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For the love of experience: changing the experience economy discourse

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EPILOGUE AND

REFLECTION

I begin with an idea
and then it becomes
something else.

PABLO PICASSO

An epilogue usually follows a theatrical or musical performance, to summarize what has been seen and heard, to explain and give context to what happened and to bring closure to the work. Since the theatrical metaphor is widely used in the context of the experience economy, I thought it would be nice to bring my 10 years of research to a closure in this final chapter by writing an epilogue. I will use concepts and insights from my research (what has been seen and heard in the former chapters) to explain how the ideas have come about and how they in hindsight can be recognized in my own experience of doing this research (explanation and context for what happened) and in this way bring the research to a closure.

A dissertation is not an experience.

Let me start with some bad news: this dissertation is not an experience. Writing it has been an experience for me and it may function as a basis for others to have their own experiences, but it is not an experience in itself. To write a dissertation on experience in fact felt rather paradoxical. A dissertation consists mostly of written text, while I have stated time and again in this dissertation that an experience consists of an individual in an encounter with his or her environment. This dissertation can thus be considered to consist of mere secondary experience: a filtered extract of my experience. From all the ideas, theories, models, books, articles, notes, figures, Post-its, paintings and tables that I have made and/or used during my research, only a very small portion has been presented in this book. Theories that at first seemed to take the research in a useful direction proved to be useless in the end and are not presented. The trial and error manner in which notes and transcripts were coded is lost in the writing of this dissertation, resulting in a seemingly ordered structure in which the insights are presented. Even the objective of the study has changed in the process. In the beginning my objective was to find success criteria for different types of experiences, by exploring the differences between the service-economy and the so-called experience economy and confronting the different definitions of experience with various developmental models from psychology and philosophy. The fact that there are no exact universally agreed upon definitions of the term experience caused

me to change my objective until it became clear that the lack of terminology and the biased discourse were in fact the biggest problem I saw facing the experience economy. However, former objectives and the way in which the final objective came about, have been filtered out from this dissertation. They were and still are part of my experience though, but not of the information conveyed in this study. Dewey stated that information is useful when it can help others to have a better experience themselves. He gives the example of the map that is a filtered version of the original explorers' experience of a territory, but can help others to have a better experience, since they do not have to discover everything themselves and can focus on other things. In the same way I hope that the selection of my own experience that I have presented in this dissertation can function as a roadmap for everyone interested in the experience economy and that it may help them in finding their way in the jungle of innumerable names and concepts, by giving them a language to explain what they are talking about. But this book is not an experience.

Where do experiences begin and end?

Then what is or has been my experience? This is not an easy question to answer. Primary and emotional experiences can be described in terms of episodes or moments. I saw this, I heard that, I felt angry or elated etc. In this sense I can in fact describe my so-called Erlebnissen, as far as I can remember them, referring to a beginning and an ending. For the Erfahrung I have had (or am still having) as a whole this is much more difficult. For instance when did the experience start for me? Was it when I wrote the first line? When I had my first discussion with my supervisor? When the contract with the university was signed? When I first had the idea that there had to be more to the experience economy than was described in the available articles and books? Was it in Bologna when I first became interested in the subject of the service economy? Defining the end of the experience is even more difficult. What is the consummation of this experience? Will it be the last sentence of this dissertation? Or has it already passed and was it the moment I handed in the final draft? Or when I will receive the printed books? Or the defense on September 7th? Or…? In fact I have often reflected during the whole process on the fact that not only does there seem to be a dominant focus on Erlebnissen with a beginning and an ending in literature on the experience economy, but also in practice I noticed this focus. The

question: when will you finish? was asked innumerable times more often than the question: how is it going?

