

Department of Tourism Alta

TOURISTS PERFORMING THE UNPREDICTABLE:

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SCRIPT, STAGE AND SOCIAL INTERACTION ON
NORTHERN LIGHTS ACTIVITIES IN NORTHERN NORWAY

Franziska Wentzlaff

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ABSTRACT

Visitors travel from all over the world to Northern Norway to view the natural spectacle, the Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights during the wintertime. To increase the chances of visitors viewing the lights, they participate in a range of different activities. In order to get an understanding of how tourists perform during those activities, an ethnographic methodology informed by feministic research values was applied. Data were gathered from different ethnographic methods and thematic analysis was used to categorize gathered data into the script, stage and sharing of performances. The findings indicate that northern light experiences are a fluent process of confrontation, adjustment and improvisation.

The script behind Northern Lights experiences enables the participants to perform unknown activities in unfamiliar environments. Often, performance is a process of fluidly transiting from initially perceived uncontrolled situations to the actual performance of the activity. The uncertainty of the phenomenon Aurora Borealis requires improvisation and flexibility from all involved participants. Activities that are attached to such a place and setting associate with a need for increased improvisation, while flexible activities require additional guidance and structure.

The stage for performance consists of the arctic landscape and darkness both involving uncontrollable factors of the natural phenomena Northern Lights and the weather. Businesses use and form through materiality that supports performance, a controlled environment and stage within nature. The guide negotiates between stage, script and the visitors to enable their performance.

Nevertheless, performance is individual and varies due to personal background and previous experiences. Sharing the experience with others and expressing themselves was almost as important for the tourists as to listen to the guide. Relatedly, performance does not just take place throughout a Northern Lights activity itself, additional performances reach and continue through social media.

KEYWORDS: Northern Lights, Performance, Northern Lights Tourism, Northern Norway

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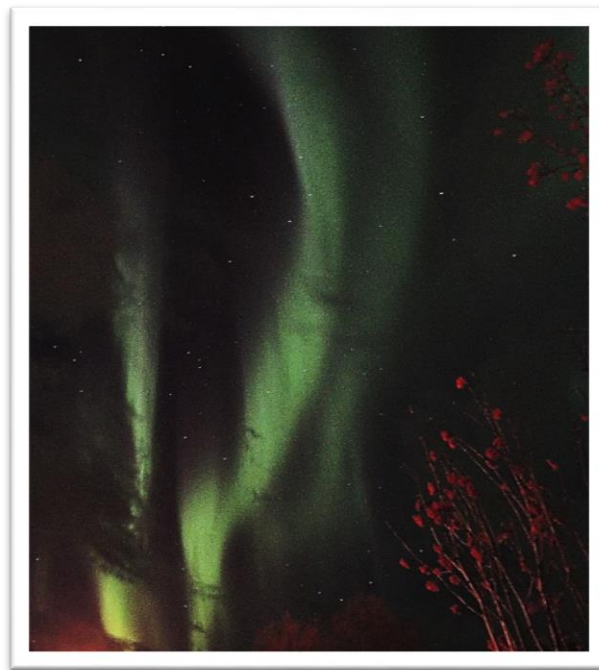


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1 INTRODUCTION

This introduction gives a short overview of developments of Northern Lights tourism in Tromsø in Northern Norway and its surroundings. The aim of this research and the related research question are presented to frame the intent of this Master thesis. The chapter concludes with an overview of each of the chapters of this thesis.

1.1 NORTHERN LIGHTS TOURISM IN NORTHERN NORWAY

The Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights is a natural phenomenon that can be observed in Northern Norway from mid-September to mid-April, when the sky is dark and the weather is suitable (Hansen, 2014; Larsen, 2005; Weaver, 2011). The phenomenon has a long history and combines scientific and mystic explanations of its existence (Friedman, 2010; Mathisen, 2014). Scientifically, Northern Lights occur when explosions on the surface of the sun send electromagnetic particles, which hit the magnetic field around the earth in the pole areas (Edensor, 2010; Hansen, 2014). The Northern Lights belt or zone, where the phenomenon can be mainly observed, reaches about 2500 km from both pole areas. Sometimes the lights can also be seen further south, but here the conditions have to be exceptional and the explosions extremely strong. The shimmering and moving lights can occur in different colors, dependent on how deep the electromagnetic particles reach into the atmosphere and with which kind of gases they mix with. Mainly green lights can be viewed, but sometimes violet, red, white and blue lights can occur (Friedman, 2010; Hansen, 2014). Besides the scientific explanation, many myths surround the Northern Lights. Children were not supposed to wink at the lights, or they would be taken away, another myth tells that strong aurora activity was seen as a messenger for war or other negative events. Some northern cultures interpreted the lights as souls of their ancestors. Thus, in early history, the Northern Lights have been connected with supernatural spirits and mystic explanations of the people living beneath them (Mathisen, 2014).

Scientific or myth, the natural phenomenon Aurora Borealis still maintains its magic and in recent years has generated increasing international attention to northern areas like Finland,

Northern Norway, Iceland and Alaska (Friedman, 2010; Heimtun, Jóhannesson, & Tuulentie, 2014; Mathisen, 2014). Joanna Lumley, a British actress and her “Hunting the Northern Lights”- movie is often referred to as catalyst for the international attention to the Northern Lights in Norway (BBC, 2008). Since then, tourism numbers in Northern Norway have increased substantially and people from England and other European countries, as well as Japan and South America have come to experience the Aurora Borealis (Vinter Troms AS, 2014). The bigger cities like Bodø, Tromsø and Alta serve as hubs for incoming tourists (Heimtun et al., 2014; Vinter Troms AS, 2014). Here the infrastructure provides easy access and sufficient accommodation, although most of the activities take place outside the towns in smaller, rural places (Weaver, 2011). With increasing tourist numbers, the number of offered products has also increased. In 2004-2005, one product was offered seven days a week in Tromsø; by 2013-2014, 65 products were offered (Heimtun et al., 2014).

Smedseng (2014) states that Northern Lights tourism can be classified as a part of nature based tourism, since nature is a part of the product and the product is dependent on nature. Weaver (2011) defines Northern Lights tourism as celestial tourism, which is focused on the observation of naturally occurring celestial phenomena for example comets, Northern Lights, sky- and stargazing. Heimtun et al. (2014, p. 15) differentiate Northern Lights activities between “Northern Lights hunts” and “Aurora Experiences”. The first includes a pure hunt of the Northern Lights in a minibus, coach or boat, where long distances are travelled. Often those tours include professional photographers or guides that are trained in handling the camera to take pictures of the lights and the visitors together with the lights (Bertella, 2013). Aurora Experiences on the other side are activities that surround the Northern Lights experience, for instance, dogsledding, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, horseback riding and overnight stays. There are about 30 products that fall under the Aurora experience in Tromsø, which are also more specific to place (Heimtun et al., 2014). Hunting the lights products slightly outnumber the Aurora experiences with 35 products offered in Tromsø in 2013-2014.

According to Mathisen (2014), it is necessary to leave the towns and dive into the darkness and arctic landscape to really experience the Northern Lights. The arctic or aurora landscape plays an important role by being extreme and in a sense hostile, which creates a more

dramatic platform and stage for experiences that are meant to encounter the light (Smedseng, 2014). Nonetheless, all activities surrounding the natural phenomenon have to deal with uncertainty, the cold, waiting and the dark as important components and factors that make it an effort to experience the lights, which in turn contributes to the excitement and surprise when doing so (Kivelä, 2014). Mathisen (2014) states participants can have a unique experience when seeing the Northern Lights. Nonetheless, in order to see the phenomenon, Kivelä (2014) refers to the importance in the actor – network surrounding Northern Lights products. The guide and some tangibles connected to Northern Lights experiences are supposed to create a certain balance between nature and the participant. The guide narrates and leads through the experiences based on the type of activity and the weather. Smedseng (2014) approaches Northern Lights tourism from the perspective of the entrepreneur, stager and guide. Smedseng (2014) indicates that the more active Northern Lights are approached, for example by dogsledding or snowshoeing, the less participants are disappointed when not seeing them. On the other hand, when an activity is bound to a place, the actual chance of seeing the lights is limited. Hence, the search for the Northern Lights is dependent on type of activity, seeing or not seeing them and the accordant narration strategy of the guide. Ekland (2011) emphasizes the importance of learning for tourists, who are active controllers of their own involvement in experiences. He describes that guests from Hurtigruten coastal steamer request special and more individualized activities surrounding the light, as a sort of social platform, so participants can meet others, share experiences and have something to talk about. Such requests suggest that social contact and meeting others are important elements of tourism experiences as well.

Winter tourism in Northern Norway in comparison to summer tourism, requires skills and knowledge. In the summer, it is easy to drive and access the natural environment, whereas in the winter the roads are icy, it is dark and to enter nature requires to know about right clothing and behavior. Due to unfamiliar and uncontrollable conditions, boundaries are created along with a strong dependence on activity providers in order to experience the phenomenon and surrounding arctic activities. The interplay and constellation of different natural, human and materialistic attributes have a significant influence on the adventurous character of “hunting”

the light experience. At first glance, many see Northern Lights tourism as easily earned money, but due to the uncertainty and the correspondent requirements to the capabilities of the guide it becomes clear that this is not the case. Marketing and reality start to clash since Photoshop and marketing organizations create an “arctic fantasyland” (see for example Bertella, 2013; Friedman, 2010; Mathisen, 2014). Product descriptions in the Internet often promise exceptional arctic and Northern Lights experiences, which cannot always be practically realized.

1.2 OBJECTIVES AND BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY

The landscape and natural conditions in Northern Norway are the basis for various extraordinary experiences. Especially during winter, many visitors search for an encounter with the arctic and the Northern Lights to experience something new, magical and extraordinary. Northern Norway is not a destination for mass tourism in the international sense, but rather a niche market for a wider and more specialized range of products. The major hubs and starting points for incoming Northern Lights tourists are Tromsø, Alta and Bodø, whereas many of the rural areas close by serve as a stage for the actual experiences.

In case of this study, Tromsø serves as starting point for the Northern Lights activities. The surrounding rural areas, mainly the Lyngenfjord region, provide the platform and examples for Northern Lights hunts and experiences. This Master thesis was written throughout an internship and cooperation with Visit Lyngenfjord, a destination company that is amongst others responsible for the presentation, packaging and sales of touristic products for the Lyngen, Storfjord and Kåfjord communities (Visit Lyngenfjord AS, 2015). Getting to know existing products, local entrepreneurs and businesses, along with the knowledge of packaging, development and sales of products are essential basics for understanding the Northern Lights industry and developing an understanding of activities and tourist performances. In combination with the practical insight into the industry from an overall destination agency perspective, participant observation in the activities themselves offered me the chance to look at the performance perspective of tourists during Northern Lights experiences.

My aim was to analyze and discuss the performance of tourists participating in Northern Lights activities. In detail, this involved the influence of the script, stage and social interaction throughout the performance of different Northern Lights activities. Traditional concepts, like Urry's (1990) "tourism gaze" that describes the tourist as gazing and being passive experientially, do not apply in modern tourism anymore. It is important to clarify and understand the performance of the tourist in order to provide enhanced experiences. Activity providers and destination companies need to be wary of focusing primarily on visual encounters with place. Such a focus perceives the tourist as a paying, passive figure and ignores the tourist as a seeker of holistic sensual involvement and active interaction. According to Hughes and Deutsch (2010) it is not the first time that the perspective and motivations of tourists are misunderstood by the industry, which resulted in the development of irrelevant product concepts. For this reason, the purpose of this thesis is to focus on how participants relate and perform Northern Lights experiences in practice, instead of sorting them into certain pre-defined containers. Thus, it is necessary to look at the active decisions in the form of following the actual performance of the tourists to understand their motivation and needs. The following research question captures the overall aim of this thesis, which is supported by three sub-questions related to components of the performance of Northern Lights activities.

How do tourists perform Northern Lights activities?

- ✓ How does the script of activities influence the performance of Northern Lights participants?
- ✓ What role does the stage play in the performance of Northern Lights activities?
- ✓ How is performance shared throughout the participation in an activity and afterwards through social media?

The purpose is not to define "THE Northern Lights experience", but rather to outline considerations for understanding the visitors by looking at their performances. Different dynamics will be illustrated and set in context to each other. The aim here is to look at tourism performance in order to understand and redefine tourists as complex, individual and

sensing bodies (see for example Bærenholdt et al, 2004; Edensor, 2000; Larsen, 2005), to which the Northern Lights industry has to respond accordingly.

1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE MASTER THESIS

This Master thesis is divided into seven chapters. *The introduction* gives a short overview over the general developments of Northern Lights tourism in Tromsø and the Lyngenfjord region (Northern Norway). The aim of this research and the research questions are presented to provide a frame for this Master thesis.

Chapter 2 theorizes tourism performance. The theoretical framework of performance theory, its characteristics and different implications are presented. The social realm and the encounter with place and landscape as part of performance are also discussed.

The *third chapter* presents a detailed and transparent illustration of the ethnographic methodology that was used for this thesis. This thesis applied a qualitative approach that is informed by feministic research values. A combination of ethnographic methods, such as, participate observation, semi-structured and informal interviewing as well as online ethnography was applied. All of these methods provided the basis for the development of thick descriptions of four different Northern Lights activities involved in this Master's research. Thematic analysis was used to develop themes and categories underlying performance, which are discussed later in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Chapter 4 presents the findings and discussion of different scripts as decisive factors associated with the process of an unknown performance related to Northern Lights activities. The scripts aim ensure performances are successful and include the uncertainty of the natural phenomenon of the activity itself. Performance is a process that goes through different phases, which can be perceived as uncontrolled by the participants in the beginning and thereafter develops into a disciplined ritual that enables a successful performance.

Chapter 5 analyzes the role of the stage that is marked by the arctic landscape and darkness and associates with uncontrollable elements. Materiality is considered as a major impact on the success and authenticity of performance by providing a controlled stage within the natural

environment. With regard to this, the guide is discussed as a negotiator between materiality, which creates a homogenous space within the arctic landscape as an uncontrollable space.

Chapter 6 outlines different performances and reactions towards the activities and discusses performance as being individual in nature. An analysis of the social influence on performance and how performance is shared with other participants is presented. Finally, the reproduction of performance in social media is discussed and how this generates expectations that arise with regard to Northern Lights activities.

Chapter 7, The conclusion summarizes the findings and discusses them in relation to practical aspects of Northern Lights activities. The study is evaluated and further considerations associated with the future performance of Northern Lights activities are provided.

2 THEORETICAL DISCUSSION ABOUT PERFORMANCE THEORY

This chapter theorizes the characteristics and implications of tourist performances. The chapter proffers that production, consumption and encounters with the stage, that is, landscape and darkness, as well as materiality and guide, are important determinants for tourist performances. The influence of the social realm, another important determinant for tourism performances, is also considered.

