, you either need someone to pick you up, or get to Karasjok, which is 17 kilometres from Ássebákti, where there is a bus that returns to Alta.

Several tour operators and adventure companies offer this adventure starting at NOK 12.000. Some of these are Hvitserk (n.d.), Bergans Adventures (n.d.), and locally-based Glød Explorer (n.d.). They offer the crossing excursion as a structured experience, having a beginning and an end. It is specifically designed and planned for the customer. As in line with Arnould and Price (1993), commercial companies often facilitate an extraordinary experience, taking all the risk and safety precautions needed, presenting the participants with a packing list and take care of all the logistics.

Many people choose to do the crossing on their own. While there are several options for skiing across the plateau, my focus was the ‘classic route’ from Alta to Karasjok. Although most people stay in the cabins along the route, the adventurous ones choose tents. Some people ski with back packs, and others bring a pulka. The weather on the plateau can be harsh. The shift in weather conditions comes in fast and can be severe. Sunny days with no or little wind is rarely difficult - unless you are not fit for the distance. But if bad weather hits you, it can have a severe and unpleasant impact on the skiing experience unless you are well prepared.

The map below provides an overview of the Finnmark plateau and the area of research. A red line is added to illustrate the route the participants skied from Stilla to Ássebákti.



Picture retrieved from (Kartverket, n.d.)

1.3 Structure of the thesis

Having introduced the subject of my thesis and research question, I will briefly overview the following chapters.

Chapter 2: Is my theoretical framework. It starts with a brief literature review on ‘experiences’, followed by the main review, which focuses on extraordinary experiences. The key headings are: prior to the experience and satisfaction; memorable and meaningful moments; connecting to others; and immersion and transformation.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods. This chapter explains my methodology, ethical considerations taken, and how the research was conducted. I explain how I selected participants, overview the interview guide, and the coding process in order to establish credibility and trust for the reader with regard to my process. A figure portraying the result of the coding process is included in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings. This chapter is a review of the empirical findings. There were four emergent themes arising from the coding of the interviews. These are divided into four sections. These sections are memorable experiences, expectations and satisfaction, connecting to others, and finally, immersion and personal change.

Chapter 5: Discussion. After having analysed the results, I present the nature of the experience of crossing the Finnmark plateau as well as what my case study adds to the literature on extraordinary experiences. I discuss my findings according to my literature review presented in chapter 2. I also present the elements that are important for skiers’ ability to transform into immersion. These elements are preparations and planning, risk and safety, and physical exercise. In sum, these elements enable people to experience short and long moments of immersion.

Chapter 6: Conclusion with a summary of the main findings.

Chapter 7: Reflections, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2 Theoretical framework

In this chapter, I present the literature that I reviewed, which related to my research question concerning extraordinary experiences. I commence with a brief literature review regarding experiences, relevant to my case study and also as a background to experiences being extraordinary. Second, I move on to my main literature review which focuses on extraordinary experiences. The available literature on extraordinary experiences is extensive. As a consequence, I have concentrated on characteristics relevant to my thesis in order to understand and analyse my participants' memories, meaning and the nature of their extraordinary skiing adventure in crossing the Finnmark plateau. Throughout this second section, I have essayed to explore and understand the concept of an extraordinary experience. Importantly, it is upon this review that I have based my findings and discussion in chapter 4 and 5.

2.1 Experiences

Extraordinary experiences are referred to as experiential (Abrahams, 1986; Arnould & Price, 1993; Hansen & Mossberg, 2013). Cohen (1979) proposed five types of tourist experience based on where the experience takes place and the importance of it. His modern tourist has personal and individual quests related to the "centre" (Cohen, 1979, p. 180). The tourist is searching for authenticity away from his/her normal life at home. Specifically, tourists want to move from the ordinary to the extraordinary (Abrahams, 1986). A tourist searches for "various types of leisure and recreational activity in which the individual finds release and relief" (Cohen, 1979, p. 181), and where interest in cultures, different to your own, is central. The experiential tourist is aware of their everyday life and wants to break free from the mundane and experience something new and authentic. In searching for new meaning, "it is often the sheer strangeness and novelty of other landscapes, lifeways and cultures which chiefly attract the tourist" (Cohen, 1979, p. 188).

In rethinking authentic tourist experiences, Wang (1999) discussed existential authenticity. What one finds authentic is often subjective and personal and differs from person to person. It is a social construction. Experiential authenticity requires a person to be physically and mentally present, in what he calls the "real world", and where nature can be one place to experience the "real self" (Wang, 1999, p. 351). In liberating from the ordinary world of everyday life to engage in non-ordinary activities away from home allows for a special state

of being. Existential authenticity allows one to be true to oneself, free from restricting social norms, and allows for joyous, spontaneous, and new experiences. “Nature tourism in particular, is an effective way used in search of authentic self” (Wang, 1999, p. 361), which involves bodily feelings and a search for identity. It is the nature of the activity, which facilitates the search for an authentic self. This encompasses a sense of newness, the ability of self-realisation, and enjoying yourself. Existential authenticity also includes spending valuable time with family members and forming relationships with others. Relationships are often formed without concern for social background or status, instead they are based on common interests and similar motivations for tourist experiences (Wang, 1999).

Enjoying yourselves in an extraordinary experience is often referred to as being in a liminal phase or a liminal state (Goolaup & Mossberg, 2017; Hansen & Mossberg, 2013). The tourist “leaves the ordinary world and leaps temporarily into the extraordinary liminal world before returning to the ordinary world again” (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013, p. 216). Liminality is an inter-structural situation in a structural world (Turner, 1996). It comes from *rites de passage* “transition between states” where the liminal phase is the stage in between, after separation and before aggregation (Turner, 1996, p. 509). During the liminal stage, you are moving from one condition to another. The condition can be physical, mental, or emotional, and transformational. Turner (1986) focused on the positive effects of liminality, which include personal growth, self-awareness, knowledge, and experience. People foster deep personal bonds and relationships with others in the liminal phase. All are equal without any concern for social background. Even after the rites, when returning home to the ordinary, these relations can last a lifetime. Liminality is a stage for reflection. People can let themselves go, sort out concerns and ideas of everyday, which might be resolved for when you return to the ordinary world. Liminality provides “a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence” (Turner, 1996, p. 521).

In their study on the dimensions of the tourist experience, Cutler and Carmichael (2010, p. 3) refer to the tourist experience as a “complicated psychological process”. Experiences are highly personal, subjective, and intangible. One is engaged in the experience at an emotional and physical level, and is left with memorable impressions (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). It can be said there are two levels of experience, one being in an actual experience, and the other, the memories one is left with after an experience. Cutler and Carmichael (2010) continue that in order to understand an experience you need to look at the tourists as individuals as well as the individuality in the destinations where the experiences take place.

Tourists seek self-identity, personal growth, and self-realisation, which can lead to transformation. They are motivated by escape, adventure, and recreation, and get satisfaction through physical interaction with the environment in which they are (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010).

As expressed by Cutler and Carmichael (2010), there is no simple process to understand the tourist or how to attract their attention. Within the experience economy, successful tourism companies focus on how they can create personalised and meaningful experiences to their visitors, and for which their customers will willingly pay (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). You need to actively engage customers, facilitate their immersion, evoke their emotions, and also facilitate memorable tourism experiences. Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 99) also purport that “experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level”. Attention by tourism companies to the nature of personalised and meaningful experiences increases the possibility of loyal customers and potential return visits.

An extraordinary experience is sometimes associated with flow, peak experience, and peak performance (Blumenthal, 2020). The terms have similarities like being out of the ordinary and immersion albeit they are separate concepts with different qualities (Arnould & Price, 1993; Hansen & Mossberg, 2013). All four are also experiential phenomena used to describe positive and subjective experiences. According to Privette (1983) flow, peak experience, and peak performance might appear in the same experience, with different views of the experience, but individually they might also be an experience of their own. Peak experience goes beyond the usual level of intense and meaningful moments. It is ecstatic. Peak performance might be a once in a life-time event. It happens when a person performs at his or her highest and with the highest intensity. The performance is referred to as superior or richest as it has drawn upon a person’s most profound abilities. Peak experience and peak performance are often achieved individually, they are not dependent on the sharing the experience with others. Flow is optimal enjoyment and fun, and it varies in strength from subtle joy to high intense happiness. The experience of flow is intrinsic, and you are instantly rewarded. Being in flow means you perform at your highest level simultaneously as being within your comfort zone (Privette, 1983). “Peak experience is mystic and transpersonal, peak performance is transactive, clearly focusing on self as well as the valued object, and flow is fun” (Privette, 1983, p. 1361).

In my case study, I chose to concentrate on extraordinary experiences. Subsequently, relevant related extant literature is overviewed next.

2.2 Extraordinary experiences

Over the last two decades, ‘experience’ as a topic, especially in tourism, has become more and more important (Duerden et al., 2018). Duerden et al. (2018) claim there has been, and still is, little conceptual clarity when it comes to the characteristics of an extraordinary experience, which is confirmed by many scholars (Carù & Cova, 2003; Duerden et al., 2018; Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015; Skandalis et al., 2019). Extraordinary is synonymous with exceptional (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012) and unforgettable experiences (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013). The hope is that leisure science scholars will help to clarify, and make it easier to understand and distinguish one extraordinary experience from another (Duerden et al., 2018).

Understanding what an extraordinary experience is, can provide a competitive advantage for tourism companies (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012). An extraordinary experience is “an experience where the nature of the objective elements is such that they attract and hold an individual’s attention thereby producing strong subjective reactions, exhibiting emotion, discovery, and change” (Duerden et al., 2018, p. 202). Ordinary experiences do not produce as strong, or as many outcomes as an extraordinary experience. Albeit they are both conscious experiences. Extraordinary experiences are more rare, and they have a higher impact (Duerden et al., 2018). Jefferies and Lepp (2012, p. 38) define extraordinary experiences as “those that are highly memorable, very special, emotionally charged and potentially life altering in that they may contribute to personal growth or renewal”. They are often physically demanding and require certain skills (Goolaup & Mossberg, 2017).

In his anthropology of experience, Abrahams (1986) discussed the dichotomy between ordinary and extraordinary experiences. Ordinary experiences are the flow and routine-like events of everyday. They are also meaningful, but less intense, and happen more regularly. The flow of ordinary activities becomes the norm of a person’s way of living and are often judged against bigger activities. An extraordinary experience represents an experience which stands out and gives a ‘high’ or a ‘low’, an escape from every day, which is worth talking about or telling someone, it is experiential. An experience is personal, and an account of your own perceptions. Having similar cultural background makes an experience understandable to others, and it becomes an experience when it is told, it has a beginning and an end (Abrahams,

1986). Extraordinary experiences are memorable, meaningful, intense, framed, spontaneous. They have moments of surprise and happen outside of the flow of everyday. They can be told as meaningful stories, and they offer the potential for transformation (Mei, Hågensen, & Kristiansen, 2018).

According to Arnould and Price (1993), an extraordinary experience is something out of the ordinary, it is personal, filled with joy, people get absorbed in the moment, and it is intense, which is different from an ordinary experience. Moreover, Arnould and Price (1993) reported that extraordinary experiences complement peoples' reflections of escaping from everyday life and collecting memories outside of that life. The three most important features of peoples' extraordinary experiences are communion with nature, connecting with people, renewed self-awareness, and personal growth. Further features include a sense of newness, feelings of mastering a new task, employing new skills, testing limits, and being outside your comfort zone. These are features known to outdoor adventures such as river rafting (Arnould & Price, 1993). The sense of newness of perception "refers to the idea that the extraordinary experience is different or novel and not repetitious, thus exposing participants to new processes and ways of thinking" (Rundio, Dixon, & Heere, 2020, p. 713). Learning through new ways of thinking might lead to transformation. The newness of an extraordinary activity also heightens the senses and emotional involvement, and might lead to moments of immersion (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013).

Outdoor adventures and nature are often the most important theme for an extraordinary experience. Nature and being outdoors can produce strong emotions, personal challenges, happiness, pain, fear, and excitement (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012). Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) found that the inner motivation for an extraordinary experience is enjoyment and pleasure.

People have both conscious and unconscious experiences (Carù & Cova, 2003; Duerden et al., 2018). Duerden et al. (2018) explain ordinary and extraordinary experiences as conscious experiences. Their findings suggests that extraordinary experiences only count for a few percentages in peoples' lives (Duerden et al., 2018). Whether experiences are ordinary or extraordinary will vary from individual to individual, primarily they are personal and subjective. Both ordinary and extraordinary experiences are of importance, but ordinary are the more common ones, the more every day, which do not necessarily leave long lasting memories. The extraordinary are memorable, meaningful, and transformational, and they

require physical and mental presence. Extraordinary experiences are further explained as being emotional, unique, provide the opportunity to discover, and the ability to change (Duerden et al., 2018). It is suggested that the more people are in peace and tranquillity in their everyday lives, the more they seek adventure and extraordinary experiences (Carù & Cova, 2003). Experiences can be positive or negative. Being negative, the memories and the transformation can be a traumatic experience (Duerden et al., 2018).

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sub-sections guided by the dimensions presented in Figure 1. According to Duerden et al. (2018, p. 196) an extraordinary experience is “memorable, meaningful, and transformational”. Further the experience is recognised for togetherness and connecting with others (Arnould & Price, 1993; Rundio et al., 2020) and with elements of preparation and planning (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012; Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015). Immersion is also a key element in an extraordinary experience (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013). These are particularly germane for the findings of my interviews as well as the nature of the extraordinary experience of crossing the Finnmark plateau. Figure 1 illustrates these four key dimensions of an extraordinary experience and elaborated in more detail in the following sub-sections. The first sub-section concerns expectations and satisfaction. This is followed by memorable and meaningful moments. The third sub-section focuses on connecting with others and the final sub-section addresses immersion and transformation.

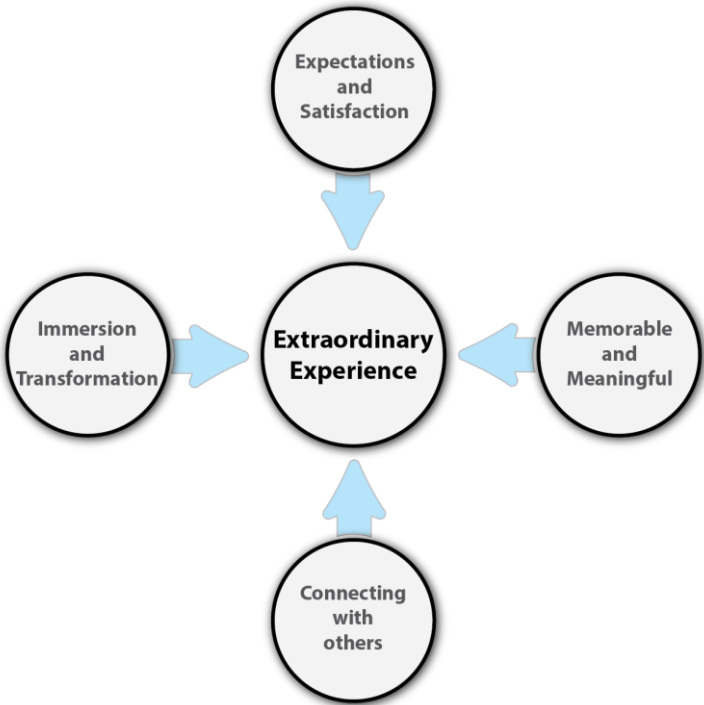


Figure 1 - Dimensions in an Extraordinary experience

2.2.1 Expectations and satisfaction

Important for participants in advance of engaging in an extraordinary experience are motivation, planning, and expectations, these are closely linked to satisfaction (Arnould & Price, 1993). Motivation has an impact on an experience, and hence the possibility for transformation (Rundio et al., 2020). According to Rundio et al. (2020), participants, who were cycling for cancer were motivated by the cause to make a difference, the outdoor adventure of the ride, just wanting to do it, communion with others, and the physical aspect of it. Motivation depended on their background, previous skills, and knowledge (Rundio et al., 2020). In a study of motivations for climbing Mount Everest, it was found that participants climbed solely for personal reasons, they all showed an individualistic mindset (Tumbat & Belk, 2011). Motivations were power based and included the grandiose personal achievement of standing on the top, to be able to tell your friends you did it, and to be categorised as the first in your country, the fastest to the top, or the youngest. None seemed to have a motivation or goal of succeeding in the climb in order to socialise or share the experience with someone. It was primarily a highly competitive experience (Tumbat & Belk, 2011).

