



# Customer experiences of resource integration

Reframing servicescapes using scripts and practices

Jörg Pareigis

Faculty of Economic Sciences, Communication and IT

Business Administration

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*Für meine Eltern.*



## **Abstract**

It is widely acknowledged that value can be regarded as interactively formed by customers through the integration of a variety of resources. However, it is difficult to find service research that takes these concepts seriously in empirical studies. Consequently, the aim of this thesis is to present an empirically grounded understanding of how customer resource integration takes place in practice and how customers experience their resource integration. By collecting data of public transport customers through qualitative diaries, interviews, and video recordings of situated action in addition to a survey, the thesis draws on script and practice theory.

The main contribution of the thesis is an empirically grounded model of customer experience of resource integration, which can be summarized in six propositions: (a) customers can acquire four different types of scripts: generic, incongruent, rigid, or transformative; (b) the script types are implicit parts of interactive value practices, which emerge as navigating and ticketing in the empirical context of public transport; (c) the interactive value practices are constellations of the resource integration activities of identifying, sense-making, and using, which customers focus on to varying extents, depending on their acquired script; (d) during or after interactive value formation customers potentially update their scripts; (e) customer processes, other customers, the physical environment, contact personnel, provider processes, and the wider environment all form the context of the service, but can also be resources that the customer integrates; and (f) the customer experience is a holistic evaluation of the interactive value formation and can be understood as consisting of three dimensions: a cognitive evaluation and two affective evaluations, positive activation and positive deactivation. As such, I reframe the notion of the servicescape in order for it to be more attuned to the perspective of interactive value formation and resource integration.

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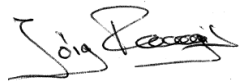
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Karlstad, August 2012,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jörgen Persson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.



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# 1 Introduction

Customer evaluations of services have been conceptualized in different ways in the marketing, retailing, and service management literature. Prominent concepts include customer satisfaction (Oliver, 2010), perceived service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988), and perceived value (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). A concept that currently has the particular attention of practitioners, as well as academics, is customer experience or the similar concept of service experience<sup>1</sup> (Johnston and Kong, 2011). Customer experience broadens the view of what and how customers evaluate, for example, including factors that are not controlled by companies (Verhoef et al., 2009), and is defined as “the customer’s cognitive, emotional and behavioral response to any direct or indirect contact with a company” (Edvardsson et al., 2005a; Meyer and Schwager, 2007). Along with this concept, forms of interaction and concrete aspects of involvement are addressed as important issues in analytical work (Gentile et al., 2007). However, it is difficult to find service research that takes these concepts seriously.

The interactional character of services is not new to service research. Within this stream of research, services have often been described as activities, interactions, and solutions to customer problems (Edvardsson et al., 2005b); or as deeds, processes, and performances (Lovelock, 1991). However, empirical studies that focus on the interactional and process character of services are scarce. Instead, the majority of studies provide static snapshots due to epistemological and methodological points of departure (Tronvoll et al., 2011). Empirical studies that address interactions focus, to a large extent, on the interactions between the customer and front line employees (e.g. Schau et al., 2007; Åkesson, 2011). Yet, they do exclude environmental issues such as the wide array of resources that are provided by the service provider and other resources that the customer might interact with. These limitations are taken as a point of departure in this thesis.

On a practical level, in times of competitive pressure with an emphasis on rationalization and effectiveness, staff is increasingly being replaced by self-service technologies; a trend that is to be expected to continue into the future

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<sup>1</sup> The terms customer and service experience will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis and express the same notion.

(Meuter et al., 2005). There are even services such as amusement parks, 24/7 fitness centers, or automatic car washes, in which the main dyadic interaction is between the customer and the built environment instead of front line employees. This is also the case in public transport (Felleson and Friman, 2008). In these settings, customers engage in a self-service process and apply skills and knowledge in order to create value (Grönroos, 2011). Service-dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2008), which is an often referred to unifying perspective about the nature of marketing, argues this in a similar way. According to this view, customers “co-create value through the integration of firm-provided resources with other private and public resources” (Vargo et al., 2008, p. 148); and these resources can be distinguished as either operant or operand. Operant resources include skills, knowledge, competences, and values, whereas operand resources are material resources that are “acted upon” by operant resources to produce effects (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Resource integration is then “the process by which customers deploy [...] resources as they undertake bundles of activities that create value directly or that will facilitate subsequent consumption/use from which they derive value” (Hibbert et al., 2012, p. 248). This perspective has also been termed interactive value formation (Echeverri and Skålén, 2011); a term that I will use throughout the thesis for reasons to be explained in the next chapter.