In presentations I always refer to this way of thinking as 'fence-to-fence' or 'entrance-to-checkout'-thinking. We seem very used to fence things in from our own perspective. Obviously this makes it easier to talk about it because you have something to talk about, a demarcated entity of which you can say: that is what it was. But often we forget that someone else may have a completely different interpretation of what is happening; an interpretation we often can't do anything about. Also what happens before the entrance and after the checkout can be part of the individuals' experiences, although it may lie well beyond the span of control of the organizer. Traffic jams on the way to the experience, bad weather, events in the private sphere of the individual, are examples of things that influence the experience and for the individual can therefore be part of the experience. This is why I focus so much on the individual perspective and on the recognition of the organizational bias.

In a worldview where the entrance is seen as the beginning of the experience and the checkout as the end, organizations can never think of new and in my opinion very clever ideas like having dinner at the airport as part of the travel-experience or travel to an event as part of the event, or to keep in touch with participants of the experience via social media, before and after, or to ask people to prepare in some way for the event. Famous examples are the masses of people dressed in white before and after the yearly Sensation White, or Sensation Innerspace as they are currently called, parties and of course the Rocky Horror Picture Show, where the audience reacts to the movie by using props and screaming at the screen. The 25 years anniversity DVD box of the movie even contains information on when to scream what and what props to use when watching the movie at home… An unforgettable example from my own experience was the sing along event Ikbenblijdatikjenietvergetenben, meaning I am glad I haven't forgotten you, after the title of a Dutch song from the seventies. In this event the audience received a book with the lyrics of around 60 songs and the hosts just shouted out a page number after which the audience sang along. However, what has been the most memorable aspect of these events was not the event itself but the aftermath of the event. Every time when the event itself ended and the hosts left the stage someone in the audience decided to shout out a page number and the audience

continued to sing. Even when the venue closed and everyone was sent outside some place was always found where a large group continued to sing until late at night. It was this hint of anarchy, of not accepting that the event was over and taking matters into one's own hands that made the experience unforgettable for me. It is less about what organizers see as the beginning and end and more what the individual perceives. It is the individual who has the experience and frankly he or she is the only one who can know where it all started and where it all ends.

Focus on senses and emotions

I have to admit that at the beginning of this research I was afraid that maybe the dominant focus on what became the left side of my theoretical foundation, on primary and emotional experiences, on the production of hedonic effects and on organizations that determine which practical values have to be invested, would pass, so that in time I would discover that I was studying a hype, a fad, which would pass and leave me with a useless piece of research on something that would already have become irrelevant at the time I would finish. In that sense it was a relief to see that the focus on the left side is becoming stronger everyday. There is almost no commercial break, magazine or conference in which the term experience is not being used in the sense of primary or emotional experience. Some years ago I was hired to consult on Sinterklaas-events for children and a first look at what happened at these events showed that they were practically identical. Everywhere Sinterklaas and the Zwarte Pieten were present, everywhere the same artists, the ones who were at that moment popular in that segment of the market, performed, everywhere children could have their faces painted, etc.

My message is definitely not that attention for the leftside is bad or that this is an inferior form of experience[19], but I have to admit that the strong focus on sensory stimulation in accounts of the experience economy were a strong motivating force for me to start this research. In many presentations I called it a situation of "painting the walls orange, placing a palmtree in the corner and a clown at the check-out". By this I meant that the sensory level of experience was risky in terms of the desired

[19] My yearly Christmas decorations provide proof for this.

decommoditization and competitive advantage, because these sensory stimulations were things that everyone could copy, leading to more of the same, as during the identical Sinterklaas-events. However, after giving some lectures about the initial stages of my research I was asked if I would like to teach in some other, more information-related courses. The opportunity to teach in these courses made me realize that primary experience could greatly help in communication. Communication can be greatly enhanced when the person you are communicating with has or has had a direct contact with the topic you want to communicate about. Later I learned that this was what is called the difference between secondary and primary experience, and what Dewey called the contact with raw material. I have noticed more than once that communicating or "transferring" the experience to someone else is easier when the other person has lived through the experience him- or herself too.