Planning for an extraordinary experience is minimal. Extraordinary experiences are recognised as being “unplanned, spontaneous, and often surprising events” (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012, p. 44). Arnould & Price (1993) also suggest pre-trip planning is vague. While Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) suggest there might be a minimum of practical preparation, such as looking at maps, preparing for the adventure by reading brochures or information on the internet, and packing or buying equipment and luggage necessary for a trip.

People have different levels of expectations for an experience, and the degree of satisfaction can be measured against this level of expectation. Arnould and Price (1993) suggest that prior expectations to extraordinary experiences are vague and complex. Some explanations for this are the newness or level of risk of the activity, which leads to associated feelings of uncertainty. Further, it depends on a persons’ level of skills, experience, and knowledge about the activity and to what extent a person can predict what she or he will experience. Novelty and spontaneity, which describes the extraordinary, render people reluctant to have too high or too many expectations about the experience. Arnould and Price (1993, p. 29) found that “limited expectations contribute to satisfaction with the experience”. Skandalis et al. (2019) propose a stronger link between expectations and outcome. Because of familiarity and knowledge of what to expect, in their case a music event, “the accumulation of previous

experiences can lead to the development of clearer expectations” (Skandalis et al., 2019, p. 49). Participants cycling for cancer reported having vague expectations. They wanted it to be a spontaneous experience. They preserved the spontaneity by being open-minded and lowering their expectations (Rundio et al., 2020).

2.2.2 Memorable and meaningful moments

Experiences being memorable are very much related to research in tourism (Duerden et al., 2018). When people have good memories from an experience, it is likely it will lead to repeat activity. It is therefore important to understand what makes an experience memorable. Memorable moments are caused when people experience affect, emotional highs, forget about time and place, high involvement, novelty, meaning, local culture, and hospitality. Among these, strong emotions play an important part and produce long lasting memories (Duerden et al., 2018). Similarly with happiness, which often comes from extraordinary experiences (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). Further, interaction with different cultures is defined as memorable in extraordinary experiences associated with travel (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012). Furthermore, being memorable involves reflection on past experiences of how a person experienced nature and the beauty of the environment, and how that gave him or her intense feelings and emotions (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012).

Memories can be both positive and negative (Duerden et al., 2018). Bad memories can also produce strong emotions and lead to a negative extraordinary experience. If you experience pain, being scared, not managing to live up to expectations or coping with the environment, this might leave you with less positive memories about an experience. On the other hand, moments of negative memories do not have to destroy overall happiness, and hence positive perception of an extraordinary experience. A meaningful experience is both emotional and can make a person develop certain skills and increased knowledge, such as “appreciation for scenery...and love of nature” (Duerden et al., 2018, p. 204). Acquiring new skills and knowledge is done through being personally and physically present and by directly experiencing something, for example skiing across the Finnmark plateau. It might impact on a personal level because of engagement with feelings and senses at a deeper level with the environment in which a person finds themselves. Moreover, a meaningful experience might lead to transformation (Duerden et al., 2018).

2.2.3 Connecting with others

Communitas and connecting with others are regarded by some scholars as essential in extraordinary experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993). Arnould and Price (1993) in their research on river rafting refer to the rafting experience as hedonic and extraordinary. It is very much based on the communion and the bonds formed in sharing experiences, sharing success, learning new tasks, depending on each other, and bonding through teamwork. After the experience of river rafting, participants felt they grew closer to friends and family members through the challenges and pleasures of the extraordinary experience. They also made bonds with guides and new people whom they met during the adventure (Arnould & Price, 1993). One distinction of extraordinary from ordinary are “occasions to encourage the participation of a greater or lesser number of people in a common activity” (Abrahams, 1986, p. 69). A study on an extraordinary outdoor dining experience confirms that the experience would not have been the same without sharing it with friends or your loved ones. It is a special occasion, something you look forward to, you have fun, and you want to share it with someone (Goolaup & Mossberg, 2017).

Similarly, for the participants cycling across the North American continent, nature was important, but more important was connecting with fellow team members (Rundio et al., 2020). Cycling for 70 days, they got to know each other on a deep and personal level. They all cycled for the cause of cancer, which for some because they solely wanted to show their support, while others because they also had close family members that had died from cancer or had severe cancer. Team members formed strong bonds and deep attachment, which changed them on a personal level, both emotionally and intentionally. People developed new beliefs and wanted to change their ordinary life into something more meaningful.

In a long lasting wilderness canoeing experience, Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) found that connecting with others was most important for unskilled consumers. Because of their newness to the environment, they depended more on the company of others. For the skilled consumers, they felt safer and more comfortable, and did not rely so much on other’s company, they concentrated on transformation into immersion with nature (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015). Outdoor adventure can also foster conflict and tension between participants (Tumbat & Belk, 2011). Tumbat and Belk (2011) found that climbers to Mount Everest did not focus on social interaction. On the contrary, they had individualistic mindsets, were competitive, and wanted to pursue their personal and self-realisation goals. They deliberately stayed away from others,

focused on the task, and were rather hostile to strangers. Two of the reasons were first, to stay healthy and avoid illness, which would destroy the adventure, and second, they preferred privacy (Tumbat & Belk, 2011).

In a study on happiness in extraordinary experiences, it was found that happiness was not influenced by the company of others, family, or friends, which is often characteristic. Happiness was found to be more connected with the nature of the experience and definition of self (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). However, the contrary was proved to be important in a study of a large group of students travelling abroad. Sharing experiences with friends provided moments of joy and happiness, feelings of belonging and of togetherness, having someone to share the experience with during the holiday as well as memories to share when you returned home (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012).

2.2.4 Immersion and transformation

Discussion regarding the relationship between immersion and transformation remains open to further research (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015). That being said, both immersion and transformation are important characteristics for an extraordinary experience.

Immersion is one of the key elements in an extraordinary experience (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013). Hansen and Mossberg (2013) claim that it is important to consider different aspects of immersion if we are to understand an activity-based experience. To obtain immersion, you need to become personally and deeply involved, it is a “special temporal state of belonging in the world” (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013, p. 212). Skills and knowledge will influence how easily one become immersed. A skilled and experienced person will more quickly and more easily delve into an experience. While an unexperienced person might spend more time getting accustomed to and comfortable with the situation or the experience, before obtaining immersion. Hansen and Mossberg (2013) claim that transformation is a person’s ability to transform and to change into a state of immersion wherein “a successful transformation into the bubble may increase the likelihood of immersion” (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013, p. 216). One transforms between the ordinary and the extraordinary, “to be immersed and captivated, a tourist needs to step out of the ordinary” (Mossberg, 2008, p. 201). The emotional strength of immersion can vary between high and low.

Experiences are individual and personal and produce emotions. When consumers physically immerse in an experience, they are cognitively moved by their emotions, and “through

accumulation of experience and thus knowledge” people might experience transformation (Carù & Cova, 2003, p. 269). Immersion involves a person’s ability and skills in leaving the ordinary and being one with the experience (Carù & Cova, 2006). When your memory is triggered by strong and intense events, it becomes a memorable extraordinary experience (Carù & Cova, 2003). This is further supported by Blumenthal (2020) who studied an activity-based experience in an enclosed escape room. Blumenthal (2020) found the participants depended on teamwork, and that the event was intense and quite challenging-based. Though, the outcome depended on individual expectations and their level of expectation. Participants immersed in what they found was a powerful experience feeling a loss of self.

For some social scientists, if we are to understand what goes on when people actively engage in extraordinary experiences when outdoors and in nature, they believe participants go beyond just immersion (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015). In particular, Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) studied participants and how they experienced transformation moving in and out of immersion during extraordinary experiences. They used the term transformative experiences “to refer to the experiences that consumers undergo during the switch between various interpretive positions in a consumption experience” (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015, p. 250). Immersion can be both a positive experience and a struggle. Their study showed that some people found it hard to cope with fellow travellers, others worried about things back home or strived to cope with mastering the challenges of the activity. On the other hand, others managed to immerse with nature, the environment, with the physical challenges, and with the companionship. Such alternate impacts support transformation. Leaving your safe home environment to spend several days in nature, requires change of self and the ability to customise. Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) argued that participants need to have experienced transformation to call it an outdoor adventure. They found determinants like skills and knowledge to be important for transformation. Whereas the unskilled participants faced challenges coping with new tasks, and found comfort being in a group. Skilled participants faced environments more familiar to them, and were more in line with nature, rather than relied so much on the company of others. Since the skilled were already familiar with their environment, they might also have a harder time putting the worries of everyday behind (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015). Extraordinary experiences can thus be both rewarding and challenging.

Outdoor adventure and extraordinary experiences give participants the opportunity to learn new tasks, master new skills, test physical and mental limits and abilities, and challenge comfort zones. These can be positive but challenging and create personal growth, facilitate renewal of self, and transformation (Arnould & Price, 1993). Transformation happens when an experience is both memorable and meaningful (Duerden et al., 2018). Duerden et al. (2018) referred to intense personal struggle and critical events as causes for transformation, which leads to personal development and increased self-awareness. Transformations are individual and unique. Further, transformative signs might be “radically new values, beliefs, and most important, new behaviours” (Duerden et al., 2018, p. 206). While all experiences are meaningful, intensity signifies the extraordinary and leads to an expectation of transformation (Abrahams, 1986). Transformation can also come from pure joyous and pleasant experiences. Such as by immersing in an extraordinary outdoor dining experience, where “the tourists’ are expected to return back transformed and renewed to the ordinary life” (Goolaup & Mossberg, 2017, p. 30). Goolaup and Mossberg (2017) studied an exclusive outdoor dining experience where participants actively participated in making their own meal. Transformations were such as identity building and that they generated new insights, through learning about oysters and the local history of the place. According to their findings it was an intrinsically enjoyable and an out of the ordinary dining experience, it was unique and memorable.

Rundio et al. (2020) strongly emphasise that some extraordinary experiences can change your life forever. This was found after examining extraordinary experiences and personal transformations following a 70-days cycling ride across the North American continent. As previously mentioned, participants cycled for the cause of cancer, which they found meaningful. Returning home, and in the time that followed, many of the participants changed their lifestyle, their career path, their social views, and some started studying, they chose new rather life changing directions (Rundio et al., 2020). These transformations meant that people challenged their self-view and definition about themselves. They learned and experienced something that made them change direction in life choices and opinions about themselves, and others. They took deliberate action to transform. The event was unusual, the experience was emotionally intense, people felt connection to nature, and group dedication. People shared personal stories, experienced personal growth learning new skills, and they felt empowered. Being away enabled them to separate from the ordinary, they felt disconnected from home, and some found it hard to return to everyday life. They found that “new perspectives contributed to their personal transformation” (Rundio et al., 2020, p. 713).

Having provided insights into extant literature related to experiences and extraordinary experiences and my case study, in the next chapter I explain my methodology, the ethical considerations I took, and the methods I used to conduct my research. Later, in chapters 4 and 5, I respectively present my findings, and my discussion.

3 Methodology and methods

3.1 Methodology

The social world is unpredictable, people see the world differently, and the study of social phenomena is exciting and fascinating. There are “different ways of knowing” (Moses & Knutsen, 2012, p. 1). A scholar’s methodological choice is the way he or she chooses to study this world. Methods are the techniques used to collect material and to gain knowledge and understanding. Methodology includes such things as “sampling, gaining entrée, resolving ethical concerns, and maintaining relationships in the field” (Bailey, 2007, p. 63). On an imagined continuum of methodological paradigms, a researcher is normally either on the naturalist end or on the constructivist end. This is a simple way of dividing the two, because there are variations in between, with different views on how one chooses to study the social world (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). Naturalists and constructivists might share some techniques or tools to gain knowledge, but they have different ontological views (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). The naturalist or positivist will explain the truth, while a constructivist will seek to understand. The reality of the latter is local and specific and consists of social facts. Social facts being “representations, feelings and actions that are not only general (in the sense of being shared by individuals) but also external to individuals, and which exercise coercive power over them” (Baert, 2005, p. 23). Methodology and methods will reveal a researcher’s position and view on the world, and how he or she has gained knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

A constructivist believes reality can be explained in different ways, and that knowledge is produced in the meeting between the interviewer and the interviewee (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Findings are created in the process, and it is important being a facilitator of a respondent’s “reconstruction of his or her own construction” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115). Trustworthiness informs the quality of research, ethics are intrinsic, and values are produced in the process of moving towards increased knowledge and understanding.

The method of abduction is one way to achieve understanding. It starts from empirical data, in light of existing theory, and works its way through the empirical material (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). In this case study, it has been used to achieve understanding about the underlying patterns of skiers’ extraordinary experiences in crossing the Finnmark plateau. Abduction is a hermeneutical process of working forth and back, between the interview

material and with previous theory, increasing knowledge and understanding, and advancing on previous theory (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Walters, 2016). The method used for interpreting my empirical material was a thematic analysis approach. According to Esfehiani and Walters (2018) this is a useful tool in tourism research and should be used with rigour. It is a way to unpack written material and let meaning unfold itself through working forth and back “capturing the nuances and deeper meanings interpreted in the representations” (Walters, 2016, p. 109) of skiers, who participated in my study and their extraordinary experiences.

In the process of developing understanding, it has been important, as according to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009), to be a reflexive practitioner. A reflexive practitioner is self-critical and aware of the power and trust relationship that might be inflicted on participants (Killion & Fisher, 2018). In assessing the empirical materials, one needs to be open minded and try to find new ways of understanding. Being reflexive means challenging oneself and trying not to let your personal views and beliefs get in the way of new knowledge. A researcher must critically think through “a set of interpretive possibilities for assessing what the material is about and for what purposes it can be used” (Alvesson, 2011, p. 5). It is important to consider what type of participants one wants to invite into a project, what type of knowledge and background you are looking for, what questions to ask, and what methods are appropriate in order to achieve the aims of the research.

In parts of this thesis, it has been natural for me writing in first person. This was to “give voice to my interpretations, constructs, and understanding” (Killion & Fisher, 2018, p. 8). I also give voice to the participants by naming the quotes in my findings, using pseudonyms. To be respectful of both genders and when referring to what could be either he or she, they are referred to as s(he) in the text.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how I conducted my research, and how I gained knowledge and understanding. It has been important to present relevant and reviewed literature related to extraordinary experiences, how I worked with the empirical material, the methods used, and the structure of my coding processes. My aim was to create what Walters (2016, p. 115) calls “credibility” and “dependability” with respect to the material, the content, and working processes. I wanted to study people’s experiences, learn from them, and compare these to how it was previously understood in academia. It has been fascinating to engage as a

researcher, to meet and interview people, hear their interpretations of their experiences, and compare findings with theoretical concepts.