How the built environment, the servicescape, affects customers and employees is to date explained in the marketing and service management literature by the servicescape model (Bitner, 1992). The model describes how three environmental dimensions – ambient conditions; space/function; and signs, symbols and artifacts – create a holistically perceived servicescape. Moderated by internal factors, such as personality traits, goals or mood states, customers respond cognitively, emotionally, or physiologically to the servicescape, which results in approach or avoidance behavior. A multitude of empirical studies that are based on the servicescape model have been conducted. They investigate the impact of one or several variables, such as music, scent or signage on, for example, customer expenditures (Chébat and Michon, 2003; Morrin and Chébat, 2005), perceived waiting time (Bailey and Areni, 2006), perceived quality (Reimer and Kuehn, 2005), or loyalty intentions (Harris and Ezech, 2008). These empirical studies have been compiled in several literature reviews (Ezech and Harris, 2007; Mari and Poggese, 2011; Turley and Milliman, 2000).

However, the servicescape model conceptualizes the *impact on* customers rather than the *interaction between* customer and the servicescape; or how customers integrate different resources within them. The customer is regarded as a passive element in the model, which has even recently been described as and acknowledged to be an important managerial tool for marketing purposes (Vilnai-Yavetz and Gilboa, 2010) – a language and a view of the customer that is not at all in line with today’s ever present S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2008).

To conclude, the majority of studies on customer experience as well as resource integration are of a conceptual nature (Arnould, 2008; Hibbert et al., 2012; Johnston and Kong, 2011; Puccinelli et al., 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009). The few empirical studies related to resource integration have shown that customers draw on resources of other customers in situations where they lack personal resources themselves (Harris and Baron, 2004) and researchers have categorized resources that customers integrate (Baron and Warnaby, 2011). As a result, we do not know how customers integrate resources and how customers experience their resource integration. Consequently, empirical investigations of the concepts of customer experience and resource integration have been repeatedly called for and have also been established as critical research priorities (Arnould, 2008; Baron and Harris, 2008; Hibbert et al., 2012; Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012; Verhoef et al., 2009).

## **1.1 Research aim**

Following from the above, the aim of this thesis is to present an empirically grounded understanding of how customer resource integration takes place in practice and how customers experience their resource integration. As such, I will reframe the notion of the servicescape in order for it to be more attuned to the perspective of interactive value formation.

## **1.2 Structure of the thesis**

The outline of the thesis is structured according to the following:

Chapter 1 introduces the area under investigation, and identifies the knowledge gap as well as the research aim.

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature in order to provide a background of the thesis as well as the analytical framework. Specifically, earlier research relating to the concepts of value co-creation, customer experience, and servicescape as well as practice theory and script theory, is reviewed.

Chapter 3 describes the research design as well as the methodologies and methods that are used in the different studies, and reflects on the research process.

Chapter 4 summarizes the findings and contributions of the individual studies.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by reconnecting to its aim and presents a model that combines the contributions from the different studies. Moreover, practical implications and suggestions for future research are presented.

## **2 Literature review and analytical framework**

In this section, relevant literature pertaining to the aim of the thesis is reviewed. In particular, I briefly explain the development from the traditional view of value formation towards a more contemporary one and the related concept of customer experience. This is followed by a concise review of research on resource integration and the servicescape literature. Moreover, I present two analytical frameworks that inform the thesis; practice theory, as well as script theory.