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO TOURISM PERFORMANCE

Throughout the years, there have been numerous approaches to defining and developing concepts that encompass the complex dimensions and perspectives of the tourist experience (for example Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Ryan, 2011; Selänniemi, 2001; Uriely, 2005). By looking at different approaches, it becomes clear that many of them overlap or refute each other. Nonetheless, this supports the development of a deeper understanding of certain facets of an experience since there are many different motives behind travelling behavior than originally theorized (Uriely, 2005).

Previous tourism conception by, for example, Urry (1990) and Cohen (1979) emphasized the passive and pre-defined character of tourists. Urry (1990) considered visitors “gaze” at things, people and places. This positioned a tourist as using only one sense – the vision – which gave the tourist a passive role in their own experience, by leaving out “how places are sensed, used, and practiced” (Bærenholdt et al, 2004, p. 5). Cohen (1979) on the other hand developed “the tourist” by drawing too much focus on tourist typologies. According to Edensor (2000, p. 322), typologies can be useful to come up with regularities, but Edensor emphasizes that they represent a “variety of practice rather than type of people”. Also Larsen (2005, p. 417) points out a common prejudice attitude towards “the camera work of tourists [which] is too easily and too quickly seen as passive, superficial, and disembodied, a discursively prefigured activity of quotation”. Larsen (2005) infers that photographing is more than a passive and imitational behavior, but rather an active and embodied performance of social relationships in a place. Similarly, Edensor (2000) ascribes the tourist as an active and partly self-conscious

role where they choose in which way they encounter a place. Hyde and Olesen (2011, p.1) state that tourists perform their identity on tourism stages through a certain packaging behavior that aims to support the “maintenance, construction and articulation of self-identity” in a different setting.

In connection to the approaches above, Uriely refers to discourses in the academic world that challenge the former superficial role of tourists as “cultural decadence in modern capitalist societies towards a more meaningful modern ritual, which involves a quest for the authentic” and personal growth (Uriely, 2005, p. 208). Sharpley and Stone (2011) also acknowledge the sophistication and complexity of today’s consumers. Past approaches, for instance, the passive role of the tourist or their quest for authenticity have to be rethought and reconnected to contemporary trends and consumer behavior. Tourism is an interactive process based on active performance between the destination as setting and tourists as active contributors and producers of the scene (Uriely, 2005). Originally, it was Goffman that introduced the performance approach that uses the theatre as an overall metaphor to explain the processes of everyday and social life as dramaturgical (Goffman, 1959). This approach has been introduced and applied to tourism related issues by various authors throughout the past years (see for example Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Edensor, 2000; Larsen, 2005). Larsen (2005, p. 417) suggests that photography is a complex theatrical issue with “expressive actors, scripts and choreographies”. Hence, tourists become actors, tourism behavior becomes performance, the audience consist of other actors present, that judge the performance, based on the ability of the actor to perform their role (Hyde & Olesen, 2011).

For the reasons described above, I apply the performance approach to the problem formulation of my thesis. Tourists in the case of Northern Lights tourism are seen as active decision makers and influencers of their own experiences. Their decision to participate in a certain Northern Lights activity requires the tourists from the beginning to engage in active reflection and reaction. Later, their participation in more or less physical activities requires the tourists too actively perform as part of the process. That being said, performance underlies certain rules that enable a successful realization. In this case, those rules for performance are defined as the script of Northern Lights performances. The script requires a certain

performance of the participants, albeit that performance itself can still vary. Edensor (2000) for instance, describes three different kinds of tourism performances in the form of walking patterns that occur on the same stage, which represent disciplined rituals, improvised and unbounded performances. These performances are influenced by different background variables and allow more or less deviation from originally intended performances. “Disciplined rituals” are culturally or social restricted and define where tourists walk, what they photograph, and does not allow any sort of deviation from the rules. “Improvised performances”, on the other hand, are a more reflexive and self-determining ways that tourists explore surroundings. Under certain circumstances, the tourist cannot always control their performance, even though it is re-enacted. When the situation becomes unfamiliar and the rehearsed performances cannot be applied, the tourist might even be in the center of attention and ridicule, wherein an “unbounded performance” applies. (Edensor, 2000; Hyde & Olesen, 2011)

Edensor’s (2000) different performances show the variation of action that also depends on the background of the tourists. For this reason, intrinsic factors, for example, cultural background and the accordant set of behavior, gender, class and ethnicity (Bourdieu, 1984) play an important role for the participation in Northern Lights activities and perspective on such. Further, Northern Lights performances are dependent on time and space, as well as constantly reproduced, regulated and negotiated with regard to the uncertainty of the phenomenon itself (Edensor, 2000). Interaction with other participants, the guides and tourism workers influences Northern Lights performances. Nonetheless, those visitors coming for the first time in winter to the North depend on the companies to define scripts and enable performance. Participation demands skills and changes over time based on the natural conditions. (Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004; Edensor, 2000; Hyde & Olesen, 2011) Subsequently, the performance approach implies tourists are active participants and creators of their experiences, although dependent on a script to enable a successful performance in the unknown.

2.2 THE ROLE OF PLACE AND LANDSCAPE WITHIN TOURISM

Traditional economic and environmental concepts describe tourism places as a result of politics, location, planning, development and impacts (Hall & Mitchell, 2005), which leaves out the concepts of place, space and time (Bærenholdt et al., 2004). In the original sense, place is reduced to a territorially fixed entity and tourist travel becomes an external element that has to be handled by the destination. Places may suffer from a focus on only the visual sense, as this ignores how places are experienced by all the senses (Bærenholdt et al., 2004). Bærenholdt et al. (2004) point out that only a few studies have examined how, in practice, tourist places are performed. Instead, studies have remained in determined cultural frames of analyzing and explaining, rather than exploring how tourists relate to places in practice. Today, traditional concepts of place are rethought and set into a new context with space and performance (for example Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Larsen, 2005).

A new perspective becomes necessary since the concepts of mobility, place, borders and culture are developed. Sheller and Urry (2006) describe a new mobility paradigm that is not solely based on the increased and intensified speed of mobility, or on decentralization and deterritorialization. They refer to a broader theoretical project that goes beyond the imagining of terrains as spatially fixed geographical unities. The authors refer to a world of contrast and liquid modernity. This world is marked by multiculturalism, freedom, mobility and massive communication (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Mobile “machines” like the mobile phone, cars and the internet generate an overlapping in time and space. Mobility also influences power relations and status since not everyone has equal access and possibilities to travel. Access or lack thereof creates certain patterns and flows of people. Sheller and Urry (2006) state that mobility is not one single network, but rather a complex, ramified and endless regime of flow. One of the integral parts of the new mobility paradigm is the change in role of place. Previously relatively fixed, given and separated from those visiting, places are now seen as connected to actors through performance. Hence, places become dynamic, closer and determined through the present by people engaged in performing in those places.

In connection to the developments described above, Bærenholdt et al. (2004, p. 1) state that “places are intrinsic – an invention of the tourist”. The meaning behind this statement is a revolutionary thinking moving away from the stereotypic role model of the tourist “gazing” at things and consuming places, which had been regarded as common paradigm in the academic and practical world of tourism. Bærenholdt et al. (2004, p. 4) describe “tourism as a form of encountering and making sense of the world by the tourist transforming a place from the ordinary to the extraordinary through his or her performance”. This means that tourism places are not bound to a specific destination inclusive of all promoted identities, but rather to tourists being at a place and performing at that place making it touristic. Bærenholdt et al. (2004) and Larsen (2005) suggest that tourist places do not have to be spectacular, however, through special performances and attitudes the ordinary is raised to the extraordinary, especially by social performance. Subsequently, in light of such changes and developments, the role of place itself becomes insignificant.

What matters are the networks of tangible and intangible elements of a destination that enable tourist performance. Tourism places are seen as “hybrids bridging the realms of humans and nonhuman” (Bærenholdt et al., 2004, p.2). This bridge includes “diverse mobilities and proximities, flows of anticipations, performances and memory as well as extensive social-material networks stabilizing the sedimentated practices that make tourist places” (Bærenholdt et al., 2004, p.2). Parrinello (2001, p. 210) sees “material cultures [as] crucial in tourism performances because they have use value that enhances the physicality of the body and enables it to do things and sense realities that would otherwise be beyond its accomplishment”. Materiality does not just enhance, it also makes performance possible. Modern tourism is full of hybrids between “things” and humans, for example, the “camera tourist” is one of the significant ones (Larsen, 2005). Relatedly, tourism performance becomes possible through the complex interplay between materiality and human actors like guides and managers in a place (Larsen, 2005).

Within a place, the present material and intangible settings will create space. Edensor (2013) explains that time and space are determining factors of tourism performance through, for instance, sensual influences, aesthetics and materiality and various constitutions of those.

Consequently, the characteristics of space will influence and determine types of performances. Purified enclavic spaces, for instance, underlie strong regulation and control. Points of entry and exit are limited and the stimuli are strongly coordinated to achieve a certain reaction and flow. Heterogeneous space, on the other hand, is marked by a mixed composition of different actors with weak regulations and control by a third party. Such space requires improvisation and flexible adjustments to stimulation and encounters (Edensor, 2000). According to Oppermann (1993), both purified and heterogeneous spaces are co-existent in tourism, which implies that there are no entirely hermetically confined or purified spaces.

In connection to Northern Lights tourism in Tromsø and the Lyngenfjord region, place itself is not seen as significant. Due to the unpredictability of the Aurora, on a bus tour, place is quickly exchanged with more favorable locations that offer a clear view on the sky. Accordingly, physical activities that are bound to place also require a response to conditions like the weather and the capabilities of the tourists to perform on the stage. What matters in both cases is the material set-up of the stage as a platform for social interaction and performance. In my thesis, I see the employees and guides as an important connection between the material setting of the stage and the performance of tourists. Further, the material culture and the guide are reactionaries when confronted with the unpredictability of the phenomenon, Aurora Borealis. In addition, certain material aspects like cloths and tripod underline performance by enabling it and making it more authentic. The companies try to create a homogenous stage for performance that responds to changing external circumstances like the weather and aurora activity. In connection to the flexible setting created by guide and materiality, the arctic landscape and darkness are important components of the Northern Lights experience that require a constant negotiation for the stage being created. Subsequently, the arctic landscape is described using attributes related to the dark.

In the past, based on historical and religious conceptions of values, darkness has been associated with negativity, evil and the unknown. Even today, darkness is often connected to unfamiliarity, and reinforces emotions like fear, excitement, insecurity or nervousness (Edensor, 2013). During a Northern Lights display, the sky is dynamic and dominates the

landscape in a different way than in the daylight. Clouds, Northern Lights, stars and snow constantly create a different picture in the surroundings. Thus, darkness can be both scary and hostile, but also calm and welcoming, which generates a different encounter with the arctic landscape. Edensor (2013) argues that darkness offers different opportunities to strengthen other senses than vision, which improves the quality of non-visual experiences. According to Macpherson (2009), walking in the dark requires a different set of priorities like focusing on navigation and safety. Hence, a familiar activity suddenly becomes more exciting and requires different type of concentration and involvement. Darkness stimulates senses that usually have a subordinate position when it comes to encountering a place. This means that normal activities like a walk becomes more challenging since sight cannot be used to navigate. If the person allows the other senses to unfold, the landscape can generate a flow experience that is marked by absorption, orientation and interruption (Edensor, 2013, p. 458).

The Northern Lights experience is dependent on darkness, which confronts the tourists with primal fears of humanity. Nonetheless, the confrontation of Northern Lights tourists with darkness is seen as a process of emotional change from fear to a feeling of calmness and being welcomed. Still, to transfer from negative to positive perceptions, the stage defined by humans and material factors plays an important role. Companies and guides aim to develop a homogenous stage within a heterogeneous environment. This stage stands in contrast to the arctic landscape and darkness that enforces a constant negotiation and restructuring of the stage according to the external conditions. Even though performance is socially and spatially regulated and directed, the nature of the stage allows actors to deviate from the norm and perform independently. Some stages allow more independence others less. The stage is produced through the individual performance of the tourist and certain tangible proximities and instructions by the guide that give meaning to the setting (Bærenholdt et al., 2004).

2.3 THE SOCIAL REALM OF PERFORMANCES IN TOURISM

Hyde and Olesen (2011) state that tourists perform their identity on tourism stages through choosing certain costumes and props to support their performances. Performance is located in time and space and requires rehearsal, reflection and self-monitoring, which has to be

repeated and learned to achieve competence and security (Edensor, 2000). In general, tourism has been either discussed as time out of the ordinary, which allows tourists to try out new sides of identity and performance as well as to experience emotional and bodily freedom away from daily routines (Turner & Ash, 1975). Larsen (2005) purports that tourism is a part of everyday life involving the performance of family relationships instead of a vacation to an exotic island. Franklin (2003), however, argues that discussions about day to day and tourism life being indistinguishable is refuted by the rituals and performative nature of tourism. Tourism is not always connected to the “exotic” or “extraordinary”, and does not always require simplistic or “purified” motives like pleasure seeking.

Edensor (2000) points out that tourist performances are influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors and the nature of experiences: individual or group. Tourism often involves being together with friends and family and what factors need to be accordingly set in a place. Places and landscapes become personalized by being performed, for instance, taking pictures and attaching stories to different experiences on site (Larsen, 2005). Thus, tourists give meaning to place through relationships performed on site. Moreover, Hughes and Deutsch (2010) have emphasized the social role of tourism. Certain customer segments, in their study of older gay men, express their interest to travel with the same segment to prohibit prejudice and harassment. This wish is based on personal safety and to be with friends and likeminded people, where they can share different holiday experiences. Fear of the homophobic view of outsiders and potential conflicts that could arise jeopardize the wish for peace and relaxation. The wish of older gay men to be accepted has, on the other hand, nothing to do with the needs of younger homophile generations to party hard, but rather to do things in which heterosexual couples the same age would engage (Hughes & Deutsch, 2010). Place diminishes in significance as long as it provides the frame for intended performances. Heimtun (2007) also outlines the need for bonding and avoidance of otherness in her study of midlife single women, who are motivated by a wish for relationships rather than the significance of place. Being surrounded by likeminded people and sharing the experience are important factors of a tourist experience. Being alone and surrounded by groups performing their relationships to each other can result into negative feelings (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2012). Hence, the role of

place itself diminishes, whereas places provide space that fulfils the requirements for people performing social relationships. This performance can create an emotional connection to place in the form of shared memories that exist long after the vacation itself (Bærenholdt et al., 2004).

Tourism is a part of social life, rather than a separate state of being. According to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach, performance is directed by stage managers and observed by an audience, which judges the actor on the stage. Thus, tourism is a social construct that includes different dimensions of social relationships and interactions, which influence and surround performance (see for example Edensor, 2000; Goffman, 1959; Hyde & Olesen, 2011). The success and acceptance of an audience depends on an individual's performance and the audience's ability to understand the performance and shared meanings. External surveillance of audiences ensures appearance conformity and subordinates individuality to collective pressure (Hyde & Olesen, 2011). Edensor (2000) proffers that an actor's performance and the extent to which it is improvised is determined by the audience's expectations, the regulations of the stage and peer pressure to perform in compliance with fellow performers. In connection to this thesis, therefore, social influence is regarded as a major impact on performance. Performance is seen as an interactive, continuing process that can never be exactly reproduced (Edensor, 2000). Individual performances are monitored according to certain pre-defined expectations. If individual performances deviate from expectations or the group's performance, this will create conflicts and tensions within the group.