The remainder of this chapter addresses considerations regarding ethics during work on this thesis. Then, I provide insights into my interest in my research topic. This is followed by an introduction to the participants, an explanation of the interview process as well as further information regarding my interview guide. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of my coding process.

3.1.1 Ethical considerations

One of the aims in writing this Master's thesis was to gain new knowledge and richer insights. I have read and followed the guidelines from The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee (NESH) (2020). In working on this thesis, it has been important for me to pay attention to ethical reflection, discretion, and good scientific practice. It has also been important to show openness, trustworthiness, and provide relevant knowledge.

The project was registered with the Norwegian centre for research data (NSD) (2021) in November 2020, and I have worked in accordance with their guidelines. A letter of information and a consent form was sent by email to all participants. As per Bailey's (2007) recommendations, these provided a short introduction to the topic of the thesis, information about the process, and informed them about their rights to withdraw at any moment and that all information would be kept confidential. The letters are attached as appendices (Appendix B and C). All respondents confirmed receipt of the two documents and agreed to participate. Currently, all signatures, transcriptions, and personal information, are stored safely and only for my personal use. This information will be deleted as soon as the thesis is accepted both by the University and NSD (2021).

As, referred to by Bailey (2007), it is and was important not to cause any damage or harm to any parties involved or influenced by this thesis. In the interviews, people talked about and mentioned names of hosts, cabins, names of friends, and people whom they had met. None of the names are repeated in any of the texts, and all third parties are anonymously presented. This is out of respect and because they have no way of defending what is being said. I am aware that when the interviewees read the thesis, they might recognise their own quotes, but quotes will be anonymous to others. I have considered this as acceptable. All transcribed material is in the original language Norwegian. When quotes are used, they were translated

into English and written the way they were articulated, in accordance with guidelines from NESH (2020). Finding myself in the constructivist paradigm, such ethics are intrinsic “because of the inclusion of the participant values in the inquiry...it requires attention to confidentiality and anonymity” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115).

3.2 Methods

There are many ways to study people, and many methods to choose from within qualitative research. Ethnography is an “attempt to understand another life world using the self – as much as possible – as the instrument of knowing” (Ortner, 2006, p. 42). Qualitative research belongs to ethnography (Killion & Fisher, 2018). Qualitative research is part of a constructivist way of seeing the world and the ways s(he) studies social phenomena. I wanted to interpret and understand different people’s behavior. I see interviewing as part of my presence in the field and as part of my practice. It is a way to collect empirical material. It will allow me to recognise and describe what meaning skiers ascribe to the processes of their experiences.

3.2.1 The crossing of the Finnmark plateau

In easter 2020, I was going to ski from Alta to Karasjok with two friends flying up from Oslo. I was really looking forward to this 4-day crossing, and I was also a bit anxious. Having lived in Alta only for a short while, hearing the different stories about the Finnmark plateau as well as experiencing how harsh the weather conditions can be in the north made me both a bit nervous and excited. Especially, since the weather can change fast on the plateau. The three of us talked a lot about what to bring, what to wear, if we were fit for the crossing, and not least, we needed to do quite a lot of research and planning regarding logistics. I did not know too many people here at the time, and transport to and from was something that was difficult to solve. But in the end, we had it all booked and worked out, and were ready to go.

Then, one month prior to our adventure, Covid-19 hit, and we were prevented from going. This was a great disappointment to us all. Also, it was additionally disappointing for me because it was to have been the topic of my thesis. Initially, I had planned to combine autoethnography and participant observation. Subsequently, new decisions needed to be made. I was still eager and fascinated to learn about the experience of crossing the Finnmark plateau. The solution was to interview other people that had already completed the crossing.

In accordance with Moses and Knutsen (2012), I wanted to gain knowledge and an overall understanding of the nature of people's extraordinary experiences crossing the Finnmark plateau.

3.2.2 Selecting participants

In order to develop knowledge and insight of peoples' extraordinary experiences skiing across the Finnmark plateau, I purposefully searched for people who had previously completed this trip. My aim was to locate people who had completed the crossing on their own, alone or in company with others, and had not participated in an organised tour. To be included in my study, all had to have had in common that they planned the crossing on their own and were responsible for their own safety. While not deliberate, most were all skilled and experienced skiers. They came from different social backgrounds, they emphasised different highs and lows, and had different perceptions of what made it meaningful. Eleven people were interviewed, these were two men and nine women. Half of them lived in Finnmark and the rest in the south of Norway between Stavanger and Oslo. Ages ranged between 45 to 60 years old. Among my interviewees, three experienced it on their own, the rest were in pairs or in groups with three or more people. Most skied with friends, and sometimes family. Two groups were a mix of people some of whom were new to each other. The crossings of the Finnmark plateau usually took place in the months of March, April, and May. The first crossing occurred in 1980 and the last in the winter of 2020. Albeit the majority of the adventures happened within the last four years.

I got in touch with my interviewees by talking to friends and acquaintances who were eager skiers. The interviewees were friends of friends, friends' relatives, and people known to friends that were eager skiers and had been skiing across the plateau. This method of contacting potential interviewees is known as snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). All the interviews were agreed upon before the process of interviewing started. When first getting in touch with the participants, I used phone contact. All participants were given a short explanation about the project and asked if they would be interested in participating in an interview. Second, they were sent an email including the information letter and the letter of consent and asked an appropriate time and 'place' for an interview. As previously mentioned, the letter of consent and the information letter are included in Appendix B and C. Half of the people, I interviewed in person and the rest were interviewed online via Teams. I had hoped to meet everyone and be physically present and face-to-face, since this, also according to

Alvesson (2011), is the best way to interview people and to establish a good and safe environment for the interview process. But meeting online face-to-face proved to be a good way as well to establish good relations. During the interview experiences, respondents were open and spoke freely, and there was as much energy and emotions online as when I interviewed participants in person.

Throughout the research that informs this thesis, interviewees are referred to as participants, respondents, people, and skiers. When quotes or vignettes are used, these are referred to by pseudonyms. This, as in line with Alvesson (2011), personalises the quotes and the findings become more meaningful. The vignettes are there to underpin and add validity to the findings and to create a connection to the interviewees.

3.2.3 Semi-structured interviews

There are different ways of acquiring knowledge. Since participant observation was prevented by Covid-19 restrictions, personal and face-to-face interviews were the best ways to construct valuable information, develop knowledge and foster understanding. Experiences are personal and complex, and you want as much information as possible from interviewees. To get rich accounts, semi-structured and open-ended interviews were chosen. In order to interpret and understand peoples' meaning making processes of their experiences, this was the most effective way to achieve the purpose of inquiry and the aim of my project. The interview process has been a "reconstruction of the social reality" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 10) of my interviewees, which entailed interpreting, advancing and creating new meaning based on their narratives. Semi-structured meant the interviews were loosely structured towards the aim of the thesis, but open ended to allow for rich and in-depth information. This allowed for more answers which added to the production of knowledge. I had a loose structure for the interviews, meaning as Bailey (2007) advised researchers, that I was not dependent on following the order of the questions. Depending on the flow in an interview, I could easily change questions around. The structure was flexible. I had probing questions so I could follow up on areas that were of special interest and which were valuable for my research. I thought about how I was going to be a patient and conscious listener and wanted to establish a trustful relationship with my interviewees. If one wants to achieve new understanding and new knowledge, it is important to spend time with, and encourage and allow respondents to talk freely and openly in order for new knowledge to reveal itself.

A theoretical understanding acts as a foundation for the questions asked of the participants. But importantly, as Alvesson (2011) advises, I tried to enable participants to open up about as much of the context as possible to develop and let in new and increased understanding based on people's personal experiences and interpretations. I tried to leave theory behind and be as open as possible to what unfolded in the interviews for new visions, insight, and conceptions to emerge. I learned the questions by heart, so concentration could be paid to listening, paying attention, and posing my questions naturally as stories unfolded. The course of the interviews was a learning process and allowed me to improve. After the initial interviews, I learned to relax and be more patient, focusing on not letting my personal views and experience get in the way, letting interviewees speak freely, and allowing time for pauses to increase reflection and more answers.

The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour and 18 minutes. I fully transcribed all interviews immediately following their conclusions while they were fresh in mind. The process of transcribing took on average six hours for each interview. Separate documents were kept for each interview as a backup, and all interviews were then collected in one big document for the coding process and analysis. All the interviews were conducted and transcribed within a period of three weeks. When the 11th interview was performed, I felt there was a certain saturation. All interviewees added personal and specific happenings to their stories, but some of the findings were repeated, and there was enough material to proceed work on in order to achieve an overall understanding. This was also partly due to the time limit and the size of my project, and I had to weigh the time I had left for the different parts of my thesis writing.

All interviews were recorded and stored in the software program Audacity and labelled anonymously. As already noted, the interviews will be deleted together with transcriptions when the thesis is submitted and approved. I paid attention to keeping the recorder turned on till I was sure we were due to conclude interviews. As the interviews came to end, I found many were eager to tell me more, and sometimes added extra useful and valuable information. For each interview, there were between eight and 12 pages of written raw material, and the total mounted to 89 pages. Following the recommendations of Esfehiani and Walters (2018) and Kvale (1996), each interview was thoroughly transcribed, in verbatim form, and emotions were added in parentheses when this was appropriate. I took it as a sign of emphasis when interviewees talked in a higher tone of voice, articulated memories with excitement and repeated certain words or feelings over and over again.

My position and view on interviewing were that of “romanticism” or “emotionalism” (Alvesson, 2011, pp. 13-14). Meaning, I tried to establish trust and to be personal, to come as close to interviewees as possible, to facilitate their talking about their authentic experiences, how they felt, and their reconstructions and understandings of what they experienced. Subsequently, participants shared sensitive information, talked about the many memories from their experiences, they expressed both fear and excitement, and they shared their interpretation of the culture on the Finnmark plateau. Their knowledge and experience were valuable and helped in the understanding and interpretation of this extraordinary experience.

3.2.4 Interview guide

In preparation for my interviews, I started work on the interview guide. I conducted a pilot interview in May 2020 with a girl, who had just come back from her skiing experience of the crossing from Alta to Karasjok. This was good practice in order to check my questions and to become familiar with the interview situation while simultaneously improving the guide and preparing for more interviews. The knowledge and experience from this interview, coupled with a theoretical understanding, allowed me to form my questions and to improve and adjust the interview guide. The interview guide is included in Appendix A. I divided the questions into three main parts, pre-trip and preparations, the nature of the experience, and questions relating to what stood out as particularly memorable about the crossing when looking back in time. During the first interviews, the guide was adjusted a few times to make sure to allow for rich accounts and answers based on participants’ experiences and that pointed towards the aim of my thesis. The interview guide was dynamic. Every interview took different directions, and the guide could not be strictly followed. People had different ways of telling their stories. As Alvesson (2011) advises, concentration was required and questions adjusted accordingly to gather valuable information, and which was of significance to me. Since questions were semi-structured and open ended, they were meant to allow for people to cover what they found most meaningful and relevant.

The interview guide consisted of 18 questions, of which some required short answers and others allowed for deeper and longer answers. Sometimes, people talked freely and naturally and covered many of the questions on their own, others required more prompts, and only gave short answers, and these needed more follow up. The questions were there as a guideline. The participants were not familiar with the questions before the interviews. When we sat down or met online, they were given a short introduction to the subject of the thesis and the main

themes to be covered in the interview. According to Alvesson (2011), this allows participants to relax and be comfortable with what to expect. At the end of the interviews, they were all asked if they had anything they would like to add, or which we had not covered.

3.2.5 Coding of interviews

The use of thematic analysis facilitate the finding of answers, the generation of new knowledge and insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Walters, 2016), which in my case related to extraordinary experiences in crossing the Finnmark plateau. I have tried to be open for new ideas as well as to form an overall and complete understanding garnered from the interviews. Through the interviews, new knowledge was gained from participants' separate adventures, and from the meaning the skiers ascribed to their experiences. Based on the interviews as well as seeing the interviews as a whole, I endeavored to come up with new conceptualisations for this specific extraordinary experience of skiing.

For the coding process, a note of attributes known to skiers' extraordinary experiences was produced and coded with numbers. The numbers were random as the attributes were more indicative. The codes that were produced facilitated my navigation of the interview material. The codes and attributes were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. These are attached in Appendix D. More codes and attributes were added as the participants' stories unfolded. At the end of the process, the interviews provided 27 codes for different attributes and some codes for practical use, these were numbered from E01 (E for experience) to E27. While listening to, and transcribing the first interview, I played with placing these codes into the text simultaneously while I was writing. When the process of transcribing was done, a check was undertaken to see if the codes could easily be retrieved. Further, I checked to see that the codes were used in a way that could provide valuable information and that the context or phrases were useful. After testing the codes, refining, and adjusting the material in the first interview, this procedure was then used to code the rest of the interviews.

Each interview was transcribed in separate Word documents. Finally, all the interviews were collected in one large document and the process of coding was finalised. While reading through and coding, I often found several codes could be collated under the same statements or grouped together as they pointed towards some main themes in the participants' stories. In working my way through the material, certain aspects around the experiences were repeated or talked about in different ways by different people and appeared and emerged as more important than others. A picture of the experience started to present itself, as explained by

Alvesson (2011, p. 1): “data are presumed to guide researchers to understand specific phenomena and develop theory”.