### **2.1 From value-in-exchange to value co-creation**

Comprehending how value is formed has occupied numerous marketing scholars. Previous research essentially separates two different types of value formation. The first emphasizes that value is exchanged and deems that it is produced by providers and consumed by customers (Bagozzi, 1975; Hunt, 1976; Kotler, 1972). The second emphasizes that value is co-created during the interaction between provider and the customer (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b; Ramírez, 1999; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The former has also been termed non-interactive value formation and the latter interactive value formation (Echeverri and Skålén, 2011) in order to emphasize the difference in relation to interaction and to connote the possibility that value can also be destroyed in interaction.

In non-interactive value formation, value is considered to be embedded in the offerings that companies produce independently from the customer and is added during the production process. Moreover, value can be objectively measured in monetary terms and is equal to the price that the customer pays for the company offerings. Dixon (1990) argues that this view of value formation can be traced back to writings of Adam Smith and established itself due to the heavy influence of economic theory on early marketing scholars. Vargo and Lusch (2008) describe this view as part of the goods-dominant (G-D) logic in which the customer is perceived as a passive element and in which firms attune their marketing mix for optimal firm performance. Others (e.g. Hadjikhani and Thilenius, 2009) have labeled this view as “marketing management”.

Contrary to this view, interactive value formation considers value to be co-created by customers and providers, instead of embedded in products. Instead of being objectively assessed in monetary terms, value is subjectively evaluated in the social context (Edvardsson et al., 2011) by the provider as well as the customer. The interactive value formation is nothing new and has been a central point since the first publications of the Nordic scholars on service marketing (Grönroos, 1980; Gummesson, 1987). The notion received revived interest through publications relating to S-D logic (Etgar, 2008; Jaworski and Kohli, 2006; Kalaighnam and Varadarajan, 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2008; Vargo et al., 2008). However, the majority of contributions are conceptual, such as the process based framework of Payne et al. (2008). The authors (ibid.) focus mainly on how companies can manage value co-creation, but highlight the importance of understanding the processes, resources and practices of customers. They suggest process mapping (e.g. Patricio et al., 2008) as a technique for understanding customer activities, but emphasizing that emotional and experiential aspects of the customer experience are easily neglected this way.

Recently, a few empirical studies have been conducted that investigate interactive value formation in a variety of settings. Ots (2010) investigated this in a business-to-business context similar to Fyrberg Yngfalk's (2011) study in a multi-actor network. Schau et al. (2009) explore interactive value formation in a practice theory based study of web-based communities. Another practice theory based study that is of particular interest for this thesis is the study by Echeverri and Skälén (2011) in the public transport sector. The authors identify five practices; informing, greeting, delivering, charging, and helping, all of which contain elements of procedures, understandings and engagements of staff and customers. A particular contribution of the study is that the authors empirically demonstrate that value formation does not necessarily have to take a positive course (value co-creation), but might also progress negatively (value co-destruction). This notion had been conceptualized earlier by Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres (2010) and accounts for a more nuanced and critical view of value formation in an otherwise overtly positive stream of literature. However, a central limitation of these studies is owed to its methodological choice. The authors build their arguments to a large extent on interviews that are held with staff of the service provider. Consequently, the authors (Echeverri and Skälén, 2011) call for more observational studies that make it possible to capture

interactions, which is an often required aspect of practice theory studies (Korkman, 2006; Warde, 1996).

While there is some discussion (Grönroos, 2008; 2011) about the specifics of who creates value and who co-creates (the firm or the customer), it is now widely accepted that value formation is an interactive process in which the customer takes an active role. This was also a central point of departure for my thesis, based on my academic interest in service research (Edvardsson, 1997; Grönroos, 1980; Gummesson, 1987) and S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2008). Another important factor is that interactive value formation does not always lead to positive outcomes (Echeverri and Skålén, 2011; Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010) and that research on the subject needs to be sensible to this.

Although the value concept is often left undefined in publications on the topic of interactive value formation (c.f. Eichentopf et al., 2011) there are two definitions that are often referred to. In S-D logic, Vargo and Lusch (2008, p. 7) define value as “idiosyncratic, experiential, contextual, and meaning laden”. Similarly, Holbrook (2006b, p. 212) refers to value as an “interactive relativistic preference experience”. These definitions inform my thesis and imply that value is a function of the interaction between subjects, or a subject and an object; is contextual and personal; is a function of attitudes, affections, satisfaction, or behaviorally based judgments; and resides in an experience. The definitions indicate that value is very closely related to one of the main concepts of my thesis – customer experience. This could even suggest that they are the same; that is, value is an experience. Sandström et al. (2008) elaborate on the connection between value and customer experience and suggest that value is a cognitive assessment of the customer experience. Before taking a position on the relationship between the concepts, I will continue with a more thorough background on the customer experience concept in the next section.