3 METHODOLOGY – AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

The following chapter presents a detailed and transparent illustration of the conditions under which this study was conducted. The philosophical background built the frame for the ontological (what is reality) and epistemological (how can reality be captured) considerations of the study along with the methods used in the study are described. The role of the researcher as well as ethical considerations related to the appropriateness of gathering, evaluating and processing data are contextualized against the philosophical background and research methods.

3.1 FEMINISTIC INFLUENCE ON THIS RESEARCH

The philosophical background is an important determinant. Tribe (2001) points at different research paradigms, which influence the research process (epistemology) and what is perceived to be reality (ontology). Uriely (2005) emphasizes a shift in academic research from a positivistic perspective of finding absolute truth towards a more open and interpretive approach about the relativity of truth of research. This academic shift creates new opportunities for studying tourist experiences. Within tourism, Tribe (2001) advocates the importance of different paradigms to capture values and the meaning of different problem formulations. For my study, I rejected positivistic methods, which aim to capture reality solely through use of quantitative methods. Quantitative methods exclude the researcher and their emotions as an individual, which I consider has an important impact on research in general.

Tribe (2001) refers to methodology as a detailed and continuing process of reflection on potential methods. However, method itself should not captivate all sort of reflection while turning into a major determinant of future results. Rather, method should be as a sort of critical perspective on the whole research process. This means that the “problem” or “meaning” of a study should be the basis for reflecting on different methods and what can be achieved using those, instead for letting the method define what kind of results are achieved.

My intention for this thesis was to look at the performance of tourists during Northern Lights activities. The performance approach requires the researcher to dive into the matter and become a part of the research. Subsequently, I chose qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are mainly applied when it is necessary to get access to meaning, purpose, and to gain an understanding of a context as well as to discover new dimensions of phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To get an insight into tourism performances during Northern Lights activities required me as researcher to get really close to the tourist experience itself. According to Denzin (2003, p. 720) “performance does not become fixed in a written text to be read later. Rather, performance is doing, is now, and has feelings, passions, joy, tears, despair, and hope. Performance can reach to people’s hearts and not only their minds”. This makes this research an intimate matter since the researcher enters the world of emotions of the tourists. This required reflection and ethical considerations from my side, as well as clarity over my perspective as a researcher to the researched, which is examined further in section 3.3.

In this thesis, I apply certain values of a feministic approach as described by Fontana and Frey (2005) and Heimtun and Morgan (2012), and which conforms with the problematic described above. Fontana and Frey (2005) set the focus within a feminist’s paradigm of care and responsibility and “feminist informed social values”. For Heimtun and Morgan (2012), feminism involves empowerment of the researcher and the researched persons, participation and a joint focus to discuss a topic or issue in order to reflect about possible solutions. Interviewees are no longer research objects, but rather they become active participants within the research process and contribute to informing the results (Fontana & Frey, 2005). “Feminists try to produce knowledge in cooperation, refusing typical values like neutrality or predefined questions of the researcher and rather build knowledge on trust and friendship, the research is owned by those participating” (Denzin, 1997, p.275 in Fontana and Frey, 2005). Hence, with respect to the researched parties, I chose an approach that respects them as individual person, who cooperatively contributes with me as the researcher to the development and production of this research. The values of this feministic approach will be apparent throughout this thesis.

In the following section, the study will be introduced as well as a discussion of how the research was conducted with regard to the study's specific context. To get to the heart of tourists performing Northern Lights activities requires active participation by the researcher in order to "be in there" and "feel what they feel". A combination of participant observation, online data, semi-structured group and informal interviews were used to get to the bottom of Northern Lights experiences. Advantages and disadvantages of each method will be discussed in relation to the aim of this study.

3.2 A DATA-ORIENTATED APPROACH – NORTHERN LIGHTS TOURISM IN TROMSØ AND THE LYNGENFJORD REGION

The overall goal of tourists visiting Tromsø in the winter is to see the Northern Lights (Vinter Troms AS, 2014). Visitors travel from all over the world for many hours to view this spectacle. After initial monetary and leisure time investments, tourists undertaken consideration of which activities will ensure the highest possible chance of viewing the lights. Tromsø as a hub offers the necessary infrastructure and a manifold product range when it comes to Northern Lights products. Nonetheless, activities mostly take place outside Tromsø in regions like Lyngenfjord and Kvaløya (Visit Tromsø AS, 2015). Typical activities include hunting the Northern Lights by bus, dogsledding under the Northern Lights, snowmobiling, horseback riding, snowshoe walks, reindeer sledding and overnight stays.

My aim was to access the performance of participants in different Northern Lights tours that started from Tromsø using different ethnographic methods, specifically, participant observation, online ethnography and semi-structured or informal interviewing. A variety of Northern Lights activities was chosen due to the varying degree of physical involvement in the activity self and the visitors within the environment. To use a combination of different activities and methods combines advantages and access to different methods and diminishes misunderstanding by studying different sources. The following table presents a summary of the data I gathered in November 2014 until end of January 2015. Dependent on availability and if there were already other participants signed up, I participated in eight Northern Lights tours.

<p>Participant Observation</p>	<p>Participation in Northern Lights-:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - bus hunts: two participations in middle of January 2015, 26 participants in the Tromsø region and 23 participants on Kvaløya (island) - dogsledding: two participations during January 2015, 19 participants separated in 3 groups in the Lyngenfjord region, 4 participants in the Lyngenfjord region - walk: two participations during December 2014 in the Lyngenfjord region, one with 12 and one with 3 participants - overnight stay: in a Sami tent two participations during December 2014 and January 2015, 1 participant on both tours in the Lyngenfjord region.
<p>Semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>One interview during a Northern Lights walk in the beginning of December 2014 with two young Malaysian women in their thirties in the Lyngenfjord region.</p>
<p>Informal Interviews</p>	<p>Unofficial statements and informal interviews with participants of the eight different activities in which I participated.</p>
<p>Online Data</p>	<p>Contributions from Trip Advisor associated with activities that the researcher participated in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guided bus tour: February 2013 to February 2015, in total 38 comments, Tromsø and surrounding regions - Dogsledding: January 2013 to January 2015, in total 28 comments, Lyngenfjord region - Snowshoe walk: February 2013 to December 2014, in total 10 comments, Lyngenfjord region - Overnight stay: January 2013 to January 2015, in total 14 comments, Lyngenfjord region.
<p>Other Data</p>	<p>Webpages of the destination companies, Visit Tromsø and Visit Lyngenfjord, the Snowmonitor, a quantitative study of the Vinter Troms AS and printed material with product information from companies from the tourist information in Tromsø and Lyngseidet.</p>

Table 1: Methods & Data

In the following, I discuss the methods presented in the table in more detail along with the advantages and disadvantages of each method with regard to the study of Northern Lights tourism.

Participant observation was used to get a general insight into Northern Lights products. Angrosino (2005) states that for social and behavioral sciences, observation is fundamental for observing human activities and physical settings. This form of research is almost always a natural part of research since throughout interviews people are observed. Angrosino (2005) characterizes participant observation as an act of balance between participation and observation. Such participant observation is different to earlier research, which aimed for positivistic objectivity. In the latter, the researcher was emotionally detached and researched at a distance rather than engaged in dialogue.

According to Denzin (2003), performance leads to a better understanding of the context of a certain issue. This means the researcher gets into the activity to perform and feel how the other participants feel, in order to understand. Hence, to see how people act in the context, how they approach different activities and frames for such, how they interact and what kind of emotions were generated would contribute to developing an understanding of performances of Northern Lights activities and more broadly to tourist experiences. Choosing different activities enabled the development of a general understanding of different Northern Lights tours as well as elements that affected performance. Participant observation was used to delve into the diverse activities of each of the different companies offering northern light experiences. The research was conducted with four different types of activities surrounding the Northern Lights, specifically, a Northern Lights walk, dogsledding, guided bus tours and overnight stays in a traditional Sami-tent. The research was conducted in conjunction with two different companies, one in the Tromsø and one in the Lyngenfjord region. The same activity offered by the same company was performed twice in order to see how the flexible factors of an experience, such as, the weather and group dynamics could change and influence experiences. It was important for me to combine observation with interviewing in order to give the tourists a voice to directly express their points of view and to determine how their views compared or contrasted with my observations.

To ensure an authentic interpretation of performances, I conducted semi-structured group interviews and informal interviews. Fontana and Frey (2005) state that informal interviewing or in-depth (ethnographic) interviewing and participant observation go hand in hand and much of the data gathered during participant observation comes from informal interviewing in the field. Personal feelings influence the research process as well as what kind of interview is done and both have consequences for the results. Interviews are dependent on interactions and relations, they are always biased and influenced by how the interviewer understands and forwards information to a third party. My aim was to build a relationship to achieve insight into the tourist side of the Northern Lights activities. Therefore, my aim was for my research to take place when people booked a combination of an overnight stay and physical activity in order to have more time to build a relationship with participants and conduct interviews. This was not always possible, for example, during the dogsledding tour or guided walk in the dark. Here, I was confronted with the issue of weather in the beginning of December, where there was no snow and guests cancelled or chose other tours, and did not stay overnight. This made it hard to conduct interviews, since I needed the time to build up a relationship to generate trust. In January, the Northern Lights activity was high and lasted almost through the whole night, so again there was no time to conduct semi-structured interviews. Accordingly, I used informal interviewing when there was no time for semi-structured interviews. The advantage of informal interviewing was that many statements came more into the context of the experience itself. Nonetheless, one semi-structured interview was conducted to learn about the perception of people after the performance, as well as the setting and other relevant aspects. Most of the informal and semi structured interviews were conducted in groups since many came as couples, with friends or family. Since participants engaging in the experience together and performing together; interviewing them together led to a broader discussion of how they had experienced the previous activity.

To supplement the direct statements of the tourists and my observations, I included Trip Advisor comments dating back two years that were related to the participating companies and activities, Online ethnography and the Internet shape an arena for communication, expressing and sharing meanings and ideas between like-minded people without any physical attachment

(Markham, 2005). Considering the use online ethnography has different advantages but also factors that should be considered. Different identities can be created and it becomes hard to see who the person behind the text is. Using examples from Trip Advisor means using anonym statements that do not tell if it was male or female posting. Further, people can post comments long after they participated. On the other hand, pressure is taken from the person, so they can state what matters to them (Markham, 2005). Throughout this research, Trip Advisor was used to locate narrations of Northern Lights performances to complement the observed tours. These narrations provided further insights into how different people narrate the same activities, what were important elements, highlights and criticisms, as well as how varying aurora activity influenced the experience of the tourists. The aspects mentioned are not asked by the researcher but independently shared via the Internet. Narration is, according to Chase (2005, p. 656), used as a “retrospective meaning making – the shaping or ordering of past experiences. Narrative is a way of understanding one’s own and other’s actions, of organizing events and events into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time” (Chase, 2005, p. 656). In Trip Advisor, former visitors often sort chronologically, as well as, highlight aspects and happenings about which they deemed worth talking. They further express emotions and their perspective on certain aspects. However, the challenge for me as a researcher, lay in the comparison of the different and individual narrations.

Secondary data as all kind of product information, webpages and articles from Visit Tromsø and Visit Lyngenfjord was also used to get a general picture of the Northern Lights industry. A quantitative study that was conducted of the Arena vinter (winter) project “Lønnsomme vinteropplevelser” provided basic quantitative data concerning general information about the motives and satisfaction of winter tourists in Northern Norway. Further, this study reviewed booking behavior, motives, the importance of different types of activities as well as payment behavior.

This thesis is based on data orientated research, which means that the data gathered from the ethnographic methods are the basis for developing four dense, thick descriptions of Northern Lights activities. A thick description aims to explain a certain phenomenon within its context

so it can be understood by an outsider (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). In this connection, the researcher describes detailed field experiences, patterns and relationships (Holloway, 1997). The thick descriptions are presented in Table 2 at the end of this section, which I will refer to more detailed throughout the analysis in the following chapters. Further, the thick descriptions are the foundation for thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is used to develop themes that are connected to the initial pattern (Aronson, 1994), in the case of this thesis performance of Northern Lights activities. Subsequently, thematic analysis aims to combine and catalogue related patterns into subthemes. Themes can be for example “conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 131). Further, themes are recognized by “bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone” (Leininger, 1985, p. 60). Hence, thematic reading is used to identify themes that underlie an initial pattern. Under those themes, sub-themes are developed to categorize information and details into a comprehensive portrait of a certain activity. Going through my field notes and the comments, I found repeated themes that were connected to the performance of activities by the tourists, the role of northern light during the tours and other aspects, for example, security, other participants, the guide, landscape or the organization of tours. I categorized performance into the themes script, stage and social interaction, where I assorted most of the subthemes. Critical in thematic analysis is that the themes are presented from the researcher’s point of view. This means that the researcher influences which topics are emphasized and discussed. Therefore, Aronson (1994) advocates for reassurance that the analyzed data outlines relevant factors. This is done by analyzing each activity with data from my own observations and statements from the guests during the trip along with Trip Advisor data to provide different sources. The argumentation of why the presented categories matter follows in the next chapters, which present the analysis and discussion of the data.

Participating in a NORTHERN LIGHTS DOG SLEDDING TOUR is an activity that certainly needs guidance, equipment and surroundings. As do most of the tours, this tour also begins in the city of Tromsø. When arriving at the wilderness camp, a guide distributes proper cloth, mittens and shoes. Two participants at a time get assigned to a sledge and are provided with a short introduction about the tour

and the handling of the sledge. First one drives, while the other participant sits on the sledge. Halfway, the positions are switched. The guide stops regularly to ensure that everyone is following, or when the Northern Lights show up. The groups are small so that every guide has a view other sledges with him. If there are several groups, the guides will leave enough space so the experience becomes more exclusive and less crowded. After the tour participants are served hot food and beverages, they return to Tromsø.

The NORTHERN LIGHTS WALK requires the participants to leave the center of Tromsø by bus as well. Coming to a wilderness camp in more rural areas is often the starting point for the tour. After being assigned to a guide and offered proper cloth, mittens and shoes, a short introduction follows and the tours start. The tour varies in length, leads through the dark forest and winter landscape. Depending on the weather and snow conditions, snowshoes are used. The guide stops and assures that everyone is close to the group and explains traces of animals in the wilderness, facts and myths about the Northern Lights. The guide tries to involve participants in conversations and creates interaction. Regardless of whether the lights shows up or not, the guides return the group to the camp, where warm beverages and dinner is served. Participants get the chance to look around in the camp, visit the dogs if they want and take pictures. The dinner usually takes place inside a tent or lavvu.