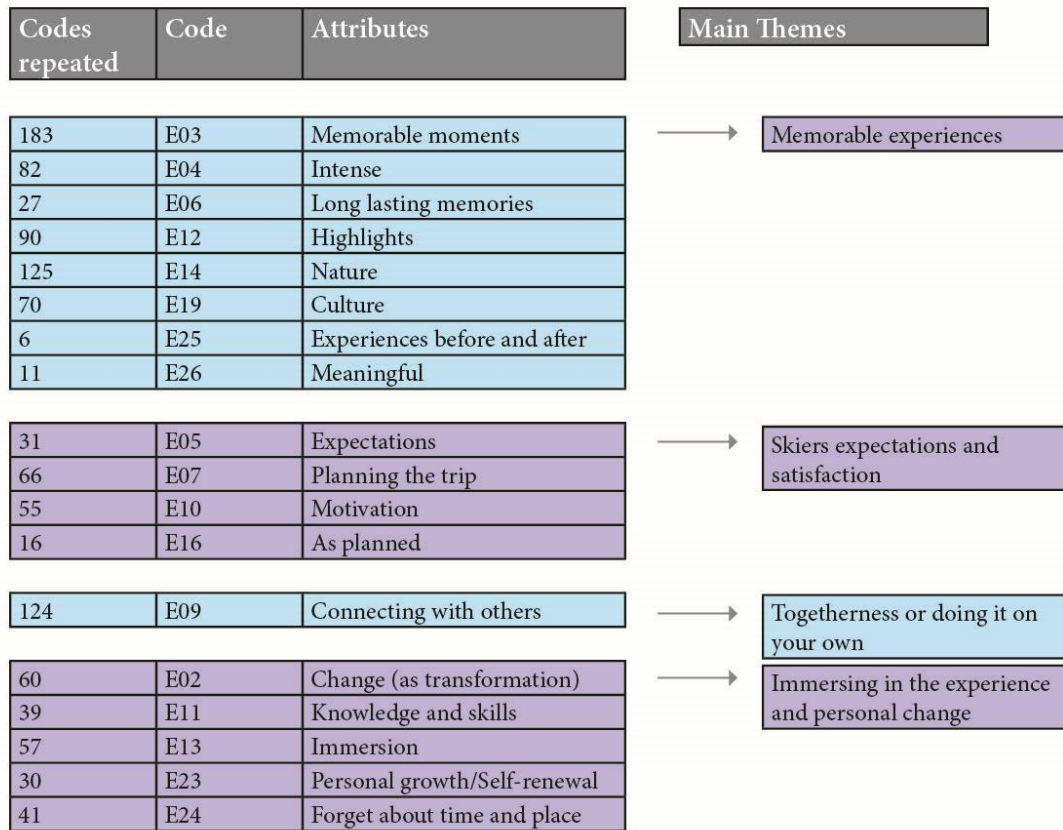


Figure 2 - Dimensions of skiers' Extraordinary experiences

It was a process of working forth and back between the codes and the text, comparing codes, being critical of what participants told me, checking the material to see if more codes needed to be added, in order to gain an understanding. It was a hermeneutical process (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Esfehni & Walters, 2018). I worked my way through the interview materials, trying to find similarities, dissimilarities, intra-relationships, making sense of the material, and trying to understand what made the crossing an extraordinary experience. This inductive way of working allowed me to reflect and be open for new meaning, and at the end of the process I ended up with four emergent categories. These four categories are memorable experiences, skiers' expectations and satisfaction, togetherness or doing it on your own, and immersing in the experience and personal change. These are all important elements of the

participants' perception of their extraordinary experience. Figure 2 presents the main themes. These themes were also used to structure the findings chapter. The figure also shows the codes and attributes connected to the main themes, and the number of times the codes were repeated in the interview material.

While most of the initial attributes were organised into four main categories, some of my codes represented commonalities and others I found vague or irrelevant, these were either collected under the main themes or left out. All the codes are included in appendix D.

Throughout the process of working on my thesis, as Walters (2016) advises, I have read through the interview material several times to search for new insights and have paid attention to all data in order to inform my understanding. I have also kept a scrapbook with me at all times where I have made notes to myself, things to remember, drawn mind maps, questions, issues for follow up, and ideas that had sprung to my mind as the process evolved. Making drawings and figures as mind maps facilitated my conceptualising and clustering. Revisiting the notes proved valuable many times and helped in the process of working on the thesis.

In the next chapter, chapter 5, I present my findings. Following chapter 5, is chapter 6, wherein I discuss my findings.

4 Findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings of skiers' extraordinary experiences in crossing the Finnmark plateau. Their stories are discussed in the order that emerged as the most important to them when they were talking about their experiences on the plateau. In chapter 3, I introduced the four main themes generated from the coding of my interviews. Those four themes were presented in Figure 2. The different headings that encapsulate those themes are used to structure the content of this chapter. Those headings are skiers' memorable experiences; their expectations and satisfaction; togetherness or doing it on your own, and finally, immersing in the experience and personal change. These are all important elements in the extraordinary experiences of crossing the Finnmark plateau.

4.1 Memorable experiences

For all the participants, the entire journey was very memorable, and they were able to tell me about numerous memorable moments. Some moments stood out as intense. Albeit the moments varied in intensity from joyous to particularly memorable. The participants were all very happy and emotional when they told me about their memories. They all gladly shared their memories with me, and said they had extraordinary experiences.

Common to all participants was a shared love of nature and the physical presence of skiing in this outdoor skiing adventure. This was repeated and talked about throughout the interviews. The participants felt a strong connection with nature, appreciation of immersions in an endless white wilderness, the weather being at its best, the beauty of the frosty environment, the shifting lights, the Northern lights, sunshine, beautiful white snow, skiing long distances, and just enjoying being in the moment.

Words that expressed positive emotions of connecting with nature was that it was beautiful, magical, fantastic, grandiose, fascinating, like a fairy tale, wild, and epic. And it gave them feelings of quietness, tranquillity, joy, happiness, excitement, time for meditation, and for reflection.

“The air was so fresh, it was so clean, it was unbelievable (...) it was starlight, and moonshine, and I was out there alone. It was kind of spooky, I asked myself if there were any wolves (...) but it was wonderful and freezing cold. I think it was minus nineteen in the middle of the night. The trees had thick frost on them, it was fantastic” (Ingebjørg).

The Finnmark plateau was for all a unique and special nature experience. It was evident that nature was the main motivation for this outdoor adventure. Some had had the crossing on their bucket list or as something they had always wanted to do. Although people experienced bad weather on parts of the trip, they remember with awe the days and hours when they had good weather. When experiencing bad weather, they only felt even more lucky when the sun was shining.

“It is the location, so far north, it is quite special. Especially the nature, quite exotic really”
(Fabian).

One of the participants told me how she and her group walked twice as much as first planned on the second day of their trip. They enjoyed the moment so much. They walked slowly to immerse in the moment. This was due to the beautiful weather, the colours of the environment. The motivation to keep on walking was so they could be outside for sunset, and because the skiing experience was so pleasurable. They kept on and forgot about being tired.

One experienced downhill skier, said she enjoyed the pleasure of powder, fresh untouched snow, on her last day of skiing down to Ássebákti. This gave her a real thrill. All the skiers experienced many intense moments with nature.

“I have a strong feeling about this trip. The experiences are grandiose (...) my friend and I, we just looked at each other and screamed, Yeaayy, we made it” (Jeanette).

Lake Iešjávri was central in many of the stories told. This vast, open, white lake has an endless view. People had both anticipated the stretch and were excited about it. They talked about it being lengthy, beautiful, and breath taking. One woman told how she used to count the marks across the lake, that way she knew how far she was, and could easier cope with getting across. Many talked about how they did not meet anyone across the whole lake, and the only small interruption on the map and in the landscape, was a tiny island rising in the middle of the lake. It was a natural place for people to stop and have lunch. Most people had a great experience crossing the lake. A few talked about it as hard. One of my informants met someone else at the island that had had an accident and hurt themselves and were waiting to be rescued. Another one of my informants walked across with blisters and were in pain. The weather also made an impact on their experience. For the ones that had no wind and only sunshine, it was great, while others experienced worse weather, which made it more unpleasant, having nowhere to get shelter from. Another woman and her group came across a

storm. Their experience turned into a nightmare. The weather prevented them from skiing further. The marks had blown away, and they had to stop and wait for rescue. Because of the wind, the snow, and everything being white, they experienced white out, which makes you dizzy and plays with your brain. They felt that the ground, which was flat, seemed like it was tipping, and they physically fell over. I will come back to this special experience when this woman talks about the challenge of being with people less experienced, in the third section, connecting with others.

Another woman had been across the Finnmark plateau so many times, yet still continues to enjoy it so much. She thinks that she must have been a reindeer in her past life. She had so many stories regarding the extraordinary nature of and outdoor experiences she had had on the Finnmark plateau. She was deeply and profoundly happy to be living in close proximity to this area. A few of my interviewees had also completed the crossing several times. All remember the first one as the most extraordinary.

Another element central in all the stories about the Finnmark plateau was the cultural aspect of the plateau. Both for those already living in Finnmark and others travelling here. The informants living in Finnmark talked about their experiences at the different cabins and the food they brought and prepared, which was a cultural thing. The ones from the south, met with a culture different to their own. They were all very excited to talk about this cultural aspect. People from the south especially appreciated meeting with locals from the north, Sami people, learning about the local tradition with scooters that they did not recognise from the south. The openness and curiosity from locals were a positive experience for many.

“I think it was the culture, and that it was so open, I think, such grandeur of nature (...) yes, it was that, the nature, the culture, and the fact that I finally got there, yes” (Katrine).

One participant in particular had many encounters with local culture. She met so many different people from the area during her crossing. She was offered tips on how to ski, and how to prepare for what she could meet and experience across the plateau. She was offered help, and transport and she was overwhelmed by the openness and the extraordinary friendliness of everyone she met. She said she was offered dried reindeer heart at every place she stopped, which she had never tasted before. She and a friend who came from southern Norway enjoyed the novelty of this dried meat, especially because it was a cultural food in Finnmark. She laughed when she told me how they were served reindeer stew every night at

every cabin they stayed in. She laughed only because she enjoyed it and found it a curiosity. The encounters with local culture, so different to her own, made this experience memorable and extraordinary.

Everybody talked about the pleasure of arriving at the cabins after a long day of skiing. Especially after Lake Iešjávri, which was the day with the longest distance. The local culture was very much a part of making the adventure both meaningful and memorable. People talked a lot about the service and hospitality and the ways they were welcomed. The participants were in a remote environment, and at day's end finally arrived at a cabin in the middle of nowhere. At these cabins, they received different welcomes ranging from very hospitable, which was most frequent, to a non-welcoming feeling of being more of a nuisance. One woman said they had asked for a cup of coffee when they finally arrived after a long day of skiing, but were met with what she took as unfriendliness, and reluctance to be served anything until supper in the evening.

“We arrived at (this cabin). It was kind of a shock when we first arrived, it looked like a deserted place without people. While walking around the place a person opened a window from inside the cabin. The person was kind of introvert, and would not let us in. We asked for a cup of coffee. First the person hesitated, things were not ready yet, but okay then...I will make you a cup of coffee then..., it was kind of a curiosity” (Ingebjørg).

All the interviewees had different stories about the cabins and the hosts. And their impression of the cabins, the history, how remote it seemed, the hosts living far from people and on their own most of the year, being eight months alone and a few months, maybe only three, welcoming tourists. Participants reflected on how this must be a big change for them and how that influenced how the cabin hosts behaved. Participants told me the nature of the hospitality made the crossing unforgettable and added an extra aspect to the nature of the experience. Most people had positive encounters and rewarded the hosts at the cabins for being welcoming, giving their best, and providing for the skiers. People appreciated the smaller things. They did not have great expectations about what kind of food they got, they enjoyed any meal, like the traditional Sami dish Bidos or porridge for breakfast. People had a big appetite after a long day of skiing and being outdoors in the fresh air.

“And then it was reindeer stew, and then dessert. It was mulberries from the Finnmark plateau. It is the biggest portion I have ever seen, we could just delve in, they had plenty of it,

it was extremely tasty. Food tastes exquisite when you have been skiing all day long, and it was homemade, really good” (Ingebjørg).

There were many curious stories about the hosts’ behaviour, which were told in the way that they were not surprised, that while it would not be acceptable in other places, it was the way it was out here on the plateau. One interviewee talked about arriving at one of the cabins late in the season. The host did not open the door but appeared in the window. The interviewee was first asked if they had a reservation, if not they were not going to be let in. The host became more hospitable when my interviewee said they had already booked accommodation. Then the host said they had run out of food but managed to find what seemed like leftovers. The interviewee was very surprised about this, but kind of pleasantly surprised because of the setting, and it made the whole experience a positive and memorable one. In the end, they were properly fed and had a very pleasant stay.

One skier mentioned that you never know if you are going to be put in a room with strangers. You need to expect this when you stay at these cabins. But the event and the circumstances at the plateau makes this a pleasant meeting, because it is the culture on the plateau, up here you are all the same, it is expected, and you share the same experience. You enjoy yourselves, and people are friendly towards each other. She said you would never accept being put in a room with a stranger in an ordinary hotel in a city.

Nature and the culture were what people talked about as generating the highest emotional joy. But there were many other memorable moments. Most people talked about only good memories, some had both good and bad memories. However, mostly there were very good memories, but there were also stories of negative, painful, and even severe ones.

One of the skiers had an especially severe experience being close to death. She had intense moments of being scared, which was traumatic for her. She talked about how close to death she was. Luckily, it ended well, and she suffered no pain or mental illness after the incident. She explained in detail what happened when a severe weather change hit them, an explosion of a sudden polar pressure which changed the weather dramatically. She also told how she started out with long hair and at the end of the trip she had short hair, which she laughed about when she talked about it. From the wind and storm out on Lake Iešjávri, snow and ice were stuck to her head and her hair. It would just not melt. She used the doorframe in the

cabin to bang the door against her hair to get freed from the ice. This caused her hair to break. The whole incident was severe and rare.

“I remember that I felt I was freezing to death (...) then I remember I fell in and out of sleep (...) 4 hours in that cold storm, seeing nothing, getting white out, it was a hell to say it straight, it was a nightmare (...) from when I felt I was burning, you know you have about ten minutes left to live, or a maximum ten minutes left to live” (Grete).

What most people encountered was blisters, painful feet, tiredness, feeling exhausted, and being hungry. These feelings can be intense and interrupt the joy of walking. One skier had been walking for four hours before she came to Lake Iešjávri. Then she experienced big blisters and severe pain. This pain and the long walk figure as a strong memory in her recollection. She walked in pain across the whole of Lake Iešjávri which constituted most of the day’s journey. Despite painful moments and many hours walking across Lake Iešjávri with blisters, she found the overall experience as extraordinary.

“I walked across Iešjávri and was thinking, I will burn my skis, I will burn my shoes, eh, because I was in such pain” (Celia).

Another skier expressed worries and concern for her family members. This was so intense that it interrupted her experience. She worried about her daughter and her boyfriend, whether they would make it home on a snow-scooter. They returned before the rest of the group. This was in spring and she explained that the heat from the sunshine causes the snow to melt. On the Finnmark plateau, this means that a lot of water is collected on top of the ice on Lake Iešjávri. It can get very deep, and hard to cross the ice because of all the water, and impossible for a snow scooter to cross, because it will submerge. Another participant told me how they walked across the lake with water up to their waist. While the layer of ice was still safe, when it dries up, the water will sink back under the ice, and the ice will reappear. These changes happen over a short period.

“Only thing that could have been negative was when I was scared that my daughter and her boyfriend had been in an accident and died (...) I started calling them, but they never replied, I thought, now they have drowned” (Helle).

Some of the skiing excursions happened 15 years ago, and people talked about them as if it were yesterday. They said they would remember this trip forever. They still have moments

where they dream about the moments of skiing the Finnmark plateau and share memories with their friends. One skier had been crossing the plateau several times each year for 40 years. She could still remember many extraordinary moments from her different crossings. When I asked her if the time that had passed had changed her impression of the crossing, she replied,

“no, no, no, no, it is as fantastic now as it was right afterwards” (Ingebjørg).

And another replied.

“It will stay in my mind as a strong memory for the rest of my life” (Jeanette).

Many of the informants told me about all the photos they had taken, and how they could look at the photos and recall the beautiful moments and the memories. They also kept the memories alive by talking about them with their friends and relatives and daydreamed of all their magical moments.

4.2 Skiers’ expectations and satisfaction

People had different levels of motivation and expectations for their trip across the plateau. Common for all is that they enjoyed the sport of skiing, being outdoors and that the Finnmark plateau seemed like a beautiful skiing experience. Their motivation was to ski the distance between Alta and Karasjok. Some had it on their bucket list, many people said it was something they had been wanting to do for a long time, it was a dream they held. They saw it as something exotic. They pictured the wilderness and the vast landscape, and the act of skiing for several days. They pictured the feeling of arriving at a warm and cosy cabin after a long day of skiing. Some saw it as novel, and that it would give them a feeling of escape from work and obligations back home. Some saw it as a challenge doing it on their own. One of the skiers, a very sociable person, asked herself if she would manage the challenge of being on her own. For her, it was a test of personal strength walking that distance. She needed time to think and reflect on important matters in her life.