## **2.2 Customer experience**

The concept of customer experience has its origin in the seminal article of Hirschman and Holbrook (1982). The authors demonstrate that customers are not only rational decision makers, but also engage with products or services emotionally and give subjective meaning to them. As with the concept of value, only few researchers define customer experience (Helkkula, 2011; Johnston and



Kong, 2011) seemingly assuming a common meaning of the term (Padgett and Allen, 1997). Johns (1999) describes the service experience as the customer's view of the service. The broadest definitions are presented by Oliver and Westbrook (1993, p. 12) and Meyer and Schwager (2007, p. 118) who define it as the "subjective consciousness of consumers as they interact with goods and services", and "the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company", respectively. The subjectivity of the notion is shared by Schmitt (1999b, p. 60) and Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 98) who describe experiences as "private events that occur in response to some stimulation" and "inherently personal". By referring to Hirschmann and Holbrook (1982), Oliver and Westbrook (1993, p. 12) describe the consumption experience to not only include cognitive responses to product usage, "but also the perception of sensory, emotive, imaginal, and aesthetic responses". The extension to multilevel responses of the customer, especially the inclusion of emotions, can be regarded as the common denominator in the literature (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994; Edvardsson, 2005; Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Robinette, 2000). Moreover, experiences can emerge directly, indirectly and virtually, but always stem conceptually from the interaction between an object or an environment and an individual (Li et al., 2001).

For the period of 1998 to 2000, the Marketing Science Institute declared "Understanding Customer Experience" as one of their priority topics, with subcategories such as "Understanding value from a customer perspective" and "Understanding the consumer experience from multidisciplinary perspectives" (Holbrook, 2000; Wensley, 2000). Consequently, it is not very surprising that around the millennium shift plenty of articles have been published with related topics. However, the majority of these studies are of a conceptual nature, the empirical base is in the form of anecdotal data (Berry et al., 2002; Carbone, 1998; Haeckel et al., 2003; Morgan and Rao, 2003; Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999a; 1999b; Schmitt, 2003), and they have been described as self-help guides for senior management (Holbrook, 2006a). As within the literature on value formation, the research on customer experience is overtly positive, often suggesting that companies should offer "extraordinary" experiences that are memorable and surprising (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999b). A more nuanced view is presented by Carù and Cova (2003) who convincingly show that experiences range between the ordinary and the extraordinary and that the concept cannot only be used for experiential offerings but can also be used for functional services or non-market facing offerings.

In fact, the experience concept has been applied in different contexts and in different stages of the customer life cycle. For example, Echeverri (2005) examines the customer experience of public transport users and focuses on interactional aspects and the customer process in the servicescape. The author uses the experience concept in line with Carù and Cova (2003) and clearly demonstrates that the servicescape can contribute to negative customer experiences. O'Loughlin et al. (2004) conceptualize the customer experience in the financial services as three different levels, namely the brand experience, the transactional experience, and the relationship experience. Due to the ongoing depersonalization and automation in that particular industry, the authors question the appropriateness of the relationship marketing approach and suggest the notion of experience as more suitable. Verhoef et al. (2009) present a conceptual model of customer experience for retailing and call for more empirical research on the topic. The authors highlight the need for an investigation into the role of self-service technologies for customer experiences.

A measurement tool for customer experience has been discussed and called for quite some time (Gentile et al., 2007; Palmer, 2010; Verhoef et al., 2009). For the brand experience concept a measurement tool has already been developed (Brakus et al., 2009) and validated (Iglesias et al., 2011). However, the brand concept does not seem to be applicable in the current context. The fundamental purpose of brands is differentiation and they usually operate in a market environment where differentiation is crucially important (Wood, 2000). Also for another experience concept, the online experience (Novak et al., 2000), an instrument has been proposed. However, the authors actually measure flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990) and not a separate online customer experience concept. Recently, the first measurement instrument for service experience (EXQ) has been published (Klaus and Maklan, 2012). The scale was developed in the context of mortgage retail banking. However, in that context the interaction between employee and customer is of central focus rather than the integration of operand resources, as represented by many items on the scale. Moreover, similar to measures on perceived service quality or customer satisfaction, the EXQ measure evaluates characteristics of the offering, rather than the actual customer experience on a comprehensive or overall level.