Participating in a guided NORTHERN LIGHTS HUNT is connected to a bus ride that starts in front of a hotel. The tours go where the weather allows a clear view on the sky. “We do chase the good weather, but we have to wait for the Lights” (Guide Northern Lights Tour in January 2015, Tromsø region). Conditions like the cold, wind and other determining factors are taken into consideration. The tours start with an introduction of the guide, clear advice to use the belts and other information related to the tours and the procedures for viewing the Northern Lights. Throughout the drive, the guides explain the scientific facts and myths surrounding the Northern Lights. Some companies use base camps. The advantage of facilities is that participants can warm up, use toilets and order, if they want food. Another very important benefit of this solution is improved security, the possibility for participants to move freely and experience the Northern Lights slightly away from other people. Some of the guides take pictures of guests, others let guests take the pictures themselves. The company I accompanied used different base camps. The guide took pictures of the guests and said he would later send them via email.

Some of the Northern Lights activities can be combined with an OVERNIGHT STAY IN A SAMI TENT or cabin. This unusual sleeping experience is monitored by a guide, who explains where certain facilities are located as well as the guide's cabin should participants need to wake the guide. The guides fuel the stove between three to four times each night to ensure the comfort and well-being of the participants. Further, they explain how to use the sleeping bag, stove and other equipment.

Table 2: Thick descriptions of Northern Lights activities

3.3 MY ROLE AS A RESEARCHER & ETHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Foley (2002) describes the role of the researcher as an important determinant for the course and outcome of research. He emphasizes the need for reflexivity by the researcher as well as due diligence regarding the responsibility of the researcher to all involved parties. Reflexivity means not taking things for granted, but to undertake research based on a problem and follow a mix of intuition and pragmatism (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Research is a strongly personal process for both, me as researcher and even more so for the researched persons (Chase, 2005). Both parties appear in the spotlight and therefore it is necessary to protect the rights of the participants in the observation. Reflexivity and ethical considerations are essential throughout the research process. The participants of the Northern Lights tours had the right to be informed about the research, but also the right to privacy and protection. The interaction of the researcher and the researched, how it is reported, how the data are processed and what happens to the data afterwards are important considerations. Research ethics in this thesis therefore were based on moral values that support an honest and transparent research process along respect towards the researched persons (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Foley (2002) discusses different forms of reflexivity of which the researcher has to be aware during the conduct of research. Rantala (2011) claims that those different forms of reflexivity influence the research in the course of three different processes: physical field work, during writing and how information is textually analyzed. When conducting research, it is necessary to reflect on the researcher's position, perceptions, the way she is biased and finally, how processed and written texts impact the reader.

Theoretical reflexivity is interwoven in the whole research process as it describes how the researcher is influenced through certain theoretical concepts that influence the perspective of the researcher in the physical field, when writing and textual analysis procedures (Rantala, 2011). Using certain theories influences the course of research as well as the methods that were applied to study aspects that were considered relevant from the beginning of the research. Looking at performance theory and influencers of performance can direct the attention of the researcher into one specific direction. It is important to be open to other aspects that may arise in the course of the research. During the writing and analysis process, theoretical concepts also influence the research process. Since this thesis is a data orientated approach, it is important that theoretical concepts do not influence the systemizing and categorizing of data from the beginning, but rather serve as a tool that supports the broadening of perspectives and the development of new discussion points.

Another important issue is how the researcher and her power relations influences the research (Foley, 2002). Rantala (2011) mainly connects confessional reflexivity to the physical field and issues related to the gathering of data. It is necessary to consider important organizational aspects like access to targeted interview participants, different cultures and languages of respondents, how you present yourself and gain the trust in order to gather the information you need (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Gaining access, culture, the language of respondents, how the researcher presented herself, the location of informants, gaining trust and final reporting were some of the factors that were emphasized during the data gathering process of this thesis. Additionally, Chase (2005) states that narrations are socially constrained and depend on to whom the researcher talks and in what ways.

This Master thesis was written during an internship and with the cooperation of Visit Lyngenfjord, a destination company that is amongst others responsible for the presentation, packaging and sales of touristic products for the Lyngen, Storfjord and Kåfjord communities (Visit Lyngenfjord AS, 2015). To work with a practical issue results in many positive aspects. Getting to know existing products, local entrepreneurs and businesses, along with the know-how of packaging, development and sales of products are essential basics for understanding the Northern Lights industry. The already established contacts of local businesses eased the

way for gathering data, since former cooperation had already generated trust and respect for each other.

However, as positive as this practical perspective in this context is, it may also be viewed as a hazard for the course of this Master thesis. My personal background in the tourism business and my internship at the destination company Visit Lyngenfjord may be seen as profitable, and could have influenced the research. I am aware of my responsibility not just for the guests but also the numerous businesses involved. That being said, the experience of the tourist stands in first place, before being a worker and a researcher. As Fontana and Frey (2005) state reflexivity is necessary since the researcher cannot be neutral or always correct, so her feelings should be incorporated into the research process. The feelings of the researcher will always influence how data are interpreted, so use the true feelings instead of a “wannabe” state of properness. Through my friendly and concerned attitude, I gained trust from the visitors and an honest response to questions, which helped me to support local businesses. Chase (2005) states that narrators are complex and individual and that it requires ethical considerations when the narration is described using the voice of the researcher. On the other hand, the researcher may be able to reveal issues a storyteller would be unlikely to bring across. Fontana and Frey (2005, p. 720) acknowledge that the aim of interviewing is to “speak with the voices of the respondents”. As a researcher, I did not take it for given that I knew how to talk to people, and treated people with respect and open attitude to learn about them and to hear their voices.

This study has been conducted in very close contact with businesses and the experiences of guests. It was important in this project not to disturb the tourists in any negative way. Therefore, the presence of the researcher was agreed on by the businesses beforehand. Gaining access to their guests was a result of trust and related responsibility.

The guests have been informed about my role as a researcher before the start of each activity. The participation on interviews was completely voluntary, if guests have wished to proceed without my observation and being interviewed I would have drawn myself back. However, the physical access was the first obstacle that needed to be taken into account throughout the

research process. This has not been a problem and visitors were really friendly and interested in what I was doing.

All participating guests were assured of anonymity. Similarly, businesses have been made anonymous as possible by describing only the activities offered. Place names are left out, nonetheless, detailed descriptions of the surroundings as stage and part of this thesis are essential. Virtual observation requires that no names and real email addresses are used and individual people are made unrecognizable. The problematic with virtual data is that people hardly get a chance to agree on that and how the researcher uses the data (Chase, 2005). On the other hand, the data used in this thesis was meant to be shared with other consumers of the Internet. At the end of the study, all data has been properly stored and for third parties inaccessibly stored.

Another issue is intertextual and deconstructive reflexivity, which according to Rantala (2011, p. 155) refers to writing style and “the creation of an encounter between the reader and the author”. Writing style influences who will read the work. It is important to know to whom I am talking, what it is I want to say and how this will be understood. Even though this study focuses on the consumer, the output can serve businesses to understand their guests better and maybe shift the perspective of businesses. However, since businesses often lack time, a short article that summarized the results of the research has addressed them.

4 THE SCRIPT BEHIND NORTHERN LIGHTS PERFORMANCES

In this thesis, I use the concept of performance, which positions tourists as active contributors to their own experiences. External factors also direct and influence performance as much as internal aspects, including personal background and previous experiences. The scripts of Northern Lights tours provide frames and sets of requirements for the performances of tourists. Since activity choices of tours vary from physically, active to more passive northern light tour experiences focused on learning; subsequent scripting differ in performance requirements. The purpose of this chapter is to develop an understanding of how specifically the activities themselves script and guide tourist performances. In the course of this chapter, I use Edensor (2000) different performances types, such as, disciplined rituals, improvised- and unbounded performances to discuss the variations in performances within the same and different Northern Lights activities. Performance is not defined as role, but more as a repertoire of actions and reactions while participating in an activity or event.

4.1 DISCIPLINED RITUALS DURING NORTHERN LIGHTS PERFORMANCES

Being a tourist involves a considerable amount of work (Hyde and Olesen (2011). Performances have to be prepared and costumes and props chosen accordingly. Being a Northern Lights tourist is no exception. First, the traveler has to decide, which destination to visit. According to a survey conducted in Northern Norway, most of tourists draw on advice from friends and family in order to decide where the best place is to see the Northern Lights (Vinter Troms AS, 2014). Activities have to be pre-booked, especially in the main season. Some visitors plan their trip for a long time. If decisions have not been made beforehand, choice of activities, timing and tour companies, has to follow arrival. The high uncertainty factor of the Northern Lights experience, a limited time frame and financial resources only allow participation in some activities related to the Aurora theme. Once the activities have been booked, for many visitors the activities can be challenging. The outside conditions can be physically grueling, as it is cold outside and warm inside, the body has to continuously adjust, which can be tiring for those not used to this. Hence, different activities require different amounts of physical and cognitive concentration and effort.

According to Edensor (2000) disciplined rituals are collective and pre-defined performances. The performers seldom reflect consciously upon their performances. Such a performance can occur in package tourism, but also within traditional settings of religious events or ceremonies. Edensor (2000) refers to an “over-determined stage” that channels and guides the actions of performers. Performance in this setting is repetitive within a collective framework, specific and constrained by time. This performance presumes a certain relationship between the performers and place, which comes to live through performance. Participants often take pictures to show the relationship to each other, with place and with other cultures (Edensor, 2000). They keep to the group and listen to the guide. The guide decides where to stop, which pictures to take and what information to pass on. The disciplined ritual narrows down roles to predefined actions and movements. The performers dutifully follow the script and play the required role. Strong improvisation and other deviations from the required performance can evolve into frictions with other participants since they are confronted with an unfamiliar and deviating performance (Hyde & Olesen, 2011). Thus, disciplined rituals are highly constrained, which leaves little room for improvisations.

During the winter time in Northern Norway, almost all tourist performances share a major goal, which is to see the Northern Lights (Vinter Troms AS, 2014). During my observations, it became clear that in order to achieve this goal, visitors participate in organized tours, which are differently set up according to activity and provider. Different sources showed that they are aware that sighting this phenomenon is dependent on far more than participating in a couple of activities. The weather and the activities on the sun are important components that make luck a decisive factor throughout their performances. The following description of my observations presents a short summary of the overall organizational procedure of all Northern Lights tours I participated in.

Almost every tour starts in one of the hotels in Tromsø city. The tourists get on the bus and sign a declaration that they participate of their own free will. The bus driver or guide gives an explanation about safety and the tour route. When the tour arrives at the base camp or starting point for the activity, further organizational instructions are provided. The visitors are channeled into the dressing room or tent depending on their

booked activity. Particularly in the beginning, the visitors follow instructions as smoothly as possible.

(Participant observation, eight different Northern Lights tours in Tromsø and the Lyngenfjord region)

After arriving at the camp for the dog sledding, or Northern Lights walk, the participants were divided up and instructed about the next steps, which varied according to activity and setting. The participation in the two dog sledding tours was marked by clear instructions and procedures. The schedule, the structures - everything was pre-defined and the tour was as organized as possible. One participant was required to break and push, while the other sat on the sledge, which left little option for individual performances. After the performers familiarized themselves to the new performance, they started enjoying the landscape and surrounding nature. The dog sledding performance was highly constrained by time and the overall schedule of other tours.

The Northern Lights walk proceeded through the forest and combined physical activity and informational guiding. The physical capabilities that were required on this tour were quite low. Nonetheless, going in the dark into the forest created an unusual surrounding for many participants. In the beginning, the performers followed their guide closely. The guide could choose which route to take, which information to pass and how long to stay outside. After a while, some participants realized that they were secure so they started performing more independently, for example, by staying a little away from the group or taking pictures while the guide has been talking.

The overnight stay began after the physical activities. The participants were taken to a cabin or a Sami-tent, given an overview of where to find toilets, the guide's cabin in case something happened and instructions for their fireplaces. Staying in the Sami tent meant that the oven had to be fueled two to three times each night, which is considerable work for the guide. Nonetheless, clear instructions and information eased this unusual sleeping experience.

All of the eight observed tours contained elements of disciplined rituals when it came to structure and set-up of the trip. The script behind dog sledding was especially structured and

allowed almost no deviation besides stopping when the Northern Lights showed up. In contrary to Edensor's (2000) description, the performers were not just listening, they also had to physically perform and be actively involved in this disciplined ritual as is made clear in the following description of a participant below.

Unlike other dog sledding experiences you get to drive. The sleds are for two, one driver and one passenger, and half way through the 15 km trip you swap over if you want to. It's really great fun and not as difficult as I expected. The dogs know to follow their pack leader (on the guide's sled) so you don't need to do much steering, just a bit of avoiding trees. In fact the main issue is that they are overenthusiastic so I had to brake a lot of the time! (Dogsledding Trip Advisor, March 2013)

The performance described above is novel since many have never been on a dog sledge before. The disciplined ritual is therefore chosen to compensate for a lack of skills and knowledge by step-by step instructions and a slow pace. All packaged tours included elements of disciplined rituals in the form of a schedule, organization and safety instructions. These tours only deviated from the plan, for example, when there was no snow, or the Aurora showed up before the camp was reached. Depending on the participants of the different activities, different kind of performances were emphasized. Regardless of the kind of activity, a bus tour, Northern Lights walk or dog sledding; participants were all requested to follow the commands and instructions of the staff. With the increasing demand towards the capabilities of the participants and overall security, the performance required disciplined rituals, which was clearly defined and did not leave room for individual performance. When not provided, the participants reflected on procedures, organization, safety and instructions, as is apparent in the following statements taken from Trip Advisor:

There was no clear communication about whether you should leave your other items in the shed or take them with you... (Dogsledding Trip Advisor and Overnight stay, January 2015)

Two parts there were lacking was the guide essentially did no guiding. Just a chaperone to make sure the right number of people got on and off the bus.

(Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, January 2014)

Despite the disciplined set-up of activities, non-delivery in activities, left participants wishing for structure, organization and clear instructions. The physical activities of dog sledding and walking are related to entering unknown space and request a certain performance. Dog sledding requires skills, knowledge and involves a certain risk. Using a sufficient number of guides, small groups and having prepared routes, the first part of the frame for the performance of the guests is created. Here, the disciplined ritual is necessary to overcome a lack of experiences and capabilities of participants in an unknown environment by providing instructions by the guide (see chapter 5). Risk always remains with regard to trees, and some steeper curves, icy parts or deep snow. Space in this activity cannot be fully determined and often requires spontaneous adjustments of the course before the tour begins. For both, Aurora hunt and Northern Lights experience, the set-up of space is an important component, which will be discussed under 5.2 in the following chapter. Partly the environment and partly the performance of the staff enable the performance of the tourists, which is discussed under 5.3.