“First, it is the grandiose nature and an experience (...) then I like skiing (...) it was kind of a bucket list. I wanted to do it alone, just having yourself to think about, that challenge of actually being on your own, I thought that was kind of exciting (...) and, I needed some time alone, time to think and reflect upon life” (Celia).

Another loved to be on his own. The ability to get away from daily life, ski the whole day, walk on your own having only yourself to think about, alone with your own thoughts, not having to talk to anybody. He wished for more day's alone skiing, but obligations at home meant he had to restrict the number of days away from his family. He enjoyed walking with the heavy weight of the backpack, being exhausted after a long day of skiing, and he felt personal strength and empowerment.

Most of my participants wanted to do it in company with others, they focused on the social aspect of the trip. Getting together with friends you do not see very often, and it was a great way of spending time together. Their motivation was managing together, reading maps, and finding the direction, socialising, and making the crossing together as well as sharing the skiing experience.

“It is the social part, which is super important, and maybe the most important part of all. Because we have always hung together, from when we were children. To have these journeys together, to forget about everything else, to just enjoy ourselves. Yes...and you will be back full of energy” (Fabian).

One participant had been on the plateau many times. She enjoys the experience of being there. She enjoys the company of others, both friends and family members, but she also enjoys being on her own. Either way, she likes both. She feels happy being there. She feels a special connection and familiarity with the environment. Normally, she enjoys the pleasure of spending several days on the crossing. One time, her motivation was competition. A group of male skiers at work were discussing if they were able to do the crossing in one day. She got ‘fired up’ and motivated to prove that she could do it, sooner and faster than the men, and she wanted to do it with another female colleague. She wanted to prove to everyone that she could do it. The two women managed to do the whole trip in one day. It took them 11 hours. They felt like partners in crime.

“I thought, I will test this before you even manage to take a deep breath” (Helle).

One of the participants had gone through some personal challenges back home and had foremost a psychological motivation to participate. She needed space and time away to increase her personal strength and psychological power. Her expectation was to experience a different state that she described as outside her comfort zone. This meant leaving behind and letting go of her responsibilities back home, which was very hard for her at the time, because

it had been troubling her for a long time. It was a personal struggle changing from one state to the other. For her, this journey was a process of getting back on track personally, mentally, and psychologically. At the end of the trip, she was very satisfied that she managed. Another participant, living in Finnmark got an extra push when she had friends from the south coming to visit. Her motivation was she had to do it before they arrived, she could not be living in Finnmark and not have done this trip.

“Part of my motivation was (...) I told my friend, if we are going skiing, I could do this stretch. I believe there are more fun places and places with more varied terrain, but it will look stupid, if a bunch of southerners are coming here to walk it, and we have not walked it (...) we just need to do it...it does not look good on my CV either” (Annette).

Some of my interviewees said they did not have any particular expectations, but still mentioned expectations of it being a nice journey and being able to enjoy nature. They were looking forward to the crossing, skiing, experiencing something new, and socialising with friends. Some said it was their motivation that drove them, and they had expectations according to their motivation.

“I cannot remember if I had any other expectations other than just being on journey, being outside for three days, that it was kind of going to be a social happening, and that we were doing something new...yes” (Beate).

Others said they had very high expectations. Something they could tick off as a thing they always wanted to do. Some had expectations about the route being flat, which it turned out not to be. The ones travelling in a group mentioned the fact of getting to know the people in the group, and their expectations about the skills and experience of the others. This was especially so for one group preparing to sleep in tents. Some were concerned regarding how would everyone cope with setting up the camp and sleeping in the tents. Others were concerned if they were fit for the excursion, and if they would experience any physical challenges. Some mentioned they were expecting personal growth and self-mastering, both on a mental and physical level. The participant for whom motivation was mainly psychological was anxious as to whether she would be able to enjoy herself and immerse enough to be thoroughly present in the moment. There were expectations about the weather. Most of my interviewees had checked and planned for weather changes in order to be safe and secure. They also hoped for sunny days and little wind. Many reported beautiful weather and were

excited and happy about the days with sunshine. Both good weather and sunshine enhanced their experience of pleasure and their well-being increased. One skier was stressed about not being prepared well enough for this new experience of skiing for several days and sleeping outdoors. She wanted to succeed in taking care of herself. She did a lot of planning in order to have all the necessary equipment and food that she needed for the excursion.

In the interviews, I found the participants connected expectations with planning. Planning made them feel safe and meant they could look forward to the trip with positive and pleasurable expectations. Some of the interviewees commented that because of the remoteness and the missing logistics the crossing required a lot of planning. They had to plan for safety equipment, they talked together before the trip and planned what to wear and what to bring. Many had pulkas, and needed to plan what to bring in these. The ones staying in tents needed to plan for food and drinks since they were camping outside. Most of the participants stayed in the cabins. They needed to plan and book accommodation and food. You need to book both dinner and breakfast. Some said it made the experience even more extraordinary and exotic needing to plan for so much, having to do so many preparations beforehand. On the Finnmark plateau, logistics are not in place, and since they chose not to participate on an organised tour, everyone had to find out on their own how to organise the crossing.

“It makes it more exotic, because it requires more planning, you need to plan for flights, you need a hotel, accommodation across the plateau, you need a taxi, and you need a hotel upon return, because things do not correspond, it takes a lot more planning (...) it is more planning going to Finnmark than to Austria skiing” (Fabian).

They were all very excited about doing this crossing and had in common that their satisfaction was according to their expectations. It went from expecting a nice crossing, to saying that the experience was fantastic. They all had extraordinary experiences. Many said the whole experience exceeded their expectations.

“It was just, just like I hoped for, great” (Espen), and “I expected it to be a nice tour, and it was, it was a fantastic tour” (Fabian).

Some of my interviewees said they were excited that they managed, felt communion with friends, and fulfilled personal challenges and self-renewal. Most of them would like to do it again. One woman was reluctant to do it again only because she did not want to spoil the

memory of the extraordinary journey her first crossing turned out to be. Her experience was packed with so many memorable moments and meetings with both the locals and other skiers, so she could not imagine that happening again.

“Definitely, the crossing succeeded in all aspects. Maybe even better than I dared to hope for. And the challenges were kind of as expected actually. Yes, yes, it was even better than I dared to dream of” (Lillian).

Some said it was tougher than they had expected, it was longer than they had foreseen, but still a positive experience. One of the people that walked alone said the crossing involved a kind of stubbornness as well as a personal achievement when she managed to do it. And she said that the fact she did not have any special expectations, made the experience even better.

“I think that because I did not think about all the negative consequences, it made the experience even better, because I did not worry, I did not think about wild animals or whatever, I was only in my little cocoon of experience” (Celia).

4.3 Togetherness or doing it on your own

Sharing these extraordinary nature experiences together with someone was for many very important whilst others preferred to do it on their own. For the ones sharing the experience, some would not have done it without sharing, and some said they could easily have done it alone.

People said it was important that they felt safe. They referred to proper equipment, knowing who you went with, if they were fit and mentally prepared to do this trip. Concerns of being fit were directed towards themselves and the company with whom they were travelling. Some mentioned the concern of traversing Lake Iešjávri, because of possible weather changes, and the long distance. They preferred the company of friends in order to feel safe in case something should happen across the plateau. One of the participants experienced severe weather changes and it nearly costed her her life because of a lack of skills, knowledge, and care from her participants. She said she was much more physically strong and skied a lot faster than the rest of the group. That meant she had to ski back and forth in order to keep warm, and to encourage the others to ski faster. She was expecting her luggage to be brought to her after Lake Iešjávri and was poorly dressed. When the unexpected storm hit them, she started freezing more and more and soon experienced loose of strength. None in her

companions recognised this. They did not provide her with clothes, manage to keep her awake, or gather around her to protect her from the wind and try to keep her warm. If they had more knowledge, it could have made a huge difference. Luckily, she was saved by the local and experienced owner at Mollisjok, who managed to find them in the storm.

“No, to be totally honest, I would have hoped to be together with more experienced people, because, they did not see the danger, they did not see it at all (...) if I had been with (...) it would never have happened. I would have been picked up earlier, gotten warm clothes, they would have gathered up around me (...) you must never leave a person alone in a situation like that” (Grete).

A few participants noted a less severe, but still important issue that arose during the crossing when they were skiing with people who had totally different paces of skiing than themselves. This caused conflict, since there were physical differences in the group. None of them really managed to enjoy the skiing experience because the fitter ones were annoyed at the ones skiing slower. The slower ones enjoyed their pace, and felt they were lagging behind, and were being pushed by the ones going faster. One participant made a point on how her friend and her both skied much faster than another female party, and how these other women arrived at the cabin many hours later than everyone else. She said she was happy they reached the cabin before the evening and were able to both eat and relax before next day of skiing. They needed to recharge.

“I have some bad experiences also. Where you have been in a large group and with very different levels of experience, maybe with people you did not know so well. And that has in a way been challenging (...) so I think, for me, it means a lot, that the people you walk with, that you know what they stand for really, physically” (Beate).

Most of the interviewees talked about special and joyful memories socialising with their group. The social part was very important to many. Both during, and after the experience. Seeing and doing things together, they felt they were bonding, socialising as a group, had someone to talk to during the crossing, and were able to plan together before the adventure. They felt communion through having the same goals for the crossing, enjoying the same things, finding the right pace of skiing, and enjoying the landscape and experience together. Some mentioned how important it was to have someone to share the memories with when you came home. Some of the skiers said that back home, in their everyday life, they could enjoy

skiing alone. And that they would see themselves also doing this alone, but most of them said that on this actual crossing, they preferred to ski together with someone. Because of the distance, and this kind of skiing experience, where you spend the whole day walking, slow skiing, they enjoyed the company of having someone to talk to and to depend upon.

“It could not have been better with the group dynamics. It could not have been better, no bad experiences for anyone. We were overly happy, all the photos, we had real fun. And of course, we were really tired, but that was part of it. It was a reward arriving at that cabin, having a glass of wine, it was all much better than I hoped for” (Jeanette).

Two women brought their children with them on their crossing of the plateau. They knew their children were fit for the crossing but were more excited to see if they would get bored. At Jotka, they met another couple with a dog who started just before them the next morning. The children accompanied this dog across Lake Iešjávri and made them busy all day. The day and time just flew for them all. Many of my interviewees experienced being alone or meeting few other people while crossing the Finnmark plateau. This made it even more exotic for many. Not having to share the experience with many other people and avoiding the busy season, enabled them to enjoy nature and the crossing even more. It made it even more exotic.

The social aspect included other people that the participants met during their crossing including the staff at the cabins, locals, and other skiers with whom they met and talked to and shared information. Meeting other people at Finnmarksvidda means you have something in common, they felt connectedness because they shared the same goals and enjoyed the same things. As previously mentioned, one participant said they were put in a room with people they did not know and emphasised that even when they were put in a room together with strangers, they did not mind. She explained deliberately, because at the plateau the culture is similar, everyone is the same, they were all friends and shared the same experience. She laughed at this and said that would never happen in an hotel in town.

“When you are on the plateau, you meet people that also like the plateau, you have something in common, you see, you both want to be out skiing, the weather, you have something in common...then something clicks” (Beate).

Many said that the social aspect was part of what made this crossing so special. One group of eight people consisted of friends, and friends of friends. Some were from Alta and the surrounding areas, and a few were from the south. The first night they stayed together in a

cabin at Jotka. They realised later that this made them bond and get to know each other. When they camped in tents the second night, they separated into three tents. In the evening, it was freezing cold, and people stayed separately two and two within their tents, they missed socialising as a group. Consequently, the third night, after a very long day's walk, they decided to book at Ravnastua and share a cabin again. This decision was made because they wanted to be together, talking about the day's journey, looking at maps and planning the next day, eating, having a drink and sharing stories about the days' events.

“In separate tents we did not see each other, so we thought it would be nice to share a cabin so we could eat and drink together and have a nice evening together” (Annette).

Three of my interviewees preferred to do the crossing on their own. They all had in common that they wanted to enjoy nature and the skiing experience in solitude. One specifically mentioned she needed time to think and reflect, while all said the experience enabled them to think and reflect upon life. The crossing was facilitated by walking in silence, letting thoughts come and go, periods of not thinking about anything, just enjoying the views and the landscape, sorting out worries, minor or bigger problems, tasks at work, getting new energy and new solutions to different issues, and just letting go of everyday stress and obligations. In managing on their own, they felt personal growth and increased self-awareness. One participant said she could recall how small she felt in the vast landscape, how minor she was compared to the whole, like her existence did not matter. It gave her a feeling of relief and of letting go. The ones doing it on their own said the experience would not have been the same if they shared it with anyone. They would not have had the same long periods of silence, time to think, reflect, and letting go of things. The skier that deliberately went on this adventure meaning to solve some personal challenges, said she was surprised about how little she ended up thinking. Her expectations about solving the big problems were not met. But she came back fully restored anyway, and felt she got a real break from her everyday life at home. She came back refreshed and with more energy. She said being there enabled her to be in her own little bubble.

“When I walked alone the focus was more inside myself, introverted, more like, I feel so much stronger about things when I am alone. Everything gets much stronger. It is like you hear more, you see more, you are able to smell more, you notice better the pain, like, you feel everything much stronger when you walk alone” (Celia).

4.4 Immersing in the experience and personal change

The interviewees all felt they got personally and deeply involved with the environment during their skiing trip across the Finnmark plateau. They physically enjoyed their skiing experience, and they talked about their high emotional state of enjoyment and pleasure of immersing in the activity of skiing and letting go of everyday, just being in the moment. They enjoyed the beauty of nature, feeling peace and tranquillity, and strong moments of pure happiness. Both the ones walking alone, and the ones in company with others.

Participants found peace and tranquillity in skiing. Just 'being', it was for them like a kind of mental medicine, a state of mindfulness. They found it meditative. Some said it gave them a good stomach feeling. They enjoyed the long distances of skiing and the endless views. They concentrated on the skiing experience. It made them open their mind, by letting go of thoughts of everyday, obligations, and struggle. Some did not think much, others had thoughts that came and went, and some felt they solved issues they had been having trouble with for a long time. Some said they did not recall thinking about anything, they just enjoyed the silence, just being there and then.

“To start with I was in that zone of immersion. Where you just walk. My motivation was to philosophise...but I was thinking, how little I actually ended up thinking. You know, I did not philosophise about life, the big questions in life. I just concentrated on putting one foot in front of the other, I just walked (...) it was kind of a meditation. Just walking, seeing, enjoying nature, beautiful weather, sunshine, it was just fantastic” (Annette).

“What I think happens when you are out in nature and ski, is that I don't think, it's like, I don't know, I just am. A kind of meditation I think” (Katrine).

Some touched their heart when they were describing their feelings about immersing with nature, they felt joy and gratitude. Many managed to forget about time and place. Some called it a magical experience, in which they found harmony. The intensity of emotional highs and lows were different from person to person. People managed to lower their shoulders and enjoy the experience of just being there. One of the skiers said she felt like a tiny person in a big open environment, like you disappeared into the environment. One group ended up walking twice as much as they planned, they immersed in the skiing experience, just because they enjoyed being outdoors, the beautiful weather, the colours of nature and the landscape,

walking and not noticing how tired they were until they arrived at the cabin. They were immersed in the moment of just ‘being’, walking and walking. They did not want it to end.