Re-connecting with the value concept, Arnould (2007) argues that customer experience is the outcome of the value formation process. This is also

suggested by Palmer (2010) and is correspondingly my view on how the two concepts relate.

### **2.3 Resource integration**

As stated earlier, it has been argued that customers “co-create value through the integration of firm-provided resources with other private and public resources” (Vargo et al., 2008, p. 148), which can be distinguished as either operant or operand. Operant resources include skills, knowledge, competences, and values, whereas operand resources are material resources that are “acted upon” by operant resources to produce effects (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Resource integration is then “the process by which customers deploy [...] resources as they undertake bundles of activities that create value directly or that will facilitate subsequent consumption/use from which they derive value” (Hibbert et al., 2012, p. 2). In their conceptual study, Arnould et al. (2006) categorize resources in a more detailed manner. They distinguish between customers’ social (relationships and community access), cultural (knowledge, skills, imagination, experience), and physical (energy, emotions, strength) operant resources and economic operand resources, including material objects and physical spaces. Contrary to the resource based view (Wernerfelt, 1984) or resource-advantage theory (Hunt and Morgan, 1995; Hunt, 2000), which are both firm centric, the focus of resource integration in interactive value formation rests on the customer and his or her resource integration activities (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012).

Resource integration highlights the active role of customers, which is a central issue in service research. Customer participation, that is, the “actions and resources supplied by customers for service production and/or delivery” (Risch Rodie and Schultz Kleine, 2000, p. 111), has been acknowledged since the first publications on service organizations (Lovelock and Young, 1979; Mills and Moberg, 1982). The few empirical studies have focused mainly on the effect of customer participation on service quality (Dabholkar, 1996), satisfaction (Cermak et al., 1994), and repurchase intention (Kelley et al., 1992). Other empirical studies have shown that customers draw on resources of other customers in situations where they lack personal resources themselves (Harris and Baron, 2004) and have categorized resources that customers integrate (Baron and Warnaby, 2011). Resource integration emphasizes not only the active role of customers, but also their knowledge and skills (Hibbert et al.,

2012) in order to successfully deploy these. However, empirical studies have been sparse (Risch Rodie and Schultz Kleine, 2000) especially on understanding how resource integration takes place in practice. An exception is the practice theoretical study of McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012) in a health care setting, which is of particular interest for the analysis here. The authors identify eight value co-creating activities, which constitute five value co-creating practice styles, namely, team management, insular controlling, partnering, pragmatic adapting, and passive compliance. These are then placed in a 2x2 framework according to high or low levels of activities and interactions. Activities were defined as cognitive or behavioral performances or doings, whereas interactions refer to the ways that customers engage with others in their network in order to integrate resources. Although the study draws on extensive interview data, a similar limitation as in Echeverri and Skálén (2011) applies. Regardless of the authors making observations in the clinic, co-creating activities were derived from the analyses of the interview data.

The lack of empirical studies resonates in the numerous calls for such research (Arnould, 2008; Baron and Harris, 2008; Baron and Warnaby, 2011; Hibbert et al., 2012; Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012); in particular those that focus on service settings that are not typified by interactions between customers and staff (Echeverri and Skálén, 2011), such as public transportation. In these settings, customers interact foremost with the built environment, which is better known in service research as servicescape (Bitner, 1992). However, I regard servicescapes here as bundles of resources, which the customer can potentially integrate and in which interactive value formation takes place. In the next section I will briefly review the literature on servicescape research.