4.2 HUNTING THE NORTHERN LIGHTS - IMPROVISATION REQUIRED

The natural phenomenon Aurora Borealis is highly unpredictable despite Northern Lights and weather forecasts. Therefore, companies use different scripts for activities, dependent on the activity itself. Guided Northern Lights hunts with the bus offer a more flexible approach, whereas physical activities like dog sledding and Northern Lights walks are bound to a certain infrastructure and place. Nonetheless, all activities require improvisation when it comes to see the Northern Lights or to deal with the natural circumstances like snow and ice.

Improvised performances are dependent on the decisions of the performer of where to go and how to gaze upon something. Accordingly, performances are chosen from a “menu of scripts and stage directions” (Edensor, 2000, p. 335). Space is partly regulated and partly unfamiliar. Improvised performances rely on a frame of instructions and context that is offered by guidebooks and employees. Nonetheless, those sources cannot prepare the performer for all eventualities. Improvised performance can also result in “chance meetings and contingent events” (Edensor, 2000, p.337). Reflective behavior can create a new way of encountering a

place, which is seen as static and pre-determined (Klugman, 1995). Improvised performance is often marked by oppositional or more loose behavior in certain settings that often neglects traditional structures and emphasizes a more individual encounter (Edensor, 2000). Sometimes improvised performers refuse to engage in classic actions of taking pictures or collecting souvenirs. Improvised performers or post-tourists are more self-reflexive and distanced from codes and conventions (Edensor, 2000). They express unconventional behavior including sarcasm, playfulness or humor, which can contribute to a more dramatic performance. While participating in package routines, using oppositional and more critical behaviors enables participants to create an individual niche to escape conventional roles. The participants question the way things should be gazed upon and sometimes follow other conventions to create or transmit alternative meanings. With this, they also question the significance of place.

The strict organization and schedule of the more active Northern Lights tours allowed only a limited amount of improvisation and individuality. The Northern Lights hunts on the other side follow a more flexible script that allows only spontaneous adjustments in schedule and procedure. During my participation in the two bus tours, I observed flexibility in structure and improvisation. The major goal of the participants was to spot the Northern Lights, which requires a certain flexibility that enhances the probability to do so. The advantage of participating in a guided bus tour certainly is the amount of flexibility when it comes to moving around. The tours orientate themselves on the weather and Northern Lights forecast. If necessary, tourists drive around several hours until late at night. During one of the tours, I participated in the Northern Lights showed up quickly, so the trip lasted until 11pm at night. The other bus tour ended at 1.30 am in the morning because the lights did not eventuate. Time is marked more or less by waiting. Driving by bus for many hours also implies less activity for interacting with others or taking pictures, which makes the tourists mainly more passive observers of the landscape and listeners to the stories and information of the guide. This means that performance is in a way placed on hold since participants must wait to perform. This requires flexibility of the organization and the participants, since the latter have to adjust

to certain changes in their performance, too. The improvisational nature of bus tours is presented in the following statements drawn from Trip Advisor.

...within just 30 minutes the coach pulled over to a safe spot off the road as Lady Aurora was making her first appearance of the evening - not the ideal spot for taking photos as we encountered some light pollution from nearby Tromso but our guide didn't want to disappoint us in case she went before we reached our intended destination. (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, Oktober 2014)

We didn't see the Northern Lights on our trip because it was snowing the entire ride, but during the delicious fish soup dinner after the sledding a guide came in and told us all to come outside as the Northern Lights had come out. Also on our bus ride home (90 minutes) to Tromso from Lyngsfjord we saw the Northern Lights peaking out again and the bus driver stopped the bus so we could all take photos. (Dog sledding, Trip Advisor, February 2013)

The northern light hunt reveals similar disciplined structures as the dog sledding and walk in the beginning, but there is also more room for improvisation when staying at a camp. The camp creates a safe environment with necessary facilities, a toilet and shelter. The camp stage incorporates many positive aspects as participants can move around freely, warm themselves up and stay out of the traffic. That being said, it became apparent when participating in bus tours that seeing and not seeing the Northern Lights is decisive performance. The longer the participants wait, and the lower the chance to see the lights, the less active they get. Thus, for the Northern Lights hunt seeing the light plays a major role for the success of the tour. If the lights do not show up the guide needs to do his best to involving the guests.

Participants were aware of the need to change their initial performance to see the Northern Lights. To shorten waiting times and to give a feeling of being active, the smaller companies will drive the tourists around. Looking at bus tours, arrival at the camp, signals time is marked by waiting. Participants cope in different ways: some get bored, some interact with the guide, some sit around the fire. Sitting in a bus and listening to the guide are rather passive experiences from the tourist side. Participants chose different performances. Paradoxically,

waiting did not trigger individual performance or entertainment by tourists. Instead, expectations were set on entertainment being provided by the guide. For some tourists, learning about the lights, culture, nature and through the experience were important elements of the Northern Lights experience.

Both guides speak perfect English and they are very kind and funny, and will tell you all the information you always wanted to know about the Northern Lights, the history of the city and the Sami culture. (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, January 2014)

The guide was really helpful. Her knowledge of the northern light and the area was huge. She could tell you a lot of information about the history of the light and a lot of small facts. (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, participate observation, January 2015)

While waiting, visitors have time for active reflection about the evening's processes. Despite participating in a sometimes rather passive activities visitors still reflect about procedures and consequences. Flexibility and improvisation are essential when hunting the light and are important fill-ins because individual visitor performances may often lack content, which can create boredom and dissatisfaction with regard to the value-for-money-received by the visitor.

4.3 THE FINE LINE BETWEEN DISCIPLINE RITUALS, IMPROVISATION AND UNBOUNDED PERFORMANCES

The participation in Northern Lights activities is for many participants a new experience. Being so, they are often confronted with the cold, darkness and an unfamiliar environment with which they have to cope.

An unbounded performance arises when the stage is highly unfamiliar and certain known reference points that usually indicate performance are missing. Consequently, the requested performance is unclear and the participant does not know what performance to choose from their repertoire, or if the participant has something to choose from at all (Edensor, 2000). These situations can arise when certain events or activities cause a physical bombardment, where sensory and social overload lead to a subsequent denial of reflexive and contingent

performance. The performer suddenly is confronted with an unknown drama that they have no suitable response too. As a result, fear and annoyance start dominating the situation. Edensor (2000) refers to this as a liminal situation. The “destabilization may produce a state of acute self-awareness” (Edensor, 2000, p. 338). Some participants become literally overloaded with stimuli, which makes them retreat into more familiar areas. On the other hand, as Edensor (2000) argues, some tourists seek out such challenges and unfamiliar situations. These tourists desire the unpredictability and they find pleasure in constant mental and physical disruption as an escape from their everyday life.

During my observations, I saw that participating in Northern Lights activities in general confronted the participants with different unknown situations. For example, being outside to view the Northern Lights during the hunts required tourists to sit in the cold and wait. On both Northern Lights hunts, most of the participants went at once into the tent or cabin when they arrived at the base camp. Given a choice after sitting in the bus and going suddenly into the cold triggered a retreat into more familiar spaces. A direct confrontation with the cold and the dark is overstimulation. With the choice of being either in- or outside, many participants spend most of the time waiting inside. This behavior changed, when the Northern Lights showed up on one of the tours. Priorities shifted, which made the cold become suddenly irrelevant and participants strode outside to view the spectacle. The cold and darkness were forgotten.

Participating in two dog sledding tours showed that the demand towards one’s own physical involvement in the performance was higher. Before the tour started, many participants, including myself, were obviously nervous. The dark and cold, the loud sounds of the dogs barking and jumping in their leashes, as well as the waiting for the last adjustments of the sledges by the guides, contributed to feelings anxiety. The setting was highly unfamiliar and over stimulating for the participants. Nonetheless, the situation was soon balanced by the instructions of the guide and the structured organization, which informed the performers of what they were required to do. The instructions how to perform created a frame and reduced insecurity as the participants shifted into a disciplined ritual. Without disciplined rituals, the performance of dog sledding would not be possible, these norms stabilize those participating

in unknown environments and enable performance. The created structure and security lead to good experiences for almost all participants. Those that did not follow the instructions, for example, taking the foot of the break or not pushing uphill, became unpopular with other group members, who followed the rules and were giving a disciplined performance. After getting familiar with their performances, attention was able to be redirected to enjoying the landscape. Overcoming challenges yields positive experiences.

Dog sledding is an activity that requires a certain extent of physical fitness and strength. Visitors are often anxious in the beginning, but after a while when they become competent in their experiences and shift into a state of confidence which leaves them with an absolute feeling of excitement and enthusiasm after they return. Edensor (2000) describes this as a state of ecstasy that is a result of facing an over stimulated situation. Becoming competent in their own capabilities upon the described stage lessened the importance of seeing the lights, at least in the first moment. If you see the light on top, the participants emphasized that they had had an unforgettable experience.

The Northern Lights walk as well confronted us as participants with going out in the dark and cold. Following the guide into unknown terrain creates for some participants the feeling that they better stay close to their group. Being scared of the slippery ground during an icy tour created a tense atmosphere especially in the beginning until the participants got used to it. Sleeping outside in a cabin or tent was for many a new experience and new situation, with facilities they are not used to. They were scared of the cold temperatures until they realized that the accommodation was warm and comfortable.

Few visitors had been to Northern Norway before. Many were not used to the natural conditions like winter, icy roads and snow. Performing Northern Lights experiences is a constant balance between unbounded performance and disciplined ritual. The natural conditions make many situations unbounded, the uncertainty of the phenomenon requires improvisation although the tours themselves are disciplined. This meant that performances switched between unbounded to disciplined ritual to improvised performance in the course of the one single activity.

To summarize this chapter, the Northern Lights tours follow different scripts and require a mix of different performances by the tourists. The more unfamiliar the performance, the higher the chance of overstimulation and unboundedness was for participants. For many participants, this became a thrill. All activities of the Northern Lights tours involved disciplined elements that required the participants little deviation. Due to the unpredictability of the phenomenon itself and the natural conditions, improvisation was a necessary element of performances. The scripts variously allowed for improvisation, although participants demanded structure and clear instructions, when there was too much freedom. Performance, therefore, is a constant negotiation between different strategies dependent on external influences and required performance.

5 TROMSØ AND THE LINGENFJORD REGION AS THE STAGE OF AURORA PERFORMANCES

This Master thesis uses examples of Northern Lights tourism from the Tromsø and Lyngenfjord region. According to Edensor (2000, p. 323), performances are “shaped by the constraints and opportunities that tour structures produce and are informed by the symbolic meanings and spatial organizations on site”. In this connection, this chapter attempts to analyze the role of landscape and darkness as a heterogeneous space that has a constantly changing influence on Northern Lights performances. Tourist places are produced spaces and tourists are co-producers of such. This requires multiple flows of networks of tangible and intangible constructions of infrastructure on site (Bærenholdt et al., 2004). Subsequently, the materiality of space is looked upon as attempt to form a homogenous space for tourists that enables and structures performance within a heterogeneous environment. Furthermore, tourism places are seen as “hybrids bridging the realms of humans and nonhuman” (Bærenholdt et al., 2004, p. 2). Actor-network theory is therefore an important basis for Northern Lights performances, which not only includes materiality but also the guides, who structure and conduct performances (Kivelä, 2014). Thus, materiality and humans at a place intertwine and interact, which forms the basis for performance. In relation to Northern Lights activities in Tromsø and Lyngenfjord, the guide is discussed as both influencer and manipulator of the performance of the participants as well as negotiator between the heterogeneous environment and homogenous space that forms the stage for tourist performances.

5.1 THE IMPACT OF THE ARCTIC LANDSCAPE AND DARKNESS ON PERFORMANCE

Northern Norway offers an exceptional and sheer endless landscape of mountains, fjords and sea. In summer time, the light of the midnight sun is dominating, but soon after the sun turns darkness returns as well. Darkness is necessary to view the Northern Lights. Even though the aurora borealis can be seen from the city, Mathisen (2014) advocates the need to leave the cities and to dive into the darkness to really experience the Northern Lights. Destination Tromsø is the hub for sending out participants to activities, whereas surrounding communities

like Lyngen or Kvaløya are platforms where most of the activities take place. This chapter discusses the importance of landscape as an aesthetic part of the Northern Lights experience. Beyond aesthetics, the landscape with its scenery and darkness is involved in performances and stimulates all the senses to create the right mood for encountering the Northern Lights.

The Arctic landscape is an important part of this platform and stage for the performance of Northern Lights activities, whereas some companies shape spaces for the generation of an encounter between the landscape and the performers. In Tromsø and surroundings, the landscape changes due to the natural conditions and weather. Snow, rain and wind are events that have to be reacted upon and all factors have a significant influence on the performance of tourists. Edensor (2000) describes space as a heterogeneous space when it is marked by various stimulations, rapid change and as a result weak regulations and control by a third party. Performing in heterogeneous spaces can be a strong sensual experience marked by interruptions, encounters and distractions, all of which require attention and adjustment to the constancy of change. Entering a heterogeneous space enforces bodily involvement, which can either lead to a positive, negative or unbounded experience (Edensor, 2000). Thus, the arctic landscape plays an important role. Being extreme and in a sense hostile, creates a more dramatic scenery for performances that are associated with encountering the Northern Lights (Smedseng, 2014). Visitors often expect a landscape that is not marked by anything urban or modern. For many the Nordic and arctic landscape is exotic and magical (Mathisen, 2014).

Landscape is linked to the attribute of darkness and is an important component of the Northern Lights experience. Darkness affects vision, which is one of the major senses used to familiarize oneself with new surroundings. Observing several tourist experiences showed that moving around in the darkness was for many participants a challenge. During the Northern Lights hunts, most of the people went directly inside the tents or cabins after arriving at the camp. Being directly confronted with the dark and cold was for many intimidating and unknown. Nevertheless, seeing the Northern Lights makes darkness an essential component and regulates the encounter with the dark. For example, the Northern Lights walk, showed that participants were a little nervous and stressed at the beginning of the tour. Moving in the total dark of the forest was difficult for those, who were not familiar with it. It was hard to

orientate since every sense of direction was absent in the unfamiliar surroundings coupled with a lack of vision. Macpherson (2009) states that walking in the dark suddenly requests the involvement of other senses than usual, whereas they are mostly used for basic orientation and navigation. The participants follow the guide closely into the dark forest, whereas little by little the contrasts of white, grey and shades become more apparent. Participants start adjusting their sight and also their other senses, which eases the performance and contributes to feelings of confidence in the unknown surroundings that they are experiencing. Together with the strengthening and emphasis on other senses, the landscape contributes a flow experience that is marked by absorption, orientation and interruption (Edensor, 2013, p. 458). On the other hand, darkness offers an alternative experience of landscape, which should be looked upon more closely with regard to the Northern Lights. In the dark, the landscape looks different, offers contours instead of details, shades and contrasts of the white snow. Many of the participants described the Arctic landscape as exotic, beautiful and peaceful:

...and it was incredibly beautiful - enough light from the moon and stars to see where you were going, but zero light pollution and no background noise at all so incredibly peaceful with just the sound of the sleds and the dogs. (Dog sledding, Trip Advisor, February 2014)

And the fact that we had one more extra stop in a beautiful valley to enjoy two completely different views at the landscape -one in the shadow and one in the light, it was a beautiful end of this trip. (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, January 2014)

One of the guides argued that going on a walk in the dark enables the participants to see the lights more clearly and intensively. Edensor (2013) explains that it is scientifically proven that the eyes are more sensitive to light in the dark. In daytime landscape is roamed, whereas in the night, the moon, stars and dark change the landscape. Details become contours and shadows, which create a different perception. Thus, darkness creates a mood conducive for the activities and strengthens other senses than vision, thereby providing a different encounter with the landscape.

