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An investigation of meanings and processes of tourist transformation

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**Transformative tourism experiences:
An investigation of meanings and processes of tourist
transformation**

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Glossary of Key Terms

| Key term | Definition |
|----------------------------|--|
| Transformative tourism | Transformative tourism refers to the practice of organised tourism that leads to a positive change in attitudes and values among those who participate in the tourist experience (Christie & Mason, 2003, p. 9). |
| Existential transformation | Existential transformation is related to a type of experience where tourists are struck by a sudden event during the trip and as a result start re-evaluating their life direction and enhance their sense of existential authenticity (Kirillova et al., 2017b). |
| Peak episodes | Peak episodes refer to moments during the tourism experience that trigger existential transformation. They are sudden and emotionally intense, and include the tourists' realisation of transiency of the moment (Kirillova et al., 2017c). |
| Liminality | Liminality relates to the extra-ordinary dimension of the destination, where tourists are able to escape from their everyday social structures, and are free to unconsciously express and perform a different persona (Turner, 1969; Cohen, 2010; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017). |
| Flow | Flow refers to a mental state caused by focusing on an enjoyable and rewarding activity, which involves a temporary loss of self-consciousness and a perceived distortion of time, leading to a sense of control and mastery of the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). |
| Duoethnography | Duoethnography is a subtype of autoethnography (see Chang, 2008), and is conducted by two researchers who engage in a dialogical method and discuss their personal experiences, to then identify different and common narratives. It is also defined as the examination and detection of socio-cultural issues determined by race, ethnicity and sexuality (Mair & Frew, 2018; Sawyer & Norris, 2013). |
| Open and axial coding | Open coding and axial coding refer to parts of data analysis, where open coding identifies and classifies narratives into broad |

| | |
|--|---|
| | categories, and axial coding makes comparisons between themes in order to make theoretical claims (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). |
|--|---|

Summary

Holidays are promoted as opportunities for refreshment and physical wellness. However, consumers are more and more interested in experiences cultivating a greater sense of purpose and meaningful relationships. In this context, there is a need for conscious and transformative holidays that provide means to change lifestyles, and to increase the positive impact made on destinations. However, we do not yet have a precise understanding of tourist transformation nor a conceptual model of how transformative tourism experiences occur. To address the consumers' demand for meaningful and refreshing travel, research is needed to understand the dimensions of transformative tourism experiences and to define tourist transformation. To theoretically and empirically analyse transformative tourism experiences and how they are characterised, this thesis presents three studies.

To develop a conceptual model of tourist transformation, the first study of the thesis reviews the contexts in which transformative tourism research has emerged, and the main theories that have been employed to understand the phenomenon. Transformative learning and existential transformation were the two major conceptualisations found to explain changes in tourists. By adopting a psychological and geographical approach, a range of transformative stimuli occurring across the tourism experience, namely peak episodes, disorienting dilemmas and physical performances, were identified and discussed. After a critical review, the first study proposes a tourist transformation conceptual model, and defines transformation as triggered by a combination of disruptive stimuli experienced throughout the holiday, which change the tourists' value system and attitudes to create new meanings.

Building on the comprehensive conceptual framework of tourist transformation proposed in the Conceptual Model, Study II explores the meanings attached to transformative travel by individuals as tourists, and investigates characteristics of their experiences that may facilitate

or inhibit tourist transformation. Adopting a qualitative semi-structured interview approach, it revealed that interviewees primarily viewed subjective tourist transformation as achieving greater self-efficacy, humility and personal enrichment. Study II findings suggest that transformation facilitators correspond to: interacting with locals and travellers, facing challenges, experiencing the sense of the place, long stays and post-travel reflection; while several aspects emerged as transformation inhibitors, such as short stays, repeated activities, and the lack of access to the residents' lifestyle. Not all participants reported experiencing transformation through tourism, meaning that tourist transformation requires facilitators to occur. This disputed the idea of wellbeing as outcome of transformative tourism experiences, and confirmed that not all travel experiences are transformative. However, when transformation emerged, it was perceived as permanent.

Building on the findings of Study II, Study III further analyses gendered and subjective experiences of young travellers, who represent a crucial transition phase that has not yet been addressed within transformative tourism research. In the realm of transformative tourism research and tourism studies on gender, transformation is considered part of the emancipating and empowering process that women mostly experience through travel. Yet, little is known about the same process from a male or comparative perspective. To address these research gaps, Study III adopts a double duoethnography approach aimed at analysing young male and female experiences of transformation through tourism. Through a photo elicitation technique, data was collected from the candidate and another researcher' personal experiences with transformative tourism, then analysed for gender-based similarities and differences. Overall, Study III findings suggest that both young female and male tourism experiences of transformation are characterised by becoming mentally stronger and more confident, as well as increasing acceptance of unexpected negative events arising during the trip. The critical role of liminality is also common for women and men in exploring their identities during

tourism experiences. The female process of transformation is marked by bodily feelings and self-consciousness, while the male experience is characterised by flow, adaptation, a sense of community with other travellers. The findings of the three studies composing the thesis advance knowledge in transformative tourism, and present important implications for operators and managers designing and delivering conscious and transformative travel activities.

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Publications from this Thesis

Journal articles

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Pung, J. M. & Del Chiappa (2020), “An exploratory and qualitative study on the meaning of transformative tourism and its facilitators and inhibitors”, *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 24, 2404. (Journal Ranking: ANVUR 2019 = Scientific Journal).

Pung, J. M., Gnoth, J., & Del Chiappa, G., “Tourist transformation: Towards a conceptual model”. Revised and resubmitted. (Journal Ranking: ANVUR 2019 = A; ABDC 2019 = A*)

Conference Publications

Pung, J. M. & Del Chiappa, G. (2017), “The transformative power of tourism experiences and related barriers: a qualitative study”, Società Italiana di Marketing (SIM) Conference, Oct 26-27, University of Bergamo, Italy.

Pung, J. M., Khoo-Lattimore, C., Del Chiappa, G. & Yung, R. (2019), “Exploring the role of gender in transformative travel experiences for young travellers through duoethnography”, Council for Australasian University Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE), Feb 11-14, Central Queensland University, Cairns, Australia.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This thesis presents three studies which investigated the transformative tourism experiences, focusing on the processes and meanings of tourist transformation. Chapter 1 begins by describing transformative tourism to provide some background to the research. The theoretical framework of the study is then discussed, which leads to the identification of the research questions. Next, the base of the methodological approach adopted in this thesis is presented. Then, an overview of the contents of each subsequent chapter is provided, accompanied by the visual representation of the thesis outline.

1.2. Transformative tourism

In current times, more than 300 million people are affected by depression worldwide (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2018). In Europe, mental ill health costs €240 billion in total every year, and reduces productivity, which amounts to €136 billion in costs every year (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work [EU-OSHA], 2014). Preventing such diseases does not only ensure better population's health, but would also provide economic benefits, such as improving productivity, and reducing expenditure on health care in the long term (Hartwell, Hemingway, Fyall, Filimonau, & Wall, 2012). Consumers seek to fulfil wellbeing through their holidays, and the tourism market is increasingly focusing on providing wellbeing (Voigt & Pforr, 2014). However, tourism marketing messages may only convey a superficial search for feeling physically well, and may not consider the transformational possibilities of being well that tourism can deliver (Reisinger, 2013; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006), especially in relation to identity and value-related crises that may affect individuals in our contemporary society. Tourism and travel not only could provide physical and/or

psychological wellbeing, but also transformation and self-realignment. The advent of the experience economy has meant that individuals are now willing to enrich their daily lives with engaging, entertaining and memorable activities and encounters that deliver a sense of enjoyment and improvement (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Yeoman, 2013). This has meant that current consumers are attributing less and less importance to material goods, and are more interested in experiences cultivating a greater sense of purpose and meaningful relationships (Boswijk, Peelen, & Olthof, 2013; World Tourism Organisation [UNWTO], 2016b). To achieve this, future consumers are predicted to increasingly seek cutting-edge and authentic leisure activities which help them achieve new levels of enrichment and personal accomplishment (Yeoman, 2013).

In the disciplines of marketing and consumer behaviour, transformative service research (TSR) has recently emerged as research strand investigating the connection between the consumption of meaningful services and the increase of consumers' wellbeing (Blocker & Barrios, 2015). Through this initiative, TSR analyses services that create change, intended as improvement of the wellbeing of both individuals and communities (Anderson et al., 2013; Blocker & Barrios, 2015). In tourism research, Christie and Mason (2003) have defined transformative tourism as "the practice of organised tourism that leads to a positive change in attitudes and values among those who participate in the tourist experience" (p. 9). The importance of transformative tourism is underlined by the World Tourism Organisation's recent report on "the transformative power of tourism", which argues that through transformative tourism, consumers show changes in their lifestyle, not only towards health, but also sustainability and greater responsibility towards the society and environment (UNWTO, 2016b). In transformational experiences, tourists visit unique places and find opportunities for self-expression and meaning, towards a better understanding of their self and the world (Reisinger, 2013). Tourists also experience transformation when adapting to a new

environment, and are forced to shift their viewpoint in examining the world: thus, they may become interculturally competent in the host culture, acquiring a more inclusive perspective (Reisinger, 2013).

These trends highlight the need for research examining transformative tourism experiences and how they are characterised. Understanding the dimensions of transformative tourism experiences plays a significant role in defining tourist transformation and addressing the consumers' demand for refreshing and meaningful experiences. Therefore, a theoretical and empirical exploration of transformative processes through tourism is crucial to the design and marketing of transformative tourism with long-term positive impacts.

1.3. Theoretical contextualisation and proposal of a theoretical framework

Research suggests that specific types of tourism provide transformative benefits: among these, studying abroad provides self-development and cultural cosmopolitanism (Gill, 2007; Grabowski, Wearing, Lyons, Tarrant, & Landon, 2017); volunteer tourism favours the acquisition of skills and confidence (Erdely, 2013; Wearing, 2001); backpacking represents a transitional phase of achieving independence (e.g. Pearce & Foster, 2007), etc. However, literature on transformative tourism experiences remains at a limited stage, with studies being limited to a descriptive overview of how certain tourism types lead to transformational meanings and outcomes. There is a significant gap in our understanding of how tourist transformation is characterised across different activities and experiences, and in the identification of which travel characteristics facilitate and hinder the process of transformation (Reisinger, 2013).

Previous studies have used transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978, 1991) as theoretical foundation to explain the tourists' process of encountering a 'disorienting

dilemma' at the destination, causing the tourists to question their values and assumptions and integrate a new perspective (e.g. Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Morgan, 2010; Reisinger, 2013). More recently, Kirillova, Lehto and Cai (2017b, 2017c) employed existentialist and humanistic constructs to frame existential transformation through tourism, where tourists are struck by a sudden event (i.e. 'peak episode') during the trip and as a result start re-evaluating their life direction and enhance their sense of existential authenticity. However, existential transformation represents only one area of tourist transformation. Moreover, transformation is considered part of the emancipating and empowering process that women mostly experience through travel (e.g. Elsrud, 1998; Myers, 2017). Yet, little is known about the same process from a male or comparative perspective. Thus, previous studies have yet to reach a general consensus on the definition of tourist transformation – which includes learning, skills development, self-growth, and behavioural outcomes - and the key dimensions of transformative tourism experiences.

Transformation is considered to be influenced by the destination context, where tourists visit a different cultural and physical environment, and are exposed to the local 'Other' (Morgan, 2010). As such, tourists are not only passive gazers, but in the liminal setting of the destination, where they are far from their daily routines and constraints, they engage in performativity and practices, and are potentially challenged by the contextual encounters and unpredicted conditions (Edensor, 2018; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Tourists attribute meaning to these encounters, and reflecting on their experience is considered a fundamental process that allows for transformative meanings to be realised after their trip (Kirillova et al., 2017c; Robledo & Batle, 2017). After transformative travel experiences, individuals make life-changing decisions and potentially modify their behaviour, such as re-negotiating their social relations (Lean, 2012); changing their career prospects (Brown, 2013b; O'Reilly, 2006); developing environmentally-friendly behaviour (Christie &

Mason, 2003; Moscardo, 2017). Thus, it is important to understand how these transformative outcomes are achieved, and whether they can last over time (Kirillova et al., 2017b).

Based on transformative learning and existential transformation theories, as well as existing literature describing the transformative processes of tourism activities, a tourist transformation model is presented to be examined and enriched with this thesis (Figure 1.0).

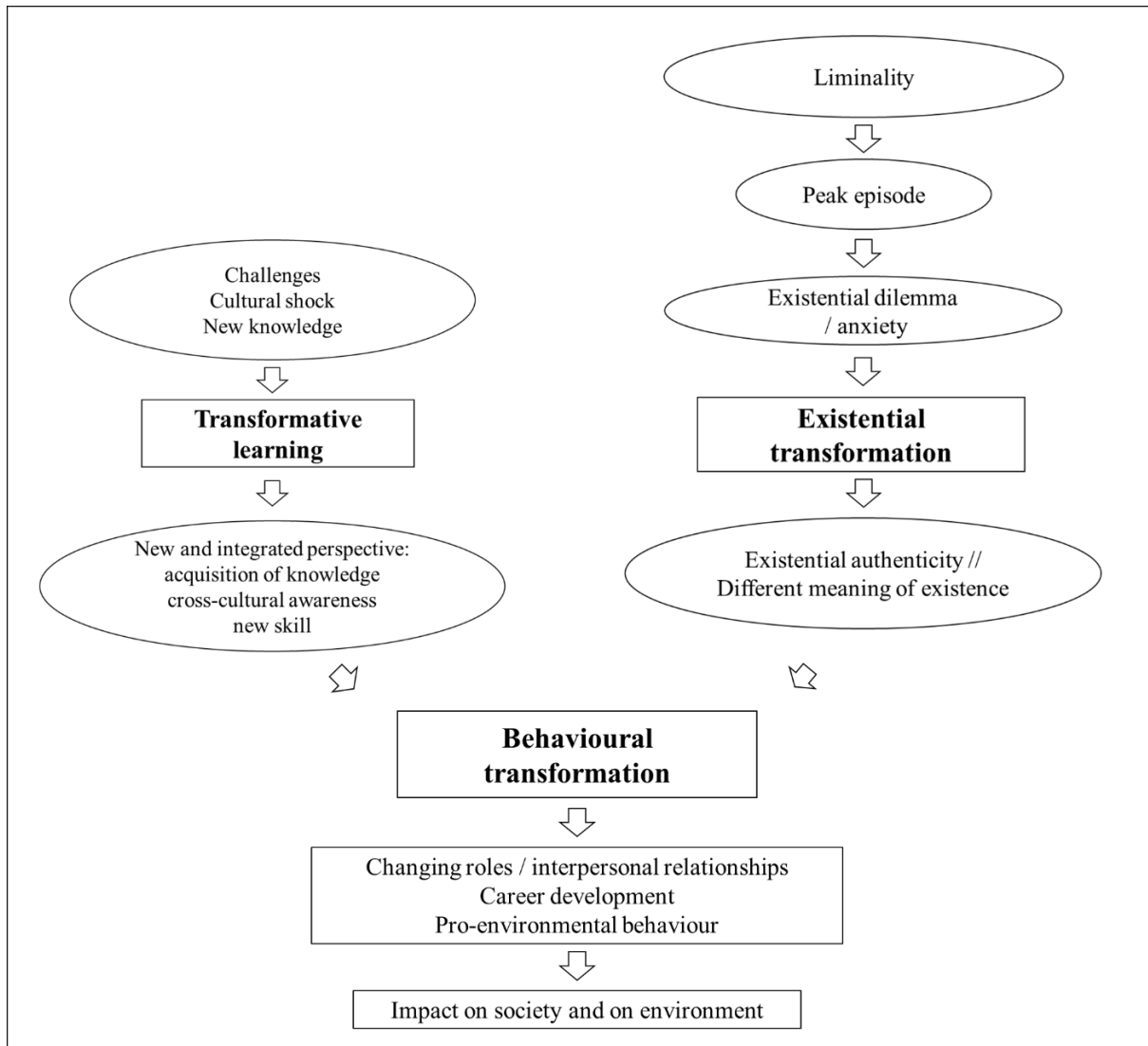


Figure 1.0 A conceptual model of tourist transformation

1.4. Research gaps and questions

The development of the theoretical framework uncovered that transformative learning and existential transformation are the main constructs, along with behavioural outcomes, characterising our limited knowledge of tourist transformation. In order to develop a comprehensive conceptual model on tourist transformation among these constructs, the following research questions are formulated:

RQ1: In what contexts has transformative tourism research emerged?

RQ2: Which theories have been utilised in transformative tourism research?

RQ3: Which theories have not yet been used but may further explain the tourist transformation process?

RQ4: Which are the key dimensions of tourist transformation that can be identified, regardless of the tourism type?

In addition, there are several areas requiring further investigation, especially in defining transformative tourism experiences. These areas are:

1) the lack of examination of the tourists' perspective on their subjectively perceived transformation; 2) the lack of understanding of travel characteristics that drive tourist transformation; 3) the lack of knowledge of factors which could hinder transformative tourism experiences. To address these gaps in the literature, this thesis will also qualitatively explore the following research questions:

RQ5: What is meant by transformative tourism experiences?

RQ6: What inhibits and what facilitates transformative tourism experiences?

Further, the thesis also seeks to expand the conceptualisation of tourist transformation by addressing: 4) the lack of further research exploring meanings and benefits attached to young tourists' process of transformation; 5) the narrow focus on women's discourses of empowerment and resistance obtained through independent and family travel, and the lack of comparative research on men's experiences of transformative tourism; 6) the need for a research instrument that allows to better interpret how individuals perceive their transformation through tourism. In order to qualitatively investigate these areas, the following research questions are elaborated:

RQ7: How can the process of transformative change be provided to young individuals through travel?

RQ8: What are the similarities and differences in male and female transformative tourism experiences?

In order to address the research questions so far formulated, the thesis is comprised by three studies, where the first study (titled Conceptual Model) discusses and proposes a conceptual model, and the second and third study (Study II and Study III) use a qualitative approach. This approach, comprising a different methodology for each study, was chosen because it enabled the thesis to further expand the limited understanding and theoretical framework on tourist transformation and transformative tourism experiences. This is described in the next section.

1.5. Aims and methodologies

In order to address the research questions above illustrated, the thesis is composed of three studies: a theoretical study (Chapter 2), and two empirical studies (Chapter 3 and 4).

To answer Research Questions 1-4, the thesis starts with a theoretical chapter (Chapter 2),

presenting a literature review that investigates the contexts where processes and outcomes of tourist self-change are analysed (RQ1). Because of the theoretical approach of this study, main theories that have been utilised by transformative tourism research are also discussed and critiqued (RQ2). In order to further explain how tourist transformation occurs, additional theories and approaches are illustrated (RQ3), specifically a psychological and geographical approach involving the concepts of performativity and embodiment; Peirce's theory of experience; the process of changing values and attitudes. Based on this literature review and theoretical discussion, we propose a conceptual model with the key dimensions of tourist transformation (RQ4) in Chapter 2.

To answer Research Questions 5 and 6, the thesis proceeds with a second and empirical study (Chapter 3) taking an exploratory approach since several areas defining transformative tourism experiences require further investigation. Qualitative methods are considered to be suitable for providing insights on lived transformative tourism experiences. The exploratory and qualitative approach involves semi-structured interviews with individuals that had different travel experiences, to have a comprehensive understanding of how they personally defined and experienced transformative tourism (RQ5). This is also related to exploring factors that drive tourist transformation (i.e. transformation facilitators), and characteristics that could inhibit tourist transformation (i.e. transformation inhibitors) (RQ6). The participants are selected through non-probability purposive sampling, and the data obtained is analysed using thematic analysis. The full description of the study is presented in Chapter 3.

To answer Research Questions 7 and 8, qualitative methods are used in a third study (Chapter 4), employing duoethnography and involving the comparison of the candidate's experiences with the ones of another young researcher. Duoethnography, in the form of open conversations and memory-work elicited by photographs, is used to investigate personal

transformative tourism experiences as young adults (RQ7), as well as to explore narratives, meanings and determinants attached to these experiences according to gender (RQ8). This method is considered an ideal research instrument for better equipping researchers in understanding and interpreting how others perceive and consider their lived tourism experiences. Three transformative travel experiences for each researcher are posited as data entry points, and these data are analysed through open and axial coding. The data and coding are further analysed and negotiated by a 3rd and 4th researcher, thereby characterising a double duoethnography. The full description of the research method used for this study is presented in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

1.6. Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters, and comprises three main studies. Chapter 2 (titled Conceptual Model) presents the review of the literature and conceptualisation that illustrate a theoretical framework underlining the key dimensions of tourist transformation. The chapter first presents the existing research that has touched on the transformative benefits provided by specific types of tourism (i.e. the mobilities paradigm, study abroad, volunteer tourism, backpacking and ecotourism, wellness and spiritual tourism), to then discuss transformative learning theory and existential transformation, which have been so far employed by the literature as conceptual framework explaining transformative tourism processes. This literature review is then followed by a discussion of other approaches that would further expand our understanding of tourist transformation, namely discussing the tourist encounter, Peirce's experience theory, and value and attitude change. From the literature review and conceptual discussion, a theoretical model is then proposed to illustrate the key dimensions of tourist transformation.

Chapter 3 presents an empirical and qualitative study (Study II) exploring the meaning

individuals attach to transformative travel as tourists, and investigates potential factors in their experiences that may facilitate or inhibit tourist transformation. The chapter first presents a review of the literature on transformative tourism and tourist wellbeing, and reviews tourism aspects such as peak episodes, interacting with locals and experiencing the sense of place, as transformation facilitators. A rationale is provided for selecting semi-structured interviews as study methodology, and the results highlight how participants defined their transformation through tourism. Several transformation facilitators, as well as transformation inhibitors, are identified, and considerations are also made on the tourists' post-travel wellbeing, specifically on its perception and duration.

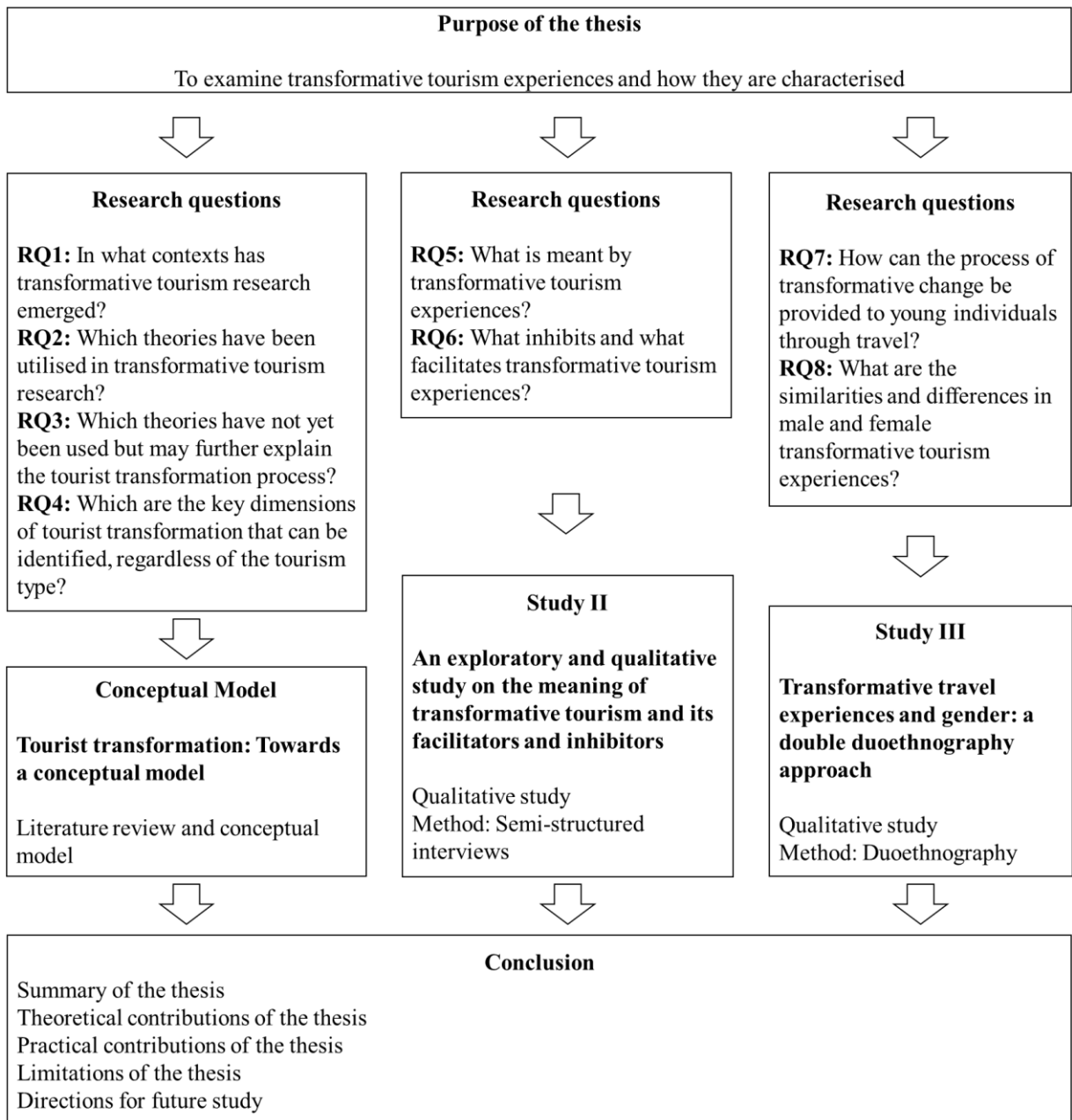
Chapter 4 presents an empirical and qualitative study (Study III) analysing young male and female experiences of transformation through tourism. The chapter first illustrates a tourist transformation model based on the main theories characterising transformative tourism studies. It then provides a literature review of the transformative benefits linked to youth travel activities and of the transformative meanings discussed by research on women experiencing empowerment through tourism. As methodology for this study, duoethnography as research instrument is explained and justified. Then, the findings of the double duoethnography are presented as themes and discussed in relation to the literature on transformative tourism and women travel experiences. A tourist transformation conceptualisation, integrated with the duoethnography findings, is also proposed.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents the conclusions drawn from this research. The chapter begins by revisiting the rationale for conducting this study and provides a summary of the previous four chapters of the thesis. The contributions of the research to theory are then presented and discussed, highlighting areas in which new knowledge has been contributed to the literature. Also, the contributions of the research to practice are discussed, highlighting how the results

of the thesis could be useful to industry practitioners, and to tourism products designers and marketers. Finally, the limitations of the study are considered and directions for future research are discussed.