All the skiers I interviewed talked about their previous experience with skiing, and they all had similar stories of immersion when they talked about the beautiful nature and the extraordinary experience of skiing across the Finnmark plateau. A few mentioned how other members in their group were not as experienced and how this troubled them and impacted on their ability to enjoy and immerse in the experience. One woman, whose group were caught in a storm, recalled how she deeply looked forward to her next day of skiing. She was there for the skiing experience and longed for one long day of quiet and peace so she could enjoy the surroundings and the physical exercise. But she was interrupted by phone calls and interviews, among them the news channel NRK, which wanted her report on the previous day’s incident. She talked about the distress and frustration of receiving calls, having to make stops to concentrate and reflect on yesterday’s event. This made it difficult for her to immerse and concentrate on what should have been the beautiful skiing experience for which she had planned. One informant walking alone did not see or meet any other people or scooters except one on the longest day when she walked across Lake Iešjávri. She was only interrupted once. However, this interruption threw her out of her immersion.

“The weather was great, we had the wind behind us, the sun was shining, and it was great. But, Mollisjok had reported the incident of the bad weather and NRK had gotten hold of it. So there, in the middle of the mountain I was called by a friend that works for NRK...” (Grete).

When I asked my participants if they experienced any personal changes from their outdoor adventure, they were unsure at first. They had to think and reflect upon it for some time. Many said at first, they did not think it changed them in any way. They talked about the feelings they had from being at the Finnmark plateau. Then they all came up with different answers to changes.

People answered that the trip added to their previous knowledge and experience, which gave them personal strength. People felt empowered. People felt they became re-energised, and felt happiness, and became stronger as a person. Some felt it gave them safety in the way that they believed more in themselves. Being able to plan for all kinds of weather, what equipment to bring, what to wear, and being able to navigate on a map. The physical challenge of being away for many days and skiing such a long distance impacted on participants. Many said it

gave them the peace and tranquillity, which they sought. They were able to get to know people in different ways because they became very close to one another. They spent a lot of time together and were sharing similar interests. One person said she was very grateful, living in Norway and being able to experience skiing across the Finnmark plateau.

“I guess all experiences lead to change in a way. Maybe you are just not conscious about it (...) I think it more gave me the tranquillity I needed, time to myself, time to just be in the moment (...) we are living such hectic lives, things happen so fast, you get so much input all the time (...) I think, to be able to turn off, just being, you get so little time to do that” (Celia).

Many people said they felt empowered. They experienced personal growth and self-renewal. This experience was a generator or part of their development as to what experiences they chose next, they all wanted to do more similar crossings. Completing this crossing gave them great pleasure. Some said it made them love and enjoy nature even more.

“It has made me love being outside in nature skiing even more (...) to love the remoteness and the wild nature where you see nothing (...) it was so quiet (...) it has given me the taste of this kind of skiing, and to do to it more” (Ingebjørg).

Another skier said it was outside her comfort zone, and that the achievement gave her a real mental boost. It was a real challenge to her, and she felt great happiness and personal growth after the crossing. She felt she was way outside her comfort zone, testing her limits and being able to master new tasks. Coming back from the experience she said she believed more in herself and got self-confidence, she felt stronger as a person.

“I was high on that crossing for a long time. It built me up psychologically, I felt psychologically stronger afterwards, you feel you are robust, you can take more than you think. So, I bring with me such a boost, such self-confidence, and such a, on your hard drive in your head there are so many fantastic moments, mainly about personal growth, and not least the nature experiences, which is, it can't be compared with anything” (Lillian).

One said he realised how unprepared he was. He only came to realise this after the crossing. Both in terms of clothing, food, and safety equipment. Experiencing also how bad the mobile connection was at the Finnmark plateau, he feared the consequences of what could have happened. He was relieved that he did not encounter any problems or severe weather changes,

and excited about having done it. He learned from the experience and would plan things differently next time.

The skier that had the experience of being close to death said it did not change her in any way. Even though this was both dramatic and traumatic, she found herself not doing anything differently now after the crossing. She received a satellite phone from her family for Christmas that year, so she would not have to depend on internet connection, but other than that, no real change. She said it did not change her or her life choices. She did say she would be more critical of whom she would choose to adventure as well as being properly prepared in terms of clothes and equipment.

“I think I would have done the same again (...) but I don’t travel now unless I have a backpack full of clothes and necessary equipment” (Grete).

In this findings chapter, I have tried to give a nuanced review of the skiers’ extraordinary experiences crossing the Finnmark plateau. It has given me great pleasure to hear all the different and fantastic stories about the adventure of crossing the plateau. I believe the findings reflect much of what is already known about extraordinary experiences in the extant literature on the subject.

Drawing on the background in the literature and analyses of the findings, I will now move on to discuss what I found as emergent themes in the participants’ stories of their extraordinary experiences crossing the Finnmark plateau.

5 Discussion

There is no doubt that crossing the Finnmark plateau is an extraordinary experience. But what of the nature of this extraordinary experience compared to other such experiences. As intimated in chapter 2, extant literature informs us that the nature of an extraordinary experience is different from example to example, each having certain elements that stand out depending on the actual experience. This is true for the crossing of the Finnmark plateau. Certain aspects are important and need to be in place for people to obtain an extraordinary experience and transformation into immersion. Previous examples in the literature happen outdoors, mostly in nature, often facilitated by a guide (Arnould & Price, 1993; Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015), an organised tour (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013; Jefferies & Lepp, 2012), or by participating in an event (Goolaup & Mossberg, 2017; Rundio et al., 2020; Skandalis et al., 2019). The nature of the Finnmark crossing is such that all participants do it on their own, alone, or together with friends. They plan and take personal responsibility for the risks involved. The elements doing it on your own and the risk involved in this crossing I would suggest is special to this extraordinary experience.

For my Master's thesis, I wanted to find out, when alone and personally responsible, what are the important factors enabling people to transform into immersion in the extraordinary experience in crossing the Finnmark plateau.

A classification by Duerden et al. (2018, p. 196) notes that extraordinary experiences are “memorable, meaningful, and transformational. The distinction between the classes of extraordinary experiences is based on key characteristics of emotion, discovery, and change”. A memorable experience becomes meaningful and might lead to transformation into immersion. Duerden et al. (2018, p. 197) also claim that “lack of consensus still exists when describing different types of experiences”. In the adventure of crossing the Finnmark plateau, findings suggest there are some important elements that need to be in place to allow people to transform into immersion. When all elements, which I will discuss, were in place, the participants experienced two kinds of immersion. First, shorter, as instant and stronger moments, and second, longer moments, which resembled that of a mindful and meditative state.

In my case study, there are three elements that emerged as important to the participants which led to immersion. The nature of the adventure was such that people needed to do quite a lot of

preparing and planning for the excursion. This was due to the aspect of risk involved and the nature of safety precautions that needed to be taken. Further, when people were ready for the crossing, it was the physical exercise of walking long distances people sought. This was the main motivation for the crossing, walking from cabin to cabin while being outdoors the whole day. During this time, people experienced immersion, both shorter and longer moments.

This chapter will seek to illuminate and discuss these stages beneath four different headings. These headings are included in Figure 3 below. With the classification by Duerden et al. (2018) as a background, I discuss what was important in the extraordinary experience of crossing the Finnmark plateau. Starting with preparations and planning, then going on to the risk involved and safety, then physical exercise, and finally how this leads to shorter and longer moments of immersion.

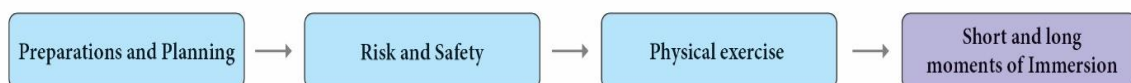


Figure 3 - Stages in the Extraordinary experience of crossing the Finnmark plateau

5.1 Preparations and planning

The nature of crossing the Finnmark plateau requires a lot of preparation and planning. This contrasts with extant literature which says an extraordinary experience is often recognised as being spontaneous and with a minimum of planning (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012). Relatedly, Arnould and Price (1993) suggest pretrip planning is vague. Further, Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) argue that there might be a minimum of practical preparations. My analysis shows that crossing the plateau requires several things to be considered and for which need to be planned. For some, these were plain-tickets and a hotel room in Alta connected to the trip. While everyone needed transport at either end of the tour, advance booking of accommodation and meals, and reservation for extras like sauna also needed to be made. Many mentioned specifically they would not get dinner unless they booked in advance, it is not like there is anything you can buy on the Finnmark plateau. There is quite a lot of logistical planning, which makes it everything else but a spontaneous activity.

Due to the level of risk, preparing for the crossing also meant planning what to bring such as gear, clothes, food, snacks, safety equipment, sleeping bags, wind shelter, and tents. Some

planned by reading blogs and looking at the internet as did Lindberg and Østergaard's (2015) participants, others asked friends, and planned together with friends. One said he did not plan much. Despite his comment, analysis showed he, like others in Lindberg and Østergaard's (2015) study, did a minimum of planning related to transport, accommodation, and meals. What he did not plan for was gear and safety equipment. He is still thinking about how little he planned, which scares him thinking about what could have happened, such as if the weather had changed, or he got injured. He learned a lot from the crossing and would do things differently next time.

The findings show that expectations and planning were connected. Planning for what to expect was an important part of preparing for the trip. This is described in the literature by Arnould and Price (1993) who said expectations can be vague and complex. Expectations in my analysis were not vague, but complex. Since, for many, it was their first time, "novelty is a theme throughout the research on extraordinary experiences" (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012, p. 40), the participants did not know what to expect. People hoped for good weather conditions, but they planned and prepared for weather changes. The fact that the crossing is so remote and required so much planning and preparation, made the trip even more exotic. Many enjoyed and saw it as an exciting part of the trip, to plan, be prepared and in control. The crossing was something people had always dreamt of, which meant people had high expectations about this crossing.

Arnould and Price (1993) commented that people are reluctant to have too many or too high expectations about an extraordinary experience because fewer expectations might lead to higher satisfaction. Specifically the researchers said "limited expectations contribute to satisfaction with the experience" (Arnould & Price, 1993, p. 29). Skandalis et al. (2019) argue that there is a stronger link between expectations and outcome because of familiarity and knowledge of what to expect. An experienced person can thus have clearer expectations of an adventure. My findings show that the level or nature of the expectations was different from person to person. But the outcome and the memory of the adventure was the same with everyone, they were all overly excited and highly satisfied by the experience. Some experienced difficulties, some severe and others mild incidents. The former felt increased happiness and joy at overcoming these challenges. With regard to outcomes due to expectations, although different, the participants all came out highly satisfied. They rated the crossing as highly memorable and would remain in their memories for a long time, most said

for ever. Such outcomes might have resulted from the “accumulation of previous experiences that lead to the development of clearer expectations” (Skandalis et al., 2019, p. 49).

Participants were proud of themselves for having done the crossing. People felt proud they had planned, prepared, and arranged everything on their own, been in control and able to manage. The crossing led to personal growth and mastery of self. This empowered the participants, they learnt new skills and became self-proficient. These results are in line with extant literature. Arnould and Price (1993) reported similar learning outcomes in an outdoor adventure. Finally, making it across the Finnmark plateau and succeeding, lead to great happiness and feelings of achievement. It became what Arnould and Price (1993) describe as an intense, memorable experience, similar to what Abrahams (1986) depicted as something that stood out and was worth talking about.

Further, an important aspect of the crossing was the risk involved. Therefore, planning and preparing due to level of risk and safety, are strongly connected. People needed to prepare and plan in order to feel safe and then be able to enjoy the crossing, and hence be able to transform into immersion.

5.2 Risk and safety

Crossing the Finnmark plateau is not without risk. Doing it on your own, or in a private party, means you take personal responsibility for the risks involved. There is no one to help you, or guide you, and rescue might be far away. The weather can change very fast on the plateau, and there are many stories where people have been stuck for hours before they have been helped out. It happened to one of the interviewees, who had a dramatic story. It also happened to two ladies this winter of 2021, reported by NRK news channel (Larsen & Groseth, 2021). The article report that the skiers were surprised by a sudden and severe weather change and were stuck for nine hours before being rescued. They survived because they were prepared with extra clothes and equipment. There are more similar stories, and stories where people have frozen to death. Luckily, most crossings are good ones and pleasurable, but knowing what might happen, makes people check the weather forecasts, bring safety equipment, and take necessary precautions. There is also the risk of injury, accidents, people can get lost, equipment can be damaged, and the fact that people do not have the right level of physical health to be able to ski for so long. The nature of the area, the long distances between the cabins, and certain areas with no mobile connection, makes it remote and inaccessible.

This makes safety an important aspect of the experience. One must presume that quite intense feelings are connected in relation to safety (Arnould & Price, 1993; Jefferies & Lepp, 2012). Arnould and Price (1993) mention safety as an element within an extraordinary experience. In my findings people frequently mentioned safety, both directly and indirectly. It is an “evaluative criteria” for such excursions (Arnould & Price, 1993, p. 25). Safety was a recurring aspect both prior to, and during the experience. Participants relied on each other for support in case anything should happen, as Arnould and Price (1993) found, people depended on each other. Similarly, it was important for people that their companions were in the same physical condition as themselves in order to walk at a pace for which they had prepared to keep warm and comfortable.

Jefferies and Lepp (2012) found that nature and outdoor adventures can produce feelings of intense nervousness and fear around what to expect. The interviewees knew about earlier incidents as described above. My findings show that safety was an underlying and very important factor people considered and followed in order to feel comfortable and safe. Taking necessary precautions enabled them to relax and enjoy the crossing. Consistent with what Arnould and Price (1993, p. 39) found in their study, participants said they were testing their “comfort zone”.

Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) noted that skills and knowledge make you enjoy nature more. Due to my findings, all the participants had independent skills and knowledge sets as well as enjoyed and managed to immerse with nature. But the less experienced were more dependent on the company of others and their skills and knowledge in order to be able to feel safe and enjoy the crossing. The less experienced had someone to advise them on what equipment to bring and knew they had someone more experienced upon whom they could rely. Some said they would not have done the crossing without such support.

As reported in the literature (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Jefferies & Lepp, 2012), when participants looked back, knowing that all went well, knowing they were safe and sound, gave participants a positive experience, they felt happy. People felt in control, they experienced personal growth, and learned a lot from the tour and from each other. Jefferies and Lepp’s (2012, p. 45) study found that participants extraordinary experiences “often involved effort, involved challenge, and produced intense emotions including excitement, a sense of accomplishment, nervousness, happiness, being scared, and awe”. My findings support their findings, and these elements led to an overall positive experience.

Having addressed risk and safety issues arising from engaging in a Finnmark crossing, the next stage to be considered is physical exercise. When all necessary safety precautions were taken and risk was reduced, participants could proceed concentrating on the actual experience of skiing. They were relaxed and free to enjoy what was their main motivation for this adventure. People in my case study were particularly motivated by the physical exercise involved in crossing the Finnmark plateau.