Going through the process of adjustment to darkness and landscape is similar to the fluidity of transition between unbounded performances to disciplined rituals or improvised performances. Hereby, generates landscape emotional reactions that vary from eventually uncomfortable feelings in the beginning of the encounter into a feeling of peacefulness and calm.

A: The landscape around us ...It's quite dark so you don't see (laughing). But I think ...as person you feel that for me in a way that it's not so familiar, but I think it's very comfortable and it's very welcoming...even though you are in the dark, but it's still welcoming in a way. The landscape when it was cleanyou could actually feel that feel like woow, cause back in Tromsø you see the rocks, you see the mountains but now you are in between the mountains laughing. And you think Woow you are only so small in the World (dogs are howling, laughing). (Interview Northern Lights walk, with two young women from Malaysia, December, 2014)

Darkness offers relaxation from constant overstimulation, fosters other qualities in the landscape and make the eyes more sensitive for light (Edensor, 2013). Edensor discusses the role of darkness and how it fosters and influences communication, imagination and feelings. For Edensor, darkness is the absence of light, which “calls the mobilization of the non-visual senses” (2013, p. 3) like hearing, smelling and tactility. Suddenly the guests are in the experience, which means that they are active and perceive the landscape as a part of the experience. Edensor (2013) discusses that by reducing the visual sense, other senses are sharpened and the perception is even stronger.

Y: One walking out in the wilderness in the cold, how calm and peaceful you feel just being out in the quiet and dark... it's like so peaceful,... which even for us even if it's on an deserted island it would not be so calm like what we get here it is very different.

A: I think I would also just say right now, whatever this would be, in the woods it's like we get a national geographic life. (laughing)

Y: For us its like We see it on TV, but we never experience it in real life, but now we experience it actually in person, get in the state what real nature is like in terms like

being out in the snow having a so called bonfire.. in winter. Its like mmmm we can actually light a fire.

(Interview Northern Lights walk, with two young women from Malaysia, December 2015)

The two Malaysian women stated that the Northern Lights walk was an exotic adventure related to the arctic landscape, the mountains and the snow. After they familiarized themselves to the new surroundings and adjusted by using other senses as well, they perceived the beauty of the winter landscape, they felt the freshness of the cold and heard the snow and not much more. They suddenly felt that they were a part of it and it was not scary at all. Even though it was dark, they were able to still see, and experienced the darkness as calming and welcoming. Being outside with a guide they trusted, the trip became a special experience, even without seeing the lights.

Selänniemi (2001) refutes MacCannell and Urry by using his example of sun seeking tourists that neither search for an authentic experience nor things to “gaze” at like local attributes. Urry and MacCannell set their focus only on the visual sense as aspects of the tourist experience. Selänniemi’s (2001) aim is to outline the involvement of all senses - the “sensible body” - as the quest of “sensual pleasure” as a goal of the tourists (Selänniemi, 2001, p. 186). He draws the bottom line at “how you experience is more important than what you experience” (Selänniemi, 2001, p. 186).

The nature of the Northern Lights tours is connected to the dark and cold. From the perspective of the towns, the Arctic landscape and wilderness seems beautiful, but unfamiliar and a bit scary. Entering an unfamiliar environment, that is marked by for example loud barking, slippery ground and darkness can be an overstimulation of too many senses, which could not be counterbalanced by the participants in the beginning of an activity. Nonetheless, observations and customer reviews leave the impression that most of the participants felt more confident than expected when participating in an activity. The darkness stimulated other senses than just sight, being out made the participants feel cold, feel wind and fresh air in their faces, this gave a different perception of the stars and the Northern Lights. The feeling of

being surrounded by nature, being outside the city, in the snow, winter and cold, generated peace and calm. Darkness became welcoming and less over-stimulating. Thus, throughout the activities darkness changed its role from offering insecurity to confidence. This emphasizes that experiencing the Northern Lights produces a holistic sensual involvement. Vision, which is usually emphasized as major sense of the tourist experience is limited, which means that other senses are more strongly involved from the beginning. Seeing the light can be a strong experience (Mathisen, 2014). However, it shows that the visualizing tourist actually is a sensual and actively performing body, due to the natural conditions of the experience.

5.2 STRUCTURING PERFORMANCE THROUGH MATERIALITY

It is not just the landscape that constitutes part of the stage. The tangible and intangible elements of stage settings also influence performances and interactions (Edensor, 2000). The landscape is more than the overarching scenery, it is also a space formed through human impact, which contributes to performance. Franklin (2003) and Haldrup and Larsen (2003) discussed how tourist performances facilitated by objects, machines, and technologies. Hence, performance is a hybrid of material and social spheres, which intertwine and create frames for performances.

I observed that winter activities in Northern Norway were for many visitors a new experience. Some had not even seen snow before, or experienced temperatures below zero degrees. Not knowing what one really expects in the North, tourists often purchased experiences based on the advice of others or guidebooks. Companies try to respond to the fragmentary nature of equipment possessed by tourists by providing, for example, proper clothing, facilities and tripods. The aim of providing the right tools is to ensure the success of the performance. For many participants, the cold is a factor that creates insecurity. Edensor (2000) explains that space, including its sensual influences, aesthetics and materiality as well as the constitution of these, is a determining factor for tourist performances. He describes purified enclavic spaces that underlie a strong regulation and control, which exclude unwanted stimuli and elements. Enclavic space is planned and directed throughout, with regulated access and exit, along with controlled direction to certain main attractions making for a highly selective performance with no room for individual spatial exploration. Throughout my participation in eight different

Northern Lights activities, I observed that the companies formed controlled space within the heterogeneous landscape. The dog sledding tours used prepared tracks through the wilderness. The Northern Lights hunt used camp facilities as basis. Some companies hunting for the lights just stopped along the road. Hunting the Northern Lights with a base camp offers certain advantages and disadvantages. The overall aim of the companies is to create an enclavic space to ensure optimal safety for their guests, which is described through my observations and in a comment from Trip Advisor.

At the camps or base stations visitors find infrastructure for instance outside fireplaces, barbeque huts, lavvus and (outdoor) toilets. Usually it is flat and enough space in the surrounding area. The places were all situated between the mountains and offer a good view around the area. (Participant observation two Northern Lights hunts in January 2015, in Lyngenregion and Kvaløya)

It is a very good offering since you can wait to see the Northern Lights while chilling out in front of the fire and drinking hot chocolate or tea. If you want you can also stay inside a typical Norwegian tent with a fire or use a toilette. (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, December 2014)

The use of a base camp incorporates many positive aspects, participants can move around freely, warm themselves up and be out of the traffic. Thus, the camp creates a safe environment with necessary facilities that provide a homogenous space as an oasis within a heterogeneous environment. For the hunt, seeing the light plays a major role for the success of the tour. If the lights do not show up, the materiality of the camp will not compensate for the lack of experience. Here the guide needs to respond accordingly to the situation, for example, by leaving the safe space to drive around to hunt the lights. This demonstrates the necessity for interplay between human and material factors.

Leaving the camp for the hunt, dog sledding or snowshoe tours also means entering heterogeneous uncontrolled space. The arctic landscape is special and the weather can often suddenly create new conditions, for instance, extreme cold or an icy, slippery ground. One of

the base camps could not receive visitors for a period due to icy surfaces. After buying sand, the entrepreneur was able to ensure safe access and movement on the property.

The characteristics of a place influence the choice of performance. According to Oppermann (1993), both purified and heterogeneous spaces co-exist in tourism spaces. This means there is no totally, hermetically sealed spaces, so no purifications. This exemplified by looking at movement in connection to natural conditions. Those conditions create insecurity regarding how to cope in extraordinary and unfamiliar circumstances. A usually flat and safe camp or track in the wilderness can change from a homogenous space into a heterogeneous space that suddenly creates overstimulation and new challenges for tourists performing. An icy surface during a Northern Lights walk can create fear and insecurity, while on a snowy day the same experience is perceived as calming and welcoming. Naturally, this also depends on the personal background of the tourists. Hence, by human external influence, a more or less homogenous space is created to ensure the success of tourism performances, which is in constant negotiation with natural factors. This is described in an example from my observations.

The camp was ca.50-60 meters away from the parking lot. People were warned to go slow and to be careful it could be slippery. The host has been sanding the way up and around the lavvu. (Participant observation Northern Lights hunt, January 2015)

Many companies provide in addition to regulated spaces other tangible assets like snowsuits, heads, shoes and proper gloves to ensure the physical well-being of their participants, this also makes the participants a homogenous group. However, most important is the feeling of security those cloths give and prepares them for the role they have to play.

We visited Tromso and this was part of the experience. Arrived and were suited and booted then kitted out with insulated gloves and hats then taken over to the sleds where we were given instructions on safe technique. (Dog sledding, Trip Advisor, December 2014)

The statements from Trip Advisor below show that props and costumes support and underline performance. They help to set the self in the role by using unusual items as a part of the play,

for instance, reindeer skins, simple outdoor facilities for sleeping and toilets. For many, the materiality of the performance is unknown. Nonetheless, the props and requisites are an important part of the role that supports the performance, which provides security and creates authenticity (Hyde & Olesen, 2011).

We spent the night in a Sami tent. Wood and fire was provided to keep the place warm. My husband kept the fire going as it was cold and snowed just about the whole night. Expect just the bare minimum in the tent. We as 50 plussers thought it quite exciting. (Overnight stay in Sami tent, Trip Advisor, May 2013)

Sleeping arrangement was also great, slept in a Lavvu. We slept on reindeer skins in sleeping bags, I was a little bit sceptic about it but I haven't slept so good in a long time. (Overnight stay in Sami tent, Trip Advisor, January 2013)

Northern Lights tourism as a part of nature based tourism is especially promoted in rural and peripheral areas (Lindner et al., 2005). Rurality typically refers to attributes such as a little infrastructure, local ownership and special activities derived from the natural conditions of an area. Whereas from a tourist perspective, peripheral or rural regions comprehend qualities connected to an exotic and individual, as well as peaceful and authentic experience (Brown & Hall, 2000). On the other hand, consumers equate tourism in rural areas not necessarily with tourism located in a rural area, but more as a form of tourism that incorporates the attributes of a rural place yet not necessarily its functions (Brown & Hall, 2000). Hence, consumers demand certain supply and infrastructure at such destinations, as pointed out in the statement below.

Tiny school camp style bedrooms at either end of a shared open space. It wasn't terribly comfortable but it was ok. Toilets were absolutely shocking. With no running water in the camp they were in a small wooden shed outside away from the cabin, with a very basic toilet seat set up over what was basically a hole through the bottom of the shed. Not a pleasant experience. (Dog sledding and Overnight stay in Sami tent, Trip Advisor, January 2015)

This quote demonstrates that for some participants an experience of space and materiality can also be a shock. The required props and frame is highly unfamiliar and clashed with the expectations, which resulted in negativity. For some, the easy outside facilities are a new experience and how to deal with it is not always as clear. Icy conditions, the cold, the physical activity, patience to wait, to take proper pictures, going to an outside toilet are just some of the examples that clearly show the different challenges that the participants are faced with during their performance. Materiality is an important element that enables performance and makes performers more convinced about their roles.

Space in northern light experiences is fluid and changes constantly. Whether snowy, or icy different settings are created and this requires attendant responses. Materiality is an important factor that creates and negotiates contrasts. The sensual experiences that build a contrast of stimulation should therefore fit into the concept of performance. Materiality contributes to the authenticity of the experience and how a place is sensed. The warmth of a fire and a lavvu are important contrasts to outside, which creates an authentic setting around the Northern Lights experience. In contrary, artificial light, electric heaters and sitting in a bus has eventually a different effect by reducing the authenticity of the experience. Nonetheless, I would argue that entering a heterogeneous environment, in this case, the landscape during Northern Lights activities stimulates the senses and creates fulfilling experiences for tourists. Entering nature with the dog sledge or walking in the forest creates a deeper sensual involvement then just leaving the bus and walking to the tent or cabin.

5.3 THE INFLUENCE OF THE GUIDE ON TOURISM PERFORMANCES

The arctic landscape of the Tromsø and Lyngenfjord region and the materiality of Northern Lights activities are important determinants of performance. Nonetheless, it is the different companies and guides that create access, negotiate and control tourist performances. Every Northern Lights tour involves a guide, who leads participants through their experience. The tasks of the guide can vary from active guiding through a dog sledding adventure, or a guide that focuses on narrating the Aurora and explaining camera adjustments. Some guides have to combine both, using active and informative approaches. Hence, the guide is an important component of the northern light experience. The following chapter highlights the role of the

guide in the eyes of the performers and how the participants look upon the decision-making of their guides with regard to seeing the Aurora.

Modern tourism is full of hybrids between material and human factors. Tourism workers and managers have an important role in the performance of the tourist (Crang, 1997). Workers and managers influence the performance through staging the experience and guiding the tourists through it. Visitors hope for empathy and personal safety, which means they trust the guide when going on a tour. He outlines that service encounters are marked by the performance of employees, which he associates with Goffman's performative approach. Crang (1997) further outlines that the tourism worker has a strong influence on social encounters in tourism experiences. People are trained in a certain way to provide a high qualitative performance. Crang (1997) primarily focuses on the performance of employees and managers, but he neglects the performance of the tourists and describes them as passive observers.

However, the guide is an important element of the stage as he negotiates between the participants and the experience. I observed throughout my participation that either the tourists were familiar with their camera and tripod or the guide supports with tips and even takes pictures for them. The camera captures "the shot" which proves the encounter with the lights. Hence, the guide compensates for a lack of knowledge and alters the performance of the tourists if needed. He gets an important role, which shows the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman interaction. However, before the shot of and with the Northern Lights can be taken, the lights have to appear. Through appropriate communication, the guide balanced the expectations and motivation of the participants of the Northern Lights hunts I participated in by making them understand the nature of the lights.

The Aurora is like a lady. Sometimes she shows up a little later, or a little earlier you never know. (participate observation Northern Lights hunt January 2015, explanation of the Aurora by the guide)

My observations indicate that the guide provides motivation on a cloudy and rainy night. Even in clear weather, the guide does their best to spot the lights over the several hours of a tour.

The guide was really focused on spotting and taking pictures of the Northern Lights, he was outside almost all the time, tried to spot the lights and only came inside for a short time to warm himself. (Participant observation Northern Lights hunt, January 2015)

The participants observe the decisions of the guide and reflect over the results as well. Subsequently, the guide has a significant influence on the mood of the people, which is underlined by additional comments from Trip Advisor below.