Following is an outline of the thesis as visual representation.

1.7. Thesis outline



Chapter 2: Conceptual Model

Tourist transformation: Towards a conceptual model

2.1. Introduction

People go on vacation to feel refreshed and fulfilled (Filep & Pearce, 2013; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012), even transformed (e.g. Christie & Mason, 2003), all of which has been marketed as benefits of tourism experiences. Recently however, the actual nature of such ‘tourist wellbeing’ has become the object of debate in tourism research (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). What is feeling refreshed, fulfilled or transformed in relation to wellbeing? Filep and Laing (2019) have encouraged future research investigating tourists’ eudaimonic experiences, which are not only characterised by experiencing pleasure and refreshment, but also by the tourists’ opportunity to change as a consequence of learning and growing. Particularly when focusing on transformation, is it entirely subjective or also an objective or empirical process, and when and how does it occur during the experience?

In relation to learning through tourism, Christie and Mason (2003) defined transformative tourism as leading to ‘positive change in attitudes and values’ among its participants (p. 9). Transformative tourism could thereby come about through activities that foster tolerance and cross-cultural understanding (Caton, 2012; Gibson, 2010), or a shift towards responsible travel (UNWTO, 2016b). Therefore, conscious and transformative travel can provide means for changes in lifestyle towards sustainability and greater global citizenship, ultimately increasing the positive impact on (and of) destinations (UNWTO, 2016b). Robledo and Batle (2017) have argued that transformational tourism is provided by a combination of different factors, rather than by a type of tourism. However, literature on transformative tourism experiences remains at a limited stage, with studies mainly focused on describing transformative benefits provided by specific types of tourism (e.g. volunteer tourism, study

abroad, mindful travel, etc.) (e.g. Reisinger, 2013). Therefore, there is a significant gap in our understanding of how tourist transformation is characterised across different activities and experiences, and a general consensus on the definition of tourist transformation has yet to be reached.

To address these research gaps, and achieve a conceptual framework and definition supporting further theory building, this study focuses on answering the following questions:

- In what contexts has the notion of transformative tourism research emerged?
- Which theories have been utilised in transformative tourism research?
- Which theories have not yet been used but may further explain the tourist transformation process?
- Which are the key dimensions of tourist transformation, regardless of the type of tourism tourists engage in?

The structure of the present study is as follows. First, existing transformative tourism studies are reviewed to investigate the contexts where processes and outcomes of tourist self-change have been analysed (section 2.2). We then present and critically discuss the main theories employed by transformative tourism studies to consolidate our theoretical understanding of tourist transformation (section 2.3). Particular attention is given to how tourists may experience transformative change, based on interactions between their consciousness and external environment. Following the review of literature on transformative tourism, we consider approaches on experiences and tourist behaviour (e.g. psychological, geographical and pragmatic perspectives) to suggest and discuss a more comprehensive conceptual framework of tourist transformation (section 2.4), and we finally illustrate a conceptual model of tourist transformation that includes the main constructs and key dimensions underpinning transformation (section 2.5).

As a result of our literature review and discussed conceptual model, we propose that *'tourist transformation involves awareness and the fragmentation of existing cognitions, which encourage tourists to reinstate their internal balance by restructuring beliefs about their self and the world. With sufficient momentum and reinforcement, the tourists' transformative experience can further lead to attitude change and permanent behavioural change and result in an overall sense of growth.'* The definition of tourist transformation proposed in this study adds to the aforementioned definition of transformative tourism by Christie and Mason (2003), by giving insights on how values and attitudes are changed by transformative tourism experiences. Destination communities and operators are thereby encouraged to develop strategies that provide sufficient momentum and reinforcement for tourists to consolidate transformative experiences that connect themselves to resultant changes, and that also lead to more conscious behaviour towards tourism practices and destinations.

2.2. Transformative experiences in tourism contexts

2.2.1. Mobilities paradigm

Drawing upon a geographical and anthropological perspective, Lean (2012) argued that physical travel in a mobile world makes it difficult for travellers to remove themselves from familiar ideas, objects, and symbols. The mobilities paradigm involves humans in a mobile world characterised by physical, but also virtual, communicative and imaginative travel (Urry, 2007). Lean (2012) discussed continuous social processes in these different modes of mobility, where relationships, experiences and memories are factors that interact and influence the 'before', 'during' and 'after' of travel experiences. Upon return, individuals re-establish and re-negotiate personal relationships in light of their internal realisations (Brown, 2009; Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Hirschorn & Hefferon, 2013; Jafari, 1987; Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017b; Lean, 2012). With his critique, Lean (2012) concludes that transformative travel

is not a finite process, but rather a complex global phenomenon of social nature. Instead of defining transformative travellers and transformation through travel, Lean (2012) argues that continuous alterations and social processes should be further analysed as part of the tourists' wider construction of reality. Lean (2009) also discusses transformation through travel in terms of behavioural change. Because it is not understood how behavioural change can be prolonged in the long term, he calls for further research to investigate how behavioural change can be long-lasting, and promote sustainable practices and community wellbeing.

2.2.2. Study abroad

Brown (2009) discusses the transformative power of students' international sojourns. Her analysis shows how the prolonged absence from home, exposure to other cultures and challenges faced while attending lectures and studying in a different setting have consequences for life perspectives of international students. Through this experience, international sojourners become more independent and better-equipped in coping with stress (Brown, 2009). Study abroad promotes opportunities for tourists' self-growth, to adjust to the new environment, culture, values and practices (Fordham, 2006; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). In addition, international students may also change while facing different economic conditions (Mathers, 2004), and feeling in-between cultures at the destination (Erichsen, 2011). Therefore, study abroad is attributed multiple transformative benefits: changing attitude towards the destination hosts (Nyaupane, Teye, & Paris, 2008); developing cultural cosmopolitanism and international political concern (Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Fordham, 2006; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017; Grabowski et al., 2017); increasing self-efficacy (Erichsen, 2011; Milstein, 2005); and reconstructing one's self-identity (Gill, 2007). The improved knowledge and cultural competence acquired through study abroad is also believed to have repercussions on the traveller's professional career and interpersonal relationships

(Brown, 2013b).

2.2.3. Backpacking and ecotourism

Matthews (2014) described the rite of passage experienced when backpacking. It involves being separated from family and friends, and creating *communitas* with other backpackers. The backpackers' narration of their experiences highlights reflexive self-change, made up by 'real' and authentic encounters (Noy, 2004; O'Reilly, 2006). Through backpacking, tourists may also develop and refine new abilities (Kanning, 2013), such as acquiring new general knowledge, self-confidence and independence (Pearce & Foster, 2007).

In ecotourism research, Beaumont (2001) and Weaver (2005) stress the importance of reinforcing motivations and deep understanding, to influence pro-environmental behaviour. As such, ecotourism particularly focuses on designing programmes and activities that involve interpretation to make the tourists' behaviour more responsible and sustainable in the long term (Christie & Mason, 2003; Moscardo, 2017). Through a systematic review, Wolf, Ainsworth and Crowley (2017) have conceptualised a model of transformative travel market niches for protected areas. They illustrate experience-outcome linkages, according to participants' sociodemographic characteristics and motivations, with the ultimate objective of ensuring satisfaction and destination loyalty (Wolf et al., 2017). Beyond increasing wellbeing and restoration, transformative travel in natural environments and protected areas may involve highly challenging activities encouraging personal development, to less challenging activities promoting socialising and cultural learning (e.g. Wolf et al., 2017).

2.2.4. Wellness and spiritual tourism

Wellness tourism has been defined as journeys motivated by the tourists' willingness to increase their health and wellbeing, and is characterised by stays at facilities designed to

enhance physical, psychological, spiritual and social wellbeing (Voigt, Brown, & Howat, 2011). Fu, Tanyatanaboon and Lehto (2015) have analysed guest reviews of transformative experiences at retreat centres. This analysis has found that physical, work and existential challenges often characterised the guests' pre-trip state of mind. Yet, through their visitations they experienced bodily change (feeling healthier), emotional change (balanced feelings), attitudinal change (increased confidence) and change in skills (Fu et al., 2015). Voigt et al. (2011) focused on wellness tourists' motivations, and similarly found that they benefitted from their experiences on a physical, psychological and spiritual level. Rather than using the word 'transformation', studies focusing on spiritual tourism experiences, characterised by an intentional search for spiritual benefit through religious practices (Norman, 2011), discuss the tourists' quests for meaning (Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra, 2013). These motivate them to engage in sacred journeys (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005), that lead to spiritual fulfilment (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011) and self-actualisation (Moufakkir & Selmi, 2018).

2.2.5. Volunteer tourism

The main objective of volunteer tourism is to help local residents and vulnerable groups in their territory. Several studies discuss the transformative impacts of such experiences on tourists' lives. During their activities at the destination, volunteer tourists engage in self-exploration and reflection (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Grabowski, 2013), develop intercultural sensitivity (Bailey & Russell, 2012; Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2015; McGehee & Almeida-Santos, 2005), new skills (Wearing, 2001), greater confidence and an improved perspective on life (Crossley, 2012; Erdely, 2013; Wearing, 2001; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007). However, it has also been noted that volunteer tourism may result in soft global citizenship, the unproblematised adaptation to a new context (Bone & Bone, 2017), and may even reinforce negative stereotypes (Sin, 2009). While Kontogeorgopoulos (2017) argues that volunteer

tourists seek existential authenticity (further discussed in section 3.2), it has been suggested that such trips, made up by experiencing privilege and sensitive encounters, have to be consciously examined and de-constructed by the tourists in order to be ‘truly’ transformative experiences (Bone & Bone, 2017; Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Knollenberg, McGehee, Bynum Boley, & Clemmons, 2014).

The previous studies describe transformations based on a variety of methodologies from which we may synthesise some observations that highlight tourist-destination relationships, or how the tourist’s mind makes sense of its own activities (see Gnoth & Matteucci, 2014). The discussion under the mobility section discusses transformation as a social process in the tourist’s construction of reality. When studying abroad, familiar and constant activities (such as studying) allow for gradual and easier adaptation to unfamiliar environments and different cultures. For backpackers, the adaptation experience appears to be more radical and often involves a self-focused transitional phase where travellers pool restricted resources with other backpackers. While these changes occur through cycles of involved practice and reflection on disorientation triggered by ‘the other’, wellness and spiritual tourists seek tourism experiences that appear to focus far more on the self than ‘the other’ and how to engage with it. If self-focused, transformative tourism experiences may result in restoration or in the transformation of the individual’s perceived identity and existence, whereas if other-focused, it may occasion learning about the world, with different transformative outcomes. The latter opportunity is most pronounced with volunteer tourists: they are entirely concerned with ‘the other’, adapt and change to suit ‘the other’, and finally assess if and how to change their self and their behaviour. Having reviewed the different contexts where transformative tourism research has been developed, we now turn to discuss how the literature explains such changes in detail.

2.3. Tourist transformation: current theoretical perspectives

2.3.1 Transformative learning theory

Mezirow (1978)'s transformative learning theory has been widely employed to conceptualise transformative tourism (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Decrop, Del Chiappa, Mallargè, & Zidda, 2017; Lean, 2012; Morgan, 2010; Reisinger, 2013; Robledo & Batle, 2017; Walter, 2016; Wolf et al., 2017). Sociologist and educationalist Jack Mezirow suggests a 'disorienting dilemma' in life as the trigger and the first of a ten-step transformation process consisting of: self-reflection, analysing one's own assumptions, acknowledging the shared dilemma with others, exploring and testing new roles and relationships, acquiring new knowledge, developing skills in the new role and finally integrating the new perspective into one's life (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 168-169). As a result, an old experience is renegotiated from a different perspective and provided with new meanings, so that transformative learning leads "toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated perspective" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 155).

Mezirow's transformative learning theory has been applied to the process of tourists acquiring new knowledge, facing challenges in the destination and developing new skills (Pearce & Foster, 2007; Wearing, 2001; Wolf et al., 2017). Coghlan and Gooch (2011) have associated Mezirow's transformative learning steps with volunteer tourism experiences, such as: facing a new environment, reflecting on emotions felt during the activity, discussing the experience with others, engaging in new tasks, acquiring skills as volunteer and finally, building a network. Adventure outdoor tourism may also push visitors to face physical and psychological challenges involving thrill and flow in wilderness environments (Buckley, 2012). Therefore, disorienting dilemmas may also be identified in this type of tourism, along with nature-based tourism experiences, where visitors experience awe and transcendence in

the wilderness while witnessing the damages to the natural environment and wildlife (Walter, 2016). By purposefully delivering mental, emotional and physical activities going beyond the visitors' knowledge and comfort levels, these types of 'nature shock' and 'adventure shock' have been proposed by Walter (2016) as opportunities of transformative learning, especially fostering reflection and action in relation to sustainability goals.

Mezirow's theory also helps explain tourists' experiences of culture shock at destinations.

The cultural imbalance between the host/tourist backgrounds leads tourists to question subjective meanings and values (Brown, 2009; Taylor, 1994; Walter, 2016). This encourages them to develop cross-cultural awareness: the understanding, tolerance and acceptance of different cultures' beliefs, with a broader frame of reference regarding practices (Brown, 2009; Hanvey, 1982; Taylor, 1994). As travellers realise that they have adapted their cultural constructs to different international realities, they transform by expanding their worldview and their ability to integrate elements of their experiences when returning to a "blurred home" of new and old meanings (Erichsen, 2011; Jafari, 1987; Mkono, 2016; Pocock & McIntosh, 2013).

In conclusion, transformative learning theory is used by many tourism studies to describe culture shock and disorienting dilemmas faced at the destination, which make the tourists reflect about their surroundings and integrate new skills and values such as cross-cultural and pro-environmental awareness. These key dimensions emerge from a review of tourism studies that discuss transformative learning, which rests on a theory of gradual adaptation and adjustment but does not discern how the self is involved. Some studies further clarify how change is a consequence of reflection (e.g. Taylor, 1994), while another stream stresses that the change in environment through travel forces behavioural adaptations (e.g. Brown, 2009), which becomes permanent as a consequence of opportunity, change of taste, or fashion.

2.3.2 Existential transformation

Regarding transformational changes, the tourism experience had previously been modelled as stratified by motivational involvement, and physical engagement with ‘the other’, whereby existentially authentic experiences had been identified as a profound and self-fulfilling type of tourist experiences (Cohen, 1979; Gnoth & Matteucci, 2014). Kirillova et al. (2017b) focus their framework on the particular philosophical perspective derived from existentialism and explore transformational changes under this paradigm. Portraying transformation as a re-consideration of one’s personal value system (e.g. Heidegger, 1927/1962; Sartre, 1943/1993), the human being’s existence is shown to be subject to change, and affected by the balance between authenticity and anxiety. Anxiety is the fear of living a meaningless life and not expressing the best version of self (e.g. Kierkegaard, 1986; Sartre, 1943/1993; Tillich, 1952; Yalom, 1980). It pushes individuals to question their life’s direction and values, thus initiating a path towards transformation and achieving existential authenticity (Kirillova et al., 2017a, 2017b).

According to these authors, a peak episode leads to a sudden revelation and triggers the tourist’s existential transformation. It describes a serendipitous and meaningful moment that occurs towards the end of the tourism experience (e.g. connecting with other people, reaching the top of a mountain, witnessing a striking local performance, etc.). Compared to studies discussing transformative learning in relation with specific types of tourism (e.g. volunteer tourism, adventure tourism, study abroad), existential peak episodes have not been confined to specific environments or settings characterising the tourism experience. Specifically, the sudden and peak experience increases self-awareness and intensifies the tourist’s existential anxiety, leading to questioning personal values and re-evaluating priorities (Kirillova et al., 2017a). Existential transformation results in tourists achieving or enhancing their existential authenticity (Kirillova et al., 2017b).

Tourism research also dwells on the concept of authenticity, as studies debate what tourists seek and what they can actually obtain at the destination (e.g. Brown, 2013a; Cohen, 1979; Pearce & Moscardo, 1986; Urry, 2002). Wang (1999) described existential authenticity as a “potential existential state of Being which is to be activated by tourism activities” (p. 352). Existential authenticity is thought to be difficult to obtain in daily life due to ordinary routine and social pressures, which are suspended in the liminoid and self-explorative dimension of tourism settings (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Turner, 1969). As Gnoth and Wang (2015) note, tourists’ novelty seeking is fed by their orientation towards existential authenticity, and may thereby increase sensitivity and empathy. Critical and mindfully experienced environments during the trip will accelerate a spiritual journey of interpreting, evaluating and reorganising one’s life’s purpose and existential priorities (Gnoth & Matteucci, 2014; Kirillova & Lehto, 2015; Kirillova et al., 2017b, 2017c; Pearce, 2010; Willson et al., 2013).

After conceptualising existential transformation, Kirillova et al. (2017c) turned to deconstruct peak episodes experienced during trips, and found that they evoke intense mixed emotions and heightened cognition. They also engender the tourists’ sense of transiency, demarcation, and connection to something grand (Kirillova et al., 2017c). Therefore, peak episodes seem to characterise any tourism experience eliciting strong emotions and meaningful moments, which are ‘serendipitously’ interpreted in relation with the tourists’ existence. In comparison, disorienting dilemmas (section 3.1) are results of experiencing cultural shock in studying abroad and volunteer tourism (Brown, 2009; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011), of going beyond comfort levels in adventure tourism (Buckley, 2012), or of witnessing damages to the environment in nature-based tourism (Walter, 2016), and have been discussed as learning and conscious processes.

Gnoth and Matteucci (2014)’s theoretical model of the tourist experience generally supports

Kirillova et al. (2017b)'s findings. Looking at the context of experience in general, however, they also identify flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) as an existential experience. While this leads particularly to recreation and self-discovery - rather than existential transformations, the first experience of flow could be transformational, and lead the tourist to keep practising the behaviour that triggered the experience (Gnoth & Matteucci, 2014). These practices, which tourists could copy from other travellers or locals or adopt mindlessly at the destination, should be considered to understand transformational change across different experiences, and beyond the reviewed theories on transformative learning and existential transformation.

2.4. Understanding the tourist transformation process

2.4.1. The tourist encounter

While tourist transformation has been conceptualised from an existential perspective, little attention has been paid to transformation in relation to tourists' interaction with destinations as places. As Crouch, Aronsson and Wahlström (2001) note, tourism experiences are constructed by multi-sensory and bodily trajectories of tourists in space. Tourists not only reflect on ideas and their daily life, but are also practically involved. Through embodiment, they interpret artefacts and landscapes, so that fragments of the experience are not only used to understand others' realities, but to also negotiate their own identities (Crouch et al., 2001).

Urry and Larsen (2011) discussed how tourism discourse has moved from using the concept of 'gaze' for describing tourists as passive consumers, to employ the concept of 'performance'. Tourists engage in ritualised practices that have been set according to expectations, cultural contexts and power dynamics (Crouch & Desforges, 2003). This is exemplified by Edensor (2001) describing backpackers: "They like to wander off the 'beaten track', and may seek apparently unorthodox mystical, drug-enhanced and other counter-

cultural experiences [...] Clothing is often ‘rough and ready’ and apparently signifies scorn for fashion, or is local apparel to signify ‘going native’. Books are used among backpackers to signify a shared disposition towards exploration” (p. 74). It is not only guides and signs that regulate the visitor’s movements and overall experience, but also invisible cultural norms and codes that dictate how the destination is perceived (Edensor, 1998). Tourism spaces do provide for the suspension of everyday stress and work routines, but they also promote new habits and ‘familiar, predictable, comfortable sensory environments’ (Edensor, 2018, p. 914).

Performativity refers to the visitors’ encounters with the destination environment, local residents and other tourists (Crouch & Desforges, 2003). Site-specific and unique situations influence visitors’ expressivity, who engage with embodied practice, and reconfigure themselves in relation to the experience (Crouch and Desforges, 2003; Dewsbury, 2000). Tourists also imitate others’ practices, so that they appear natural to others (Urry & Larsen, 2011). However, scripted interactions with the place may include sensory surprises, which may be opportunities for the visitor to attribute meanings while narrating memorable moments of their holiday (Edensor, 2018). Compared to disorienting dilemmas and peak episodes, tourists’ physical performances involve embodied activities they reflect on in relation to their everyday habits. Moreover, the repetition of ritualised behaviours may detour and uncover creative practices and personal stories, meaning that tourists (and their bodies) are not passive subjects of sensorial experiences and their repetitions, but also become agents in negotiating the place and in increasing awareness of their reality (Urry & Larsen, 2011). For example, Desforges (2000) note that tourists engaging in backpacking through the Andes use the activity as means to assert their identity, and Robledo and Batle (2017) argue that meditation provided the study participants with opportunities not only to enjoy the moment, but also to acknowledge the experience as meaningful and reflect about their selves. In fact, performances may become potentially unsettling, revealing something new about their self

and their position in the world (Crouch & Desforges, 2003; Urry & Larsen, 2011). It evokes memory as an important faculty, as it continuously re-configures and re-invigorates performativity (Crouch & Desforges, 2003).

Although the above non-representational geographers and sociologists do not respond to the ‘performative contradiction’ (Habermas, 1990) that looms when creative mental processes emerge from experiences of disorientation during practice, they would find support in Deleuze’s transcendentalist model of memory and action. Accordingly, memory stores experiences as actual and virtual existence, and past lived moments are recollected with the lens of the present (Parr, 2005). Thus, memory not only provides an impression of a unified self, but also plays a pivotal part in detecting tourist transformation, as remembering corresponds to juxtaposing the ‘before’ and ‘after’ situations, so that the past experience is interpreted in terms of current circumstances. This may be exemplified by contemporary tourist photography (Crouch & Desforges, 2003), and by the travellers’ urge to have conversations and to write about their experience in journals, social networks and travel blogs (Robledo & Batle, 2017). Therefore, memory and interpretation are hereby considered key dimensions of the tourists’ transformative process. In line with this problematic, Pearce and Packer (2013) note that the role of memory in framing and recalling the travel experience has been underplayed by tourism research, and needs to be further studied in understanding the multisensory encoding of experiences, as well as memory mechanisms that allow for long-term outcomes, whether attitudinal, behavioural, or both.

With the help of studies on performativity and philosophical interpretations, transformative processes can further be explained by tourists’ embodiment of practice. By performing previous practice or emulating that of others, new memory can form and, at times, cause disorientation that leads, for example, to the formation of new preferences and transformed

behaviour. In line with Gnoth and Matteucci (2014), copying and practicing locals' behaviour may also lead to a better understanding of the place and its identity. However, instead of existential transformation, this involves mainly learning through copying behaviour and acquiring new knowledge. It may change the appreciation of a place – and how tourists are received, as they become less conspicuous; but this may not actually cause change in tourists' values, attitudes or behaviour in the long run. They participate but change only outwardly and as far as it can be observed. A pertinent question therefore is, how does the mind respond to the sensation of disorientation? In order to analyse how practices at the destination experienced by the tourists may transform their behaviour, and to define potential stages that this process requires, the conceptual paper attempts to expand the discussion by turning to Peirce's theory of experience.

2.4.2. Peirce's theory of experience

Charles Sanders Peirce was an American pragmatist who linked his philosophical theories to experience (Misak, 2004). After Kant, Peirce defined three universal categories of experience, and applied this classification to the psychic system, defining '1st category' as a state of pure consciousness, which is startled by an immediate and new feeling or stimulus existing in a single instant (Houser & Kloesel, 1992). In tourism, a transformative stimulus may be being struck by different cultural practices at the destination, facing an unexpected challenge during the trip or realising the extraordinary dimension of the destination, all of which may then constitute a peak episode or dilemma. In response to the 1st immediate feeling, 'dual consciousness', or a 'polar sense' comes into play in a 2nd moment of cause/effect, action/reaction. In this 2nd category, the individual realises that something has changed between the 'before' and 'after' the dividing stimulus, and starts relating the self to the outside world. At this stage, the transforming travellers start reflecting about the

transformative stimulus exemplified above and make sense of their predicament.

Such reaction is followed by a 3rd stage of a person's 'synthetic consciousness', connecting and interpreting the experience as a whole. After reflecting on their dilemma or peak episode provoked by the tourism experience, the tourists reminisce about the experience and assign it meaning and an interpretation. This classification also coincides with Luhmann (1990)'s view on social systems, where objects that function as stimuli (1st) send or contain communications to which the senses react. These symbols are processed and integrated into the present state of the system (2nd) and then interpreted (3rd). The 3rd category of synthetic consciousness has also been defined as obtaining a sense of learning, of similarity and real connection. This 3rd state is the psychological basis for physically acquiring habits (Houser & Kloesel, 1992). The durability of acquired habits depends on the intensity and permanence of the stimulus, and on its repetition. Such habits are also considered to have a definite purpose, namely, they remove the state of uncertainty provided by the stimulus (Houser & Kloesel, 1992). For example, Warren, Becken and Coghlan (2016)'s study investigating the effectiveness of environmental education programmes in tourist accommodation, found that a structured programme, the host capability, infrastructure, feedback and satisfaction foster the acquisition of habits such as saving resources, removing litter and becoming more involved in environmental issues. In Kanning (2013)'s research, former backpackers refined their minimalistic lifestyle choices after the trip, by using public transportation and biking to work, as well as by adopting backpacking as new travel lifestyle.