Many organized experiences are heavily focused on the auditory and visual senses, one can try to give others who have not been present an impression by showing footage in the form of images, film and/or sound. However, as I said, the sensory level of experience can be risky in terms of the desired decommoditization and competitive advantage, if everyone is doing the same thing. Especially in the event-business organizations are thus exploring ever bigger and more extravagant means to wow their visitors, but usually still focused on the auditory and visual senses. Examples are impressive lasershows, fireworks, complete theatrical performances during events, and related to sound a covenant between some event-organizers and venues in the Netherlands has recently been signed to limit the level of sound on their events because the wowing level of sound could lead to serious eardamage for the visitors[20]. These extreme levels of sensory input cannot be communicated via mere images and film, let alone by mere words. You have to have been there to understand what has happened. It may very well be that sharing this primary experience with whom was there creates a bond between people, since they are the only ones who know what it was like.

[20] http://www.geluidnieuws.nl/2011/juni2011/muz.html

Vicarious experience

When I became interested in vicarious experiences and began to search for manifestations of online experiences, I noticed that many of these revolved around experiences that people were living through or had lived through which are hard to explain to someone who hasn't lived through them. Usually these were very impactful or even life-changing experiences like birth, death, travel, relational issues, health-related issues and the like. On a forum for people who were quitting smoking people who had given up this habit years ago were still active, chatting with their fellow stoppers and supporting the new members. The most impressive example I found was Lieve Engeltjes (Sweet Little Angels) where parents gathered who had to cope with the experience of losing a child. The emotional impact that the stories on this site had on me, together with the question of how the primary experience can be shared with others who have not had the primary experience and for whom it is not possible to have the primary experience anymore, led to my realization that there had to exist something in-between secondary and primary experience, which as I discovered later was called vicarious experience.

A vicarious experience that will be known by most people is the emotional reaction felt when reading a book or watching a movie or hearing a story etc. In literature the focus was strongly on primary and emotional experience but when doing research in this area, you can't help taking the experience perspective everywhere with you, testing whether you recognize the concepts in practice and theory and whether the spectrum of concepts is complete. I found that there were instances in which I felt emotions and/or I learned something and/or I changed, but without what in literature was considered to be primary experience. There seemed to exist some indirect form of experience that takes place via a medium but that leads to emotions and other effects all the same.
One example was some years ago when I won a trip to the Greek island of Crete. The tour-organization offered several excursions to tourists and a friend of mine and I decided to take an excursion to the so-called ´Leper-island´, Spinalonga. Many boats take tourists to this island where they can visit it with a guide. Our guide, who had been studying the origins of the island and the stories about it for decades did not just give the secondary experience of the facts and information about the island, but he made a direct connection between the behaviour of the Greek people in the time that

lepers were banned to this island out of fear of contagion, and our own lives and behaviour in our day and age. According to him, all of us regularly take actions, without knowing all the facts and without taking into account the consequences. He read newspapers of all the countries from which tourists visited the island, and used these to show how in this day and age people who are different are being separated from the others, for example prisoners, psychiatric patients, asylum-seekers, people with a handicap, etc. Because of this connection with many aspects of our own lives, Spinalonga became more than ´just a Greek island with a history´; it became a symbol for how people think and behave. Obviously, it is not possible for someone to visit the island in the time of the leper-colony, but by telling stories instead of mere facts and by making the connection with the present lives of the visitors through their national newspapers, something happened which was not primary experience, but I felt very hesitant to call it secondary either. However, like I said: in the literature I hadn't found any reference to something between secondary and primary experience so I was quite curious what I was missing.