## **2.4 Servicescape**

Almost 40 years ago, Kotler (1974) highlighted the importance of atmospherics as an important tool in marketing. Atmospherics was presented as the deliberate design of space in order to influence buyers' emotion to increase the likelihood of a purchase. This is achieved through the design of four sensory dimensions, being sight, sound, scent, and touch. It is highlighted that a division between intended and perceived atmosphere exists. Bitner (1992) provided the new term and conceptual framework servicescape. The framework describes how the physical environment affects employees as well as customers

of service providers. Configurations of three different environmental dimensions – ambient condition (e.g. temperature, music), spatial layout and functionality (e.g. layout, furnishings), and signs, symbols and artifacts (signage, style of decor) – are postulated to create a holistically perceived servicescape that activates internal cognitive, emotional and physiological responses within customers and employees. These are moderated by personality traits and situational factors. The internal responses affect subsequent behavior of the actors in terms of approach (affiliation, exploration, staying longer) or avoidance (opposite of approach) and the social interactions between the actors.

A limitation of the two models can be argued to be the focus on the physical environment (Edvardsson et al., 2005a; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011) and the exclusion of social elements, which can affect the service experience for the better or worse (Grove and Fisk, 1997). To this end, Tombs and McColl-Kennedy (2003) developed a social-servicescape model, which accounts for this theoretical gap. Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011) provide an extended servicescape model, which also includes (in addition to the social dimension) a socially-symbolic and natural dimension. All models build on the stimulus-organism-behavior concept that stems from environmental psychology (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). In this concept, the customer is regarded as a passive element, which is affected by the environment. This passive view of the customer received criticism (Aubert-Gamet, 1997) and is not in line with interactive value formation (Edvardsson et al., 2010; Grönroos and Ravald, 2011; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004a; Ramírez, 1999; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2008). Bonnin (2006) suggests the concept of appropriation in order to increase our understanding of the service environment and calls for further research, especially to gain more knowledge about the interaction process between service environment and service experience. Another extension of the servicescape model is suggested by Edvardsson et al. (2005a; 2010). The authors develop the notion of the experience room – a place allowing simulated service experiences. Six design dimensions, which are in the following referred to as experience room dimensions, are argued to constitute the experience room. These include physical artifacts, intangible artifacts, technology, customer placement, customer involvement, and interactions with employees. The model attempts to account for the active role of customers, which is more aligned to the interactive value formation perspective.

In current marketing literature it is still argued that there is a dearth of empirical investigations concerning the role of the service environment on the service experience, where authors refer to Bitner's observations from 1992 (e.g. Ezeh and Harris, 2007). After decades of research on this topic, this is hardly the case as illustrated by several literature reviews (Ezeh and Harris, 2007; Mari and Poggesi, 2011; Turley and Milliman, 2000). However, there are several limitations in the studies on servicescapes. The majority of the empirical studies stem from similar empirical contexts (the retail or hospitality industries) (Turley and Milliman, 2000). Moreover, the focus rests on the impact on the customer of one or several variables such as music, scent or odor. Additionally and most relevant for my thesis, the dominant view treats servicescapes from an atmospheric perspective (Turley and Fugate, 1992), which focuses on the effect of the servicescape on the customer. As such, servicescapes are regarded as a managerial tool for marketing purposes (Vilnai-Yavetz and Gilboa, 2010), which clearly resembles the marketing management perspective associated with non-interactive value formation. Apart from a few publications, this has remained largely unchallenged and unproblematized in relation to marketing research (Aubert-Gamet, 1997; Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999; Bonnin, 2006). As stated earlier, in contrary to the marketing management perspective, I regard servicescapes as bundles of resources that the customer can potentially integrate and in which interactive value formation takes place.

## **2.5 Analytical frameworks**

Recently, it has been suggested that script theory as well as practice theory are fruitful theoretical frameworks that can help us to understand customer experiences of resource integration activities (Eichentopf et al., 2011). Both of them inform this thesis, in line with these suggestions.

### ***2.5.1 Practice theory***

Practice theory, rather than being a specific theory constructed around a few key propositions, is a broad body of knowledge. According to Reckwitz (2002) it is a type of social theory, in particular a cultural theory, and is outlined by authors such as Bourdieu, Giddens, Taylor, late Foucault and others. Consequently, there is no unified practice theory approach (Schatzki, 2001). However, there is a central focus on the notion of practices, as the key concept in practice theory (Duguid, 2005; Reckwitz, 2002). Action, in this approach, is

only possible and understandable in relation to common and shared practices, which also constitute social order (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2001). It follows that practice theory proclaims a distinct ontology in which the social “is a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings” (Schatzki, 2001, p. 12).