5.3 Physical exercise

My findings show that the motivation for crossing the Finnmark plateau was the physical act of skiing long distances for several days. Specifically, skiing from one place to the other and from cabin to cabin. Duerden et al. (2018, p. 199) previously noted that “experiences require both physical and mental presence”. The time it took crossing the Finnmark plateau depended on skiing conditions, weather, length of breaks, and the physical shape people were in. The long days of skiing made the participants drained, tired, hungry, and sweaty, which they sought. Goolaup and Mossberg (2017) confirm that an extraordinary experience is also often physically demanding. As a result, finally arriving at the cabins in the afternoon, lead to feelings of intense joy and happiness. Similarly, these outcomes were reported by Arnould and Price (1993). Such strong feelings of happiness came from the physical exercise of being outdoors in nature all day. As Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2014) found, happiness is foremost connected with the nature of the experience. Arriving at a warm cabin was an extraordinary pleasure to everyone. Hours with no signs of civilisation, being exhausted, increased the feeling of happiness in finally getting there. This created strong emotions and memorable moments.

Jefferies and Lepp (2012) and Arnould and Price (1993), found that joy and happiness is connected with sharing the experience with friends. My participants also enjoyed sharing the experience together. Whereas my findings suggest that it was foremost the nature of the experience, being outdoors, enjoying nature and the physical exercise which produced the feelings of happiness. My findings are more in line with Lindberg and Østergaard (2015), since the participants were all fairly skilled, they more easily managed to enjoy the skiing experience and be more in one with nature.

My findings also show that this physical exercise was meaningful to people. Being outdoors, skiing at a slow pace, one foot in front of the other, enjoying the landscape, sharing the

experience with friends, being away for several days, made it meaningful. People were not there to exercise, they were there for the adventure, to get a break from every day and to enjoy. A few mentioned they could have done the trip in a day, but the whole point was to make it into several days of walking. To build on Duerden et al.'s (2018) understanding, extraordinary experiences become meaningful when learning something. My participants came to love nature even more and increased their knowledge. They found it meaningful due to the physical exercise and the ability to just be present in nature and enjoy the experience. Duerden et al. (2018, p. 207) further stated that if an experience becomes meaningful, it means you learn something about yourself and that it leads to transformation such as “radically new values, beliefs, and most important, new behaviours”. This was also supported in the study by Rundio et al. (2020) who found participants experienced new world views and took on personal life changing directions. My participants found it highly meaningful, and they built on previous experience and learned new skills. In contrast they did not think it in the main changed them in any way. No one reported any radically new beliefs, new values, or new ways of behaving.

Again similar to Arnould & Price (1993) and Jefferies and Lepp (2012), common to all participants in my case study was that they shared the joy and pleasure of skiing long distances, over several days, and being outdoors in nature. For many it was their first time while some had completed the crossing several times before. The ones, who had undertaken the crossing several times, recall the first time best. They all agreed that it was the first time which was the most special and extraordinary. According to Arnould and Price (1993), novelty is a characteristic known to an extraordinary experience. “Novelty is a theme throughout the research on extraordinary experiences” (Jefferies & Lepp, 2012, p. 40). The newness of the experience also increases sensations and emotions (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013).

Overall, being an outdoor adventure, despite any pain, having moments of harsh weather, left the participants with a feeling of happiness and a strong positive memory of the crossing. This led to a memorable experience. This is in line with previous theory. According to Duerden et al. (2018) an extraordinary experience is known to stay in your memory for a long time, maybe forever.

In sum, planning for risk and safety, being able to enjoy the physical exercise of skiing, enabled people to transform into immersion. Due to the length of the crossing, the slow pace,

the beautiful nature and the environment, people could immerse in the physical exercise of ‘ski, ski, and ski’.

5.4 Short and long moments of immersion

As in line with previous theory, an extraordinary experience most often happens outdoors in nature (Arnould & Price, 1993). When all the necessary planning was completed, and any risks were reduced; the participants could enjoy the skiing experience, the beauty of the natural surroundings allowed the participants to immerse and be one with the skiing experience. The skiing experience, doing it on your own, sits in contrast to high arousal activity like white water rafting (Arnould & Price, 1993), cause-related activity like cycling for cancer (Rundio et al., 2020), or high-pulse challenge-based activity (Blumenthal, 2020). In my case study, skiing allowed for immersion, the nature experience was purely for joyous and pleasurable reasons, as was more subtle and delightful, or peaceful and tranquil. After having considered safety, there were no big decisions to be made, no confronting choices, only the long endless plateau which allowed participants to walk and immerse in the experience. They had the security and safety of equipment, comfort of friends, and no obstacles ahead. It was effortless as long as weather permitted, and if they were fit; this allowed people to immerse and achieve deep joy and appreciation of and with nature.

Further, my findings show that the section of the crossing where participants skied across Lake Iešjávri was the section people enjoyed the most. As Hansen and Mossberg (2013) and Lindberg and Østergaard (2015) earlier reported in their studies, this can facilitate people just being in the moment. The long stretch with no interruptions involved just putting one foot in front of the other, to ‘walk, walk, and walk’, which allowed people to transform into a state of immersion. All the participants experienced immersion, though some found it harder to transform from the ordinary due to their social background and responsibility back home. The latter had to work harder to reach a state of immersion. Arriving at immersion, resembled a state of mindfulness or meditation where they thought of nothing, they managed to leave every day behind. They were just enjoying the beauty of the endless plateau. This was the most frequent type of immersion. In addition, people had a second type of immersion, which involved shorter and more intense moments. According to Hansen and Mossberg (2013), it is important to understand different aspects of immersion if we are to understand the experience, especially experiences that are activity-based. Hansen and Mossberg (2013) elaborate further that the emotional strength of immersion can vary between high and low. My findings support

that emotional strength varies for different types of immersion. My findings also go a step further by saying immersion can be divided into shorter and longer moments of immersion. Shorter and more intense moments, and longer and deeper moments of immersion. These will now be discussed starting with longer moments of immersion.

First, longer and deeper periods of immersion. Skiing alone or with friends, the participants all had moments where they walked in silence and had moments of forgetting about the world around them. Everyone specifically mentioned the act of walking, when they walked at their natural pace, slow walking, they fell into this state where you just put one foot in front of the other and walk and walk and walk. Letting everything go, and just 'being'. Participants said they reached a meditative state. It enabled them to enjoy, let go, lower their shoulders, and be one with nature. In this state of immersion, they just walked, without worries or concerns for anything else. It was the act of skiing and the natural surroundings that allowed them to enter this state. Participants said they did not think of much, or anything in particular. This is in direct contrast to Jefferies and Lepp (2012, p. 46), who found that "reflection seemed to be the catalyst for many extraordinary experiences" and that reflective moments often happen in outdoor settings where scenery opens up opportunities. According to theory, being outdoors in nature and enjoying the beauty of the environment is part of the extraordinary experiences, but my findings show that participants were surprised as to how little they actually thought.

Second, signs of shorter moments of immersion involved, also as according to Duerden et al. (2018) as recognised by forgetting about time and place, but now as a result of more sudden episodes. These shorter and more sudden moments are associated with the shifting colours of sunset, fifty grouses suddenly flying up behind a bush, a herd of reindeers passing, or other sudden environmental cues. Earlier, Hansen and Mossberg (2013) explained that unexpected events can cause distress, which can cause interruption from immersion, a shift from immersion and back to the ordinary. My findings instead suggest interruptions can cause a shift from one pleasurable state of immersion to another. Participants could move from a deep and longer immersion to a shorter, more sudden, and intense immersion. Like the unexpected interruptions described at the beginning of this paragraph, participants were surprised by, and deeply enjoyed the wonders of nature. As intimated, these are unexpected happenings and elements of surprise (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013). The consequence of these is to make the experience stronger and more emotional. The shorter moments of immersion seemed to create higher emotional states of enjoyment and pleasure. They were also the moments people said endured in their memory. As Duerden et al. (2018) commented this allows people to reach a

high mental and physical presence with nature. My findings indicate that the shorter moments were the stronger ones while the longer ones were more mindful and meditative. The shorter ones being worth talking about and which created long lasting memories of joy and happiness. While overall both short and long moments of immersion contributed to it being an extraordinary experience.

Findings further indicate how long and short immersion were connected. People seemed to be able to move directly from a long immersion and into a short immersion. On the contrary it was harder, or it took longer time, to shift from a short immersion and directly back into a long immersion. As earlier mentioned, the pleasurable state of forgetting about the world around you, when you find your rhythm of walking, allow a person to transform into immersion, which are the longer moment. In this state a person is more receptive to the world around you, the mind is calm and more responsive to outside impressions. At the Finnmark plateau, where the landscape is monotone at places, the same vision for hours, the endless plateau, no sounds, just your skis, and the rhythm of walking allow one to deeply immerse. Then, when a sudden and unexpected happening occurs, as a herd of reindeers passing, an eagle flying above you, or a mountain range appear in the horizon; this throws you into a short, strong and intense state of appreciation of the surprising vision. This shorter moment of immersion requires time to absorb and enjoy. As a result, because of the thrill, it may take some time to return back and reach the tranquil state of a longer immersion.

When recalling these moments, many did not manage to say which day, at what time, or exactly when it happened. This was not important to people, it was a sign of immersing in the experience, going deep into the experience managing to leave the ordinary or every day behind. What was important was solely to enjoy and be truly present with and in the skiing experience. Hansen and Mossberg (2013, p. 212) describe this as a “special temporal state of belonging in the world”.

Participants’ skills and knowledge allowed them to immerse. In line with theory, and previously noted by Hansen and Mossberg (2013), a skilled and experienced person will more quickly and easily delve into an experience. S(he) will quickly become accustomed to the environment, be comfortable with the situation and the experience, and achieve immersion. Even the participants that said this type of crossing was new to them managed to reach this state. My findings show that all participants transformed into “the emotional state of being immersed in wilderness” (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015, p. 255). Lindberg and Østergaard

(2015) say that people must have experienced immersion to classify it as an outdoor adventure, and this was the case for my study of crossing the Finnmark plateau.

When asked specifically about changes that occurred, people found it hard to talk about if any transformations or changes happened as a result of the experience. According to theory, some people are willing to but find it hard to explain or articulate what changes they experience (Alvesson, 2011; Arnould & Price, 1993). Some said it did not change them at all. Some said at first that they did not think it changed them much but reflecting for some time, they mentioned what they thought could be results from the experience. Reflecting outcomes previously described by Arnould and Price (1993), the skiing experience increased my participants appreciation of nature, feelings of self-mastery, and intense joy at having completed the crossing. And like Arnould and Price's (1993) study findings, participants in my case study also experienced self-growth, bonding with their friends, and personal achievement. Further, the skiers also wanted to do more of the same type of adventure, advancing on the tasks like sleeping in a tent, extending the crossing by one more day, bringing a pulka instead of a backpack, and maybe doing the crossing on their own. However, as previously mentioned, my findings contrast with Rundio et al. (2020), who found their participants experienced life changing events such as new world beliefs and changes in self-view.

This ends my discussion chapter, the next chapter is the conclusion. In this chapter, you will be presented with a summary of the main findings.

6 Conclusion

This thesis focused on the extraordinary experiences of people, who chose to ski across the Finnmark plateau alone without guides and taking all the risk themselves. The case study research that informed this thesis drew on extant literature on extraordinary experiences, particularly the work of Arnould and Price (1993); Duerden et al. (2018); Hansen and Mossberg (2013); Jefferies and Lepp (2012); and Lindberg and Østergaard (2015). Using qualitative research and 11 semi-structured interviews enabled me to achieve understanding of the underlying patterns of such skiers' extraordinary experiences in undertaking this crossing. As a researcher, I essayed to be reflexive and to "maintain an awareness that there is more than one good way of understanding something" (Alvesson, 2011, p. 107). I have learned through studying extant literature and different relevant case studies, and from my empirical material on skiers' narratives, that, as in line with Goolaup and Mossberg (2017), an extraordinary experience is multidimensional and complex in nature.

In this case study, participants in the research were tough enough to do it on their own without a guide. They were personally responsible for their own actions. More specifically, my aim for this research was to investigate if participants managed to immerse in the experience and to determine the important factors enabling people to transform into immersion.

According to the literature, an extraordinary experience is different from example to example (Duerden et al., 2018). There are some central characteristics that are common for all, but the experience is shaped by, and shapes different outcomes. The experience of crossing the plateau also generates some central characteristics that shape the nature of the outcome of this experience.

Most of the interviewees skied for the first time across the Finnmark plateau, others had done it multiple times, nonetheless, it was the first time which stood out as most extraordinary. The newness of the activity, as previously noted by Jefferies and Lepp (2012), made it into a memorable experience. Skiing across the plateau is an outdoor activity happening in nature, which is a characteristic of an extraordinary experience (Arnould & Price, 1993). I will now summarise what emerged as the most important characteristics for the skiers, who participated in this case study, regarding the nature of the extraordinary experience in crossing the Finnmark plateau.

There were three phases, enabling participants to immerse in the experience. These were preparations and planning, risk and safety, and physical exercise (see Figure 3). Due to the lack of, or the absence of logistics, people needed to do quite a lot of preparation and planning. Most importantly, due to level of risk and expectations of what might happen, undertaking the necessary planning led to clearer expectations, and participants could concentrate on the actual skiing experience of crossing the plateau.

Even though the skiers had different levels of expectations, they all recalled their adventure being highly satisfactory. All had memorable experiences. Participants enjoyed each other's company, but foremost, they relied on each other for support and safety, as well as being of similar physical health and with similar values and attitudes. All of which built ground for a positive experience. Managing on their own resulted in personal growth and self-mastery. The participants managed to enjoy skiing across the plateau, they managed the physical exercise of long days of skiing, which was their primary goal and motivation. The skiers were not there to exercise, but to enjoy nature and the beautiful and serene landscape and the endless plateau. The physical exercise of skiing all day made people tired and worn but in a positive way, and, as a consequence, they felt happy finally arriving at the cabins in the evening.

It was during the experience of skiing that people transformed into immersion. Allowing them to be physically and mentally present in the moment. It was the surroundings and the nature of the activity, which enabled them to concentrate on walking, purely enjoying and be in one with the skiing experience. The result of my findings indicate there were two types of immersion. A longer immersion, and a shorter and more intense immersion. First, the moments of longer immersion mostly happened across Lake Iešjávri. Participants skied for hours, just putting one foot in front of the other, seeing only the white plateau and the horizon. As a result, people transformed into immersion, just 'being', not thinking much. This resembled a state of mindfulness, where they managed to leave every day behind.

Interviewees mentioned specifically that they were surprised to find how little they ended up thinking. Second, there were the shorter moments of immersion, where the skiers also lost track of time and place, enjoying the moments of beauty. Seeing animals passing, sunsets, or other beautiful and spectacular environmental cues. Participants mentioned they did not see too many animals, so when they finally saw one, breaking the pattern of the deeper immersion, it enabled them to enjoy a different, beautiful, and shorter moment of immersion. These shorter moments were recognised for being unexpected and surprising.

The latter moments were incidents people mentioned by themselves and talked of on their own initiative. The moments of the longer and rather mindful immersion were talked about foremost after being initiated through open-ended questions posed in the interviews. Nevertheless, both, short and long moments of immersion, were two different ways of forgetting about life at home and purely enjoying being fully concentrated on the experience of crossing the Finnmark plateau. Further, findings suggest that one moves directly from the longer immersion and into a short immersion but find it harder to move back to the longer due to the strength and intensity of the shorter immersion.