A third indicator that there had to exist something between secondary and primary experience was when there were massive emotional reactions to situations, like when a Dutch politician was murdered and when the terrorist attack on 9/11 happened. This evoked strong emotions in people who hadn't been present in both cases. Reflections on situations like these led to the recognition that there had to be an intermediate form of experience placed between primary and secondary experience in my spectrum. Telling others about one's primary experience, simulating an experience, playing with a model of an experience, these were examples that I started to see all around me. The awareness of the existence of this type of experience resulted in an awareness of the vast increase in this type of experience in practice. Because of technological developments, which can lead to more immersive and simulated experiences, and because of the increasing amount of encounters between people and media of all sorts, there are more and more vicarious experiences and developments intended to improve the almost primary nature of these vicarious experiences. 3D movies, gaming, virtual reality, augmented reality, presencing, there are many developments based on technology. But also without technology there are many developments in how people make an effort to approximate the primary experience. Storytelling for example can help in communicating what would

otherwise be secondary experience, because a good story can give people the illusion they vicariously live through an experience.

Emotions

Being in touch with the raw material in a direct way, like when having a primary experience, or in an indirect way, by having a vicarious experience, does by no means mean that the emotions experienced will be the same for everyone. People can react in a completely different way to the same sensory stimuli. Everyone will recall some situation in which he or she was very positive about a dish, a movie, a song, a person or something else, while someone else felt very negative about the same thing. Regarding the research process alone, there have been many ups and downs. Ups when a hunch proved to result in a valuable insight in some aspect of the study, or when months and sometimes years of puzzling ended in a desired answer. Downs when my late cat decided to make a playground out of my hundreds of carefully ordered quotes from interviews, or when a theory I had been very enthusiastic about and on which I had written tens of pages, proved to be a mere distraction from the point I wanted to make. There were also moments in which ups and downs were almost intermingled, for example the moment I first heard about Martin Jay's book: Songs of Experience. The fear that he had done what I had been working on for years and the relieve when I read in his introduction that he had done something related but at the same time completely different (and useful!) are emotions I can vividly recall to this date. There was also the moment I found out about the English translation of Gerhard Schulze's book 'Die Erlebnisgesellschaft.' Since this book contains 765 pages in German I was elated when I read all the references made to the translation: 'The experience society'. I was a bit surprised to find out it had been published in 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2007, but nevertheless: if so many people referred to this translation, I had to have it. After 2 years of searching I finally sent an e-mail to Campus Verlag and Sage, the publishers that were usually referred to, only to hear back from both that neither had ever translated this book in English, nor were there plans to translate it in the near future…

Reflecting on the process, it may seem logical that I only remember the intense emotions vividly but this has some implications for studying experiences. The

memorability that is often indicated in experience economy literature as the goal of offering experiences is mainly related to strong emotions in my opinion. However, in the same way that a focus on intense sensory impressions leads to a need for providing more, bigger and more intense sensory stimuli, a need for strong emotions also leads to a need for bigger and more intense emotional impact. The difficulty lies in the fact that emotions cannot be predicted. People may feel completely different about different things at different times and organizations can never know exactly how one will feel about something in a specific moment in time so how can they know what to do to provoke certain emotions? One of the theories that has left a lasting impression on me was the theory of Kraut, on happiness, discussed in chapter 4. His insight that for being truly happy we need to have two needs fulfilled, the 1rst and 2nd order needs, has changed my perspective on many things. It is not enough to think things are going alright because you can be misled and it's not enough if things are alright because if you think they're not you can still feel miserable. Because of this understanding I notice how often we create problems where there are none, for example students who stressed themselves out about an exam while they didn't even know their grade yet, and how often we try to make problems go away by not looking for how things really are, for example people who feel under the weather but refuse to go to the doctor's to get a check-up.

The illusion of control

This again shows that aiming for (more intense) emotions that are memorable is a risky business. It pertains to the logic of control I have criticized during this whole study. It indicates an illusion that emotions can be controlled, produced or evoked by one party in another party. My idea is that the traditional way of thinking, in which organizations were seen as, and felt like, they were in control of and responsible for providing added value, in the experience economy they have to get used to the fact that there is shared control over added value. It is not just the organization that adds value but there is a big role for the individuals themselves too. It is not like the slogan of a Dutch florist says: "You don't just give a bouquet, you give a feeling"[21]. Feelings and emotions are not simply given, they are had by individuals. Again this is an issue