A practice has been described as “background coping skills” (Chia, 2004, p. 32) or, in the context of strategy work, as shared “social, symbolic and material tools through which strategy work is done” (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009, p. 70). According to Warde (2005), practices encompass temporally unfolding and spatially extended linkages of behaviors that include practical activities, performances, and representations of talk. Reckwitz (2002, p. 250) defines practices as “a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood”. Consequently, the practice can be understood both by the agent that carries it out, as well as a potential observer. In line with Echeverri and Skálén (2011) I regard practices as background coping skills that limit as well as enable interactions between provider and customer at the same time. As identified earlier, practice theory has been applied in several marketing studies that focus on interactive value formation (Echeverri and Skálén, 2011; Korkman, 2006; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012; Schau et al., 2009) in different ways. Drawing on Schau et al. (2009), Echeverri and Skálén (2011) conceptualize practices as consisting of configurations of three elements: procedures, understandings, and engagements. When these elements are congruent, value is co-created; when these elements are incongruent value is co-destroyed. McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012) conceptualize practices somewhat differently. Instead of the three elements of practices (procedures, understandings, engagements), the authors argue that practices consist of constellations of value co-creation activities. The authors do not distinguish between co-creation and co-destruction of value.

### ***2.5.2 Script theory***

A related theory that has also been suggested in order to understand phenomena such as interactive value formation is script theory (Bateson, 2002; Eichertopf et al., 2011). A script is a schema held in memory that describes sequences of events or behaviors appropriate for a particular situation (Abelson, 1981; Graesser et al., 1979; Schank, 1975; Schank and Abelson, 1977). Examples of scripts include going to a restaurant, visiting a dentist, or

withdrawing money at a bank or choosing the right bus and buying a train ticket. A script is a cognitive concept – an implicit thought in the minds of customers. Scripts organize knowledge about activities that customers perform during interactive value formation (Eichentopf et al., 2011). Script theory has been advocated for in order to understand behavior in organizations (Gioia and Poole, 1984; Lord and Kernan, 1987), has been applied in studies of service encounters (Schau et al., 2007), and in the analysis of industrial purchasing behavior (Leigh and Rethans, 1983; 1984). Script theory stems from cognitive psychology and a script can be defined as an “elaborate causal chain which provides world knowledge about an often experienced situation” or a “predetermined sequences of actions that define a situation” (Schank, 1975, p. 264). In comparing script theory with practice theory, I draw on Reckwitz (2002, p. 250) who argues that cognitive psychology is the empirical discipline that carries out the culturalist mentalism program; a different version of cultural theory, in which mental structures are the smallest unit of social analysis instead of practices. Later, Reckwitz (2010) relates practice theory to script theory ever closer by presenting scripts as an implicit part of practices.

People benefit from scripts in two ways. They enable understanding of situations and provide guidance for appropriate behavior in those situations. Understanding a situation involves searching one’s memory in order to draw on previous experiences similar to the present situation (Schank and Abelson, 1977). Scripts guide and direct the behavior of customers and are important tools in standardizing customer experiences as well as in managing the expectations of customers (Leidner, 1993). Customers acquire scripts either directly by participating in interactive value formation or indirectly through formal orientation programs, written material provided by the company, such as brochures, webpages, or newsletters, orientation aids in the servicescape, the design of the servicescape itself, observation of other customers, and rules governing customer behavior; e.g., for safety (airlines), dress (restaurant, theaters), noise level (hotels, libraries, theaters) (Claycomb et al., 2001). For interactive value formation to be successful, both customer script and service process must be congruent (Bateson, 2002; Eichentopf et al., 2011).