The three steps (1st, 2nd, and 3rd categories) can be regarded as independent of each other, hence explaining the variability of experiential processes across people. The 2nd category of polar sense and dual consciousness, a dividing instant, setting the object (e.g. the exposure to the 'Other', sensing the difference at the destination, etc.) against the subject (the tourist),

corresponds with the unsettling imbalance between anxiety and authenticity characterising existential transformation, previously described. Such disruption may cause the tourist to consciously experience a sense of difference and fragmentation (e.g. during Peirce's construct of dual consciousness). This fragmentation can be represented by what Kirillova et al. (2017b) described as travellers reinterpreting their everyday cultural environment, making sense of incongruities between internalised values and their true inclinations, and dealing with existential concerns such as a meaning in life, alienation, and freedom. In this regard, the transcendentalist Deleuze considers fragmentation a necessary step in which individuals consider all virtual and implicit possibilities underlying the experience (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983; May, 2003; Williams, 2005b). This process allows individuals to 'return to difference', to be aware of their internal differences and move beyond unity and multiplicity, towards 'becoming' (Deleuze, 1997; Parr, 2005; Williams, 2005a).

Therefore, considering Peirce's theory of experience allows us to understand how an immediate and new stimulus occurring during the trip (e.g. peak episode in existential transformation; disorienting dilemma in transformative learning theory), especially when intense, may disrupt the tourists' inward equilibrium and may lead to the formation of new values. Subsequently, when behaving according to the newly adopted values, it may eventually lead to lasting change in behaviour in the form of habits, once the tourist returns home. Alternatively, a striking event may not be strong enough to startle the tourists into changing their value system; or the tourists may experiment with new values and follow these at the destination, but may abandon such behaviour once they leave the tourism environment for lack of reinforcement. For example, tourists WWOOFing (working and staying in organic farms through the Willing Workers on Organic Farms organisation) in Australia report their willingness to live in a more sustainable manner, to do more farming and to eat organic food (Deville & Wearing, 2013). However, tourists' positive intentions may not materialise, and

little is known about the longevity of such practices after the WWOOfing experience.

While this model confirms that not every tourism experience including a striking event leads to personal transformation, it also provides a stimulus-response perspective to the tripartite process of tourist transformation. However, behavioural change through tourism may not always occur in the form of developing habits. Tourist transformation does not necessarily entail adopting new practices altogether but may correspond to a once-in-a-life-time and life-changing decision that affects the individual's way of life. This could be a career change, deciding to retrain, committing to intrinsically fulfilling hobbies, or terminating a disingenuous personal relationship as result of a transformative tourism experience (Hirschorn & Hefferon, 2013). Therefore, while Peirce's experiential theory explains how transformative experiences through tourism can result in the formation of new and visible habits, more perspectives are needed to understand the full array of behavioural consequences of transformative tourism, which are not always visible but nevertheless profound for the tourist.

2.4.3. Value and attitude change

Christie and Mason (2003) define the act of transformation as 'positive change in attitudes and values' (p. 9). This definition has not yet been critically analysed by transformative tourism studies, nor used to explore the process of transformative change experienced by tourists. Attitudes are evaluative responses to an object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). They help individuals organise stimuli and responses and are aroused by a need or environmental stimuli (Li, Cai, & Qiu, 2016). The evaluations that form the attitude can be analysed within three components: affective, cognitive and behavioural (Ostrom, 1969). The affective component includes favourable/unfavourable feelings, emotional and physiological reactions; the cognitive component evaluates desirable/undesirable qualities and attributes assigned to the object; the behavioural component reflects personal action tendencies and future intentions

(Ostrom, 1969) but may remain latent and not show in behaviour. Tourists' attitudes towards tourism have been considered at a macro level (i.e. towards a destination) and at a micro level (i.e. towards an organisation) (e.g. Breitsohl & Garrod, 2016; Kwon & Vogt, 2010; Li et al., 2016), yet not for the analysis of transformative changes.

Beliefs or values are inner representations and subjective norms that individuals reflect upon and test, and are antecedents of intentions and behaviours (Gnoth, 1997). The awareness of difference, if felt with sufficient intensity, disrupts the tourists' system of beliefs, which is responsible for forming attitudes, attitude change, or new behaviour (Ajzen & Dasgupta, 2015). In fact, the affective strength of the attitude depends on the importance of the newly-reconfigured and underlying value that drives the attitude. Steinmet, Knappstein, Ajzen, Schmidt and Kabst (2016) have found that interventions aiming at changing behavioural, normative and control beliefs, lead to an intention to engage in the planned behaviour. Therefore, transformative tourism processes, whether they be learning experiences or existential re-evaluations, consist of a combination of stimuli experienced throughout the holiday, which disrupt the tourists' value system and change the tourists' attitude towards the new meaning. Both discourses on transformative learning theory and existential transformation focus on a change in meaning that the individual makes sense of or internalises (Kirillova et al., 2017b; Mezirow, 1978). When sufficiently strong and reinforced, these processes can also involve meaningful behavioural changes, where behaviour is directed to fit with the newly-acquired perspective and/or the new sense of self (e.g. Kirillova et al., 2017b; Mezirow, 1991). Taking these theoretical perspectives into consideration, this study will now propose a tourist transformation framework and discuss its key dimensions.

2.5. Conceptualising tourist transformation

Based on our holistic approach of integrating different factors and theoretical perspectives,

the framework presented in Figure 2.0 is proposed to guide the conceptualisation of tourist transformation and to understand its common processes. The conceptual model was initially built drawing upon the paper's literature review, where a number of transformative dimensions were identified. Specifically, the review of literature on the transformative benefits provided by specific tourism types (section 2.2) uncovered challenges encountered by tourists at the destination as facilitating transformation. By discussing the main theories employed by existing transformative tourism research in section 2.3, cultural shock, disorienting dilemmas and peak episodes emerged as having an important role in initiating the process of tourist transformation, being followed by reflection and making meaning of the experience, and may result in the enhancement of existential authenticity, or acquisition of new skills and values such as pro-environmental awareness and cross-cultural understanding. Once these dimensions were identified, the present study proceeded to expand the conceptualisation of tourist transformation (section 2.4) by discussing how tourists might experience transformation in their interaction with the destination as a physical place, and identified physical performances as additional key element of the transformative experience. After employing Peirce's theory of experience to understand which stages tourist transformation process comprise, the discussion highlighted that a transformative experience is initiated by a stimulus, which tourists react to and interpret. The interpretation and integration of new knowledge and values may lead to attitude change and temporary habits: if these are enforced, long-term behavioural changes may be adopted.

In this section, the identified key dimensions of tourist transformation are illustrated in the form of a conceptual model in Figure 2.0. As specified above, each of the model's steps or processes, similarly to Peirce's independent categories, may lead to the next one, but may also not be sufficiently intense, or provide all necessary circumstances, to follow the whole sequence of our comprehensive conceptualisation of tourist transformation. We discuss these

processes below in four propositions.

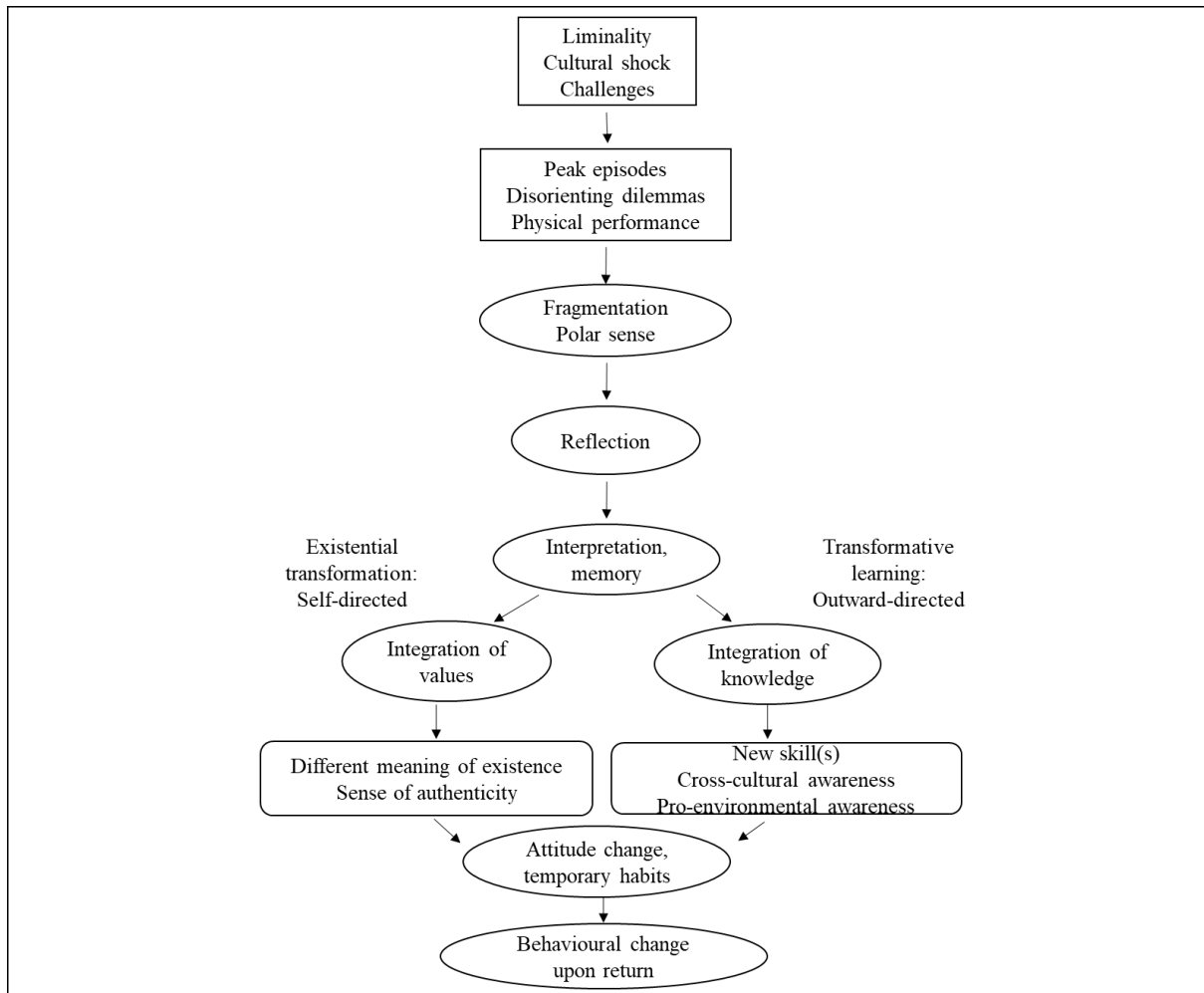


Figure 2.0 Key dimensions of tourist transformation, based on the Conceptual Model review and discussion

1. Tourist transformation is facilitated by the destination's liminality, as well as cultural shock and challenges that arise from difference. It is initiated by stimuli in the form of peak episodes, and disorienting dilemmas including performance dilemmas.

The tourism setting is a liminoid dimension, where daily routines and work pressures are suspended temporarily. This allows for the tourists' self-exploration, through embodying different roles and personas (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017). Being in a new environment also provides opportunities for interacting with local residents and other travellers, thus

experiencing a different culture, made up of unfamiliar values and practices (Brown, 2009; Walter, 2016). Adapting to the novel setting can prove to be challenging, together with other unpredicted situations and events that the tourists may have to face during their stay. The liminoid dimension, the cultural shock experienced and the challenges encountered at the destination, all contribute to generate multiple stimuli, occurring across the experience with different degrees of intensity. This may lead up to Kirillova et al. (2017b, 2017c)'s peak episode, a culminating stimulus that suddenly strikes the tourist in the form of a moment of transcendence and connectedness, and awakes the tourist's existential anxiety.

While a peak episode mainly involves a re-evaluation of the tourists' life direction and existential values, the observation and adaptation of different cultural practices and lifestyles also generate learning opportunities in the form of Mezirow (1991)'s disorienting dilemmas. Together with serendipitous peak episodes (as antecedents of existential transformation) and disorienting dilemmas (as antecedents of transformative learning), the embodiment of tourist performances can also lead them to detect a sense of difference (Crouch & Desforges, 2003), compared to their ordinary practices, and to question the nature of their newly-acquired behaviours.

2. Intense stimuli at the destination cause sudden awareness and fragmentation, leading the tourist to reflect on their sense of self in relation to the world.

As seen in Peirce's theory of experience (Houser & Kloesel, 1992), our literature review posits that transformative tourism experiences are caused by multiple stimuli that strike or disrupt the tourists' sense of self and value system. Once the stimuli are perceived, the individual becomes conscious of the intensity of his/her reaction to them (double consciousness). Peirce's polar sense and Deleuze's fragmentation illustrate the state in which tourists are suddenly aware and upset by feeling an incongruence between their way of being

and behaving at the destination and at home, in relation to the physical, psychological and sociological difference in their surroundings. This awareness leads tourists to start reflecting and questioning their position in the world. Alternatively, tourists may escape into stereotyping (Gnoth & Matteucci, 2014), or assume a gaze (Urry, 2002), thus ending their transformative process.

Research on transformative learning experiences has established that reflecting during the trip is a necessary step to make sense of the challenges provided by the tourism experience (Mezirow, 1978; Taylor, 1994). It is an important process to timely react by consciously integrating knowledge to respond to the different environment and culture (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Gill, 2007; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Robledo & Batle, 2017; Wearing, 2001). However, Kirillova et al. (2017c) specify that existential transformation is perfected only through meaning-making and reflection after the tourists return home, as individuals who experience existential transformation do not necessarily self-reflect at the destination. So far, research has not yet examined at which phase tourists reflect on their transformative experience (i.e. on-stage or post-trip), nor confirmed whether existential transformation and transformative learning are made sense of at different stages. It may however be certain that once tourists have become aware of disorienting situations that are more than just startling but apparently profound, that transformative conjugations of alternatives take place, in which new meanings form, as they start interpreting and integrating changes into their personal perspective (Kirillova et al., 2017b).

3. The transformative experience is interpreted and reminisced, and tourists restructure their value system and/or develop new knowledge about the world and the environment

As a common step in both transformative learning and existential transformation processes, tourists' reflection can turn into an interpretation of the occurrence that is relevant to their

own reality. As a final category in Peirce's theory of experience (Houser & Kloesel, 1992), the individual interprets the transformative experience, and learns something new, either about their consciousness or the external environment. Such interpretation involves memory, through which individuals compare virtual and actual recollections (Parr, 2005), relate their present situation to their past tourism experience, and associate new meanings to their position in the world. The interpretation may be directed outwards, and involve integrating new knowledge about the world (the outside environment). Through practice, facing challenges, or just by cultivating an interest at the destination, the tourists may detect the development of a new skill, such as independence, mastering a new language, self-confidence, etc. When learning and interpreting the lifestyle of other (local) cultures, tourists develop cross-cultural awareness, expanding their worldview and global citizenship (Grabowski et al., 2017; Mkono, 2016). As seen in the literature review, interpretation proved to be an essential tool for visitors' management, to facilitate their understanding of sustainability issues and development of pro-environmental awareness (Moscardo, 2017; Weaver, 2005). Managerially, the consequences are profound. Tourists must not just be confronted with 'otherness' but also helped to fully appreciate it; not by 'watering down' differences but by providing means to understanding through practice and explanation.

Conversely, appropriate didactic and managerial measures may help tourists direct the interpretation of stimuli towards their self-understanding and sense of authenticity. Through introspective interpretation, tourists may adopt a new value, or attach a different meaning to their life, thus experiencing existential transformation (Kirillova et al., 2017b). Therefore, the interpretation of the experience may be directed inwardly and to the self, or outwardly by reframing how they perceive the environment. Both types of interpretations may occur, or neither, as the tourist does not perceive the need, feels overwhelmed, or not suitably stimulated in this holiday time free of choice and alternative options. Nevertheless, even if

suitably stimulated existentially, the transformation, let alone in behaviour, may not become overt but solely directed towards the inner self. Existential transformation is primarily self-directed, and consists in changing meaning of existence or having an enhanced sense of existential authenticity. In contrast, transformative learning is primarily outward-directed, and takes place, for example, through developing cross-cultural awareness (i.e. changing one's view on others), pro-environmental awareness, and new skills (i.e. learning practical abilities). As such, these transformative learning outcomes could be more visible than existential and introspective changes. A particular transformative tourism experience may include both processes, occurring at similar or at different times. It is proposed that this understanding was not clearly evident in earlier conceptualisations of transformative tourism processes and outcomes, making this one of the intended theoretical contributions of this study.

4. The newly-acquired knowledge and values change tourists' attitude and influence their behaviour.

Transformative tourism experiences are not only characterised by increased consciousness, but are also influenced by the practices tourists engage in at the destination (Crouch et al., 2001; Urry & Larsen, 2011), at least as long as they are in the tourism setting. In Peirce's theory of experience, the third category of interpretation and synthetic consciousness also involves the formation of habits (Houser and Kloesel, 1992). Accordingly, tourists assume habits in order to remove any insecurity or irritation around a new stimulus. In the case of existential transformation, tourists may even change their life direction to mitigate their heightened existential anxiety (Kirillova et al., 2017b). Similarly, in the case of transformative learning, tourists may respond to culture shock by attempting to adapt to the different cultural and social environment (Brown, 2009).

These actions and repeated practices, while now consciously applied and existing with a

purpose, are often found to be dropped and stop after leaving the learning environment (Lean, 2009; Moscardo, 2009; Salazar, 2004). When travellers return to their home setting, the habitual forces acquired in the familiar environment ‘kick in’, so that the transformation is only temporary and limited to the trip.

However, tourists’ attitude change may also be strong enough, and able to transform their long-term behaviour beyond the tourism experience, into everyday life. Behavioural change through tourism involves the adoption of permanent practices, e.g. developing environmentally-friendly behaviour (Christie & Mason, 2003; Wolf et al., 2017) or behaving with solidarity and thinking more critically about social issues as a result of increased global citizenship (Grabowski et al., 2017; Kirillova et al., 2015). It may also take the shape of life-changing decisions, such as re-organising one’s own social sphere and interpersonal relationships (Hischorn & Hefferon, 2013; Lean, 2012) and changes in career plans (Brown, 2013b; Inkson & Meyers, 2003; O’Reilly, 2006; Pearce & Foster, 2007). These changes are different and very specific for each individual. Small or large, they have potential impacts not only on the individual, but also on the world and community wellbeing.

2.6. Conclusions

This study set out to examine the tourism literature on transformative tourism experiences. Existing research has mainly focused on discussing the transformative benefits of specific types of tourism. However, no study has explored theories from different disciplines to identify what may define and characterise tourist transformation, regardless of the type of tourism. By integrating different approaches on experiences and tourist encounters, this study has discussed and illustrated the key dimensions of the process of tourist transformation, contributing to our knowledge on transformative tourism.

Mezirow's transformative learning theory, used by a few tourism studies to frame self-growth processes, and Kirillova et al. (2017b, 2017c)'s conceptualisation of existential transformation, were found to be the main tourist transformation theories, and were reviewed and critiqued. Theories on tourist performativity and attitude change, as well as Peirce's theory of experience, enriched our knowledge on tourist transformation, as they highlight the socially induced, observable experience as studied by social empiricists (Gnoth & Matteucci, 2014). Destinations can be transformative because of their liminoid dimension and different context, providing cultural challenges, whereby 'culture' can refer to just local, as well as regional or even national difference. Tourist transformation is initiated by the occurrence of stimuli experienced in a liminoid space, namely in existential peak episodes, disorienting dilemmas, physical performances and other situational factors at the destination. As such, this study contradicts the idea of a specific peak episode to be the sole antecedent of tourist transformation. Instead, it supports the occurrence of complex, contextual stimuli with different intensities, across a journey and stay which may or may not achieve lasting attitudinal and/or behavioural change.

These stimuli create a sense of fragmentation and heightened consciousness in tourists, who reflect, recollect and interpret the experience in relation to their self (inward interpretation) and/or the world (outward interpretation). From the literature review, an issue emerged regarding the lack of consensus on whether reflection, an essential phase for meaning making and tourist transformation, takes place mostly during or after the tourism experience, and whether different reflective processes affect the nature of transformative outcomes. Moreover, this study attributed importance to the direction of tourists' interpretation, where with self-directed interpretation, new values may emerge that may change tourists' sense of existential authenticity and meaning; while through outward-directed and more visible interpretation, knowledge acquisition may develop tourists' skills, cross-cultural and pro-environmental

awareness.

The integration of beliefs and knowledge changes the tourists' attitude towards these new perspectives which, however, may remain latent and vanish unless reinforced. If reinforced, temporary habits and attitude change towards destination attributes can be translated into long-term behavioural transformation at home, such as changing to new practices, e.g. pro-environmental behaviour, or life-changing actions, e.g. career re-evaluations or interpersonal changes. While habits assumed during holidays have been explored previously by literature on tourist embodiment and performance, they had not been analysed in terms of changing long-term behaviour. The same can be argued for attitude change. Both constructs of habits and attitudes help us further understand how the integration of practices, values and knowledge can lead to permanent behavioural transformation.

Beside its theoretical contribution, the study provides tourism stakeholders, policy makers and destination marketers with useful insights on how to better position tourism experiences as opportunities to generate uplifting change for greater well-being among individuals and society, and how to gain transformative value. The conceptual model suggests that practitioners should highlight the transformative values tourists can gain through travelling, when devising a strategy for positioning their destination or company brand.

Destination management is encouraged to curate its uniqueness, enhancing the awareness of the liminoid dimension of the destination setting by promoting experiences of extra-ordinary natural sites and outstanding elements of local lifestyle (e.g. traditions, food, etc.); to increase the chance of encounters with local residents, which could be done through peer-to-peer tour guiding (with locals residents acting as storytellers), home stays or other types of interactive experiences (e.g. cooking experiences with locals, etc.) and to elicit tourists' consciousness towards their embodied experiences through flow activities. Tourism practitioners should

thereby help tourists reinforce their learning and participation in local activities, and provide visitors with opportunities for reflection and interpretation of their experience, both in relation to their self and the world. To do so, peak episodes and disorienting dilemmas could be encouraged, and followed up by slow-paced activities in natural settings, spiritual retreats, or similarly safe environs. To obtain wider social benefits, it is important that destination management develop programmes that further inspire changes in pro-environmental awareness and behaviour, as well as activities that increase the tourists' global citizenship and understanding of different cultural contexts. This would also help position tourism and travelling as a tool to promote happiness and wellbeing both at an individual and societal level.

While this study provides insights into the conceptualisation of tourist transformation, it also has limitations. Because transformative tourism literature is characterised by research focusing on the individual benefits of specific tourism types, our review mainly analysed tourism studies using 'transformation', 'transformative' or 'transformational' terminology. Were we to take into consideration research which, for example, analyses tourists' changes in wellbeing and quality of life, or leisure and travel benefits (not framed as transformation by authors studying these), we would be able to further enhance the discussion on aspects that could not find space in this conceptual model. Finally, the interpretation of the existing literature and the expansion of the conceptualisation to other specific theories remains subjective.

While this study has focused on discussing a theoretical model based on previous research on transformative tourism, future research should investigate how tourists perceive and would define their subjective transformation, by empirically analysing the characteristics of their transformative tourism experiences. As existing literature on transformative tourism is

theoretical and only few studies are based on interviews, further empirical research is particularly recommended to contribute to the conceptualisation of transformative tourism. In order to further understand what characterises transformative tourism experiences, future research should explore which travel characteristics could facilitate transformation, and which, on the other hand, could deter the emergence of transformative meanings.

Chapter 3: Study II

3.0. Chapter introduction

Building on the conceptualisation of tourist transformation discussed and proposed in the previous chapter, Chapter 3 will explore the meanings attached to transformative travel by individuals as tourists, and will investigate characteristics of their experiences that may facilitate or inhibit tourist transformation.

An exploratory and qualitative study on the meaning of transformative tourism and its facilitators and inhibitors

3.1. Introduction

Ever-increasing mobility and migration have now a major role in allowing for more cross-cultural interaction (European Union [EU], 2019), revealing the need for travellers to develop tools to understand different perspectives and values across the world. Transformative tourism, as form of tourism leading to “positive change in attitudes and values among those who participate in the tourist experience” (Christie & Mason, 2003, p. 9), may represent a timely vehicle of hope for expanding people’s worldview and conveying a greater sense of inclusiveness and belonging to the world (Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011).

So far, research has mainly focused on studying the transformative power of specific types of tourism, namely: backpacking (Hottola, 2004; Kanning, 2013; Matthews, 2014; Noy, 2004); Couchsurfing (Decrop et al., 2018); dark tourism (Magee & Gilmore, 2015); extreme sports and survival escapist travel (Reisinger, 2013); folklore tourism (Everett & Parakoottathil, 2018); gap year travel (O’Reilly, 2006); international sojourns (Brown, 2009; Erichsen, 2011; Fordham, 2006; Grabowski et al., 2017; Milstein, 2005); retreat centres visitation (Fu et al.,

2015; Heintzmann, 2013); river rafting (Arnould & Price, 1993); tourism in protected areas (Wolf et al., 2017); volunteer tourism (Coghlan & Gooch, 2010; Coghlan & Weiler, 2018); wellness tourism (Smith, 2013; Voigt et al., 2011); and WWOOFing (Deville & Wearing, 2013). However, very few studies have been devoted to analyse how transformative tourism experiences are characterised, regardless of tourism type, and provided in-depth information about transformative processes occurring in tourism experiences. Therefore, more research is needed to further understand what characterises transformative tourism.