[21] see http://www.bouquetsofemotions.nl/

of the illusion of control. Emotions are not just provoked by what happens between the fences or between the entrance and the checkout, they are influenced by all sorts of things. A book that has made the immensity and depth of this change in perspectives very clear for me was 'The Support Economy' of Zuboff and Maxmin. In this book the authors explain at length that we are dealing with the need for a different logic in business, to be able to truly focus on the individual and not just fake it. I still consider this book as an essential source for understanding what needs to happen if organizations sincerely want to become part of the experience economy as I have interpreted it.

Another point related to emotions is that for learning there is always emotion required, how big or small it may be. For a trajectory like a PhD or an educational experience like the ones discussed during the interviews strong emotions are needed to stay motivated the whole time. I often wondered in contact with other researchers how people, who appeared quite disconnected from their topic of study and who seemed to have a more rationalistic motivation, were able to stay motivated for all those years. For me emotions like the annoyance about the constant misuse and abuse of the term experience and the inflation of the term because of this have been a great motivating factor, rather than the intention to get a degree.

The active individual

The question remains whether it is wise for an organization to focus solely on hedonic effects. Besides the issue of people getting used to more and more intense stimuli and emotions and the resulting need for providing ever more, it also reminds of Nozick's experience machine. The hypothesis behind this thought experiment was that people don't just want fun. For me one of the reasons for starting to study experience was that I felt that the term experience was only seen in its 'fun', 'show', 'hedonic' manifestation. In Dutch there are three translations for the term experience, beleving, belevenis and ervaring, and I felt that the focus of scholars of the experience economy was more on beleving and belevenis than on ervaring. The hedonic connotations that were given to beleving and belevenis stood in strong contrast with more ervaring-like theories I was already working with, like the theory about Flow experiences.

Where in most other experience literature the individual was seen as a passive consumer who went somewhere to consume and have fun, theories like Flow are built on an idea of an active individual who is not merely being entertained but is enjoying himself in an active way. Later on the realization that experiences are not just about passive consumers but also about active individuals became clearer because of all the developments on the internet where individuals became more active contributors and creators than passive recipients of whatever organizations decided to put online, but also because of theories like co-creation and the philosophy of Arnold Cornelis. Cornelis states that we are in the midst of a change from a social ruling system, in which we should all follow the same rules and silently accept whatever we are given, to a communicative self-directing system, in which we have to make choices for what we want, where we want to go and what we want to do. I felt that the focus on hedonic effects was a very limited perspective on the effects that could result from an experience, if experience was viewed from a self-directing individual's perspective.

Lose the experience

But also some other people seemed to react quite negatively to the sole hedonic connotation that started to get attached to the term experience, especially in 'serious' organizations like the health sector and educational institutions. Patient experience was interpreted by these persons as 'funnifying' the curing and caring process and environment and improving the student experience was interpreted as making sure the student would first of all have fun at school or university. These professionals thought that experience would interfere with what their primary activity was. Neither being cured and cared for nor being educated can or should always be fun according to these persons. By having a restricted perspective on what experience entails these misunderstandings can happen. This is why completing the experience economy discourse is so important, to understand what discourse is being used in which context at which moment. In a Luna park a different discourse may be suited than in a bank.

Because of these negative reactions on the hedonic connotations of the term experience, more than once I have been advised to seriously think of renaming what I was doing and letting the term experience fall. But as I explained in the preface I felt more for explaining that these issues had to do with a discursive problem and with the

fact that experience can have many connotations, of which some had become dominant. I did not intend to rename something that had existed for centuries just because it had become synonymous with entertainment, fun and marketing during the last decade. Experience in its full meaning could be active or passive, could be pleasurable or painful, could be superficial or deep, and in the discourse on the experience economy I felt that all of these aspects should have their place.