We started waiting. The guide was already up with warning us in advance, spotting the light with his camera and sending us out. Unfortunately, the light stayed weak all evening. Anyways, he really tried and it was clear that he really did not want give up. (Participant observation, Northern Lights Hunt by bus, January 2015)

The guide was a bundle of energy, jumping from group to group, helping with photographs. Thanks to his enthusiasm we forgot the bitter cold & enjoyed the Aurora's for over three hours. (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, February 2014)

As it became especially apparent throughout the comments in Trip Advisor, in the eyes of the visitors, the guides are responsible for decision-making as to whether to deviate from the plan and adjust of performance of the tourists. Not seeing the lights, while other travelers in another tour do, the company and guide will be blamed. If the visitors have an idea that the guide has not done their best to enable them to see the lights, reactions can be harsh as displayed below.

I suppose we were most disappointed that we didn't see the lights (only a tiny bit of green) but other people at our hotel did have a good view of them on the same night at other locations & in Tromso itself. The company say that they have base stations & choose the best one on the night but it was quite obvious that the station we were taken to were expecting us & there was no way we were going to be taken anywhere else. We felt really cheated especially when we spoke to other people who saw the Lights that night. We shan't use them again. (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, February 2014)

Whereas we went with one other tour company the next day with equally bad weather still we got to see the lights. And they showed pictures of the lights they saw even the previous night. (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, January 2015)

These statements show the responsibility the participants of the tours assign to the guide, especially, when they got to know that others saw the lights, when they did not. The participants reflect over the promises of the company, their script is disassembled and mistakes are overemphasized. Giving up too fast or going for the wrong location is interpreted as “not caring”, particularly, when the participants realize they do not need a company to see the lights.

And then again, my observations showed that interaction with the guide, the possibility to ask questions, listen to and their telling of their own stories enhanced the performance of the tourists. In addition, many participants seemed dependent on the knowledge of the guide. Watching the participants throughout two Northern Lights hunts showed that the guide went around, took pictures, explained camera settings and sent the participants outside when the lights started showing. Beneath, I listed comments from Trip Advisor that support my observations.

Our guide had the gift to speak, when it was needed and be quiet when it would have been too much. Extra points for explaining us how to take auroras-photos (also to not technical people as I´m). (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, January 2014)

Our guide is a real lights enthusiast and is keen to help everyone enjoy the experience. In our case we didn't have the sense to take a decent camera so the professional photos taken by the guide of us with the lights and the lights on their own are a fantastic keepsake that we wouldn't have had otherwise. (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, February 2014)

Thus the guide is essential by not just giving the frame for the performance with constrains and rules, but the guide also empowers the performance of the tourists or takes over when they cannot perform. I observed that honest empathy and excitement of the guide mattered actually more than all professionalism, because this made it personal. One of the guides of

one of the Northern Lights walks was really good in asking questions and involving people by giving everyone responsibility to check for the lights.

The way movement is channeled is decisive for a performance. The guide has a central role in the tourism experiences as a part of the stage. He leads, entertains, ensures safety and cares for the participants throughout a tour. Valkonen (2010) describes that wilderness guiding is a combination of environment and material factors performed by the guide. Valkonen (2010, p. 177) also points at the fact that the guides “have to work harder when nature does not comply”. Smedseng (2014) sees the importance of the guide as narrator and mediator of the experience. On the other hand, the guide is also responsible to fulfill previously generated expectations. Crang (1997) proffers that tourism employees produce meaningful settings, which are consumed by tourists. However, through the reflective actions described above, the participants show that they do not just consume the setting produced by the guide. They actively contribute to the performance, which makes them a co-producer with the guide.

6 INDIVIDUAL AND SHARED INTERPRETATIONS OF NORTHERN LIGHTS ACTIVITIES

Performance is influenced by several intrinsic factors such as previous experiences, social relationships, gender and class (Bourdieu, 1984; Edensor, 2000). Further, performance is an interactive and continuing process that depends on the skills of the individual actor and on the ability of the audience to interpret individual performance (Edensor, 2000). The script and set-up of the stage aim to channel a performance towards success. Nonetheless, performance is still an individual act. This chapter compares different performances of individuals and their reactions to Northern Lights activities. Moreover, the influence of the observation and judgement of the audience on the individual's ability to perform is discussed. According to Edensor (2000), performance cannot be reproduced in exactly the same way. Nonetheless, performance reaches into social media and is reconstructed and narrated throughout the Internet. Consequently, this chapter provides insights into how expectations towards future performances are shaped by social media communication and narration.

6.1 INDIVIDUAL RELATIONSHIPS TO PERFORMANCE

Asking the participants of the tours in which I participated provided me with different understandings as to why visitors wanted to see the Northern Lights. Some said it is on their bucket list, some wanted to experience something magical, extraordinary and many saw themselves as lucky to be viewing the lights as a once in a lifetime experience. Many visitors expressed that their experience with the Northern Lights was extraordinary. Trip Advisor similarly report the experience as demonstrated below.

Great Night with the Northern Lights” 'll never forget this experience. It was number 1 on my bucket list, so thank guys!! (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, March 2014)

...we saw the beautiful Northern Lights which we have never seen before. So amazing that we won't forget forever! (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, January 2014)

One of the guides at the hunts stated that many of the Northern Lights tourists have their own history concerning the Northern Lights and why they want to see them. Some want to see the Aurora because they got married, some have cancer and soon will die. Some want to be alone while experiencing the Aurora, so they go away from the group, others do not mind being with others. The magic of the Northern Lights lies within every individual guest and their motives.

Performance is influenced by certain intrinsic factors and the capability of the individual to perform. Thus, performance depends on the skills of the actors, which are raised through learning, training and rehearsal (Edensor, 2000). To encounter the lights, tourists participate in different activities. For many participants it is their first encounter with Northern Norway. Numerous visitors expressed that their trip to Tromsø and the Lyngenfjord region to hunt the Northern Lights was a personal adventure. Participating in Northern Lights activities and Aurora hunts is declared and aligned with soft adventures, a term that describes activities with low physical capabilities, less risk and little or no previous knowledge required (Tangeland & Aas, 2011). In contrast, hard adventures require a certain level of skills, knowledge and experience, often involve more risk and are therefore not suitable for anyone, who wants to participate (Tangeland & Aas, 2011). The aim of the Northern Lights activities is for everyone to participate without any special skills or extreme physical capacities. Nonetheless, throughout the participation in several Northern Lights activities, it became apparent that this idea not always matched the reality. Throughout the participation in one of the Northern Lights walks, I observed an older couple, who were having significant trouble with the icy conditions due to rain that had fallen a few days before. The man, due to health issues, really had to watch out. After he received crampons to put on, the going was easier for him. His wife was quite apprehensive with the icy surface as well and she told me that she was too scared to walk down with the others from our group to the lavatories. For those two, the walk through the dark forest, on uneven and slippery ground was an unpleasant experience. I could see that the man's wife was in a bad mood, because she was stressed and insecure about the situation and worried about her sick husband. I stayed back and watched out for her, her husband was doing fine and after a while, the situation eased off. For the other participants,

the walk was an “easy” tour, lasting merely 45 minutes and not far from the camp. Consequently, the same experience can lead to different reactions. Some participants may have felt boredom because there was too little physical activity and challenge. Other participants struggled with the extreme natural conditions even though the Northern Lights walk was not an extreme physical activity. Hence, participants have contrasting views pertaining to the requirements of their performance on this Northern Lights walk.

I further observed a Japanese group participating in both Northern Lights bus tours I participated in as well. On the first day we saw the light and they were outside, but came back inside to warm themselves a lot. The second day they mostly sat quietly inside, some slept, some seemed sick and some of them were freezing due to thin clothing. Most of them did not speak English, which made them strongly depend on their own guide.

Participating in the dog sledding tour is a physical activity that requires a minimum of physical shape and health. The participants often have not been on the sledge before and listen eagerly to the guide. The participants become very involved and concentrate hard to do everything right. Even though the dogs run after the guide, the guests still have to brake and help in pushing the sledges on the hills. Many statements on Trip Advisor and during my participation showed that this was an exceptional experience for the participants. Nonetheless, for some it was more challenging and scary than for the others as explained by comments from Trip Advisor below.

Then came the dog sledding. I was in no way prepared for the extreme physicality of this activity. The dogs may look small, but they are very fast and VERY hard to stop. I was happy enough as the passenger on our sled until the guides insisted that we swap drivers so everyone has a turn. I was not terribly keen, having held on for dear life as we twisted and turned through trees and over creeks. It's not a leisurely ride, you have to help steer by leaning and the driver has to get off and push up the hills. I was stressed and nervous the whole time I was driving and we swapped back soon after. Unless you are very fit and don't mind a wild ride, I wouldn't recommend the dog sledding. Most of all, do not do the dog sledding at night!!! (Dogsledding, Trip Advisor, March 2014)

For others the dog sledding was exciting and they enjoyed being actively in charge of the sledge. The first group with whom I went was in a good mood, singing and laughing behind the guide and me. The woman I shared the sledge with on the next trip was euphoric and wanted to do another loop. The Northern Lights were stretching over the sky while we rode the sledge, while everything around us was quiet and peaceful. Regardless of whether the Northern Lights were seen or not, many participants still enjoyed the physically, active experiences.

The situations above show that performances vary. Some participants have the experience of a lifetime, while others struggle with their performance. However, the situations above show also that performances can vary due to different reasons. The couple in the Northern Lights walk had to deal with a combination of bad health and extremely icy weather. The Japanese bus group struggled with Jetlag, communication issues and the cold. The person describing the dogsledding experience was surprised over the physical requirements and that she was actually requested to perform herself. Hence, individual performance depends on certain external and internal conditions that ease or make performance harder. Csíkszentmihályi (1990) describes the conflict between challenge and boredom within an individual as flow principle. Flow describes a situation where capabilities and challenge conform and the participants go in a state where they forget the time and move in complete harmony with their body. If a challenge is too immense and the performer cannot respond with the necessary performance, the performer experiences discomfort and fear instead of pleasure and competency (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). The former leads to anxiety and eventually the denial of performance. The limit of an individual's performance has been reached. However, through social interaction with the habitus of such spaces and by observing different codes, a negotiated performance can be devised (Edensor, 2000).

Northern Lights experiences are marked by waiting, learning, reflecting and exercising. While I was observing, I saw that the actual encounter with the light influenced people differently. Some expressed their fascination by calling out loudly, some were just quiet, some danced and sang and some tried to take pictures and capture the special moments. The situations described above show that even in a fixed environment and with pre-defined scripts

performances vary. Some face unfamiliar situations at once, while others first stay back to watch from distance, observe and judge if it is safe. The previous discussion exemplifies that terms like soft and hard adventures to Northern Lights activities are not rigid categories. Performance depends on the personal background of the client, just as well as their physical and mental health. For visitors not used to the conditions in the North, the tour may already be an adventure by just going out into the dark, on a cold night over slippery ground. The borders between boredom, challenge and anxiety are often closely connected. It is difficult for the scriptwriter and authors to find a balance with consideration to the varied background of physical capabilities. Here again, the guide becomes a decisive factor.

6.2 THE IMPACT OF THE AUDIENCE – MONITORING AND JUDGEMENT OF SHARED PERFORMANCE

The combination of the script and the stage as described in chapter 4 and 5 choreographs and influences movement throughout a performance. However, performance is also socially constrained (for example Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Goffman, 1959; Larsen, 2005). Not just tourism workers, but also other participants watch, control and influence performance. Social identities are communicated through movement. Some performances are meant for an audience and dependent on an audience's understanding, whereas others are sole performances (Hyde & Olesen, 2011). Peer pressure and collective performances create different opportunities to perform. These opportunities generate expectations and rules for the participants as well as appropriate performance. Additionally, I argue that social interaction is important due to various reasons. Those reasons vary from for example performing a certain identity (Hyde & Olesen, 2011), or relationships to family and friends (Heimtun, 2009; Hughes & Deutsch, 2010; Larsen, 2005). In the following section, social interactions will be analyzed and how those affect Northern Lights performances.

Other travelers monitor and judge how well people perform during group performances. Not only can the physical or mental part of an experience be challenging, so can the performance of other participants. The statements from Trip Advisor and my observation below illustrate

the sociality of performances including the monitoring of others that disturb the flow of action.

The start was that day quite bumpy. Our sledge was last and the girls' sledge was in the middle. They did not realize that they had to go of the brake when they wanted to drive, while our dogs started pulling a lot and I had to put my full weight on the brake. After 50 meters, we stopped again and still she had not understood that she had to help the sledge uphill and not brake. In between, our dogs got bored and one led to the other and suddenly we had an all tangled up dog team. I did not like that things went so slow. (Participant observation dog sledding in January 2015)

So don't expect a good night's sleep – especially if you get snorers, like with us, sleeping next to you – but it is a great experience and they keep the lavvo nice and warm, even though the temperature went down to 20 degrees C during the night. (Overnight stay Sami tent, Trip Advisor, February 2014)

The guide told several times DO NOT USE YOUR CAMERA FLASH but still some people don't know how to operate a camera so a lot of flashes during that night. But here is the downside of the big group NL tours. we had a lot of Chinese people with flash light on their heads. so every time there was a little NL activity they would run like crazy from one place to another. so when you take a picture you have a lot of running people on there with flash light. so you have to walk a little but away from the base camp. (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, March 2014)

Guided tours offer often a “stop-start collective performance”, peer pressure and reflexive self-monitoring let the participants follow (Edensor, 2000). The situations described above can be challenging for the individual participant, since the other participants do not follow the script and endanger the performance of those that do. Participating in the dog sledding and stopping up all the time due to the misunderstanding of the person on the sledge in front, causes frustration and boredom. The stop-start collective performance also occurred during the aurora hunt when one participant wanted to take Northern Lights pictures. In addition to monitoring their own performances, participants monitor and judge the performance of others

(for example Edensor, 2000; Hyde and Olesen, 2011). Nonetheless, other participants can also enhance the experience, for instance, conversations shorten the waiting time.

Our camp was fine and hosts very hospitable, the other trippers were from far and wide e.g. Hong Kong, Brazil etc and talking to them also made a great evening, we can't complain at all. (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, February 2014)

Hence, social interaction and sharing experiences with other participants can be endangering, but can also an enhancing factor for Northern Lights performances. As Hyde and Olesen (2011) state that, the capability to understand the performance of another person is a major influence on how the performance is judged.

My observations showed that the Northern Lights are not just a major pull factor to visit Tromsø and the Lyngenfjord region (see also Vinter Troms AS, 2014). The lights were a common base and provided a conversation starter. Ekeland (2011) stated that during a Hurtigruten cruise participation by cruise tourists in different activities was used as a means to meet new people and interact socially in order to share their experiences. I observed common topics exchanged by Northern Lights tourists included where they came from, if they had seen the lights, in which activities they were participating and why they were in Northern Norway. Participants liked the interaction and opportunity to present themselves, as well as explaining why they were on a quest to see the Northern Lights. Hyde and Olesen (2011) state that travelers express their self-identity through costumes and props they use to perform. In addition, the narration of self in the connection of performance seemed to be an important issue. Narrating themselves seemed to some participants as equally important as listening to the guide. With this Crang's (1997) performance approach for tourism workers is called into question, since the participants actively contribute to the conversations that are meant for exchange rather than simply receipt of information.