This paper adopts a qualitative approach and in the exploration of transformative tourism experiences, it also takes into consideration the role and nature of wellbeing, thus responding to Filep and Laing (2019)'s call for investigating the eudaimonic nature of tourist experiences. While existing literature on tourism wellbeing has identified life-changing and long stays as experiences leading to increased tourist quality of life (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Nawijn, Marchand, Veenhove, & Vingerhoets, 2010; Neal, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2007; Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016), no study has identified which aspects may facilitate tourist transformation across different types of tourism, as well as those that inhibit it (Lean et al., 2014; Reisinger, 2013). Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine subjective transformative tourism experiences, with a focus on exploring which characteristics initiate tourist transformation (facilitators) and which aspects hinder transformative change (inhibitors).

3.2. Literature review

3.2.1. Transformative tourism and tourist wellbeing

In recent years, experience economy, which aims to produce memorable and personalised experiences as whole products (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), has also influenced the tourism sector, underlining the importance tourists assign to immersive and unique experiences

(Boswijk et al., 2013). This suggests that tourists as consumers collaborate with operators and suppliers in creating authentic stays and developing meaningful relations in the destination to obtain self-fulfilment (Boswijk, et al., 2013; Decrop et al., 2018; Tussyadiah, 2014). As self-fulfilment is now emerging as the primary drive for consumers in selecting and consuming products and experiences, transformative service research has emerged as research strand in the field of marketing and consumer behaviour focusing on transformative services, which have the objective of changing consumers and making improvements to the individual and community wellbeing (Anderson et al., 2013; Anderson & Ostrom, 2015; Blocker & Barrios, 2015; Mende & van Doorn, 2014).

In tourism research, Reisinger (2013) has delved into the connection between tourism and transformational learning, defining travel experiences as journeys of the mind, leading to a greater concern for humanity and the environment. In fact, in conceptualising transformative tourism meanings, it is sociologist Jack Mezirow's transformational learning theory (1978, 1991) that has mainly been employed by the existing literature (Coghlan & Gooch, 2010; Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Decrop et al., 2018; Lean, 2012; Morgan, 2010; Robledo & Batle, 2017; Wolf et al., 2017). Transformative learning theory defines transformation as an adult learning process of several steps, initiated by a 'disorienting dilemma' challenging established beliefs, and resulting in integrating new perspectives into increased self-awareness (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 168-169).

In tourism experiences, transformative learning is believed to occur in the shape of confronting challenges, which intensify an introspective process leading to greater self-understanding (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Desforges, 2000; Kirillova et al., 2017b; Noy, 2004). New skills and new knowledge are also cultivated during the trip, increasing the tourist's autonomy and self-efficacy (Wearing, 2001; Brown, 2009; Gnoth & Matteucci,

2014; Kakoudakis, McCabe, & Story, 2017). In the destination, intercultural competency and cross-cultural awareness may also be developed (Brown, 2009; Hottola, 2004; Mkono, 2016; Taylor, 1994), corresponding to the tourist's acceptance and adaptation to different values and practices, and potentially facilitating the tourist's change in perspective and integration of new meanings to daily life and interpersonal relationships after the trip (Brown, 2009; Decrop et al., 2018; Erichsen, 2011; Grabowski et al., 2017; Lean, 2012; Taylor, 1994).

Transformative learning is believed to ultimately influence and change the tourists' behaviour after their return home (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018). For example, a different professional attitude may be adopted, such as changing career prospects and the way relationships in the workplace are managed (Brown, 2009; Inkson & Meyers, 2003; O'Reilly, 2006;).

Furthermore, the adoption of responsible behaviour towards environmental and social issues may take place as a result of the interpretation of tourism attractions and ecotourism programmes (Moscardo, 2017; Weaver, 2005; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007). The transformative tourism meanings built from previous literature and so far discussed, could be perceived as self-flourishing and may positively influence the tourists' wellbeing, making tourist wellbeing a potential outcome of tourist transformation.

In tourism research, tourist wellbeing has been examined from different perspectives. Studies on quality of life have analysed the importance of tourism in influencing overall life satisfaction (e.g. Dolnicar, Lazarevski, & Yanamandram, 2013; Eusébio & Carneiro, 2014; McCabe, Joldersma, & Li, 2010; Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 1999; Richards, 1999). Tourism as dimension contributing to life satisfaction was found to hold varying relevance according to individuals, as well as within homogeneous segments of travellers (Dolnicar et al., 2013; Eusébio & Carneiro, 2014). In comparing holiday and non-holiday takers, Gilbert and Abdullah (2004) and Nawijn et al. (2010) have found that holiday takers experience greater

wellbeing in the antecedent phase of the trip. Further, Neal et al. (2007) argue that long stays are more beneficial to the positive relationship between satisfaction with tourism services and satisfaction with leisure life. Holidays are also believed to provide a wide range of experiences: Uysal et al. (2016) distinguish hedonic and life-changing experiences, in the respectively short and long-term effect they have on the tourists' quality of life.

Tourist happiness has also been conceptualised in terms of subjective wellbeing (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004), a combination of measures of affect and satisfaction with life domains and life in general (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999, p. 277). However, the use of subjective wellbeing scales to measure tourist happiness has been criticised by Filep and Deery (2010) and Filep (2014), as such scales fail to analyse the depth of the tourists' narratives and meanings emerging from their subjective experiences. While tourism experiences are considered hedonic as they provide pleasure and enjoyment, the role of eudaimonia (i.e. self-development and personal growth) in the tourist experience and wellbeing has yet to be deeply examined (Filep & Laing, 2019). As opposed to only experiencing pleasure, eudaimonic wellbeing as personal growth and flourishing also involves introspective questioning and uncomfortable situations (Keyes & Annas, 2009; Pyke, Hartwell, Blake, & Hemingway, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Adopting a eudaimonic approach, negative affect, challenges and constraints experienced during the trip require further examination to explore their role in the tourist transformation and wellbeing.

Since existing literature supports that the benefits gained from tourism are not permanent (Lean, 2009; Moscardo, 2009; Salazar, 2004), additional research should also be dedicated to explore whether and how transformation through tourism is perceived by individuals in the long term (Kirillova et al., 2017b).

3.2.2. Transformation facilitators and inhibitors

While most research on transformative tourism has focused on selected types of tourism and explored their specific transformative processes, Kirillova et al. (2017b, 2017c) investigated what ‘triggers’ transformative tourism experiences. In their studies, it was found that peak experiences initiate a tourist’s existential transformation (Kirillova et al., 2017b, 2017c). Peak episodes have been described as sudden and meaningful events occurring towards the end of the trip, and characterised by intense emotions and a sense of precariousness, transcendence and connection with nature or a divine figure (Kirillova et al., 2017c; McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2009). In the form of an epiphany, peak episodes were found to trigger a major life re-evaluation and the adoption of what the individual considered a more authentic lifestyle and existence (Kirillova et al., 2017b, 2017c). Beyond identifying peak episodes as triggers of existential transformation, no other transformative tourism study has investigated what may facilitate and what may inhibit tourist transformation. Building on literature exploring tourist attitude change, learning and spiritual experiences, two potential facilitators are also considered in this review: interaction with locals and the sense of place.

While discovering the destination, visitors may perceive a sense of difference and distance between the host culture and theirs (Taylor, 1994). This could lead to a ‘cultural disequilibrium’, leaving the tourist frustrated while negotiating values and practices that differ from his/her views and behaviour (Taylor, 1994). As Fan, Zhang, Jenkins and Lin (2017) note, social contact with locals may have a positive effect on the tourist’s perception of cultural distance, as increased social and service-oriented interactions with residents were found to reduce the tourist’s cultural shock in the destination. Social interaction between tourists and residents, now also intensified by the advent of sharing economy (e.g. Decrop et al., 2018), is an important factor, not only in reducing the tourist’s cultural shock but also in causing attitude change towards the destination (Nyaupane et al., 2008; Pizam, Jafari, &

Milman, 1991). This is further supported by Roberson (2003), who found that interactions with locals, rather than travel companions, contributed to the learning experience of senior travellers. As such, being exposed to the destination residents' lifestyle contributes to self-discovery, cultural learning, and to changing perception of the world and shared values (Adler, 1975; Yu & Lee, 2014). As a result, experiences where visitors have close encounters with locals, have conversations about their stories, and acquire knowledge about their life and practices, are believed to have a great influence in tourist transformation (Lean, 2009; Milman, Reichel, & Pizam, 1990).

Sense of place is also believed to facilitate tourist transformation, as a combination of people, places and landscapes that have physical, functional, affective and existential meaning (Morgan, 2010). Because of the liminoid nature of tourism as extra-ordinary dimension outside everyday life, the destination represents a source of difference, where self-exploration is intensified and existential authenticity can be achieved (Andrews, 2009; Brown, 2013a; Kirillova et al., 2017b; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Turner, 1969; Wearing, McDonald, & Ankor, 2016). The destination has also been described as place constructed by both the tourists' and locals' consumption through dialogical and embodied performances (Rakić & Chambers, 2012), where tourists have the opportunity to have different roles and relationships, and discover the spectacular and everyday aspects of local life (Rickly-Boyd & Metro-Roland, 2010; Giovanardi et al., 2014). The sense of place of the destination also holds cultural and social meanings (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011), which play a role in the reflexive negotiation and formation of the tourist's identity and agency (Crouch, 2005, pp. 18-19; Knudsen, Soper, & Metro-Roland, 2007). Further, the physical engagement with the environment was also found to heighten the visitors' awareness on a multisensory level, providing feelings of connectedness and place attachment (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; McDonald et al., 2009; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011).

While it is possible to draw potential facilitators of tourist transformation from previous literature, namely peak episodes, interaction with locals and sense of place, existing research has yet to further test their importance and investigate elements in the tourism experience that may inhibit the transformative process. As opposed to experiencing difference and novelty, Gnoth and Matteucci (2014) argue that repeatedly practiced behaviour, such as relaxing in a resort, tends to promote self-consolidation, rather than self-exploration. Therefore, repetitive activity in the destination could represent a potential inhibitor of tourist transformative change, suggesting that further research is needed to test whether repeated behaviour and other factors may be identified as transformation inhibitors, or facilitators.

3.3. Methodology

In order to analyse transformative tourism experiences and explore tourist transformation facilitators and inhibitors, this study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative studies are suitable for producing valuable contribution to our understanding of transformative tourism, since exhaustive theoretical knowledge on these experiences is lacking, and further research is still needed to have the conceptual foundations to develop a tourist transformation framework and scale. Participants were selected through non-probability purposive sampling. For this technique, characteristics were identified as sample selection criteria (i.e. gender, age) prior to selecting the sample, to ensure heterogeneity of experiences (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2002). Therefore, the study sought interviewees with different ages, and males and females. For example, after interviewing three participants in their late 20s and early 30s, the candidate gave priority to interviewing at least one older individual to obtain heterogeneous travel accounts and explore key and common themes despite the diverse age. In contrast with Kirillova et al. (2017b) and Coghlan and Weiler (2018)'s studies, the recruitment for this study did not exclude individuals who had not experienced transformative tourism, as one of

the study's main objectives was to investigate tourist transformation inhibitors, and there was therefore a need to also explore why transformation did not occur. Further, the reflective travel phase (i.e. 'after' travel) was chosen as temporal dimension over interviewing tourists at the destination, because the study aimed at investigating the whole tourism experience and the negotiated meanings of transformation and wellbeing after travel, in accordance with the necessity to evaluate different moments and processes across the antecedent, on-site and reflective phases of the experience (Filep, 2014; Filep & Deery, 2010; Lean, 2012). Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, and the interviews were conducted face to face (10 interviews) and via Skype (3 interviews), with a ranging duration between 20 and 60 minutes. Previous studies focusing on investigating transformative tourism experiences have employed a similar number of interviews (10 by Kirillova et al., 2017b; 10 in the case of Coghlan & Weiler, 2018), and Coghlan and Weiler (2018) argue that such limited number of interviews is ideal for focusing on the lived experiences of transformative processes to be understood and delved into. Data saturation was also achieved through 13 interviews due to the final similarity in responses given by the participants on transformation and wellbeing meanings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Therefore, the small sample size was justified by precedent credible studies with similar research purposes also conducting a limited number of interviews, and by saturation, as participants provided similar answers despite their heterogeneity (for example, as further illustrated in section 3.4, participants recurrently did not report going through a peculiar time in their life while experiencing transformative travel, or repeatedly discussed their transformation as permanent, etc.) (Saunders & Townsend, 2016).

The flexible interview protocol (Appendices A and B) was developed by the candidate with the collaboration of the supervisor, and consisted of six general questions: the first question loosely drew upon Kirillova et al. (2017b)'s study and aimed at possibly identifying a

transformative travel experience to be described by the participant (“Drawing from your experience, could you talk about a past travel experience that you think changed you as a person?”). Further questions were employed to investigate possible factors and characteristics of transformation discussed in the literature review, such as describing the specific moment when transformation took place, discussing crucial interactions with other people, as well as emotions and meanings that were generated (“When you had this travel experience, were you going through a peculiar/special time of your life?”, “Can you describe how you noticed that something was changing? Why do you think this travel experience managed to change you as a person?”, “What kind of positive and/or negative emotions were generated by your perceptions of change caused by this travel experience?”). Finally, the participants were required to reflect and elaborate on their happiness and wellbeing after their travel experience, while considering whether their transformation and increased wellbeing were still in place at the time at the interview (i.e. in the long term) (“Did your travel experiences generate a perception of wellbeing and/or happiness in you?”, “Can you describe how the changes you experienced have influenced your life?”).

In case the interviewees did not recall of having been transformed through travel, they were asked to describe their most enjoyed trip instead, and the interview proceeded with questions about produced meanings, emotions and episodes contributing to their potential wellbeing/happiness. These interviews were considered useful to the end of identifying transformation inhibitors, while the investigation of increased wellbeing as travel outcome remained unmodified. Since this is a post-trip study, a bias in memory formation of the experience (Scott, Gao, & Ma, 2017) was expected, but not analysed.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Sardinia (Italy) was the location where interviews were conducted, and participants came from both Sardinia and other places in

Italy. The interviews were entirely transcribed and then translated to English as they were conducted in the interviewees' native language. For the data analysis, the candidate initially read the transcripts to familiarise with the data and to clarify any issues arising from the translation of interview data (e.g. lexical, semantic and syntactical problems: Suh, Kagan, & Strumpf, 2009) in English. The data were then analysed through thematic coding to identify subjective meanings of the travel experiences, with both open and axial coding. The initial codes were reviewed by a research team, and an academic in the area of tourism who was uninvolved in the study revised the coding and decided whether he/she agreed with the codes. Whenever the research team and the independent reviewer disagreed about the adopted coding, discussions were made until an agreement was reached, and the final coding was then undertaken. The emerged themes related to transformation and wellbeing were then matched to constructs built from the literature review.

3.4. Results and Discussion

Table 3.0 below provides general information about the profile of the participants who took part in the study. The interviewees were aged 25 to 74; eight were in their 20s and 30s, while five were aged 53 and over. The sample consisted of 8 female participants and 5 male participants; they had different levels of education and professional status, including students, business owners and managers, a chef, a teacher, an office clerk and retired professionals, to have a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of transformative tourism experiences for different people. The interviewees came from Italy; the countries visited in their travel accounts ranged from UK, Italy, Sweden, Spain, Hungary, Turkey, Brazil, Australia, to New Zealand, India, Tunisia and Uganda. As ensured by the sampling choice, the participants had engaged in different numbers of trips (from frequent experiences to occasional short holidays) and in different types of travel, such as student exchange programmes, business trips, leisure

trips and spiritual retreats (see Table 3.0). Nine participants experienced transformative change as a result of tourism experiences, while four participants did not, including two interviewees who during the course of the interview renegotiated their response and revealed perceived transformation. Moreover, some participants felt the necessity to expand their account to more than one experience, arbitrarily comparing between trips and their related different meanings.

| Interviewee | Gender | Age | Destination | Stay | Type of Stay | Companions | Transformation |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| ID1 | Female | 30 | New Zealand | Long | Working holiday | None | Yes |
| ID2 | Male | 27 | Canary Islands | Short | Leisure | Met a friend in destination | No |
| ID3 | Female | 56 | Switzerland | Short | Health | Partner | Yes |
| ID4 | Female | 74 | Brazil | Long | Leisure | Friend | Yes |
| ID5 | Female | 31 | Sweden & London (UK) | Long | Student exchange | None | Yes |
| ID6 | Male | 33 | Turkey | Short | Leisure | Girlfriend | Yes |
| ID7 | Female | 26 | Italy | Short | Leisure | Boyfriend & friends | Yes |
| ID8 | Male | 65 | Many destinations | Short-medium | Work | Local business partners | No -> Yes |
| ID9 | Female | 27 | Australia & Ngamba Island (Uganda) | Medium-long | Visiting relative | Family | No |
| ID10 | Female | 53 | India | Short | Spiritual | None | No -> Yes |
| ID11 | Male | 30 | London | Short | Leisure | Sister & friend | Yes |
| ID12 | Male | 25 | Australia | Long | Working holiday | Partner | Yes |
| ID13 | Female | 27 | Hungary | Long | Student exchange | None | Yes |

Table 3.0 Summary of interviewees' characteristics

In the following section, the meanings assigned to transformative travel experiences are analysed (section 3.4.1), especially subjective aspects (i.e. increased self-efficacy, becoming humbler, and being enriched), as perceived by the participants. Then, the analysis proceeds to discuss transformation facilitators (namely, social interaction, challenges, sense of place, long stays and post-travel reflection - section 3.4.2) and inhibitors (i.e. short stays, repeated practices, lack of access to the residents' lifestyle - section 3.4.3), and finally explores the

impact of transformation and the nature of wellbeing provided by tourism according to the participants (section 3.4.4). Figure 3.0 provides a visual aid and conceptual framework of the main concepts and findings, which are discussed in the following section.

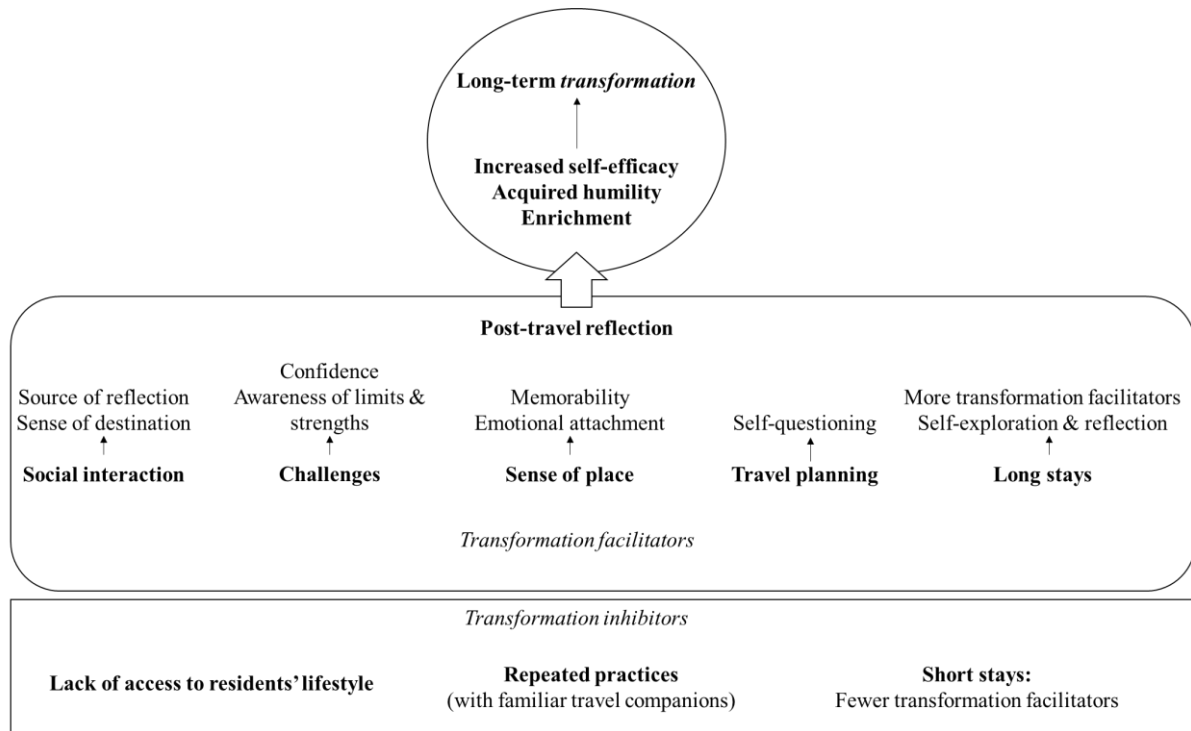


Figure 3.0 Transformative tourism main concepts, as emerged from Study II interviews.

3.4.1. Transformative tourism meanings

In describing their experiences of transformative tourism, the main meanings interviewees generally associated with transformation through tourism were the encounter with different people and cultures, general enrichment and an expanded worldview, thus supporting prior studies discussing self-development and cross-cultural awareness as transformative outcomes (e.g. Brown, 2009; Mkono, 2016; Reisinger, 2013). However, when enquired about their subjective transformation, the participants mostly reported experiencing three main changes (discussed below): increased self-efficacy (sub-section 3.4.1.1), becoming humbler (3.4.1.2) and being enriched (3.4.1.3).

3.4.1.1. Increased self-efficacy

Greater efficacy in facing challenges represented the interviewees' main change. While visiting the destination, the participants recounted about overcoming challenges, such as learning the local language and managing to communicate with residents, solving problems arising during the stay and negotiating travel plans with the travel companions.

Acquiring this ability: at the beginning I thought I wasn't a natural at languages, but then, once [I was] thrown in a context where everyone speaks a language you don't know, you slowly find yourself understanding, comprehending and finally being able to speak... So it was like... Like "I'm also able to speak other languages!" ((laughs)) ...And this happened with learning English, but while being in an Erasmus [European student exchange programme] context, it also happened with Spanish, for example. (ID5)

As Brown (2009) notes, a rise in autonomy and self-efficacy can be experienced by international students as a result of facing challenges and distress while studying and staying in a different cultural environment. Defined as developing mastery in managing difficult situations and controlling different life domains as result of holiday breaks (Kakoudakis et al., 2017), self-efficacy was in this study reported to be the main outcome of the participants' transformative tourism experiences, contributing to a heightened sense of self-confidence and self-awareness.

3.4.1.2. Acquired humility

Another major transformation discussed by interviewees was becoming 'humbler'. Travel experiences taught the participants to be free of pre-concepts and keep an open mind towards different people and contexts according to the destination, sometimes despite common cultural backgrounds. This is exemplified by the following excerpt, where a participant reflected on his wrong assumptions based on his previous stay in the United Kingdom, and on

the following realisation of a different and complex reality during his working holiday in Australia.

It taught me humility towards other kinds of realities I thought to be simpler, much more, how can I say... Easier, simpler to analyse, I thought I knew them already, whereas once I found myself in touch with these realities it was much different from what, how I expected. (ID12)

Increased humility as meaning and outcome of transformative tourism has not been yet investigated by existing literature, but may be partially associated with the constructs of developing cross-cultural awareness and intercultural competence, as tourists become more aware and accepting towards the difference in practices and values across cultures and have an enhanced frame of reference (Brown, 2009; Hanvey, 1982; Mkono, 2016; Taylor, 1994). While experienced by fewer participants compared to acquiring humility, several interviewees also reported a shift in perspective in comparing the locals' lifestyle and interactions in the destination with the participants' home country practices, often resulting in accepting and sometimes appreciating differences. While contradictory at first sight, witnessing the similarity in rituals despite different backgrounds and religious beliefs led some interviewees to interpret and stress the commonality of mankind, as the following quote suggests.

Religion, extreme religions you encounter, and you ask yourself, Muslims, Indus, the Ganges is full of people that perform ablutions there, convinced this can bring benefits. You compare it with your religion and you see common aspects. To them it's a sort of confession, a sort of communion, washing in the Ganges to purify themselves from sins. And then you understand that these are needs that men have, they show them in a way or another, the need we have to be freed from sins, from guilt, is common to all men, and this clearly leads you to grow with that mentality and that reasoning. (ID8)

3.4.1.3. Enrichment

In tourism research, several studies discuss the importance of self-growth as beneficial aspect

of travel (e.g. Filep & Deery, 2010; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Through transformative tourism experiences, travellers discussed a perceived personal enrichment. Being ‘enriched’ was found to be a broad expression encompassing developing new knowledge and feeling emotions that made the experience unique and memorable, as well as providing the traveller of long-lasting memories. This represented an interviewee’s state of mind, in the following extract discussing her attitude towards travelling and recommending it to her friends and family because of its benefits.

But when you mainly have the possibility, even a bit, time- and money-wise, it’s good to be enriched thinking of and going on trips. It’s a gift for ourselves that doesn’t compare.
(ID3)

While, in the literature, humility was found to be an outcome of extreme sports tourism (Reisinger, 2013), the themes of achieving humility and enrichment from transformative tourism lacks further analysis by the literature, therefore serving as meanings to be investigated by research studying what tourist transformation entails.