Negative can be positive

This is why I also gave attention to 'negative' experiences. The bias towards positive hedonic effects like pleasure and fun in literature was understandable: what organization in its right mind would want to provide negative or painful experiences to their customers? However, this bias may not be as logical as it seems. Negative experiences may lead to more learning than positive ones. When coping with the negative feedback that negative experiences give us, one has to learn new ways of dealing with situations. In the short term the experience may seem negative but in its effects it might work out as very positive. Examples of this abound in practice, one just has to think of quitting smoking, going through therapy or learning something in general. It can even be fun to meet challenges as described in the theory on flow experiences.

The theory of Vasilyuk showed that challenges, obstacles and problems can be overcome in different ways, by having different types of experiences. If you know what the problem is and you know how to solve it, just solve it. If there are many things you could do to solve the problem, just choose one and solve it. The situation becomes interesting when you don't know exactly what the problem is and what you should do. This situation requires creativity and by inventing new ways to deal with new situations one can innovations. But first one has to get an understanding of the situation at hand.

Obviously I'm not objective but I love the designerly way of dealing with this type of situations in the EMIM-program because it is so closely connected to my way of seeing experience. A well-known example we use to explain how designers try to find out in what kind of situation they find themselves is based on the way of working of

IDEO, an international design company. When they took on an assignment to improve the patient satisfaction of an American hospital, they did not just read reports and do market research but they had one of the members of the team tape a video camera to his head and had him admitted in the hospital on a gurney to find out what the experience of a patient actually was[22]. Another great example is a Dutch TV-program called 'Terug op de Werkvloer'[23] (Dutch for 'Back on the Workfloor'). In this program CEOs work together with their employees for a week, cleaning bathrooms, serving dinner, making housecalls etc, to discover how things are really working. These are examples of how one can really make an effort to understand the situation or problem at hand and understand people living the experience. When watching some episodes of Terug op de Werkvloer you can see that it is not always fun for the CEO to fulfill those other tasks. First of all because often it implies manual work but second because the experience often makes clear how many illogical decisions and choices have been made at the op of the organization which have completely undesirable consequences for the employees and/or the organization in general. However, the insights that the CEOs gain from this experience are often very valuable according to themselves. Years after making the initial series the program-makers revisited the organizations for a sequel called 'Terug op de Werkvloer – Hoe staat het ervoor?' (Back on the Workfloor – How are we doing?) to see whether the experience had really had a positive effect.

Operationalization of Erlebnissen

What has surprised me is that since a couple of years there has been more and more discussion on the importance of meaning, sense making and personal development and the like but that these things have not been operationalized or made explicit yet. The focus on senses and emotions has had great results in terms of measuring techniques and methods like for example PrEmo, which was discussed in chapter 3, and all sorts of neurological measurements, but the deeper effects have yet to be discovered. Attention for happiness is growing though, amongst others in the field of

[22] For the story about this study by IDEO's founder Tim Brown see http://mitworld.mit.edu/video/357/
[23] http://tvblik.nl/terug-op-de-werkvloer

positive psychology, but generally the operationalization and evaluation of effects is still very Erlebnis-focused.

But if people are able to connect what has happened to their own knowledge and framework of reference, they can connect the Erlebnis in terms of meaning to the context of their life. The Erlebnis can become meaningful in its own context or it can become meaningful well beyond its original context. To give an example from my own context: in theory I could have done nothing with my feelings of frustration about the, in my opinion, superficial use of the term experience and my curiosity about what experience is. In time these emotions might have passed. Instead I decided to look into the subject, which resulted in doing a PhD on it, causing it to influence and colour about everything I do. Especially this last step often misses in the area of experience economy. If there is any focus on meaning at all, then it is still usually meaning within one context. The best party ever, the most impressive performance of all time, the most delightful dinner experience you will ever have, the most unique, great, wonderful, fantastic… etc.