The observation of solo travelers during Northern Lights tours indicated travelling alone was not an issue. Nonetheless, when seeing the spectacle of the Northern Lights those, who had traveled alone felt it as they had no one with whom to share their experience.

I really like to travel alone, you can do what you want and when you want. The only thing I did not like was that I did not have anyone to share this experience with me and it made me sad (Informal statement young man, Dog sledding, January 2015)

Travelling makes me happy and sad at the same time. Happy that I can experience all those wonderful things, but sad, because I have to do it alone. I often wish for a partner that would share those experiences with me. Last night when I saw the lights I did together with one of the guides and this was nice to share with someone when you experience something you dreamed about for a while. (Informal statement, middle-aged woman, dog sledding and overnight stay Sami tent, January 2015)

Heimtun (2009) described a similar perspective from midlife single women who were travelling solo. They too, felt the need to share an experience with a likeminded person. A need to narrate experiences to others underscores such a perspective. According to Larsen (2005) and Bærenholdt et al. (2004), participants perform social relationships in a place that is personalized through performance. Larsen (2005) states that it is often social relationships that are the initial cause for performance. Sharing the experience with other likeminded participants is important. Being unable to share the Northern Lights experience with another person, often takes meaning away from the experience. Consequently, tourism is a part of everyday life rather than an exotic island (Larsen, 2005), which stands in contrast to the Northern Lights experience being exotic itself.

6.3 THE REPRODUCTION OF PERFORMANCES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

One of the aspects, I observed throughout several of the Northern Lights tours and without regard to which kind of activity, were the reactions and descriptions about weaker Northern Lights encounters. Talking and asking the participants showed that they were aware of the weather and the necessity of solar activity. Nonetheless, their expectations were quite high towards the intensity and colors of finally seeing the northern light.

Even though we had the nicest weather, we could only spot some really weak lights. The participants seemed generally not so interested in the weak lights. At least in the beginning they went regularly outside when the guide called. The later the evening the

least they went outside. So they sat quietly inside and waited. (Participant observation Northern Lights Hunt by bus, January 2015)

Talking to the participants of the Northern Lights walk made clear as well that when seeing the Aurora they expect this in a certain strength. (Participant observation, Northern Lights walk, December 2014)

During a Northern Lights Dog sledding tour a middle-aged woman stated that she saw fantastic lights the day before. She called some pretty strong “normal” lights we saw weak and boring. (Participant observation, Dog sledding, January 2015)

Those statements show that weak lights were seen as a failing of the performance. Therefore, this chapter investigates from where expectations towards the Northern Lights come. The preceding texts indicate there are a variety of reasons. Seeing an enormous spectacle the day before, certainly creates expectations. Published pictures of the companies, social media of friends and family, as well as Trip Advisor comments, Instagram and so forth, create expectations towards the experience. The comments describe their experiences as fantastic, awesome or exceptional. Those that read the statements know that it is not self-evident to see the lights, but recall how fantastic the lights were in comments shared, which creates expectations towards their own experiences.

Bærenholdt et al. (2004) and Edensor (2000) hold that guidebooks are script that give inspiration about a place and how it can be performed. This creates a first impression in tourists’ minds, which they will build on as they prepare and pack (Hyde & Olesen, 2011). Representational practices that are reflected by TV, guidebooks and films construct symbolic sites, although Edensor (200) sees space as fluid, changing over time and contested by different tourist groups. Today, it is not just the guidebooks and movies like Joanna Lumley’s “hunting the Northern Lights” that draws interest to a destination, in this case, Northern Lights regions. It is mainly the participants themselves that narrate their encounters through social media. According to Chase (2005, p. 657), the narrator “shapes, constructs, and performs the self, experience, and reality”. This means the performer creates an interpretation of self and communicates this as a narration to make others see the world through his eyes.

Hence, the statements above represent the encounter of different participants with the Northern Lights and how they narrated it towards others.

However, narration builds up expectations and naturally, a company cannot guarantee a 100 per cent chance to see the Northern Lights. Nonetheless, companies offering Aurora tours are often careful how they market their activities. Often pictures and social media are used to publish the best shots or the shots with the guests. However, showing incredible Northern Lights time-lapses and photo-shopped or extreme pictures in the beginning of the bus tour creates certain expectations. Even though most of the visitors are aware of the uncertainty of weather and solar activity, many of the participants do not know that the pictures come due to camera adjustments or post-processing of the pictures. This pushes expectations that unfortunately cannot always be fulfilled. Those participants that are not as informed about the habits of the lights often perceive going on a bus tour as receiving little value for money when not seeing the lights. Then the participants reflect about the program and processing of the trip. These narrations reach social media as is described below.

To start off, no, we didn't see the Northern Lights, and that is not the fault of the tour company. There were definitely no interesting stories, and the fire was way off to the side in a metal barrel. No outdoor seats. People sat inside chatting as there was absolutely nothing to see but clouds outside. The guide wandered around ineffectually, setting up cameras if asked. (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, March 2014)

If the skies are cloudy, don't waste your money! The tour office will give you false hopes of seeing the lights even when they know there is no hope. I insisted to my wife that there is no way we will see anything as the skies were so cloudy that not a single star was visible. She insisted we go after hearing the office say 'you never know, it's totally possible, it happens, blah blah (Northern Lights Hunt by bus, Trip Advisor, January 2015)

The participants reflected about the procedure of the tour and how to cope with external influences to create a best possible choice of activities and get the most out of it. The danger of the bus tours here is that they often offer a less than perceived value for money. On the other hand, the participants understand quickly that:

Tips: It seems like their Northern Lights tour may not be the best bang for your buck. From what I could understand, you pay 995 NOK for transportation to and from the camp, and then do a 2-mile hike by foot. For a few extra hundred, book snowmobiling, reindeer sledding, or dog sledding, as you're in the same area, and that's a bit more exciting if the NL are a no-show. (Reindeer sledding, Trip Advisor, January 2015)

Hence, the participants learn how to get best value for money and share this with others. The guests coming after them are therefore better informed before they choose, which tour they will participate in. Activities surrounding the light, on the other hand, seem to not be recall with as many strong negative reactions compared to the bus tours when it comes to not seeing the Aurora as illustrated next.

The night we were there it was snowing so we couldn't see any Northern Lights, but that's just the luck of the draw. This is a really excellent excursion and very well run. (Dog sledding, Trip Advisor, March 2013)

Unfortunately it was cloudy for our night-time dog sledding trip so no aurora but nevertheless a fantastic experience. (Dog sledding, Trip Advisor, March 2013)

We actually did a longer time with this group. We went out for Northern Lights dogsledding to check out the Northern Lights--unfortunately the weather was not good for the lights, but driving the dogsled was great. (Dog sledding, Trip Advisor, March 2013)

As explained above, seeing the Northern Lights is for many an important experience. Most of the participants know that the natural conditions and activity on the sun that day determine whether or not the lights are seen. Nonetheless, not seeing the lights leads to different reactions after the performance.

Friedman (2010) points to the marketing of Northern Light as an icon for Northern Norway. This marketing attaches the natural phenomenon to place. Bertella (2013) sees a problem in the marketing of destination companies, which according to him creates a picture of an "arctic phantasy land". Many tourists think they can come in two days to see the lights. According to Bertella (2013), this creates challenges for the guides to fulfill the expectations that the visitors hold. The companies have to deal with the expectations that have been created

towards seeing the Northern Lights. The companies are very honest in their product descriptions when selling their tours, however, through posting pictures a certain standard of the intensity of the experience is set. Those pictures seem to serve as a pull factor since the tours themselves cannot promise too much. Nonetheless, it is mainly previous visitors, who spread enthusiasm over social media and pictures for someone, who does not know anything about the lights maybe misinterpret “as the standard”. According to Edensor (2000) and Larsen (2005), performance is a continuing process of learning, self-monitoring and reflection, and actors produce roles according to what they have learned. New visitors either share an enthusiastic experience or are unlucky. The positive shared experiences create a continuous link between previously narrated experiences and expectations for other tourists towards future experiences.

7 CONCLUSION AND FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Performance is critical for experiencing the Northern Lights. In performing, visitors participate in organized tours, which are set up differently according to activity and provider. All encounters are underscored by the same rules associated with the weather, solar activity and being in the right place at the right time. Seeing the Northern Lights is for many a meaningful and exotic experience. To achieve an understanding of how tourists perform Northern Lights activities an ethnographic methodology was used. Research values related to a feministic approach informed this study. Data were gathered from different ethnographic methods, primarily, participant observation, informal as well as semi-structured interviewing and online ethnography. Thematic analysis was used to develop categories and sub-themes of script, stage and social interaction of Northern Lights performances.

The findings show that companies use scripts to back up Northern Lights activities in order to constantly reproduce, regulate and negotiate experiences with regard to the uncertainty of the natural phenomenon, the Aurora Borealis itself. The participation in Northern Lights activities demands skills and varies due to natural conditions. Further, the encounter with the Northern Lights is seen as a process of confrontation, adjustment and performance. Almost all tourists had to overcome the unfamiliarity of the situation in the beginning, when they are confronted with the dark and wilderness outside the towns. In the beginning unbounded performances occur, which are gradually transformed into either disciplined ritual or improvised performance. The more capabilities and knowledge an activity involves, for instance dog sledding, the stronger was the tendency to use disciplined rituals, in which participants strictly followed performance requisites. The disciplined rituals allowed no room for improvisation or individual performances. Whereas, less physical involvement left more room for improvisation throughout the tours, especially, during the Northern Lights walk or the bus hunts. Bus tours are meant for improvisation, whereas some participants requested more structure and content. Activities that were attached to a place involving waiting periods tended to generate a desire for increased structure and content. However, visitors coming for the first time to the North in the winter were dependent on tour companies to enable performance through offering different ways of encountering the northern light. Scripts offer

the necessary guidance for participation in different, unfamiliar activities within unknown surroundings. The different performances demonstrated that tourists reflected and learnt throughout performance, which made them an active contributor to their experiences. That being said, tourists also depend on the script to enable the achievement of a successful performance in the unknown.

The Northern Lights experience takes place outside of towns in a heterogeneous natural environment that varies due to the weather. Further, seeing the Northern Lights requires darkness. The confrontation of the tourists with darkness and nature outside towns is seen as a process of confrontation and adjustment, turning from initial anxiety to a feeling of calmness and feeling welcomed. The landscape is an important aesthetic part of the Northern Lights experience, but also enforces a different sensual involvement and experience of the surroundings. Here, the stage defined by humans and material factors plays an important role. Within the landscape, the camp creates a safe environment with necessary facilities that offer a structured space akin to an oasis within an unfamiliar environment. This stage stands in contrast to the arctic landscape and darkness that enforces a constant negotiation and restructuring of the stage according to the external conditions. Leaving the camp for the hunt, dog sledding or a walk means entering heterogeneous uncontrolled space. Even within the organized space, the base camps in the arctic landscape can suddenly create new conditions, for example, extreme cold or an icy, slippery ground. Thus, the character of the hunt and the different activities in general require tourists to often enter a space that cannot be fully controlled. Here, materiality provides support within this unknown environment and the unfamiliar procedures. Further, the materiality of space creates a certain authenticity in the experience. The guide has a central role in tourism experiences. The guide leads, entertains, ensures safety and cares for the participants throughout a tour. However, most importantly, the guide negotiates between space, materiality and the script. Hence, in this research the guide is connected to the stage. From a performer's perspective, the guide stimulates the experience and carries overall responsibility for the success of the performance. Reflections of former Northern Lights tour participants indicate that the behavior of the guide is always observed and judged. The guide does not just give the frame for the performance, or

constrains it with rules, the guide empowers the performance of the tourists or takes over when they cannot perform. This exemplifies the necessity for interplay between human and material factors.

The tourist experience is highly individual and depends on different intrinsic factors like physical fitness, nationality, perceptions and previous experiences. The participants of the tours and activities have different ideas why and how they want to see the Northern Lights. One of the guides stated that many people that visit have their own history regarding the Northern Lights and why they want to see them. The magic of the Northern Lights lies within every individual guest and their motive. My observation suggests that most of the participants liked to talk about themselves and about previous experiences. To share experiences, the guide and other participants become important factors. The guide can stimulate interaction and communication in the group as well as enhance performances. Participants observe and judge each other's performance. If the performance is non-conformant with the group's imagination it is rejected. On the other hand, a common performance enhance an experience through the exchange of stories and in meeting others. Sharing the experience with other likeminded participants is important. Being unable to share the Northern Lights experience often diminishes the meaning of the experience. Subsequently, social relationships and interaction are important. Furthermore, continuous performance via social media presents different implications for companies selling Northern Lights tours. Visitors coming to see the Northern Lights are aware of the unpredictability of this natural phenomenon. On the other side, when seeing the Aurora, this is expected to mimic pictures viewed on the web. Hence, previous visitors spread enthusiasm for Northern Lights tours through the narration of their experiences via social media. Images of the Aurora viewed by someone with little knowledge may be misinterpreted "as the standard". New visitors either share an exhilarating experience or are unlucky. Positive experiences are shared, which commences a continuous cycle between previous narrated experiences and expectations for other tourists towards future Northern Lights tour experiences.

Evaluating my research, I found that using different sources of data gave a detailed picture of the Northern Lights activities. Nonetheless, participating in just two Northern Lights tours

each shortly after the other gave a limited experience. Still, I was fortunate to experience different situations resulting from changing weather, group consistencies and size, seeing and not seeing the lights, which gave me greater insight into the Northern Lights business. It was also the changing conditions that made it hard to collect more semi-structured interviews. In my research, I used two different and experienced companies, hence, further research should be conducted in Tromsø and Lyngfjord to find out how other companies create frames for encounters with the light and how these encounters are performed by the tourists. The role of the guide as part of the stage and significant connection between the different elements of the experience should also be further investigated. Until now, the guide has been treated as independent element connected to tourist experiences in tourism research. I depict the guide as an important element of the stage, since the visitors connect the guide to the stage as a part of their performance. Another area of research, is an exploration of how performance reaches into social media and influences future performances of tourists. Finally, the conflict between improvisation and disciplined performance should be also researched in order to find out how to encourage more active behavior by bus tourists.

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Study: Master Tourism Course

- 1) Has not been used for the same/or any other examinations at the University
- 2) Has not been used for any other examination at another College/University both domestic or abroad
- 3) Is not referring to other persons work without having stated the source
- 4) Is not referring to own earlier work without this being stated
- 5) Having stated all references in the literature-list

I am aware that breaking these rules will be considered as cheating.

Date: 1.6.2015

Student name: Franziska Wentzlaff

Signature: 