3.4.2. Transformation facilitators

After defining how they personally understood transformation through tourism, the participants proceeded to describe the personal travel experience they considered to be transformative. The aspects of these experiences that often recurred in the participants’ descriptions were analysed and interpreted in this study as main facilitators. The analysis refers to several relevant aspects: interacting with locals and travellers from other countries (section 3.4.2.1), facing challenges (section 3.4.2.2), experiencing the sense of place (section 3.4.2.3), long stays (section 3.4.2.4) and post-travel reflection (section 3.4.2.5).

3.4.2.1. *Social interaction*

Several interviewees provided accounts of interactions with residents and people of different cultures they encountered in the destination, and these interactions were found to initiate a process of transformation. For example, when comparing his business trip with his holidays, this interviewee mentioned the importance of meeting local colleagues, experiencing their hospitality and witnessing their different practices, not only making him personally invested in the experience but also as means to blend in the destination.

When you travel for work, you're on the road like this, you bump into people of all kinds, of all types, continually. And the most beautiful thing is this, relating with them and...accepting them. Because they're often completely different from what you think they say and do. (ID8)

This particular extract above also seems to contradict Reisinger (2013)'s consideration of business travel as a type of travel that cannot provide transformation, and suggests that by combining leisure activities and informal interactions with the residents, business travel could also hold transformative power. Among the participants, interacting with locals provided a further sense of the destination and sometimes constituted the source of reflection and change of perspective, confirming the importance that existing literature has placed on the role of being exposed to different cultures during tourism experiences (Adler, 1975; Lean, 2009; Taylor, 1994).

Travelling and interacting with people living there often means realising the routine the place involves. [...] when you talk to members that are present in the social fabric, [...] there are more incentives as people know the place where they stay, and they explain the culture in a better way, or some people are quite disillusioned and disappointed at their own reality and they show it, they make you understand the routine and the negative sides of the place where you're staying too. [...] meeting with and knowing people from there, Australians, understanding the culture, understanding the city and discovering many little

places, many small things, was very important, interesting. It changed me, it taught me humility from my perspective as a person. (ID12)

Communicating with locals and witnessing moments of their everyday life is viewed as a factor that encourages self-reflection as well as the negotiation of conflicting values (Milman et al., 1990; Roberson, 2003; Yu & Lee, 2014).

3.4.2.2. Challenges

Interacting with people from different countries in the destination also constituted one of the environmental factors that led interviewees to face challenges, usually found in language barriers and learning ways to communicate with locals and to enjoy their stay. Generally, in their narratives, participants dwelled on issues and problems encountered during the trip, from discovering a mistake in the hotel reservation, clashing with travel companions, to simply finding themselves far from their usual social sphere of support.

Travel allows you to face new situations you don't face in daily life, so, in a sense, to be emancipated and grow. All those trips being alone or finding yourself in situations where you're not supported by that - group of friends or people that can help you. [...] it's a matter of finding yourself alone in new situations that force you, in a positive and negative way, to know yourself better and so to change too. We were little and the experience was that, despite having paid everything for the hotel, we arrive and the guy tells us that the room wasn't booked. And I couldn't speak, I wasn't very confident in speaking English well, and I was the only one who had the courage to be able to do it. And, well, I then solved everything but it was moments of terror, you know ((laughs)). In another country, alone, young, with two people who didn't speak the language well and that were very afraid because they didn't understand anything. So then I said "Yes, I can do it. I can solve a booking at a hotel". (ID11)

In transformative tourism research, challenges have been found to lead individuals to develop personal development and cultural adaptation in volunteer tourism and study abroad experiences (Brown, 2009; Fordham, 2006; Gill, 2007; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Wearing,

2001), and in our findings they characterised indeed study abroad, but also other experiences, ranging from short trips to business travel. These challenges were followed by the participants gradually gaining courage and finding solutions, showing other people and especially themselves how they were able to overcome fears and adapt for survival and a better experience. For example, an interviewee found herself to become stronger and ready to face unpredicted events during her trips in Northern Italy.

This was clearly a big step forward for me as I was very shy and introverted, to manage in...different things, not only while travelling, but [becoming] a little more alert ((snaps fingers)), resourceful in all things, because clearly if you have to travel you have to get it together, otherwise, bye-bye! (ID7)

In general, these challenges led the participants to be more aware of their limits and strengths, as well as to be more confident in what would have seemed unforeseen situations.

3.4.2.3. Sense of place

Besides social interaction and challenges, the destination's sense of place had the transformative power to convey strong emotions and new meanings to the participants. For one interviewee, visiting Istanbul represented more than his first holiday abroad, it became a multi-sensorial experience made up by the urban environment and the contradicting practices. The novelty and cultural contradictions were particularly felt as a way to escape ordinary life, to erase pre-assumptions about life outside Europe, while absorbing beauty and learning about a new reality.

Diving into a world that's like ours, on one hand, meaning that it comes from European culture, but also comes from a different culture, the Arab culture, and this is very much felt, you strongly feel the weight of work, [...] of communication, even just the fact of the singing at dawn, of the prayer from Hagia Sophia at dawn, or from the different mosques. [...] While we crossed areas, nearby boroughs, where the weight of religion gradually

got stronger, almost in an exponential way, the more you moved from the centre, the more you felt the influence of religion and tradition, and that was the journey inside the journey: discovering a part of the city that was a few kilometres from the centre, and I would have never imagined this... that makes you immerse in a world that's not yours and that makes you personally see [...] going back and analysing what has been at a kilometres distance, after a while. And you then realise that there's something different, in the way I relate to the place, to the people too, to everything. (ID6)

This excerpt provides an example of how locals may share their environment with tourists and play an effective role in providing a transformative sense of place (e.g. Giovanardi, Lucarelli, & L'Espeir Decosta, 2014; Rakić & Chambers, 2012; Rickly-Boyd & Metro-Roland, 2010). Therefore, this finding enhances our understanding on how the destination setting, experienced through the tourists' senses, has the potential to not only develop place attachment (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; McDonald et al., 2009; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011), but also leave a strong impact on memory and facilitate tourist transformation.

3.4.2.4. Long stays

In general, transformation seemed to require some time for the previous tourists to (self-)explore and notice underlying meanings during the visit to a destination. Therefore, it was found that long stays provided the participants with more sources for reflection and involving more of what were considered to be transformation facilitators in the destination (e.g. social engagement with travellers and residents, and challenges). In the following interview extract, a participant described the gradual acquaintance with a lesbian couple of travellers escaping China and trying to settle in New Zealand, which she realised during the interview was a meaningful part of her one-year long working holiday.

I spent 11 months in New Zealand [...] I guess that's the time I gradually realised, for me it was to know more about LGBT people. They left China because it's a very traditional place where they don't accept these things. [...] New Zealand is a place where they

accepted LGBT marriage by that time. They went there and prepared everything so they could be recognised by that country, so they could be legal and official partners. I enjoyed their company, I witnessed how people care about each other, support each other even though they suffer, you know, they have families in China, they cannot tell who they are to their parents. And they continued to make a living, find a job, and try to get a permanent residence there, so they could stay there and get a better life. That was the time I felt everyone has their own problems, what I worry about all the day is not to as the same level as they worry about. (ID1)

This suggests that transformation may more likely occur when cultural differences between visitors and locals are particularly pronounced and prolonged (e.g. Christie & Mason, 2003, p. 1). Overall, the finding seems to confirm the literature's assumption that longer journeys and considerable lengths of time away from home will more likely cause the individual to undergo transformation (e.g. Kottler, 1997).

3.4.2.5. Peak episodes / post-travel reflection

When asked about how and when they noticed that transformation had occurred, the majority of participants reported that they did not realise it during the experience, but rather made sense of the transformation after the trip and perceived it as the result of several events and introspective processes.

I think I sort of started being more aware of things after high school, after university or during university, that's what I would tie it too. But on the other hand I would also say there's not a specific time [I noticed change] because I've always grown up travelling [...]. So I don't think it's been like, it's not like all of a sudden I'm paying attention to these things, it's been a gradual thing, awareness. (ID9)

I realised that something changed when the people close to me talked about elements, things of which I had never even heard. [...] I didn't realise it in that moment, I realised it thinking about it later. They are all things one realises later, I think, it's not something we can tell while it's occurring, because experiences are often not well analysed by our brain while we're still travelling. (ID12)

The lack of specific moments triggering the transformation or sudden revelations in our analysis contradicts Kirillova et al. (2017b)'s consideration of peak episodes as necessary epiphanies or serendipitous episodes that need to occur towards the end of the trip to facilitate existential transformation.

Instead, without being asked, participants shared their opinion of what a tourist would need to do to experience transformation: a certain number of trips, a flexible mind-set and post-travel reflection.

You need several trips to transform, you need to see a lot of things to be able to see, to understand specific things or to change point of view, because I think that this depends on how much you move, from where you depart, what you want to see and so, that's basically what transforms you as a person, I think... [...] and if one manages to do this repetitively and continually, I think so. (ID2)

Time and reflection after the interviewees returned home were considered fundamental to 'metabolise' and process their transformation (Lean, 2009), to then being able to describe it. Further, two interviewees initially reported no transformation undergone, but while recounting their memorable experiences, they slowly identified personal growth and several changes in their attitudes. Therefore, this study also confirms the importance of interviews, narration and storytelling for tourists to reflect on the impact of transformative tourism (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018), as the participants grew more aware of their transformation by narrating their experiences through stories and in-depth narratives.

3.4.3. Transformation inhibitors

Based on the analysis of tourism experiences that participants described as not being transformative, it was found that several elements hindered the start of a transformative process, namely: short stays, repeated practices and the lack of access to the residents'

lifestyle. These were considered transformation inhibitors.

While Lean (2009, 2012) challenged the correlation between trip duration and transformation, this study found that short trips presented fewer transformation facilitators compared to long stays. Repetitive activities, such as sightseeing, short tours and nightlife activities were also found not to stimulate reflection or transformation. This was especially true when the tourists travelled with familiar travel companions (e.g. family, friends, partner) and if they were not able to experience social interactions with the residents.

Yes, I was with [...] my boyfriend. We were with another friends couple. The trip lasted two days. We went to Genoa because there was a concert ((laughs)), okay, sorry, it was a metal concert and I fell asleep in the front row [...] We went around the city in its little streets, we saw many traditional small shops, the traditional gastronomy and... The trip didn't last much ((laughs)). In that case. [...] Going to Milan, then going to do internships, going to visit someone else who was near Milan, I opened myself up. (ID7)

A short while ago I've been to London, still visiting a friend that lives and works there and I haven't had many interactions with local residents, with Londoners or English people in general. Because I went out with my friend or with her colleagues who were not English, but Italian, Spanish, Thai and so on. [...] But on a personal relationship level it certainly didn't struck me like it happened in the Canary Islands. [...] The Canary Islands were different because I didn't know what to expect, maybe I didn't know the place as well as I knew London, so finding that kind of world with its specific features struck me more. (ID2)

This finding may further support Gnoth and Matteucci (2014)'s consideration of repetitive activities in tourism as a crucial component of self-consolidation and re-discovery, as opposed to exploration and transformative activities, while short stays and familiar travel companions may further characterise a tourism experience without transformative outcomes.

3.4.4. Tourist wellbeing and transformation longevity

3.4.4.1. Eudaimonic meaning

Based on the analysis of the narratives provided and the meanings assigned by the participants, their increase in wellbeing was defined as fulfilment, satisfied curiosity, wonder and learning, therefore corresponding to eudaimonia, rather than hedonic meanings and happiness (e.g. Keyes & Annas, 2009; Pyke et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2001). While Anderson et al. (2013) associate services creating transformative value and eudaimonic outcomes to consumers obtaining better access to a service, marketplace literacy, or decreasing inequality, the transformative value of tourism experiences rather corresponded to a tourists' learning and growing process. When asked about achieving happiness through tourism, a number of interviewees took more time to reflect on their travel experiences and questioned the meaning of happiness, often expanding the discourse with their personal meanings of self-development. As Filep (2014) deemed subjective wellbeing to be an unsatisfying measure of tourist happiness and has called for the analysis of meaningful experiences, the same perspective was also expressed in the response of our participants.

There were some instances where after the trip I felt happy... But I'm not sure, I'm not convinced I would use that as a word. That's not the first word that I would think of. [...] You feel so lucky, not everybody gets to do that. It's the kind of things you do once in a lifetime. I feel, like, that much richer. (ID9)

I think I've never gone on trips where I haven't had fun or I haven't been well. Or where I haven't found benefits for the long term. Even if the trip in itself wasn't particularly enthralling, it was an experience from which I gained positive lessons. (ID11)

Like eudaimonia, fulfilment and enrichment characterised both the interviewees' positive and negative experiences. Further, the identification of facing and overcoming challenges as transformation facilitator may stress the importance of experiencing negative and unexpected

situations to grow and become better equipped for future travel complications or everyday-life constraints.

3.4.4.2 *Increased wellbeing across the experience*

Compared to transformation, which sometimes was not experienced or detected, greater wellbeing was always an acknowledged outcome of tourism. On the whole, participants perceived increased wellbeing prior to the departure, during and after the trip. Travel planning itself was found to be a recurring phase in which interviewees felt excited and happy.

Even just the idea of travelling and planning it. We're travelling again and I already planned everything ((laughs)). Even being there, reading the travel guide, reading... finding a place where to stay overnight, seeing the routes to take, having a first approach with the place, seeing the images of the place while you don't know how it is yet: it puts you in a good mood. Because you're getting ready to discover, to go to see new things, so yes, wellbeing, absolutely, because you're carefree, you're cheerful, you are indeed having a leisure trip... (ID5)

This finding seems to further suggest that holiday takers particularly experience greater wellbeing in the antecedent phase of the trip (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Nawijn et al., 2010).

With regard to the actual longevity of transformation and increased wellbeing obtained from the tourism experience, most participants felt their personal changes and realisations still had effects at the time of the interview. For some, their transformation was permanent due to a number of aspects, such as the great strength of emotions experienced, or travelling more and further expanding their worldview.

Permanently, definitely. So, it's a permanent change because it taught me and it made me understand that to comprehend the situations and to comprehend any person you have to be there to judge it, you can't judge it from your comfortable chair. (ID12)

Well... I think it's just a growth process that goes through your life. Somebody who's always done a lot of travelling, and I think the more places you go to, the more exotic places, the more different, the more challenging things you do, the more exposure it just gives you over time, as to what you gain and what you learn from the travel, but it's always there and it's always moving forward. [...] With WhatsApp and what not, and the TV... You get to see and learn so much without going and experiencing, but in the end there's nothing like first-hand experience, and that's what you get when you travel. The other thing that travel does is, it just shows you that there are so many other options and so many other ways of doing things. And that makes you a more flexible and broad-minded person... (ID10)

This result contradicts the previous studies' understanding of transformation as tourism activities only causing temporary changes (Lean, 2009; Moscardo, 2009; Salazar, 2004), and supports that transformation may last over time, through narrating these experiences and reflecting on personal changes.

3.5. Conclusion

This study aimed to analyse the meanings and characteristics travellers assign to transformative tourism, and to investigate transformation facilitators and inhibitors, while exploring the relation between tourist transformation and wellbeing.

The findings of Study II expand our limited understanding on how transformative tourism experiences are characterised and how tourist transformation and wellbeing are perceived by travellers. As result of their experience, participants described their subjective tourist transformation as achieving greater self-efficacy, humility and enrichment. Several factors were identified as facilitating transformation, namely: interacting with residents and other travellers, experiencing the sense of place, overcoming challenges, long stays and post-travel reflection. Short stays, repeated practices and the lack of access to the residents' lifestyle emerged as transformation inhibitors. In this study, the occurrence of peak episodes or

epiphanies (Kirillova et al., 2017b) was not found to play a central role in initiating transformation, while importance was placed in post-travel reflection (Aho, 2001; Coghlan & Weiler, 2018) to make sense of the transformative experience as a combination of different facilitators and processes. Further, this study further showed that, in any tourism type engaged, increased wellbeing was perceived by all participants and considered to hold eudaimonic meanings, mainly learning and self-growth, rather than pure pleasure. In the findings, compared to wellbeing, transformation was more problematic to be detected and discussed by the interviewees: not all participants reported experiencing transformative change through tourism, meaning that tourist transformation requires certain facilitators (above described) to occur. This disputed the idea of wellbeing as outcome of transformative tourism experiences, and confirmed that not all travel experiences are transformative. However, when transformation emerged, it was believed to be permanent and long-lasting, contradicting the literature's assumption that transformative travel benefits are only short-lived (Lean, 2009; Moscardo, 2009; Salazar, 2004).

From a practical perspective, this study provides insights on how to develop transformative tourism products. By discussing tourist transformation characteristics, facilitators and inhibitors, it contributes to the limited understanding of transformative tourism experiences, which comprise different facilitators, activities and outcomes, that could be purposefully designed and delivered. Specifically, this study suggests that tourism organisations should enhance the experience of travel planning, so increased wellbeing and self-evaluation can be further built prior to travel. This could be done by encouraging the traveller to research the chosen destination via social media platforms to gather information about local identities and practices, and by also shaping local volunteer communities that prepare the traveller for the experience by sharing highlights and knowledge on destination lifestyles and environments. Since the exposure to locals and people from different countries proved to have an important

role in developing tourists' adaptation skills, confidence and self-awareness, travellers should also be provided with frequent opportunities to engage with the destination community and fellow travellers, especially during short stays where transformation can be inhibited by the limited available time. The sense of place could also be further developed by destination management bodies, with marketing strategies aimed at strengthening the uniqueness of the cultural and environmental assets, as well as involving residents with beneficial initiatives showcasing their traditions. All these conditions would purposefully facilitate the travellers' transformation, increasing their self-efficacy, humility and enrichment, and would also contribute to their eudaimonic wellbeing, with a potential greater impact on society. Finally, communication channels stimulating the reminiscence and recollection of transformative experiences could improve the longevity of transformation, which in this study was found to be achievable. This could consist of platforms, such as sensorial staging and ad-hoc blogs, where individuals could participate post travel, recollecting and enhancing their transformative tourism experiences.

Despite its contributions and implications, the study includes several limitations. The sample exclusively interviewed Italian respondents, so future studies could employ a cross-cultural investigation of how transformative experiences, including facilitators and inhibitors, differ according to the tourist's cultural background (Lean, 2012). Furthermore, this study did not try to investigate what is the extent of change that it is needed to characterise tourist transformation (e.g. in terms of time, depth of change, etc.): these aspects would merit attention in future studies.

Further, more research is particularly recommended to further understand the subjective meanings that individuals attribute to tourist transformation, and what type of transformation may be conveyed according to travel experiences and traveller nuances (gender, age, etc.). This would help the development and promotion of transformative tourism products and

services, and the design of experiences that emphasise specific transformative activities. Since the present study used a qualitative approach, further research is particularly recommended to use innovative and empirical methodologies to critically contribute to the ongoing conceptualisation of transformative tourism.

Chapter 4: Study III

4.0. Chapter introduction

Building on the findings of the previous chapter, Study III further analyses subjective experiences of transformative travel, and adopts a double duoethnography approach as critical research instrument that will allow to better interpret how individuals perceive their transformation through tourism.

Transformative travel experiences and gender: a double duoethnography approach

4.1. Introduction

While it is acknowledged that many studies that have analysed the tourist experience were considered to exclusively and tacitly employ a male perspective (e.g. Pritchard & Morgan, 2000), there is a growing need to research and explain the implications of gender in tourism experiences (Khoo-Lattimore & Yang, 2018; Norris & Wall, 1994). Although the differences in meanings assigned to tourism and destinations by the tourists themselves is fundamental (Kinnaird & Hall, 1996; Swain, 1995), discourses on gendered tourist transformation involving both women and men have not yet been developed. For example, where transformative change during travel has been studied, research has predominantly focused on women travellers, often conceptualised as emancipation and empowerment in solo travel, backpacking and family holidays (e.g. Elsrud, 1998; Myers, 2017). On the contrary, the literature on men experiencing the same is lacking. In order to contribute to existing research on transformative tourism, this study aims to explore different and similar discourses that male and female travellers use to discuss their process of self-change occurring during tourism experiences.

Further, existing literature on transformative tourism focuses on the factors of change that tourists experience in the destination, and little emphasis is given to studying the reflections on formative experiences of transformation. In order to correctly interpret the tourists' storytelling, there is a need for researchers themselves to inwardly reflect on their subjective experiences of travel. Reflecting on formative experiences, such as travel, is considered a critical and ethical moment in identifying the researcher's agenda and lenses in understanding others' voices (Khoo-Lattimore, 2018b). As such, recent debates on the state of the art of tourism research have called for more researcher self-examination; questioning the role of their identity and culture in their research practice (Zhang, 2018). To date, no study on transformative travel has employed a reflexive approach, even though digging in on personal memories is an essential methodological consideration for identifying and reflecting on the constructs we employ to classify tourists' experiences (Wright, 2010). Therefore, this study seeks to develop a self-reflective instrument that allows the researchers to become better equipped in grasping how others perceive their transformation through tourism.

In an attempt to address these two knowledge gaps, this study aims to explore commonalities and differences in male and female transformative tourism experiences. It is worthwhile noting however that this study selected gender as a perspective with the aim to enrich the tourist transformation conceptualisation. While the study does focus on gender, our approach is exploratory, rather than explanatory, as it does not imply that gender completely explains the two experiences with transformative travel, but rather, helps us have more insights on how tourist transformation can be characterised. Attention is particularly devoted to the transformative process that youth experience during travel to expand the narrow understanding on what tourist transformation is and how it can be characterised. In analysing personal accounts of transformative travel experiences through a double duoethnography approach, this study aims to provide a critical and dialectical interpretation of the researchers'

subjective meanings of a transformed tourist.

4.2. Literature review

Transformation in tourism is described as the inward journey that individuals embark on when engaging with unfamiliar encounters in the destination (Morgan, 2010). On a community level, personal transformation from travelling abroad also shapes a better host-guest relationship (Reisinger, 2013). To illustrate a general conceptualisation of tourist transformation, this study begins with summarising the different constructs employed by tourism researchers that underpin transformative tourism, namely transformative learning, existential transformation and behavioural change.

Transformative learning theory by Mezirow (1978, 1991) is the conceptualisation most transformative tourism research has employed to define the disorienting dilemma that tourists experience in encountering cultural shock in the destination (e.g. Lean, 2009). This dilemma is provoked by an encounter with the unfamiliar host culture and the acquisition of new knowledge about the residents' lifestyle (Brown, 2009). Aspects of different types of travel contribute to transformative learning: volunteer tourism may include emotional challenges (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017), study abroad may force the negotiation of different cultural practices (Brown, 2009). Transformative learning consists of integrating others' perspectives, acquiring a broader sense of the world, and developing new skills and abilities (e.g. Mezirow, 1991; Mkono, 2016; Pearce & Foster, 2007).

Besides transformative learning theory, Kirillova et al. (2017b, 2017c) formulated existential transformation as a different type of tourist process of change. Existential transformation is triggered during a meaningful experience, such as experiencing majestic nature and different cultural contexts, by a sudden and emotionally charged peak event. In comparison to

transformative learning, characterised by integration of new knowledge to one's perspective, existential transformation instead involves a major existential re-evaluation of one's existence and value-system, initiating a different life direction towards existential authenticity (Kirillova et al., 2017b).

Behavioural transformation is the indirect and empirical consequence of the transformation process caused by transformative tourism experiences (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; McClinchey, 2015). As a result of acquiring transformative learning and existential transformation, new practices are adopted by individuals after their return to the domestic routine, with the potential to positively influence the community (Mkono, 2016), change dynamics in interpersonal relationships (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Lean, 2012), improve job prospects (O'Reilly, 2006), and encourage pro-environmental behaviours (Weaver, 2005).

Transformative learning and existential transformation can also be considered separate processes requiring their own specific contextual elements, which may or may not be present during a trip. As a consequence, a trip could comprise a transformative learning experience but not existential transformation, and vice versa (Figure 4.0). While existential transformation occurs through peak occurrences towards the end of the travel experience, it requires a process of reflection and meaning making extended throughout the return home, to be reinforced (Kirillova et al., 2017b). However, changes in behaviour after the trip and having a potential impact on the society cannot be made without a transformative process (i.e. learning and/or existential), functioning as meaningful layer or foundation (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018). Such processes occurring during the travel experience, having transformative outcomes in personal knowledge, existence and identity, could have different degrees of impact on the individual for the behavioural change to last over time.

Whilst the above framework is built from existing literature, this study will be the first to

empirically test the tourist transformation model (Figure 4.0) in its entirety. This paper also aims to further the current understanding of transformative tourism by incorporating the role of gender and youth tourism, which remains unexplored empirically within this strand of research.