But these are still temporary effects. After all, a dinner experience is the most delightful dinner experience only until a new dinner experience becomes the most delightful dinner experience. The temporary nature of effects may sound attractive because the effects seem easier to measure. In fact one can see this focus everyweher in practice: traditional education is often still focused on surface learning, at conference venues the communication often takes place more in terms of a distribution of information rather than as a conversation or dialogue and advertising is still mainly focused on sending and broadcasting. However, in all these areas, in which it is the goal of the organization to get a message across, asking people what they have learned immediately after the Erlebnis ends, cannot result in something different than mere surface learning answers. Because of the vast openness of the deep learning effects, it is still very difficult to evaluate these and to determine when to evaluate these. Perhaps this again has to do with the control focus. In those deeper levels the individual's role is much more pronounced and measurements are much less standardized and objective. Deeper effects like deep learning etc are just more complex and harder to evaluate because they are also very dependent on the person.

Richer research

Fortunately attention for more qualitative and rich research methods is growing in organizations but there also seems to be a movement within business education. When I started this research I only had experience and knowledge of the research methods I was taught during my studies. Most of these were quite positivistic, with the exception of case research. When searching for an appropriate strategy and method for answering my research questions I had to check off strategy after strategy, method after method, because none of these seemed in line with the phenomenon I wanted to study: the nature of free choice learning experiences from the perspective of the individuals who had experienced these themselves. It took me a very long time and many discussions with other researchers to get a grip on the whole interpretivistic branch of research that had been seriously neglected during my studies. Fortunately I have been given the opportunity to teach in many courses that I had followed when I was a student and I am delighted to see that these more human-centred strategies and methods are coming to the fore more and more in different disciplines.

An experience perspective

In terms of surface and deep learning one thing that surprised me was to see how working on such a big project for such a long time has such an immense effect on one's way of thinking and seeing. My whole frame of reference has transformed into an experience-perspective, something that permeates almost everything I see and do. Of course I now also know about many surface definitions and models and cases and examples but are those the effects that have made the largest impression in themselves? I think not. The fact that I can combine these, and connect them with concepts and situations that may seem unrelated to the experience economy is what has the most value for me, as a person and as a professional. Insights like the ones described above related to flow experience, the experiences as Vasilyuk describes them and the definition of happiness, are not just theoretical concepts that are useful for my research but have also influenced how I look at situations. But also the knowledge of the difference between surface and deep learning has taught me a great deal about how to go about teaching courses and how to coordinate the EMIM-program. The

(un-) desirability of a completely hedonic existence and the potential of vicarious experiences became clear from movies like The Matrix, Minority Report, Abre los Ojos, The Game and Eternal Sunshine of the spotless mind.

Experiential learning

But also the theories on experience and learning made me ponder over some issues. Although I love to teach in courses at higher education institutions and universities, this is still just one type of teaching. Especially when I started with pilates and Zumba I noticed how different styles of teaching are appropriate for different goals. I can tell someone about how a theory works, I can show what a definition is but I can't teach someone certain social skills and other more personal things. The same thing goes for certain sports: you can tell people what to do, people can follow an instructor, but there still is a large component of having to experience what a certain movement feels like or should feel like that just has to be discovered. The same thing struck me when at a conference a master chef told about all the flavors in a dish she prepared for us. There were plain oysters and after each bite she added something to the oyster which was supposed to change the whole flavor. This was yet another situation that still baffles me: how can you teach someone how to taste? Teaching secondary experience is easy I would say, but as soon as you try to teach something that has to do with sensory impressions the difficulty begins. Also because you can never ascertain that someone else senses the same thing as you do. Perhaps it is more simple for distant senses like hearing and seeing, but for smelling, feeling and tasting, and of course for the deeper effects I have focused on in this research, the situation is still unclear to me. Perhaps it has to do with what is explained by the SEC framework. In terms of the SEC framework one can say that learning to smell, feel or taste is mainly characterized by experience characteristics and deep learning has mainly credence characteristics. One can never exactly know what to expect upfront from the experience. There are of course some search characteristics one can search information on but in the case of these types of learning search characteristics are not the ones that characterize the experience. The aspects that have defined the experience are in fact experience and credence characteristics: aspects that you have to live through to know whether they are useful, pleasurable or whatever, or of which

even after the experience has ended one doesn't know what the exact use, value or meaning was.