As for changes that happened as a result of the experience, people said they did not think it changed them to a great extent. Still, findings show that participants felt self-mastery, they learned new tasks, and they learned from each other and through the experience of skiing. Interviewees talked about what they would have done differently the next time. So, the findings suggest they changed to some extent with increased competence, skills, and knowledge. The crossing added to their previous experience of skiing, and the nature of this crossing was different to what they had participated in previously. However, they did not look at the world differently, or change as a person. The adventure increased peoples' love of nature, which according to extant literature is synonymous to an extraordinary experience (Arnould & Price, 1993; Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015), all participants wished to do more of this type of skiing.

Duerden et al. (2018, p. 196) said an extraordinary experience is “memorable, meaningful, and transformational”. Findings support that the experience of crossing the Finnmark plateau was highly memorable and meaningful. But in order to obtain transformation into immersion, there were certain elements of which needed to be taken care. These were proper planning and preparation due to the nature of the area and the risks they took as well as safety precautions that needed to be taken. As a result, participants were then free to enjoy the physical exercise of crossing the plateau.

This ends my conclusion chapter. In the next and final chapter, I present some reflections on my research, address limitations of this research, provide comments on the contribution of this study to tourism studies and offer suggestions for future studies.

7 Reflections, limitations, and future research

Working on this Master's thesis has been an exciting and rewarding journey. It is the first time I have worked on a project with such a long timeline and without seeing a clear end or exactly what the end result will be. Deciding on this case study of the journey across the Finnmark plateau, there were already many theoretical angles from which to choose. Should I study the journey itself, the culture at Finnmark plateau, the impact from weather? How could I combine a case study with theories that would be valuable to me from a tourism perspective? Finally, deciding on the phenomenon of extraordinary experiences, I felt reassured that it would increase my knowledge and understanding of a subject highly valuable to me, and particularly valuable for this chosen case study.

I have learned to trust myself and choose a direction and stay with it. To trust that I will find answers if I am patient enough. It has been a long process, starting with the somewhat unknown, moving ahead step by step, and arriving at an understanding and increased knowledge of extraordinary experiences. In the process, there have been many adjustments, ways of refining, and time allowed to change views within that chosen direction. The applied approach of thematic analysis was useful in order to see the important components in this extraordinary experience from extant literature. The process of analysing the material has shown me that "the meaning or significance of the whole may be more than the sum of its parts" (Walters, 2016, p. 115).

A reflection which was as much a limitation at first, was that I concentrated too much on the different interpretations of transformation. This is what I first recognised as having different meaning or interpretations in the extant literature. This hindered my vision and prevented me from being open enough. This steered the process for too long before I managed to see other paths in the empirical material, which finally enabled me to arrive at the content presented herein. I was too focused on transformation and change, while this was not the main aspects of themes within the empirical material at all. I was trying to find answers while the material did not provide me with answers for which I was searching. Letting the answers come to me, which I know the method I used is supposed to allow for, when I did this, the answers were there. I am pleased I started early and worked hard, so I was able to adjust and change in the midst of the process.

Another limitation, or suggestion for future research, can be said to be the element of expectation. This could have been investigated further. Participants had many and deep expectations related to safety, but there were fewer or various levels of expectations regarding the actual crossing. Further clarification and more nuanced research could be undertaken to achieve such variations of expectations. I do not believe, though, that this would change the outcome of the results of this thesis.

The process with the thesis has taught me to be more open to new ideas, to gain increased understanding, listen more, reflect, and not jump to conclusions. Studying has made me more reflexive and reflective as a practitioner, which I can transfer to future work and also daily life. I have learned that there are many answers, people have different opinions, and there are different ways of seeing things. The mind works in mysterious ways. I have learned that academia has answers to mechanisms behind matters from previous work experience, and which could be applied more extensively, if academia were allowed more into the practical working world of tourism. This, I dear say, is still an unfortunate weakness today.

A weakness which could be looked into in order to strengthen the value of my thesis as a guideline for tourism companies, relates to an additional two groups of participants. Specifically, the adding of two more groups of interviewees to the one group I studied. One, a group of beginners or unskilled skiers, and two, a group that participated on a guided tour. I suggest this in order to determine if there are nuances in their extraordinary experiences of crossing the Finnmark plateau. Would they be able to immerse to the same extent as the skilled and experienced skiers interviewed for this thesis? Literature says that skills and knowledge make you enjoy nature more, while for beginners you depend more on the company (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015). And, on an organised tour most is prepared and planned for you, and one misses out on being personally responsible for the aspects of risk and safety. Increasing the number of interviewees, adding beginners and people being accompanied by a guide into the research, these interviewees might have different experiences towards changes as an outcome of the adventure and with transforming into immersion with the environment.

Still, I believe the content of this thesis is a valuable contribution to tourism industry. Knowing and understanding the content of an extraordinary experience is highly relevant and important. Tourism companies are delivering experiences to people. Knowing what makes an experience special and extraordinary, memorable, recognising and making sure you have

elements in an extraordinary experience in your product, might increase the possibility of guests remembering your place and product. Guests would talk about you to friends and family, after all, word of mouth is the best and most trustworthy marketing there is and the most convincing. There are so many choices and products from which to choose. By rendering people an extraordinary experience might just provide you with a competitive advantage.

As for future research, an interesting topic for other researchers to look into is the aspect of gender. From interviews and from learning about experiences of crossing the plateau, I see that there is a majority of women crossing the plateau. There are numerous examples of groups of women, and only few men. Why is this, why are there not more men? In my interviews, it was easier to locate women. During interviews, I heard they met other parties of women. Now, just recently catching up with some friends, all women, after having crossed the plateau, they also met many other groups, all women. What is the reason behind this? Why do not more men do this tour? In an extraordinary experience in the literature, there are no questions related to gender. In extant literature, there seems to be an equal part of both men and women enjoying extraordinary experiences. So why are there not more men crossing the Finnmark plateau? Is it due to the nature of the crossing, do they have a perception that there is not enough high intensity or adrenalin involved? These are my speculations. Female participants confirm there is, due to the aspect of risk and safety and the physical exercise of the length of the crossing. What is it with this particular crossing that attracts more women than men? The majority of women and why that is, could be an interesting topic for future research.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview guide

TEMA	Innledning MOTIVASJON og FORVENTNINGER for turen - DEL 1
Spørsmål 1	Kan du si hvor du kommer ifra og hvor du bor nå
Spørsmål 2	Kan du fortelle meg hvor gammel du er
Spørsmål 3	Kan du fortelle litt om din erfaring på ski
Probing	Har du vært på denne turen tidligere, liknende turer
Spørsmål 4	Fortell meg om motivasjonen din for å ta denne turen
Probing	Ble du spurt om å være med, bucket list, lenge drømt om, slippe "hjemmefra"
Spørsmål 5	Hva var dine forventninger til turen
Probing	Hadde du høye forventninger, spent, urolig
Spørsmål 6	Planla du turen selv, eller sammen med andre
Probing	Ble du med noen andre, reiste du alene, i gruppe
Spørsmål 7	Når gikk du turen, år og måned

TEMA	SELVE OPPLEVELSEN - DEL 2
Spørsmål 8	Kan du fortelle meg om opplevelsen din, dag for dag
Probing	Utdypende
Probing	<i>Borende oppfølging underveis som "grunnen til det" "hvorfor det"</i>
Spørsmål 9	Hva var det beste med turen
Probing	Hvorfor, selskapet, naturen, selve opplevelsen, "bucket list", personlig mål, selvrealisering, fysiske utfordringen
Spørsmål 10	Hva husker du best fra turen
Probing	Hvorfor
Spørsmål 11	Om du skulle rangere denne turen på en skala fra 1 til 10 hvor 10 er svært betydningsfull - hvor på skalaen befinner denne turen seg
Probing	Hvorfor og hvordan, hva er det som gjør det
Spørsmål 12	Har turen endret deg på noen måte eller gjort noe med deg
Probing	Hvordan da, nye mål, selvrealisering, ser annerledes på livet
Spørsmål 13	Ble du på tidspunkter oppslukt av, og i, opplevelsen
Probing	Glemte tid og sted...glemte plikter og tanker om det og de hjemme
Spørsmål 14	Var selskapet viktig i din opplevelse
Probing	Enten i selskap med andre eller alene, var dette avgjørende for din opplevelse

TEMA	I ETTERTID - DEL 3
Spørsmål 15	Ble turen/oplevelsen som planlagt
Probing	Om ikke, hva skyldtes dette, noe du ville gjort annerledes
Spørsmål 16	Har du flere slike turer i løpet av et år. Kan du si noe om betydningen av denne turen som ekstraordinær i forhold til andre turer/oplevelser du har i løpet av året

TEMA	AVSLUTTENDE
Spørsmål 17	Nå (x år senere) ser du annerledes på opplevelsen
Probing	Nye og andre store opplevelser, tiden har dempet enkelte minner, eller ikke, en tur du vil huske lenge
Spørsmål 18	Er det noe du vil legge til som du mener er av betydning for turen

Appendix B. Information letter given to the participants

Deltakelse i masteroppgave med tittel

”Extraordinary experiences crossing the Finnmark plateau”

Forespørsel om deltakelse

Dette er en formell forespørsel om du er villig til å delta i min masteroppgave om ekstraordinære opplevelser ved å krysse Finnmarksvidda.

Jeg er master student ved Norges Arktiske Universitet, avdeling Alta. Det er denne institusjonen som er ansvarlig for meg, og mitt prosjekt. Kontaktinformasjon til både meg og min mentor står nederst i skrivet.

Bakgrunn og formål

Dette er en masteroppgave hvor formålet er å identifisere, ordinære, men først og fremst ekstraordinære opplevelser, og da med skiturer på Finnmarksvidda som eksempler.

Jeg skal gjennomføre rundt åtte intervjuer, hvor du er en av mine informanter. Informasjonen jeg får av deg skal jeg bruke i mine analyser om fenomenet og teoriene rundt begrepet ekstraordinære opplevelser. Felles for alle deltakerne i studiet er at dere har erfaring med skitur(er) på Finnmarksvidda. Dette finner jeg svært interessant og jeg ønsker å lære mer om omfanget av dette.

Hva det innebærer for deg å delta

Jeg har forberedt intervju spørsmål jeg ønsker å stille deg, de er de samme for alle informantene. Det er spørsmål som gir mulighet for deg å svare så åpent som mulig. Jeg ønsker å lære om dine erfaringer rundt dine opplevelser på Finnmarksvidda.

Intervjuet vil ha en varighet på opptil en time. Jeg kommer til å lagre intervjuene som lydopptak, i et eget program, og de vil bli slettet når oppgaven leveres inn. Intervjuene skal jeg personlig transkribere, skrive om til tekst, som jeg trenger for å sammenligne svarene dine med det jeg har lest i teorien. Alle opplysninger jeg får vil anonymiseres.

Jeg vil kontakte deg og avtale en passende tid for deg å treffes. Er det vanskelig å fysisk treffes, kan vi holde intervjuet på Skype eller telefon.

Ditt personvern

Alle opplysninger jeg får tilgang til er det først og fremst jeg som har tilgang til. Det er mulig min mentor, Bård Tronvoll, ønsker å se over noe av materialet. Ingen andre vil få tilgang til opplysningene. All informasjon holdes konfidensielt og jeg jobber i henhold til nasjonale regler for personvern. Jeg kommer til å gjengi enkelte sitat i oppgaven, og alle sitat vil anonymiseres, og vil ikke kunne spores tilbake til deg. Ved prosjektets slutt, som vil være juni 2021, vil all informasjon og data slettes.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Om du skulle ombestemme deg, så kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake. Du trenger ikke oppgi noen grunn til at du ønsker å trekke deg. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet.

Om du ønsker å lese oppgaven min, og eventuelt slette eller korrigere på noe av innholdet som vil gjelde deg, så er dette i orden. Om du finner at noe ikke er i henhold til hva jeg har lovet eller sagt, så har du full rett til å klage oppgaven inn til Datatilsynet.

Prosjektslutt er 31. juli 2021. Når oppgaven er levert og godkjent vil alle data, intervjuer, transkriberinger, og personlige data bli slettet.

Studiet er registrert og godkjent hos NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS. Prosjektet har fått **referanse 893371**. Du kan selv også ta kontakt med NSD hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til NSD sin vurdering av prosjektet. De kan kontaktes på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller på telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Jeg takker så mye for tiden din, og ditt viktige bidrag til mitt prosjekt.

Med vennlig hilsen,

Student: Caroline Laurhammer
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Finnmarksfakultetet, institutt for reiseliv og nordlige studier
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Veileder: Bård Tronvoll, Professor
Finnmarksfakultetet, institutt for reiseliv og nordlige studier
Mobil: +47 90 78 55 68 E-post: bard@tronvoll.no

Appendix C. Letter of consent - samtykkeskjema

FORM OF CONSENT – SAMTYKKESKJEMA

Masteroppgave: Extraordinary experiences crossing the Finnmark plateau

Intervjuansvarlig: Caroline Laurhammer

Prosjektveileder: Professor Bård Tronvoll.

All informasjon og opplysninger som blir referert i oppgaven vil bli anonymisert. Sitater som blir gjengitt blir teksten som «deltaker A, deltaker B, osv.» Det vil ikke være noen gjenkjennbare personopplysninger i oppgaven.

Du samtykker i at intervjuet blir tatt opp som lydopptak og at informasjonen som blir gitt blir brukt kun som informasjon til denne masteroppgaven. Alle lydopptak er kun til bruk for studenten.

Etter at masteroppgaven er levert og godkjent, blir alle lydopptak slettet.

Alle spørsmål som blir stilt er med formål om å bidra til masteroppgaven, som er beskrevet i mer detalj i informasjonsskrivet som hører til samtykkeskjema.

Om du ønsker at noe skal legges til, så noter gjerne her:

Du kan når som helst trekke deg fra studiet.

Jeg, Caroline Laurhammer, takker så mye for tiden din og bidraget ditt. Jeg skal behandle informasjonen med ytterst respekt.

Sted og dato

Jeg samtykker;

Respondent

Appendix D. List of codes and attributes

Code	Attribute	Comment
E01	Extraordinary experience	Things that witnesses of EE
E02	Transformation	In what way did it change you
E03	Memorable	What is memorable
E04	Intense	
E05	Expectations	What expect. do people have, do they have any?
E06	Memorable 2	How long will this memory last
E07	Planning the trip	How did, or did you at all, plan for the trip
E08	Extraordinary on a scale from 1 to 10	What is the reason behind
E09	In company with others	Individually or with company, and people whom you meet
E10	Motivation	What is the motivation for the trip
E11	Skills	The impact from knowledge and skills
E12	Highlights	What makes it memorable
E13	Immersion	In what way did you immerse
E14	Nature (weather, animals)	Weather a big part of nature exp.
E15	How many extraordinary experiences during a year	
E16	As planned	Did it go as planned?
E17	Age	Not focus, but important
E18	Happiness	Makes you happy
E19	Culture	Culture and history, like the Sami people, cabins and their hosts
E20	Year and month of trip	To see how long memories stay in your memory
E21	Ordinary	what makes it ordinary
E22	Comparisons	comparisons with other extraordinary activities, sites, that help explain
E23	Personal growth/self renewal	
E24	Forget about time and place	Belong to immersion
E25	Experiences before and after	
E26	Meaningful	It is all meaningful, lies in it...
E27	Antistructure	