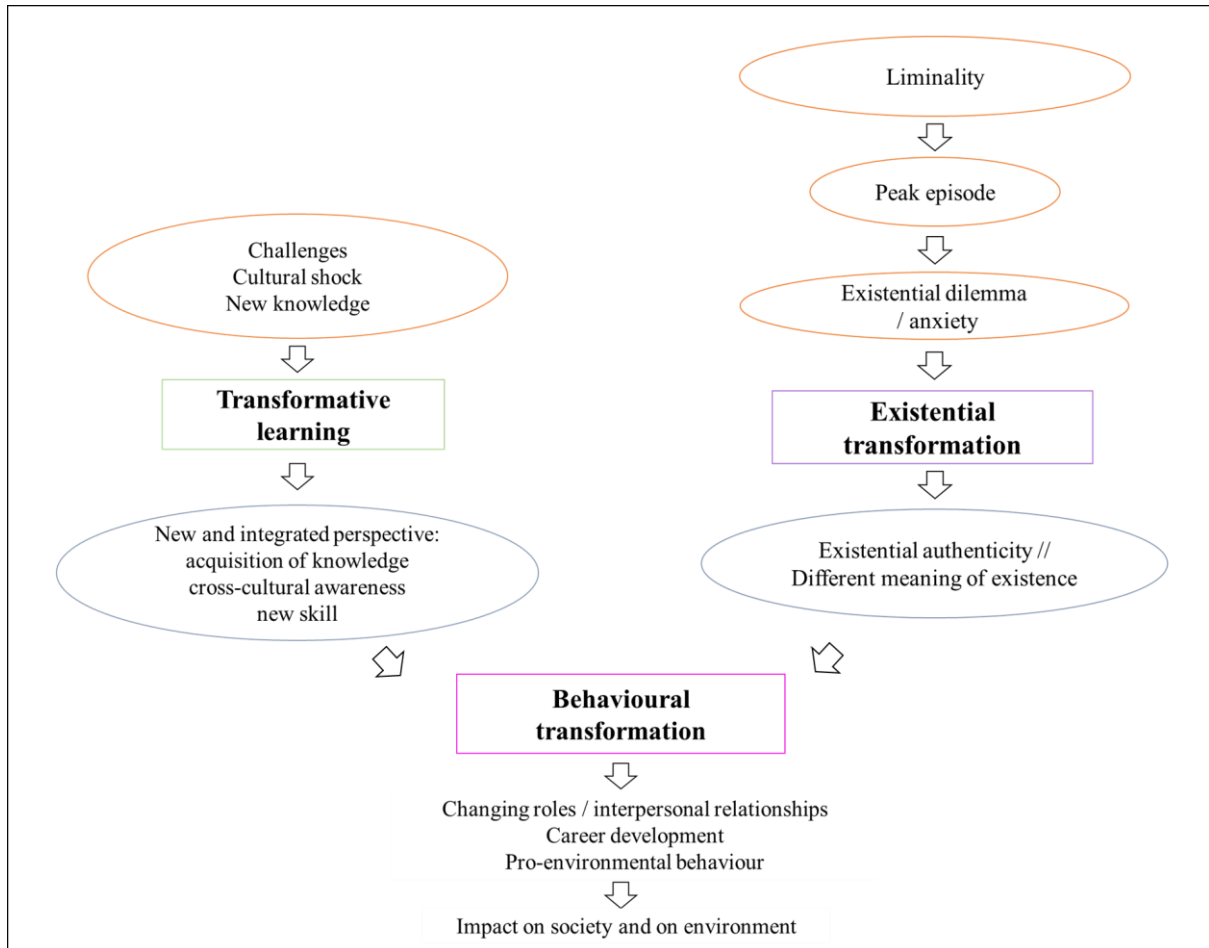


Figure 4.0 Tourist transformation model, based on Study III literature review.

4.2.1. Youth travel and transformation

Youth travel accounts for 23% of international travellers, representing a market worth around €260 billion (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2016a). Young travellers also often seek unique and immersive experiences where they can have social contact with locals and develop their knowledge (UNWTO, 2016a). Hence, examining the meanings of self-growth and transformation through travel is especially important (e.g. Grabowski et al., 2017). In

tourism and education research, youth has been described as a crucial life stage in which travel provides novel and formative experiences. As Desforges (2000) notes, international stays are a source of answers to the young travellers questioning their identity. Young people today are believed to have the opportunity to travel extensively and with flexibility, while transitioning to adulthood and before settling down (Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell, 2012). The potential held by travel experiences during this transition phase has not yet been addressed within transformative tourism research. Young people's transformative experiences during travel have only been alluded to within specific types of tourism, namely international sojourns (Grabowski et al., 2017), backpacking (Matthews, 2014; Pearce & Foster, 2007), volunteer tourism (Bone & Bone, 2017) and girlfriend getaways (Gibson et al., 2012). Yet, research that focuses on the meanings and benefits attached to the young people's process of transformation through tourism experiences remain absent.

Research on young tourists have been approached primarily with respect to the benefits provided by two distinct experiences: study abroad and backpacking. Through international study programmes, young travellers are not only involved in knowledge acquisition, but also learn through the challenges of adapting to a new environment (Gill, 2007; Stone & Petrick, 2013). Backpacking has also been described as an important rite of passage for young travellers, characterised by staying in remote destinations and experiencing extreme conditions (Noy, 2004). Such liminality accentuates their separation from family and friends, which encourages the process of identity exploration in comparing their lifestyles abroad and at home (Matthews, 2014). Gibson et al. (2012) found that young adults experiment with different identities and make decisions about their future doing as result of their travels. Addressing the lack in narratives of self-change of young volunteer tourists, Crossley (2012) found that, through volunteer tourism, young people have emotional encounters with poverty and adopt a moral perspective towards life. Young people's travel narratives have also been

found to result in shifting identities and developing soft global citizenship (Bone & Bone, 2017). Despite these studies on young people, the meaning of their transformative tourism experiences from a gendered perspective remains unexplored.

4.2.2. Gender in tourist transformation

Gender is an important aspect that determines tourist behaviour, since women and men hold different perspectives towards tourism experiences and their meaning (e.g. Wang, Qu, & Hsu, 2016). Despite this, there is a necessity to further explore how men and women's diverging perceptions of tourism can impact their long-term wellbeing. This specific concern is echoed by the generally limited investigation and explanation of the implications of gender in tourism experiences (e.g. Norris & Wall, 1994). As such, researching the travel experience from a gendered perspective is fundamental to understand the difference in meanings assigned to tourism and destinations (Khoo-Lattimore & Yang, 2018).

Tourism gender-specific research focuses on a limited number of approaches: men-specific studies are often concerned with masculinity discourses and sex tourism experiences (e.g. Kruhse-MountBurton, 1995; Thurnell-Read & Casey, 2014), and gay men tourism in relation to destinations (e.g. Hughes, 2006; Mendoza, 2013). Conversely, other studies have specifically investigated women in relation to constraints around solo travel and backpacking (e.g. Elsrud, 1998; Jordan & Gibson, 2005); women's role in family holidays (e.g. Davidson, 1996; Schänzel, 2017); women's experiences and needs during girlfriend getaways (Gibson et al., 2012); romance in tourism (Jeffreys, 2003) and sexual behaviour at tourism sites (e.g. Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Poria, 2013). Although insightful, tourism research discussing transformative learning, existential transformation and behavioural change have thus far not made any gender distinctions in describing the varying influence that tourism activities can have on the individual transformative process.

Seminal research on solo female travel has found that empowerment and resistance are the main benefits and potentially transformative aspects characterising such experiences (e.g. Jordan & Gibson, 2005). The sense of empowerment achieved by women during their independent travel corresponds to increased confidence, independence and strength, especially after negotiating constraints and overcoming challenges (Jordan & Gibson, 2005). This empowering process, while specific to women travel research, could be linked to transformative learning: developing skills in solving problems arising during the trip, potentially affecting individual self-efficacy both in everyday life and difficult situations. In addition to this, however, transformative learning is also considered to be the acquisition of knowledge about novel cultural practices and values, which provides the tourist with an enriched perspective and increased global citizenship. While the development of social encounters and connectedness has been mentioned as aspect of female adventure and meaningful tourism (Doran, 2016; Wilson & Harris, 2007), it lacks the degree of exploration devoted to women empowerment discourses.

Female solo travel also creates opportunities for women to resist surveillance from others (e.g. Jordan & Gibson, 2005), as well as to escape gender structures and transgress social norms (e.g. Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017). Such escape, coupled with taking time out from social roles to cultivate one's own happiness (Elsrud, 1998; Schänzel, 2017), are believed to generate a sense of freedom and agency in making independent choices in the liminal space of tourism destinations (Obenour, 2005). In being free to think and behave outside of gender and social expectations, female tourists may align to internal values and adjust personal priorities, a process that corresponds to existential transformation. Resistance and authenticity discourses in women tourism research have not been yet analysed in relation to the concept of existential transformation.

While these aspects may be critiqued and linked to transformative outcomes of female travel, travelling alone is especially viewed as a critical aspect in Elsrud (1998)'s study of female backpackers, as travel companions are believed to inhibit their need to lose track of time and to make personal choices without relating to everyday structures. Women's tourism meaningful experiences are also characterised by introspection: analysing and reflecting on the sense of self, as well as addressing identity issues (Myers, 2017). Another prevalent theme of women's leisure experiences is the importance given to relationships (Cave & Ryan, 2007): women are believed to experience holidays through their social sphere, which facilitates women's changes in their role choice and self-conception (e.g. Davidson, 1996). Similarly, recent research focusing on lesbian tourists' identity construction has also found that they negotiate their roles of women, mothers and partners, while on holiday (Therkelsen, Blichfeldt, Chor, & Ballegaard, 2013). While solitude, introspection and personal relationships seem to have a role in characterising the female tourism experience, their importance should be further examined and tested in terms of gendered differences in experiencing transformative tourism.

The findings from these studies on women travel summarise the main themes of literature on women travel experiences, providing an idea of how transformation can be characterised when experienced by independent women travellers. However, existing research has yet to explore the main meanings attached by males to tourism experiences that can be deemed to be transformative. So far, only a very limited number of tourism studies explicitly focuses on male tourists, and they are mainly related to sex tourism and discourses of gratification and disillusionment through sexual relationships during the experience (Kruhse-MountBarton, 1995; Ying & Wen, 2019). Thurnell-Read and Casey (2015)'s book on men and tourism discusses the reassertion of masculinity by engaging in tourist gaze, practices and embodiment in the destination. Since most tourism research on men has focused on sex

tourism experiences and masculinities, Schänzel and Jenkins (2016) have called for investigating other social roles and subjectivities of male travellers.

Another strand of tourism research has examined gay men as market segment; presenting their holiday motivations, constraints, and preferred destinations (e.g. Hughes, 2006), and has only recently started to explore LGBTQ travellers' experiences (e.g. Olson & Reddy-Best, 2019; Therkelsen et al., 2013). With regard to gay men, research has established that tourism offers an opportunity to escape everyday heteronormativity and to self-express (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018), but has not yet investigated the impacts of such identity exploration through tourism. Beyond touching on the (re)construction of gender identity through tourism, transformative travel meanings of personal change have not yet been examined from a male perspective.

These research gaps are addressed in the present study by including gender discourse (both male and female) into the definitions and characteristics of young individuals' transformation through travel. Potential common and different themes in gendered transformative experiences of young travellers are analysed through employing a qualitative approach, supported by Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan, and Villacé-Molinero (2015) in building tourism knowledge on gender that is holistic and inclusive. Double duoethnography is selected as methodology based on the rationale that a deeper understanding and reflection is needed on tourist transformative processes and meanings, from both a male and a female perspective.

4.3. Methodology

4.3.1. Double duoethnography

Since the aim of this study is to explore gender differences and commonalities in young

individuals experiencing transformative tourism, duoethnography is conducted by two researchers, a male, and a female (the PhD candidate) in an open conversation on the topic. This method is a subtype of autoethnography (for more information on autoethnography, please see Chang, 2008), and allows the researchers to engage in a dialogical method of investigating personal transformative tourism experiences as young adults, so as to share perspectives and collaboratively construct and critique new discourses (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). In this dialogical method, two researchers share their experiences to compare attached meanings to their stories and exchange reflections (Mair & Frew, 2018). As such, the duoethnographers touch on temporal, situational and conceptual dimensions of their lived experiences, mainly exploring differences rather than commonalities in order to gain critical awareness on how they are situated in their intricate narratives (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). Duoethnography is also defined as the examination and detection of aspects of socio-cultural issues determined by race, ethnicity and sexuality (Sawyer & Norris, 2013), proving ideal to discuss narratives, meanings and determinants attached to transformative experiences of young tourists according to gender.

4.3.2. Researchers as research instrument

The researcher here becomes the ‘researched’ subject of study, both participant and observer (Khoo-Lattimore, 2018a). As a self-case study, duoethnography provides cultural understanding and interpretation of others through the self and multiple layers of consciousness (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Boechner, 2000; Noy, 2008), which is also pertinent in transformative tourism, where self-growth also improves cognizance of others (Yu & Lee, 2014). Rather than a bias, subjectivity becomes an instrument to inform the researcher-respondent relationship (Wright, 2010).

To a certain extent, four researchers play the role of the researcher and the researched in this

study. The PhD candidate, Jessica, is a 27-years-old female and bicultural (with a Chinese Malaysian father and an Italian mother). She grew up in a rural area in the island of Sardinia (Italy). Her childhood travel experiences are made up of trips around Europe with her family during holidays. She also visited her father's home country Malaysia. After she finished high school, Jessica obtained her bachelor's degree in North Italy. She then studied in the United Kingdom, before working holidays in Australia and New Zealand. She believes that her travel experiences heavily shaped the person she is today. Moreover, Jessica is an Italian (or more specifically, a Sardinian) with an Asian sounding-name and mainly East-Asian physical appearance, so the social and cultural encounters she has had during her travels are also affected by the way she looks and talks to others. Therefore, she sees herself as researcher and cultural agent, tightly connected to the cultural influences and social interactions in the destinations she has visited (Noy, 2008).

At the time of writing, the second researcher, Ryan, is a 29-year-old Malaysian Chinese male. He grew up in suburbia just outside Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia). Being brought up in an upper middle-class family, Ryan had ample childhood travel experiences particularly across Asia. Having completed a bachelor's degree in Malaysia, he moved to a ski resort in Hokkaido, Japan for an internship before being offered a seasonal position the following winter. Ryan would return to manage the same ski resort two years later. In between, he lived in Singapore. Akin to Jessica, Ryan also spent extended time in Australia and New Zealand. After his third stint in Japan, Ryan took a working holiday in New Zealand, where he supplemented his travels by continuing to work in hospitality as well as freelance copywriting. Ryan then moved to Australia. Starting from his tourism education at 19, Ryan has let his passion for travel mould his life choices. Like Jessica, he also strongly believes that all his travel experiences have shaped the person he is today.

Jessica's travel experiences are compared with those of Ryan's, firstly because of age, in that they are both in their late twenties; and secondly, because of their shared cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Jessica's and Ryan's transformative travel experiences as data entries are here briefly presented to the readers: Ryan's first transformative tourism experience was a short solo trip to Australia (24 years old). His second transformative tourism experience (at 25) was in Japan, where he had a work experience as manager of a ski resort. Ryan's third transformative tourism experience (at 26) was set in New Zealand, which consisted of a two month stay in a town famous for surfing and a 'hippie' lifestyle. Jessica's first transformative tourism experience (when she was 16 years old) was a stay in Malaysia, visiting her relatives. The second transformative tourism experience was in Australia (at 24), where she spent six months on a working holiday. Finally, the third transformative experience (at 26) consisted in travelling around New Zealand.

The third and fourth researchers are experienced travellers themselves and senior tourism researchers, whose main roles are to question and critique the interpretation of gendered transformative tourism experiences. As in duoethnography, these researchers, one female and the other male, provide a balanced perspective to draw from both literature on tourist transformation and their own identity as researchers and experienced travellers to build consensus on the findings' emerging themes (e.g. Sawyer & Norris, 2013). As such, this work could be defined as double duoethnography.

4.3.3. Data collection

In this study, the process of duoethnography was between the first and second researchers (Jessica: the PhD candidate, and Ryan, a male PhD candidate), and consisted of email exchanges, face-to-face conversations and memory-work (e.g. Grant & Radcliffe, 2015; Madden & McGregor, 2013). The data in this study consists of the first two researchers'

personal travel photographs: photo elicitation is considered an instrument in duoethnography to trigger memories and facilitate the discussion (Mair & Frew, 2018). The photographs are records of memories that add to the personal narrative (Edensor, 2001), and are especially important in the researchers' process of watching themselves in the mirror while reflecting on their interacting narratives (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). In addition to the photographs, 'memories and life stories, reflection and understanding of experiences' (Khoo-Lattimore, 2018b, p. 132) also served as data. The data were collected starting from July 2018 through email exchanges and written memory-work (developed independently), followed by two sessions of face-to-face conversations (each lasting two hours) between the first and second researchers in accordance with Mair and Frew (2018)'s approach, by also using photographs, taken during each trip and therefore dating back to a 2006-2017 span. The conversations were transcribed and coded, together with the written memory-work. The data analysis, discussed below, took place in September 2018. As Coghlan and Weiler (2018) note, reflection and reminiscence after the trip are necessary to produce meanings and detect personal transformations. Therefore, Hall (2004)'s, and then Khoo-Lattimore (2018b)'s calls for tourism scholars to reflexively analyse their own travel experiences in order to understand their research agenda are here addressed in respect to personal travel transformations.

4.3.4. Data analysis

Drawing upon the first two researchers' autobiographies, three transformative travel experiences for each were selected and posited as data entry points. In interpreting email exchanges, face-to-face transcribed conversations and memory-work on these experiences, the analysis first aimed at examining the main characteristics of experienced transformations derived from tourism to identify categories and concepts within the data. Each travel experience was also examined to explore potentially common and different aspects

characterising the gendered transformative process. The researchers coded the data using open and axial coding to associate meanings assigned by the researchers/participants to subjective change with the research-based types of transformation illustrated in the literature review. These associations were also further analysed and critiqued to identify themes that highlight the differences and commonalities in male and female young tourists' transformations. Finally, the data and coding were further analysed by the 3rd and 4th researchers, who critically reflected on both their personal travel biography and their work as experienced interviewers, and consensus was built on how the meanings emerged from the duoethnography were interpreted.

The section reports the researchers' fluid engagement in discussing, identifying and critiquing main determinants, meanings and processes of their gendered transformative experiences, which was done through storytelling and conversations, here modified and re-sequenced for clarity (Mair & Frew, 2018), and presented in Appendix C. These data are interpreted to discuss and identify main themes drawn upon the conceptualisations of the three types of tourist transformation, as well as upon seminal research on the benefits of solo female travel and of young travellers' experiences of backpacking and studying abroad.

4.4. Findings

In this section, the themes that emerged from data analysis are discussed and used to confirm and contradict the model of tourist transformation constructed from the literature review.

Figure 4.1 illustrates how the findings from this study add to the existing literature. The rest of this section will highlight the contributions of this study to current knowledge – these are highlighted in red in Fig. 4.1.

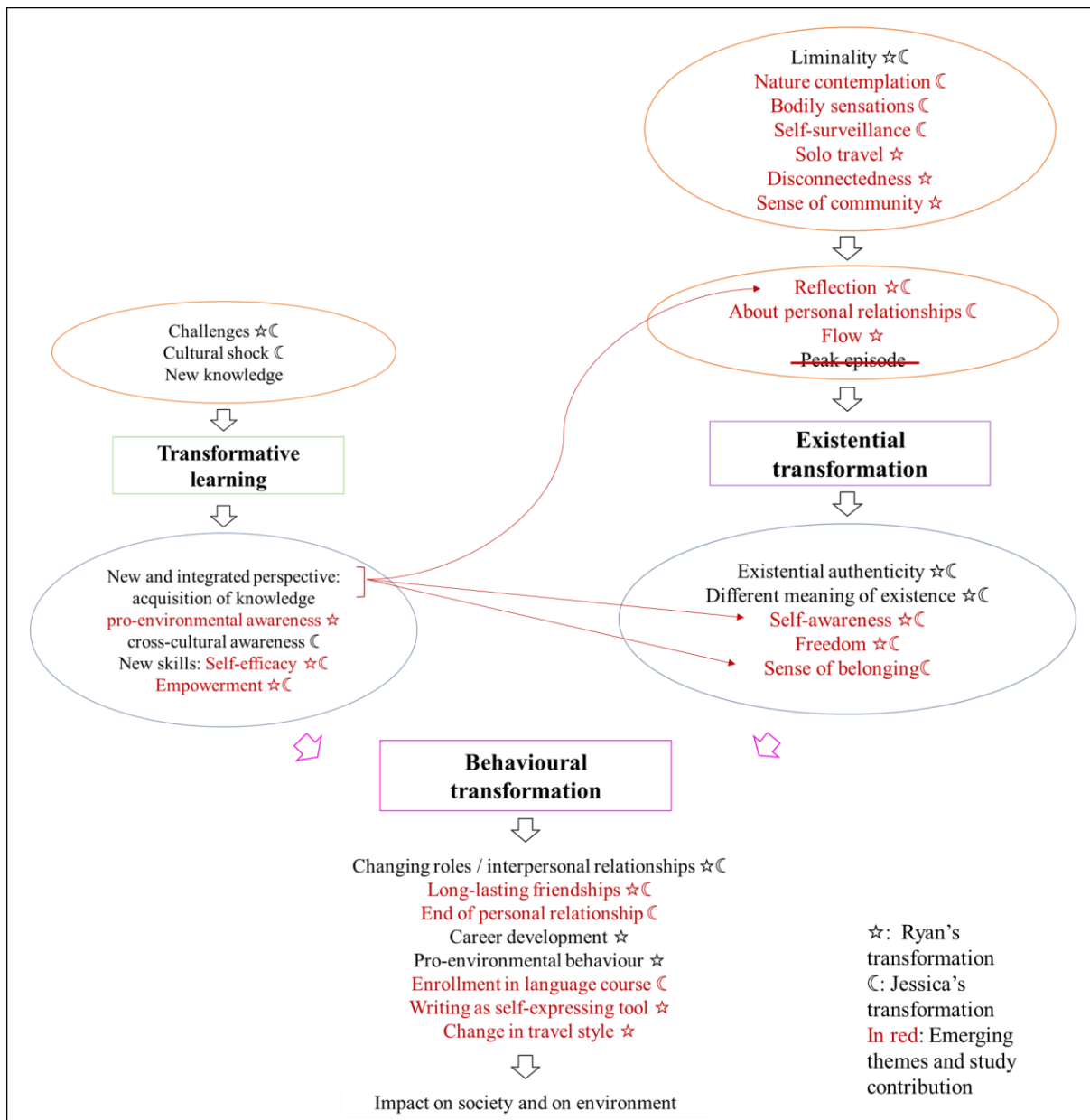


Figure 4.1 Tourist transformation conceptualisation, integrated with duoethnography findings

4.4.1. Duoethnography themes

4.4.1.1 Challenges and self-efficacy

Both Jessica's and Ryan's experiences in Australia and New Zealand, respectively, started off with encountering unexpected issues in finding a job as part of their working holidays.

Fresh off her university degree, Jessica especially experienced a long and frustrating job

search at the beginning of her working holiday, which she considered quite challenging for her self-esteem and finances. Eventually, she found work in the hospitality sector. This led her to face further challenges, characterised by developing skills in a new work environment. In narrating this, she highlighted how, after her studies, she would have never thought she would be able to do practical work such as waitressing and carrying heavy plates, all while surrounded by co-workers from other countries. Most of all, she learned that she could always survive and adapt to difficult, unknown and even bizarre situations. Transformative learning therefore took place in Jessica's understanding of how to deal with a new workplace, developing new skills related to job tasks and intercultural interactions during her working holiday. Such transformative learning and challenges increased Jessica's self-efficacy, which corresponds to acquiring mastery in succeeding in specific tasks and becoming more capable to exercise control over different life domains (Kakoudakis et al., 2017).

Ryan also encountered work-related issues, in more than one tourism experience. Once he arrived in New Zealand, he discovered that the job he had been previously promised was no longer available. Thus, his working holiday also started with a job hunt, which concluded in a hostel that accommodated him. Ryan's second transformative experience of managing a ski resort in Japan was also characterised by several challenges, ranging from resolving car accidents, breaking up fights, to helping a staff member with depression. While these were common elements of managing a ski resort, they were difficult circumstances to face while working in a foreign environment. In this case, Ryan gained confidence and patience when dealing with unforeseen challenges, which also relates to increased self-efficacy as outcome of transformative learning.

4.4.1.2. Cross-cultural awareness

Being exposed to other cultures was also highlighted as the main component of Jessica's

transformative learning experiences. Due to her trip to Malaysia, she was able to meet and interact with relatives from a background she viewed as very different from her upbringing. This was an opportunity for her to closely experience a different way of life, which enriched her worldview and provided her with new valuable knowledge about her personal heritage. Jessica's first transformative learning experience of being immersed into the locals' lifestyle also resonated with her following trips, always characterised by reflexivity and curiosity towards other cultures. In Australia, she particularly valued her experience working with South Koreans, an occasion for her to discover peers from a culture she would have had very little chance to encounter at home. Therefore, being exposed to a micro-environment of people from a different country also developed Jessica's cross-cultural awareness, providing new knowledge about other peoples and their cultures and increasing her curiosity towards them. However, developing cross-cultural awareness was not present in Ryan's subjective accounts of transformative learning, as he was not found to highlight experiencing difference in cultures. While this may not be explained by gender, it could be attributed to the fact that Ryan's transformative experiences were characterised by interacting with Western travellers, not perceived as having culturally distant behaviours, while Jessica stressed the opportunity - and excitement - of learning about the similarities and differences in the way of life of 'other people', in her travel outside of Europe.

4.4.1.3. Pro-environmental awareness

Instead, Ryan's learning process was characterised by gaining knowledge about environmentally-friendly practices during his stay in New Zealand. Here, he stayed in a 'hippie' (a subculture involving a rejection of conventional values) commune, where he had the opportunity to learn about sustainability. This experience was fundamental in providing him with a broadened perspective on consumption and environmental conservation, which

made him more aware of harmful everyday practices and then affected his attitude upon return (further discussed below). On the other hand, Jessica did not provide accounts of being educated about environmental sustainability in her transformative experiences, as, unlike Ryan in New Zealand, she did not stay in accommodation with explicit environmentally-friendly goals.