Progressive insights

Also for an explorative study like mine it was hard, not to say impossible, to form expectations upfront and to state what the results of the research would be. In fact, there have been many occasions in which a book just fell off a shelf in the bookstore that contained the perfect theory of model to solve some issue I was working on. Or cases in which I was searching for article A and because of some typo I found something different and even more useful that article A turned out to be. Or moments in which I had completely lost track of what I was doing and just painted some overview of my research on a canvas, only to discover that the encounter-centred approach, which I had tried to connect to the environment- and effect-centred approach for years and years to no avail, suddenly was connected on the canvas. I can hardly believe that I am the only one whose research was made up of moments like these, fortunate incidents and coincidences, but still most of the research methodology students learn about act as of the world is orderly. This may be the case if you are researching rocks or other inanimate objects, but people are messy and I have to say I prefer the surprises that this way of working has brought me. And as I said: fortunately there is more and more attention for the more messy, interpretivistic methods. There is also a growing market of organizations that are specialized in helping people to express deeper meanings. Usually other media are used by them than mere words and numbers. There are organizations that help by drawing rich pictures of the situation at hand and others who use Lego building blocks to help people with expressing what they mean. Also in the executive master we have implemented some exercises for expressing meaning in different ways. Especially in this information-dense society it is important to be aware of the different ways, shapes and forms in which information can be communicated. With all the developments in technology and digital communication the amount of new sources from which information can be gathered is growing exponentially.

Experience in education

This brings me to what I believe has always been the subconscious motivation for doing this research that I have only become aware of after years. I strongly believe that the present educational system is not intended for everyone. I remember a workshop a long time ago when a lady showed a picture of some coins, structured in some pattern. She asked the audience to try to move 3 coins, so that some other pattern would come about. I don't remember exactly what the goal was but I remember the explanation the lady give for the exercise afterwards: you could distinguish three groups of people. One group stared at the picture or in the air or someone else, trying to think how to solve the problem. Others took out their wallet, laid down some coins and started to shift them around to solve the problem. The third group started to talk to their neighbors to try to solve the problem together. This explanation was very much in line with all the theories on different kinds of intelligence and our strong focus in the Western world on only one or some of these, to the detriment of the others. In 2006, in one of his TED presentations Sir Ken Robinson gave his opinion on this issue: "The whole system of public education around the world is a protracted process of university entrance," and in fact the system is very much dominated by mere cognitive thought. I strongly believe that this causes a huge waste of resources, as other, non-cognitive talents, are not recognized. I have always been lucky to fit in the system but have always been surprised about what I see as a dishonest system. It's people with degrees who get the status in society, while there are many other talents that go completely ignored. But especially with the great need for creativity we should try to discover the talents of people and develop them, not ignore them. And to think that the experience discourse had been limited to a discourse about events with a beginning and an end, about fun and Disney-like spectacles and about one value: money. I would like to see experience as the basis of more attention for Erfahrung, for meaningful effects and for other values that individuals can invest beyond money.

It is about giving people the opportunity to express themselves in what they do and invest their resources. Although attention is growing for the investment of resources by individuals, I really think that it is time to operationalize this issue further. There are now so many examples of co-creation and-design, crowdsourcing and -funding,

user generated content and innovation and of course the investments people make in social media, that it is nothing but short-sighted to stick with the traditional view that money is everything that counts, that hedonic effects are the effects people look for and that we need to focus on the senses and emotions of people. I hope that my work in this dissertation has helped in this respect.

This dissertation ends here, but the experience will hopefully continue. This is also why I have said that my goal was to construct a foundation, something for others and for me to continue building on. To make the finite Erlebnis of writing and of reading this book into an Erfahrung, for the love of experience.