4.4.1.4. Liminality

Besides transformative learning, Ryan and Jessica experienced different forms of existential transformation. Despite having different results, both young travellers' accounts were characterised by a destination extra-ordinary setting in which free self-expression and existential authenticity were more likely activated (Wang, 1999). For Ryan and Jessica, being distant from friends and family corresponded to a lack of social structures, which involved the feeling of not being judged and the opportunity for self-expression.

Interestingly, the transformative experiences stemming from liminality for both Ryan and Jessica took place in New Zealand. Jessica turned it into an occasion to assign meanings to social interactions. Along with reflecting on pre-existing meaningful relationships, as well as on close friendships she established in the destination, Jessica eventually re-evaluated her life direction. During this re-structuring, however, she was also concerned about becoming a 'bad daughter and girlfriend'. Therefore, she took extra introspective steps before making life-changing decisions, also being cautious in re-negotiating her role and the perception her family and friends had of her with the prospect of her return home from travel.

Ryan experienced liminality in the form of travelling solo and therefore being free from taking care of any travel companions. By not being accompanied by a friend or partner, he enjoyed the freedom of choosing his own travel pace. What struck Ryan the most, was

noticing an environment free of judgement in the town he was visiting, as it was mostly frequented by short-stay tourists. With this realisation, he felt more confident in performing roles he would not have otherwise experimented with in his everyday life. As a consequence, both Ryan and Jessica felt free by taking advantage of the liminality of their tourism settings and actively re-negotiating (Jessica) or avoiding (Ryan) others' surveillance (e.g. from travel companions, family, etc.).

4.4.1.5. Reflection and self-awareness

In this duoethnography, existential transformation was characterised by a process of deep reflection, leading to self-awareness. During her Malaysia holiday, Jessica reflected about the relations and dynamics within her relatives' families, comparing them to her upbringing, and drawing conclusions about her values. This was evident as, during the stay, Jessica wrote down these observations in a journal. Further, contemplating natural settings in New Zealand also characterised her reflective journey towards existential authenticity.

Ryan also engaged in a deep reflection, particularly facilitated by the solitude he experienced during his holiday in Australia after an unexpected breakup. In here, he recounted spending nights in a remote accommodation, reflecting about his life plans and slowly making the best out of his improvised solo holiday. Mind-work and reflection were evident in Ryan's experience as he reported these impressions on a journal and later on his travel blog. Not only did the transformative experiences convey a sense of existential authenticity to them, but both Ryan and Jessica gained better awareness and understanding of who they were. Therefore, reflecting during their holidays and stays had an important role for the participants' existential transformation and increased self-awareness.

4.4.1.6. Connection with nature

While Ryan did not make references to nature being a significant part of his transformative experience, Jessica's experience in New Zealand was characterised by visiting natural attractions, which she contemplated in awe. Despite being very far from home, she felt a spiritual connection with the place, viewing nature as a whole and inspiring her questioning about the meaning and direction of her life. Moreover, all of Jessica's transformative experience narratives were characterised by descriptions of elements such as weather (e.g. Malaysia's humidity conveying exoticism) and surroundings (e.g. comparing Melbourne's environment to European cities). As such, compared to Ryan's accounts, Jessica's transformation was heavily marked by bodily experiences of the destinations.

4.4.1.7. Sense of belonging and freedom

Jessica's visit to her relatives in Malaysia gave her not only significant knowledge about her heritage; it was her first instance of existential transformation through tourism. Visiting family members in an environment considered to be physically, culturally and socially very distant from Jessica's background growing up was determinant in forming a sense of self-awareness and of belonging to her mixed heritage. While the first transformative experience contributed to existential transformation in terms of belonging and self-acceptance, the more recent stay in New Zealand was charged with contemplation and reflection; resulting in her ending a long-term relationship. Jessica described it as a freeing sensation of taking control over her life. All this was found to lead to Jessica's self-awareness and increased sense of authenticity. Also, whilst Jessica discovered sense of belonging to her mixed heritage because she used the experience to identify her cultural values, Ryan instead found his sense of belonging to communities with shared mutual interests, regardless of heritage. This is further detailed below.

4.4.1.8. Sense of community and 'disconnectedness'

Ryan's existential transformation taking place during his working holiday in New Zealand, was intensified by his stay in an alternative lifestyle commune devoted to surfing activities. This accommodation did not provide internet access, so that Ryan felt 'disconnected from the rest of the world', which increased the perceived remoteness of the destination. Being disconnected helped Ryan fully enjoy the slow and peaceful environment, while turning to introspection and mindfulness. This however did not prevent Ryan from bonding and developing a sense of community by living in close contact with fellow travellers. Prior to this experience, Ryan had also developed a similar sense of community with the staff from his work experience in Japan. In fact, Ryan's transformative travel (except for the experience in Australia) was characterised by the time he spent in destinations that were renowned for the leisure activities in which he was particularly interested. Despite travelling solo (Japan, New Zealand) and feeling disconnected (New Zealand), Ryan's transformative experiences were enriched by sharing mutual interests with other travellers in the destination, namely in the same activities (e.g. playing music in New Zealand; snowboarding in Japan), which created opportunities to make friends.

4.4.1.9. Flow and adaptation

Ryan's experiences of solo travel were characterised by a process of transition, which consisted of confusion and abandoning previous career plans, moving to a new life phase. In the destination, Ryan lived this phase experiencing flow: focusing on the present and dedicating all his attention on favourite activities. With flow and self-rediscovery, Ryan's outcome of existential transformation corresponded to adapting to unexpected life turns. Ryan became better equipped in facing hardships and overcoming existential anxiety from difficult situations, to then start a career that was not part of his previous 'path to success'. To sum up,

Ryan's existential transformation was characterised by disconnectedness, a sense of community, flow and adaptation, while Jessica's was characterised by bodily sensations and connection with nature, a sense of belonging and freedom.

4.4.1.10. Long-lasting friendships

Besides transformative learning and existential transformation, the duoethnography participants reported a number of behavioural changes, which are believed to have an enduring impact on their lives. Both Jessica and Ryan's transformative experiences were characterised by chance encounters and social bonding across different experiences. This was considered a behavioural change as it led to long-lasting friendships that influenced their actions in planning their future, such as returning to a work experience and applying for a PhD programme (Ryan) and re-arranging personal relationships (Jessica). Together with friendships, all the transformative learning and existential transformation processes discussed above had a role in generating behavioural changes.

4.4.1.11. Travel, writing and pro-environmental behaviour

Ryan's first and forced experience of travelling alone changed his perspective on solo travel and activities, which became his preferred style of travel, allowing him to travel and to stay in destinations by himself and, as seen above, to further experience self-development. During his holiday in Australia, Ryan also adopted writing as a restorative and self-expressive practice. As a result of transformative learning about sustainability in New Zealand, Ryan also developed environmentally-conscious behaviour in his everyday life.

4.4.1.12. Language course and ending a relationship

When it comes to Jessica's behavioural changes, the transformative experience of meeting

with her Asian relatives and not being able to communicate with them, prompted her to enrol in an intensive English course upon return. This experience later played a part in her choosing of undertaking Asian studies in her bachelor's degree. As discussed above, the existential transformation process of self-reflection occurring during her stay in New Zealand, also led Jessica to break up with her long-term boyfriend, as a result of her life re-evaluation that started in the destination. The findings of the duoethnography provide insights about our understanding of the different types of tourist transformation (Figure 4.1), illustrating how different elements may develop in young female and male transformative tourism experiences, compared to the conceptualisation drawn from transformative tourism research.

4.5. Discussions

4.5.1. Transformative learning

In the double duoethnography, transformative learning was characterised by facing and overcoming challenges. In transformative tourism research, challenges provide volunteer tourists with self-development (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017), and international students with intercultural adaptation (Gill, 2007). Overcoming challenges led both participants to increased self-efficacy (Kakoudakis et al., 2017). In prior literature, self-efficacy has not been discussed as outcome of transformative learning, and may also be related to empowerment, a main theme in women independent travel literature and corresponding to developing independence and confidence in overcoming challenges (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Myers, 2017). In the present study, empowerment was found not to be exclusive to female tourists' narratives of emancipative experiences, but may also characterise men's achieving greater confidence in solving problems during travelling. While being initially perceived as difficult situations, challenges proved to be very important in revealing underlying strengths and making both participants independent and flexible during and after their travel.

Transformative learning as outcome of the exposure to different cultures at the destination and of experiencing cultural shock, has been underlined by Lean (2009) as playing an important role in promoting tourist transformation. Facing cultural disequilibrium and achieving cross-cultural understanding and global citizenship are often associated with young travellers' experiences of studying abroad and volunteer tourism (Bone & Bone, 2017; Reisinger, 2013). In this duoethnography, cross-cultural awareness was acquired by the young female experience of encountering other cultures from both visiting relatives in a different country and going on a long-haul working holiday. Therefore, contexts other than volunteering and studying abroad (i.e. visiting friends and relatives, working holidays) may also be valuable in stimulating young travellers' interest in learning about other cultures and expanding their frame of reference. In turn, the male participant reported learning about sustainable practices during his New Zealand stay. This finding supports the importance of environmental activities and programmes in the destination in enhancing the tourists' knowledge about sustainable practices and initiating a transformative learning process, influencing their behaviour to become environmentally responsible (Moscardo, 2017).

4.5.2. Existential transformation

Blocker and Barrios (2015) note the importance of liminality provided by service experiences in creating transformative value, which leads individuals to negotiate meaning, and to move towards self-worth and a desirable reality. With regard to this study's double duoethnography, liminality was confirmed to play a fundamental role in the existential transformation of both young female and male tourists. Being away from their relatives and friends affected Ryan and Jessica's stays in New Zealand, as social expectations were temporarily suspended in the liminal destination setting, allowing escape from other people's surveillance. This shows that men travellers, described as passive gazers (Wearing & Wearing, 1996), may experience

different levels of liminality and perceived judgement from residents and fellow tourists as much as women travellers.

Liminality in the destination also had different elements according to the male and female experience. It was an occasion for Jessica to focus and reflect on personal relationships, while dealing with her gender roles. This concern has not been discussed in transformative tourism, and it aligns with self-surveillance (Berdychevsky et al., 2013; Seow & Brown, 2018), and further supports that women on holiday dedicate time to explore their gender roles, growing in relation to others (Cave & Ryan, 2007; Davidson, 1996), as part of their existential transformation. Ryan's liminality, on the other hand, was characterised by his travelling solo and enjoying the freedom from reflections on his social roles or bonds (i.e. everyday relationships' expectations, travel companions' demands), which encouraged him to take advantage of self-exploration. Jessica and Ryan's difference in experiencing liminality also led to different behavioural changes, (further discussed below), where Jessica re-evaluated her role in a long-term relationship, and Ryan valued travelling alone as way to freely experiment different personas and to re-think his life plans. Generally, solo travel has been discussed as a source for women empowerment as well as freedom to move around before settling in their next life stage (e.g. Elsrud, 1998), while transformative tourism research has yet to explore the transformative power of solo travel from a female and male perspective.

Processes of existential transformation were also characterised by reflection. Reflection is an important component in the tourist transformation process (Lean, 2009, 2012), recurring in intercultural, volunteer, study abroad and rural tourism experiences (e.g. Gill, 2007; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Noy, 2004; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). In transformative tourism literature, reflection has been described as a process taking place after the trip, in making sense of the changes occurred (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Kirillova et al., 2017b). In this study,

it was found to occur during the trip. Such process led to self-awareness, as both Jessica and Ryan reported learning more about themselves and their values. This study suggests that for existential transformation to occur, young tourists need space and time for introspection and self-questioning during their trip. While it is important to note that there has been continuing debate on the concept of 'finding existential authenticity' (e.g. Cohen, 2010), in this double duoethnography it was found that transformative travel experiences provided both researchers with self-exploration, but also with an improved understanding of their potential skills and their socio-cultural identity. This in turn reinforced their sense of existential authenticity and their dedication to redirecting their life goals.

Existential transformation was also characterised by different processes for the male and female researchers. Jessica's existential transformation involved connection with nature, bodily sensations, sense of belonging and freedom. Jessica's account of feeling connected to nature in the destination has been found to provide transformation and fulfilment in different tourism experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993; Moufakkir & Selmi, 2018), and provides an example of 'awe-inspiring scenery' facilitating 'the occurrence of triggering episodes' leading to existential transformation (Kirillova et al., 2017c, p. 508). Further, Jessica's bodily experience of the place supports previous research emphasising how women's discourses on travel experiences are characterised by increased awareness of body sensations, which contribute to the female travellers' putting the experience into context (Doran, 2016), and to their inner journey of greater self-awareness, compared to male travel narratives of physicality mainly contributing to feelings of mastery (e.g. Myers, 2010). The importance of being immersed in a different culture while travelling is supported in this duoethnography, not only as a determinant of transformative learning as established by the literature, but also causing existential transformation in providing a greater sense of cultural belonging and self-acceptance (see Figure 4.1). While freedom has not been discussed as outcome of

transformative tourism by previous literature, Jessica's sense of freedom gained through her experience reflects Kirillova et al. (2017b)'s description of the travellers' existential dilemma and eventual choice of freedom as first priority over others. This theme also corroborates the findings of previous work in female tourism, which view freedom as a necessary condition for women to take personal choices (Elsrud, 1998).

This study suggests that transformative experiences of female tourists may differ, in the way they are depicted and in the feelings leading to perceived change, from those of male tourists. Compared to his female counterpart, Ryan's existential transformation involved a sense of community developed in the destination, disconnectedness, flow and adaptation. Ryan's disconnectedness has not been found to recur as theme in transformative tourism research. This suggests that the lack of virtual ties to the society while staying in a small destination requires further investigation as (male) transformative determinant. Disconnectedness from his domestic and daily routine (from the 'outside world') led Ryan to bond with his fellow travellers and develop a sense of community in the destination. While social interaction and social contact have been found to play an important role in transformative tourism experiences (e.g. Reisinger, 2013), there is still limited understanding on the different ways social interactions can inform tourist transformation. Ryan's transitioning phase was characterised by focusing on the present and writing music, surfing and snowboarding. Engaging in enjoyable and rewarding activities while losing self-consciousness relates to Csikszentmihalyi (1990)'s concept of flow in achieving optimal experiences. As Gnoth and Matteucci note (2014), with flow and by repeating recreational activities, the traveller experiences self-discovery. This finding also aligns with Cave and Ryan (2007)'s analysis of adventure tourists and backpackers, in which it is supported that while women take care of personal relationships and are characterised by conflicting emotions, men engage in enjoyable activities, experienced in hedonistic terms and motivated by achieving mastery. Finally,

Ryan's journey towards existential authenticity ended with his acceptance and adaptation to unexpected life turns. In Kirillova et al. (2017b)'s review on philosophical approaches to the concept of authenticity, Ryan's transformation reflects Nietzsche (1921)'s view: overcoming pain to accept the harshness of reality.

These findings suggest that increased existential authenticity in travel experiences can have similarities but also different outcomes according to the transformative process that young female and male tourists experience within the destination. Compared to previous literature, the participants' transformative travel accounts and narratives did not include events occurring during the trip that functioned as triggers for transformation. This contradicts Kirillova et al. (2017b)'s theorisation of peak episodes that need to take place towards the end of a trip to cause existential transformation (see Figure 4.1). The findings rather consisted of a series of temporary but sustained-over-time conditions (e.g. liminality, contemplation, solitude, transition, etc.), constantly facilitating and informing the process of re-evaluation towards existential authenticity that Ryan and Jessica engaged during the trip(s). Therefore, conditions extended across the trip, rather than sudden peak episodes, may be evaluated as core processes of existential transformation.

4.5.3. Behavioural change

With regard to behavioural changes, both developed long-lasting friendships that were instrumental for their life-changing choices after their tourism experiences. Further, transformative learning and existential processes were important factors in determining changes in behaviour, confirming the 'layered' nature of tourist transformation. These findings also confirm the general understanding that transformative travel affects tourists' behaviour, in the way they relate to their interpersonal relationships and manage their job prospects (Lean, 2012; O'Reilly, 2006). While the male duoethnographer changed his travel

style and career plans, continued writing as self-expression tool in daily life and adopted a more environmentally-friendly behaviour, the female duoethnographer developed her language skills and ended her long-term romantic relationship. As demonstrated by Ryan's adoption of pro-environmental behaviour, tourism as a service that co-creates transformative value can cultivate proactive responsibility to act morally, with potential impacts on society (Blocker & Barrios, 2015).

These exploratory themes also represent evidence of the potential of transformative change having long-lasting impact on behaviour, contradicting previous studies suggesting that tourist transformations are only temporary (Lean, 2009; Moscardo; 2009). Such results also enhance our understanding of the range of behavioural changes that travellers can gain from transformative travel experiences, sparsely mentioned but not deeply analysed in the previous literature, especially in relation to young travellers (Mkono, 2016; Reisinger, 2013).

4.6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the researchers' lived experiences with transformative tourism, in order to explore differences and commonalities in their transformation processes as young male and female travellers. Existing literature has focused on analysing the transformative power of specific types of tourism, especially in relation to young travellers. The limited research on women tourists' empowerment and emancipation also enrich our knowledge on tourist transformation. However, no study has empirically tested the tourist transformation framework that can be drawn from sparse literature. By adopting a double duoethnographic approach, this study has identified transformative meanings and processes in youth travel through the dialogical accounts of a female and a male researcher, contributing to our knowledge on tourist transformation.

The main constructs employed by previous transformative tourism research are transformative learning, existential transformation and behavioural change (e.g. Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Kirillova et al., 2017b; Lean, 2009, 2012; Morgan, 2010). The contribution of this study lies in confirming and expanding the tourist transformation framework. The young female transformative experience was found to be particularly characterised by developing cross-cultural awareness (transformative learning), contemplating nature, bodily sensations, self-surveillance, reflecting about personal relationships and developing a sense of belonging (existential transformation), while the young male-specific transformative processes involved pro-environmental education (transformative learning), solo travel, disconnectedness from daily routine, a sense of community with other travellers, flow experiences and adaptation (existential transformation). The findings also contradicted the need for a specific peak episode to suddenly trigger existential authenticity towards the end of the trip (Kirillova et al., 2017b); instead supporting a 'layered' tourist transformation that lasts through time and influences multiple behaviour changes.

From a practical perspective, this study provides insights for the development and promotion of transformative tourism products and services, especially considering the growing popularity of 'slow travel' in adventurous destinations and destinations focused on well-being travel trends. Tourism operators and marketers could design experiences that emphasise activities for young travellers that were here found to lead to self-efficacy, empowerment, self-awareness, existential authenticity, cross-cultural awareness, pro-environmental behaviour and behavioural changes. These experiences should encourage travellers to take personal challenges, as well as provide activities such as nature contemplation and encounters with different cultures, forming groups of travellers with common interests and limiting connection with daily life's pressures. Such activities could be distinctly allocated to female and male travellers, according to what this study found in terms of common and different

transformative processes according to gender. Experiences should also provide tourists with space for reflection, which was found to lead to transformative change when introspection occurred during the trip itself, rather than fast-paced trips that may leave time for reflection only after the traveller returns home. The participants in this study engaged in extended stays in the destination, so long stays may facilitate moments of self-reflection. Alternatively, activity-packed holidays could reserve days in between to wander around the destination or to focus on a flow activity, to allow tourists to question their perspective on life and priorities, and make adjustments in relation to what they have experienced.

This study has its limitations, primarily centred on the chosen method and paradigm. Having identified a research gap in a lack of transformative tourism studies explicitly focusing on male travellers does not mean that this study sought for ‘equality’ in depicting both female and male experiences. In fact, it should be acknowledged that previous studies focusing on women tourism played a fundamental role in shedding light upon the female perspective in the tourism experience - a field that used to exclusively involve male-dominated narratives (e.g. Pritchard & Morgan, 2000). This widened our investigation by adding potential transformative meanings (i.e. empowerment, self-surveillance, resistance, etc.) to the limited knowledge on tourist transformation. Because of the study’s qualitative approach of employing one female and one male participants, Study III did not aim to reach a gendered perspective or provide generalisation. While the double duoethnographic approach was justified, it is acknowledged that other tourists and researchers, may have had differing transformative tourism experiences. Despite this, the study enriches our limited understanding of transformative tourism processes and has allowed the candidate and the other researchers to reflexively analyse their own travel experiences and improve the interpretation of others. Future research should test the themes that emerged from this double duoethnography as

transformative tourism factors, with a quantitative study further exploring, on a larger scale, how men and women may experience transformative tourism differently. This could also take other sociodemographic factors (e.g. age, visited destinations, travel companions, etc.) into consideration, thus further helping tourism operators and marketers to be aware of 'transformative tourists' profiles and which group they want to target. Since existing literature on transformative tourism is either theoretical or based on small number of interviews, further research is particularly recommended to use an empirical approach and innovative methodologies to explain and analyse transformative tourism processes and contribute to the ongoing conceptualisation of tourist transformation.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

This final chapter presents the conclusions of the thesis. It outlines a research rationale revisiting the aims set out for the three studies composing the thesis. Then, a summary of the findings of the thesis is given. This is followed by a discussion of the contributions of the research to expanding theoretical knowledge and the practical contributions of the thesis to the design and delivery of transformative travel experiences. The chapter ends with identifying the limitations of the study and presents directions for future research.

5.2. Research rationale

Transformative tourism experiences are of great importance as they provide multiple benefits: they may improve the wellbeing of travellers, but also transform them, allowing to obtain self-realignment and a greater sense of purpose (Boswijk et al., 2013; Reisinger, 2013). Through transformative travel, individuals also change their lifestyle towards increasing global citizenry, social responsibility and environmental sustainability (UNWTO, 2016; Grabowski et al., 2017). Despite this, there is limited understanding on how tourist transformation is defined, across different activities, and what characterises transformative tourism experiences.

This provided the premises for this thesis to investigate transformative tourism experiences and identify the meanings and processes of tourist transformation. The theoretical chapter (Conceptual Model) employed a conceptual review of the literature and identified two main conceptualisations of tourist transformation, as well as several key dimensions of transformative tourism experiences based on previous studies and approaches. This critical review provided answers to Research Questions 1 to 4 of the thesis. To further explore how

transformative tourism experiences are characterised, two qualitative studies followed the conceptual chapter of this thesis. In Study II, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted and coded through thematic analysis. This approach aimed to examine the subjective definitions attributed to tourist transformation by travellers, and to identify aspects of travel experiences facilitating and inhibiting transformation. The exploration provided answers to Research Questions 5 and 6 of the thesis. In Study III, double duoethnography was employed, consisting in the analysis of a female and a male researchers' memory-work and discussions of their respective three transformative tourism experiences. The objectives of the duoethnography were to investigate meanings and benefits attached to young tourists' transformation, to explore similarities and differences in male and female transformative experiences, and to develop a research instrument allowing for better interpretation of other travellers' experiences. Such approach provided answers to Research Questions 7 and 8 of the thesis. The next section presents a summary of the three studies that compose this thesis, and their findings.

5.3. Summary of main findings

This thesis started out with a theoretical chapter (Chapter 2, called Conceptual Model) reviewing relevant literature, focusing on the contexts where transformative tourism research has emerged, and analysing the main theories that transformative tourism research has utilised so far. With the review of relevant literature, transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978, 1991) and existential transformation (Kirillova et al., 2017b, 2017c) were found to be the main tourist transformation theories. Theories on tourist performativity and attitude change, as well as Peirce's theory of experience, were discussed to highlight the socially induced and observable experience as studied by social empiricists (Gnoth & Matteucci, 2014). Within the conceptual model, the study proposed a definition of tourist transformation, hereby described

as a process involving heightened awareness and fragmentation prompted by a destination's liminality, cultural differences and challenges, and stimuli such as peak episodes and dilemmas. This process encourages tourists to reflect and restructure beliefs about their self (self-directed interpretation leading to existential transformation) and the world (outward-directed interpretation leading to transformative learning). With regard to defining behavioural change through tourism, this study also argued that, as long as they are reinforced, attitude change and temporary habits at the destination can mutate into long-lasting behavioural transformation, such as adopting new practices (e.g. pro-environmental behaviour), or life-changing decisions (e.g. career re-evaluations or interpersonal changes).

Study II (Chapter 3) aimed at exploring how individuals perceive and define transformation through tourism, and to identify potential aspects of the tourism experience that drive transformation (facilitators) and those that hinder self-change (inhibitors). The sampling procedures were first outlined, together with the design of the semi-structured interviews. Finally, the thematic analysis technique used to analyse the interview data was discussed, and the findings of the thematic analysis were presented. Participants described their subjective tourist transformation as achieving greater self-efficacy, humility and enrichment. Their transformation was facilitated by social interactions, experiencing the sense of place, overcoming challenges, long stays and post-travel reflection. Findings also showed that short stays, repeated practices and the lack of access to the residents' lifestyle inhibited the travellers' transformation. In any tourism type engaged, it was also found that all participants reported increased wellbeing, which was considered to be eudaimonic rather than only providing pleasure. In contrast, not all participants reported experiencing transformative change through tourism, supporting that not all travel experiences are transformative, and that tourist transformation requires certain facilitators to occur. When transformation did emerge, it was believed to be permanent and long-lasting.

Finally, Study III (Chapter 4) investigated personal transformative tourism experiences of young travellers, and explored narratives, meanings and determinants of such experiences according to gender. To empirically achieve the study aims, the methodology in this chapter consisted in a double duoethnography, which involved the analysis of commonalities and differences of the candidate's transformative travel experiences with those of another young researcher. Three experiences for each researcher were posited as data entry points, and open conversations and memory work elicited by photographs were analysed. The analysis of the data was also discussed, and explained through open and axial coding, which was negotiated by four researchers (hence the double duoethnography) including the candidate. Findings of Study III show that both young female and male tourism experiences of transformation are characterised by liminality, and by becoming mentally stronger and more confident, as well as increasing acceptance of challenges arising during the trip. The young female-specific transformative processes involved developing cross-cultural awareness (transformative learning), contemplating nature, bodily sensations, self-surveillance, reflecting about personal relationships and developing a sense of belonging (existential transformation). The young male transformative tourism experiences were mainly characterised by pro-environmental education (transformative learning), solo travel, disconnectedness from daily routine, a sense of community with other travellers, flow experiences and adaptation (existential transformation). These processes were also found to influence multiple behavioural changes through time. The findings of the thesis are summarised in Table 5.0 below.

| Research questions | Summarised findings |
|--|--|
| RQ1: In what contexts has transformative tourism research emerged? | Tourism studies have focused on describing transformative benefits of specific types of tourism, in the contexts of mobilities paradigm, study abroad, backpacking, ecotourism, wellness and spiritual tourism, volunteer tourism. In these contexts, exposure to other cultures and challenges prompt tourists to develop a broader frame of reference and sense of identity. |
| RQ2: Which theories have been utilised in transformative tourism research? | Transformative learning theory by Mezirow (1978, 1991) has been employed by most tourism studies conceptualising transformation. Kirillova et al. (2017a, 2017b) use existentialist philosophy to discuss existential transformation through tourism. |
| RQ3: Which theories have not yet been used but may further explain the tourist transformation process? | A multidisciplinary approach is pivotal, the tourist transformation process is further explained by considering theories on tourist performativity which discuss how tourists behave at the destination, and Peirce's theory of experience as well as theories on attitude change to understand how practices at the destination may transform into habits, and what stages the transformative process requires. |
| RQ4: Which are the key dimensions of tourist transformation that can be identified, regardless of the tourism type? | Liminality, cultural shock, challenges → disorienting dilemma, peak episode or physical performance → tourists' reflection → interpretation and remembering → integration of values and/or knowledge depending on interpretation direction → attitude change and acquisition of temporary habits → behavioural change upon return. |
| RQ5: What is meant by transformative tourism experiences? | Tourism experiences that lead to greater and long-lasting self-efficacy, humility and enrichment. |
| RQ6: What inhibits and what facilitates transformative tourism experiences? | Short stays, repeated practices and lack of access to the residents' lifestyle inhibit transformation. Interacting with residents and other travellers, experiencing the sense of place, overcoming challenges, long stays and post-travel reflection facilitate transformation. |
| RQ7: How can the process of transformative change be provided to young individuals through travel? | Transformative change can be provided to young individuals through travel that ensures space and time for introspection, and that contemplates activities leading to self-efficacy, empowerment, self-awareness, existential authenticity, cross-cultural awareness, pro-environmental behaviour and behavioural changes. |
| RQ8: What are the similarities and differences in male and female transformative tourism experiences? | Both experiences are characterised by liminality, by becoming mentally stronger and more confident, and increasing acceptance of challenges arising during the trip. The female process of transformation is marked by bodily feelings and self-consciousness, while the male experience is characterised by flow, adaptation, a sense of community with other travellers. |

Table 5.0 Summary of findings of the thesis.

The next section discusses the theoretical contributions of this thesis.

5.4. Theoretical contributions

This thesis provides a number of key contributions to the advancement of academic theory about tourist transformation and transformative travel experiences. The conceptual chapter (Chapter 2), contributed to the theoretical understanding of tourist transformation by

discussing different disciplinary theories and illustrating the main dimensions of transformative tourism experiences. By proposing a working definition of tourist transformation, this thesis overcame limitations of previous research that had not yet reached consensus on the definition of this process. This thesis further contributed to the ongoing conceptualisation of transformative tourism experiences by analysing the subjective meanings that travellers assign to transformative tourism (Study II), and describing tourist transformation as achieving greater self-efficacy, humility and enrichment.

The Conceptual Model also illustrated the key dimensions of tourist transformation through four propositions and stages, which were argued to follow one another only when stimuli are sufficiently intense and changing behaviours are reinforced. Based on previous literature, liminality, cultural shock and challenges were proposed to be the main contributors of transformative stimuli (e.g. Brown, 2009; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Walter, 2016), specifically peak episodes and dilemmas across the experience (Kirillova et al., 2017c; Mezirow, 1991).

The exploration of subjective transformative tourism experiences (Study II) confirmed the key dimensions illustrated in the Conceptual Model, and found further facilitators contributing to the travellers' transformation, namely social interactions, experiencing the sense of place and long stays. However, both empirical studies (Study II and III) contradicted the sudden occurrence of a peak episode or epiphany (Kirillova et al., 2017b) to play a central role in initiating transformation, and instead supported a 'layered' and gradual tourist transformation process. Compared to existing literature focusing on benefits and processes of transformative tourism, this thesis also explored and uncovered potential transformation inhibitors, i.e. short stays, repeated practices and lack of access to the residents' lifestyle. By analysing transformation inhibitors and experiences that were not described as self-changing,

it was also demonstrated that while tourism may often increase perceived wellbeing, not all tourism experiences are transformative.

As a result of transformative stimuli and facilitators, Deleuze (1997)'s concept of fragmentation was used to explain the travellers' sense of difference at the destination, leading to reflection, interpretation and recollection of the transformative stimuli. Compared to previous studies, the conceptual framework developed in the Conceptual Model also allowed to distinguish existential transformation (Kirillova et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2017c) and transformative learning (Mezirow 1978, 1991) based on the direction of the tourists' interpretation, where existential transformation – obtaining or enhancing existential authenticity, changing meaning of existence – was proposed to be the consequence of the tourists' self-directed interpretation and change in internal values. Conversely, transformative learning was described as knowledge acquisition, skill development and increasing cross-cultural and environmental awareness, as result of an outward-directed interpretation aimed at the traveller's surrounding world.

With Study III, this thesis also addressed the predominant focus of existing research on women travellers' transformation, often conceptualised as emancipation and empowerment in solo travel, backpacking and family holidays (e.g. Elsrud, 1998; Myers, 2017), and the lack of literature on men experiencing the same. The thesis further contributed to the expansion of the tourist transformation framework by analysing young male and female experiences of transformation through tourism. In order to better identify and reflect on the constructs we employ to classify tourists' experiences, this study adopted a reflexive approach. Compared to previous methodological approaches adopted by transformative tourism research (i.e. theoretical, interviews), a double duoethnography was employed as methodology, where the researchers became 'the researched' subject of study. In the duoethnography findings,

liminality and overcoming challenges were further confirmed to have critical roles in transformative experiences, regardless of gender, while nature contemplation, bodily sensations, self-surveillance and cross-cultural awareness characterised the young female's process of transformation. Conversely, solo travel, sense of community, disconnectedness, flow experiences and pro-environmental education were found to characterise the same process for the young male traveller. These findings not only contribute to the theoretical framework of tourist transformation, but also suggest that transformative tourism experiences may be characterised by different activities and outcomes according to gender.

This study also found additional potential transformative meanings, namely empowerment, self-efficacy, self-awareness, freedom and sense of belonging. The layered nature of tourist transformation was also confirmed by the fact that transformative learning and existential transformation processes led to multiple long-term behavioural changes, which further consolidate our understanding of changes in behaviour that travellers can gain from transformative travel experiences, sparsely mentioned but not deeply analysed in the previous literature, especially in relation to young travellers. Therefore, this thesis argues that, with facilitating processes and sufficient reinforcement, transformation through tourism can have long-lasting impact on behaviour, contradicting previous studies suggesting that tourist transformations are only temporary (Lean, 2009; Moscardo; 2009; Salazar, 2004).

The thesis also extended our understanding on the role of reflection in transformative tourism experiences. Study II confirmed the need for reflecting after the trip, to 'metabolise and process' the transformation (Lean, 2009), and highlighted the importance of stories and in-depth narratives for tourists to reflect and realise the impact of transformative tourism (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018). However, in Study III, reflection was found to mainly characterise the ongoing transformative experience on site, as travellers started making sense of their

changing condition during the trip and consequently became more self-aware. This suggested that for transformation to occur, space and time for introspection and self-questioning should also be provided during the trip. These findings highlighted the limited understanding on whether reflection, confirmed to be an essential process of meaning making, occurs mostly during or after the tourism experience, or whether different timing may lead to different types of transformation.

5.5. Practical contributions

The conceptual model suggests that practitioners should highlight the transformative values tourists can gain through travelling, when devising a strategy for positioning their destination or company brand. As transformative tourism experiences provide an opportunity to increase the tourists' sense of achievement and self-growth, it is imperative that experience designers and destination managers are able to utilise strategies to develop transformative tourism.

Evidence from Study II notes that transformative experiences start off with excitement and self-evaluation during travel planning, thus suggesting that the increased consciousness at the antecedent phase of the trip can be further elicited prior to travel. Travellers could be encouraged to research the chosen destination to gather information about local identities and practices, and local volunteer communities could be trained to prepare the tourists for the experience, by sharing highlights on the locals' lifestyle and knowledge on the destination striking sceneries.

Since liminality and cultural shock at the destination were found to be strong facilitators of transformative experiences, destination managers are encouraged to curate its uniqueness, enhancing the out-of-ordinary dimension of the destination setting (e.g. showcasing outstanding environmental landscapes and local traditions), and the tourists' awareness of the differences from their everyday lives. Transformative experiences should limit travellers'

connection with daily life's pressures, and encourage them to take personal challenges, as well as provide activities such as nature contemplation and encounters with different cultures. Since such exposure to locals and people from different countries proved to have an important role in developing the tourists' adaptation skills, confidence and self-awareness, travellers should be provided with frequent, positive and mutually benefitting encounters with the destination community and fellow travellers, and tourism practitioners should increase the chance of tourists' participation in local activities. These opportunities should be especially implemented during short stays where transformation can be inhibited by the limited available time.

Consistent evidence from the thesis suggests that enhanced consciousness, reflection, interpretation and recollection of the experiences constitute a fundamental process leading to tourist transformation. Since in transformative experiences reflection was found to occur both during and after the trip, visitors should be provided with space and time to make sense of their experience, including realising challenges, cultural differences and destination's stimuli. Peak episodes and disorienting dilemmas could be purposefully designed and delivered throughout the experience, and followed up by slow-paced activities in natural settings and spiritual retreats. To further allow tourists to question their perspective on life and priorities, and to make adjustments in relation to what they have experienced, fast-paced and activity-packed holidays could also reserve days in between to wander around the destination or to focus on a flow and embodied activity, instead of leaving time for reflection only after the traveller returns home. Long stays were found to be transformation facilitators and to characterise the duoethnographers' transformative experiences, thus suggesting that extended stays may facilitate moments of self-reflection and should be encouraged for transformative outcomes. After the trip, communication channels and platforms, such as sensorial staging and ad-hoc blogs, may improve the longevity of transformation by stimulating the narration

and therefore reminiscence and recollection of transformative experiences.

Tourism operators and marketers could design experiences that emphasise activities for young travellers that in Study III were found to lead to self-efficacy, empowerment, self-awareness, existential authenticity, cross-cultural awareness, pro-environmental behaviour and behavioural changes. According to what this paper found in terms of different transformative processes according to gender, activities and meanings could be distinctly allocated to female (i.e. developing cross-cultural awareness, contemplating nature and bodily sensations, reflecting about personal relationships) and male travellers (i.e. solo travel, disconnecting from daily routine, bonding with other travellers, flow experiences). To obtain wider social benefits, it is important that destination management develop programmes that further inspire changes in pro-environmental awareness and behaviour, as well as activities that increase the tourists' global citizenship and understanding of different cultural contexts. This would also help position tourism and travelling as a tool to promote happiness and wellbeing both at an individual and societal level.

5.6. Limitations of the thesis

The thesis presents several limitations. The literature reviews on which the thesis is based mainly analysed tourism studies using 'transformation', 'transformative' or 'transformational' terminology, and did not consider research where authors did not frame travel benefits or changes in wellbeing as transformation. Finally, the interpretation of the existing literature and the expansion of the conceptual model to other specific theories remains subjective.

In Study II, the generalisability of the qualitative findings should also be interpreted with caution, as the sample size of 13 participants was relatively small and therefore only represented a limited portion of the overall population. Furthermore, the study did not try to

investigate what is the extent of change that it is needed to characterise tourist transformation (e.g. in terms of time, depth of change, etc.): these aspects would merit attention in future studies.

Study III's limitations are primarily centred on the chosen method and paradigm. Because of the duoethnographic approach of employing one female and one male participants, the study did not aim to reach a gendered perspective or provide generalisation, but to enrich our limited understanding of transformative tourism processes, and to allow researchers to improve the interpretation of others by reflecting on their own travel experiences. While the double duoethnographic approach was thus justified, other tourists and researchers may have had differing transformative tourism experiences. Furthermore, having identified a research gap in a lack of transformative tourism studies explicitly focusing on male travellers did not mean that the study sought for or achieved 'equality' in depicting both female and male experiences.

5.7. Directions for future research

More research is recommended to further understand the meaning of tourist transformation and what type of transformation may be conveyed according to experience, so that operators would be more knowledgeable in designing different types of transformative tourism experiences. Future research should test the key dimensions that were proposed in the Conceptual Model and further supported in the findings of the empirical studies composing this thesis. Quantitative studies should test the validity of these dimensions and investigate the nature and temporal sequence of their occurrence, as well as consider sociodemographic factors and different types of destinations. By testing the themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews and double duoethnography, quantitative approaches would also explore on a larger scale, for example, how men and women may experience transformative tourism

differently, thus helping tourism operators and marketers to understand which products to develop according to the destination, and to be aware of ‘transformative tourist’ profiles and which group they want to target. To address this direction, the candidate has built a questionnaire further investigating female and male travellers’ transformative experiences, and started data collection, which is currently in progress.

Future studies could also employ a cross-cultural investigation, exploring how transformative tourism experiences are characterised according to the tourists’ cultural background (Lean, 2012), and whether travellers from different cultures perceive and discuss transformation in different ways according to their lifestyles and beliefs. The thesis’ conceptualisation is mainly based on previous studies using ‘transformation’, ‘transformative’ or ‘transformational’ terminology: it would be useful to also analyse literature on tourists’ changes in wellbeing and quality of life, and on leisure and travel benefits. The relationship between tourist transformation and wellbeing could be investigated in depth, considering both positive and negative transformations through tourism, and their relationship with increases or decreases in wellbeing.

The qualitative studies of the thesis have shown that tourist transformation may be long-lasting. A longitudinal approach could monitor travel experiences over time, to better understand which factors increase the lifespan of transformation (Reisinger, 2013), and how they may influence wellbeing in the long term. As existing literature on transformative tourism is theoretical or based on interviews, further research is particularly recommended to use empirical approaches and critical and innovative methodologies to identify the specific components of tourist transformation processes and contribute to the ongoing conceptualisation of transformative tourism.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview protocol (Study II), Italian version

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| Nome | |
| Intervista numero | |
| Sesso | |
| Età | |
| Livello di istruzione | |
| Occupazione | |
| Paese/Regione | |
| Luogo intervista | |
| Inizio intervista | |
| Fine intervista | |
| Durata complessiva dell'intervista | |

- (Introduzione intervista. Benvenuto, precisazioni su anonimità dei dati forniti, richiesta permesso di registrazione.)
 - L'oggetto della mia ricerca è capire se e come viaggiare possa in qualche modo contribuire a trasformare il turista come persona. Detto in altri termini, capire se le esperienze di viaggio spingono in qualche modo una persona a cambiare i propri valori, il proprio modo di essere e di comportarsi e, più in generale, il modo di vedere le cose.
1. Personalmente ritieni che viaggiare possa avere il potere di trasformare le persone?
 2. (Se sì) Potresti per favore prenderti qualche istante per pensare ad una passata esperienza di viaggio che pensi ti abbia cambiato come persona?
 - a. Adesso potresti per favore raccontarmi quanto è durata questa vacanza, dove eri, con chi eri e cosa hai fatto durante quel viaggio?
 - b. Quando hai fatto questa esperienza di viaggio stavi attraversando un periodo particolare della tua vita? Se sì, potresti spiegare un po' in che senso?

c. Adesso prenditi un po' di tempo per raccontarmi come ti sei reso/a conto che qualcosa in te stava cambiando? Cosa è cambiato in te e nel modo di vedere le cose e il mondo che ti circonda?

d. Potresti raccontarmi un po' che tipo di emozioni positive e/o negative ha generato in te la sensazione di cambiamento causata da questa esperienza di viaggio?

e. Durante questa esperienza di vacanza hai avuto anche la possibilità di interagire con uno o più abitanti del luogo che hai visitato? (Se sì) pensi che questo abbia influenzato la tua trasformazione? Potresti dirmi perchè e come?

3. Secondo te perché questa esperienza di viaggio è riuscita a cambiarti come persona?

4. Secondo te le esperienze di viaggio possono generare una sensazione di benessere e/o felicità? (Se sì) Puoi spiegare, anche con degli esempi, come?

5. Questa sensazione di cambiamento che hai provato durante la vacanza è stata temporanea o ha cambiato il tuo modo di essere e vedere le cose in modo permanente? Se ritieni sia stato permanente, potresti descrivere un po' meglio, facendo alcuni esempi, come e in cosa questa esperienza di vacanza abbia cambiato il tuo modo di essere e vedere le cose per come è oggi?

Appendix B. Interview protocol (Study II), English version

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Name | |
| Interviewee number | |
| Gender | |
| Age | |
| Education level | |
| Occupation | |
| Country/Region | |
| Place of interview | |
| Interview start | |
| Interview end | |
| Overall duration of interview | |

- Welcome greeting, request of recording and ethical permissions
 - The object of my research is transformation in tourism, and the reason why I invited you for an interview today is to understand whether and how travelling could contribute to transform a tourist as a person. In other words, understanding if travel experiences push people to change their values, way of being and behaving, and more generally, their way of seeing things.
1. Do you think tourism and travelling actually have the power to change people?
 2. (If Yes) Drawing from your experience, could you take some time to think of a past travel experience that you think changed you as a person?
 - a. Could you now tell me how long this holiday was, where you were, who your travel companions were (if any) and what you did during this trip?
 - b. When you had this travel experience were you going through a peculiar/special time of your life? If so, could you explain more?
 - c. Now, could you take some time to please tell me how you noticed that something was changing inside? What changed in yourself and in your way of viewing the world?

- d. Could you please tell me what kind of positive and/or negative emotions were generated by your perceptions of change caused by this travel experience?
 - e. Did you also get a chance to interact with one or more locals in the destination? If so/if not, do you think this affected your transformation? If so, why and how?
3. Why do you think this travel experience managed to change you as a person?
 4. In your opinion, travel experiences can generate a perception of wellbeing or happiness? If yes, could you explain how so with some examples?
 5. Please elaborate on how this change has influenced your life now. Was it a temporary change or did it affect your way of being and viewing things permanently? If permanently, could you better describe, with some examples, how this experience changed your current way of being and viewing things?

Appendix C. Duoethnography excerpts (Study III) supporting findings

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| <p>Challenges and self-efficacy</p> | <p>Jessica: <i>'I thought I wouldn't be able to do all the physical work of standing, walking, running and taking heavy plates, but then I realised that I could do it, especially if I couldn't find anything else, I could always survive and settle with other opportunities for the moment. Because of that I still feel that if I have to survive I can do anything.'</i></p> <p>Ryan: <i>'When you are there as manager, the perspective changes, you see a lot more things and obviously you are working a lot more. I saw a lot more weird stuff, I had to deal with a lot more challenges. The first two times were a lot like a holiday where you get paid, the third time no, it was quite challenging. These [challenges] were all transformative. Each made me more mature, each emphasised that nothing was the end of the world. Acceptance, patience.'</i></p> |
| <p>Cross-cultural awareness</p> | <p>Jessica: <i>'While I thought that the Malaysian way of life was far from my values and upbringing, it certainly broadened my mind-set about how people live in different parts of the world.'</i></p> <p><i>'The working holiday certainly gave me more access to Asian people and to their culture too. Meeting Korean people for the first time, it was also about learning another new culture, and about a new kind of food.'</i></p> <p>Ryan: ---</p> |
| <p>Pro-environmental awareness</p> | <p>Ryan: <i>'Because I lived in a hippie, tree-hugging commune, I also learned a lot about carbon footprint, sustainability, etc. Really kind of changed the way I viewed consumption and my views of eco-sustainability in general.'</i></p> <p>Jessica: ---</p> |
| <p>Liminality</p> | <p>Jessica: <i>'I don't know whether it was the fact that I wasn't surrounded by my usual relationships [i.e. family and friends] and that I wasn't judged as much [...]. This just pushed me to make the cut and see how it would go being independent.'</i></p> |

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| | <p>Ryan: <i>'I found it very freeing to be by yourself and then you decide what you want to do, basically. You don't ask anyone. The whole trip is what you want to be doing basically, you don't have to consider anyone else's feelings, what they might want to do...'</i></p> <p><i>'I didn't care about how I looked (there were few mirrors) or how I was perceived, etc. I think we could all be authentic there. [...] At this place, I felt like you didn't have to live up to anyone's expectations, whether that was the way you dressed, whatever. You do what you want. Simple things like, you know, playing music in public. I wouldn't do it now. But when I was there everyone did, so when I was there, there's no – I became very unself-conscious. Less thinking of "Oh, if I do this, what will people think?" – no.'</i></p> |
| Reflection and self-awareness | <p>Jessica: <i>'The trips around New Zealand were important in facilitating a reflection I had about myself and the way I was conducting my life.'</i></p> <p><i>'I became more aware of my identity both of my nationality or cultural background and my values.'</i></p> <p>Ryan: <i>'For me, there was also a lot of self-growth. Moving on, taking the time to listen to my inner thoughts. A lot of self-reflection.'</i></p> <p><i>'Self-growth is all elaborated above. It played a big part of making me who I am today. Throughout New Zealand in general it reinforced my sense of self. Travelling alone I learned a lot about myself and my limits.'</i></p> |
| Connection with nature | <p>Jessica: <i>'When visiting natural attractions, I felt spiritually and physically connected to the place [...]. This time it was about absorbing the surroundings and the scenery is so beautiful that you just admire it and think about your existence.'</i></p> <p>Ryan: ---</p> |
| Sense of belonging and freedom | <p>Jessica: <i>'While before this experience, I went through my childhood and teenage feeling like I did not belong to my home region, with this trip I realised that I did not necessarily had to look like an Italian and be accepted by everyone at my school to just be me and to still feel like I would belong. I also realised that from both backgrounds I could learn and pick the values that I considered more suitable.'</i></p> |

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| | <p><i>'I decided to change this "fate", to try to be free and live at my full potential. [...] I felt very relieved when I chose to be independent. I felt free and the freedom to choose things.'</i></p> <p>Ryan: ---</p> |
| <i>Sense of community and disconnectedness</i> | <p>Ryan: <i>'There was only internet in the kitchen, which was a shared, communal area. [...] So we just lived without internet most of the time, and I think that was a good change of pace, you know. Ever since Raglan, I always come back to this term, "disconnect to reconnect yourself". I think it was a good change in that way.'</i></p> <p><i>'A real sense of community and disconnection from the outside world to an extent. Everyone was happy to share everything wholeheartedly. I'm still really good friends with these people.'</i></p> <p>Jessica: ---</p> |
| <i>Flow and adaptation</i> | <p>Ryan: <i>'I'm going to call it "confusing", it's like a quarter life crisis ((laughs)) in my life. Before this decision I was quite sure of what I wanted to do. I was quite happy with working in hotels, climbing the ranks. But this time was one of the first times where I wasn't sure of what I wanted to do with my life.'</i></p> <p><i>'This sharing mentality opened up other venues too, sharing of thoughts, sharing of creativity. I think my best writing, whether it was blogging, copywriting, writing music; was when I was there. [...] Mindfulness, living in the present, etc.'</i></p> <p><i>'After, I think I've become more mellow. [...] there is no path and plan that is 'ideal'. This 'go with the flow' approach led me doing my PhD through a series of chance encounters.'</i></p> <p>Jessica: ---</p> |
| <i>Long-lasting friendships</i> | <p>Ryan: <i>'In terms of community, many of my staff that year remain my best friends today. Even though we are spread across the world. This reinforced my view that regardless of background, gender, race, nationality, if two people are truly passionate about the same thing, there can be a real bond that develops.'</i></p> |

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| | <p>Jessica: <i>'Meeting meaningful people that are now still my friends also made me think about how we meet people at random moments in our life and how sometimes we do not connect at all and sometimes we have a strong connection.'</i></p> |
| <p><i>Travel, writing and pro-environmental behaviour</i></p> | <p>Ryan: <i>'But I didn't realise it until I was writing this stuff down. It was a healing process, writing. I think through that, that's something I still do now, when I'm overwhelmed I find that writing out my thoughts and feelings, writing it down helps to calm the mind, maybe [...]. I think through this trip I found that process helpful and now even when I'm not travelling, if I feel overwhelmed, I'll write...'</i></p> <p><i>'The owner was very passionate, his goal for building this hostel was to educate people about carbon footprint. So very sustainable, eco-friendly. That kind of educated me even after, today I actually think about this kind of things, about carbon footprint, not using plastic bags when I go shopping.'</i></p> <p>Jessica: ---</p> |
| <p><i>Language course and ending a relationship</i></p> | <p>Jessica: <i>'After this experience, I took up an English course after school (with a trip to London in the end with the course mates) and this definitely changed my life, giving me advantage when working or studying abroad, and determining my personal interests and life choices.'</i></p> <p>Ryan: ---</p> |