Leong et al. (1989) present a theoretical framework in order to categorize different types of scripts based on the dimensions of distinctiveness, contingency, and hypotheticality. Distinctiveness refers to how peculiar a script component is to a particular situation. For instance, greeting is common in



most services where a customer meets a service employee (low distinctiveness). However, test-driving a car is fairly distinct to car purchase situations. Contingency refers to how many “if-then” branches it contains. A low-contingency script can be described as relatively flat with few alternative sequences. Hypotheticality refers to the extent of how abstract or concrete a script is held.

### 3 Research design

In the following chapter I will present my ontological and epistemological stance, the research approach, the empirical context as well as the methodology and methods<sup>2</sup> that I used in the thesis.

#### 3.1 A qualitative reflexive article-based approach

Good social science is not determined by the methods used but rather by ontology and epistemology, in which the latter two also influence which kind of research problems a researcher deems as interesting and manageable (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). The first two chapters have already provided some hints about my stance towards the nature of reality and the relationship between the researcher and the known. To be more concrete, I draw on Fournier and Grey (2000) to explain my stance. The authors review and sketch common characteristics of the field of critical management studies and perceive a dedication to ontological denaturalization, the ambition of epistemological reflexivity and a politically anti-performative stance. Denaturalization refers to acknowledging that the way things are, is neither natural nor inevitable, which opens for a pluralistic, multiple-perspectives view (Gioia and Pitre, 1990). Reflexivity involves reflection on ones epistemology and ontology and acknowledging the role of the researcher in the construction of knowledge (Whittle and Spicer, 2008). Anti-performativness refers to the rejection of the principle of performativity which “serves to subordinate knowledge and truth to the production of efficiency” (Fournier and Grey, 2000, p. 17). In the marketing context this can be understood as shifting the focus from advising how marketing should be done to study marketing (Skålén et al., 2008).

The exploratory nature of the research aim, with its focus on understanding experience and how customers integrate resources, suggests an overall qualitative approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). With a qualitative approach I refer to “an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency [...] [and] stress[es] the

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the thesis, methodology is referred to as the choice of suitable cases to study, data gathering methods, and data analysis techniques in the design and execution of a research study. Methods are referred to as specific data gathering techniques, or statistical analysis (Silverman, 2006).

socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationships between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (ibid., p. 8). In particular, the thesis builds on a reflexive methodology as presented by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009). Reflexive methodology shifts the focus from data collection and data processing, to interpretation and reflection; interpretation and reflection not only in relation to the study phenomenon but also to the researcher themselves. The methodology centers on reflexive interpretation mainly around four levels during both the process of research and the production of the final text. The first level refers to rigorous procedures for gathering and processing the empirical data as focused on in qualitative method books (e.g. Miles and Huberman, 1994). The second level refers to the primacy of interpretation; that is, all empirical material – be it interview statements, answers on questionnaires, or observations – includes and is led by an interpreter, the researcher, and is co-created with other interpreters (the informants). As a result, method cannot be decoupled from theory and pre-understanding, and hermeneutics is therefore an important form of reflection. The third level refers to the awareness that social science is a social phenomenon embedded in an ethical and political context. Which research questions are put forward and how they are answered, inevitably support or challenge current social conditions. Consequently, interpretations and theoretical frameworks cannot be neutral, but are part of and help to construct political and ideological conditions. The fourth level concerns the problem of representation and authority. Building on postmodernism, where it is argued that the text is decoupled from any external reality, the claim of the author’s authority and the claim of the text to represent some extrinsic reality are both called into question.

The four levels essentially represent four different intellectual orientations: empirical oriented currents, for instance grounded theory; hermeneutics; critical theory; and postmodernism (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). The idea is not to integrate those four fundamentally incommensurable positions into one framework. Rather, I regard them as a sensitizing heuristic, which shall assist me in reflection along their abstract principles. In particular, reflexive methodology highlights the importance of empirical material, which is often downplayed by the latter three orientations.

However, I do not want to argue that the choice of reflexive methodology was necessarily a conscious one when I started the project five years ago. In fact, the choice was part of the reflective process, towards the end of the project as I built up my interpretive repertoire (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007). Yet, my research process, which I will describe in more detail in chapter 3.3, fits very well with the description of reflexive methodology. I started the project rationally or, in terms of Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009, p. 317) “provisionally rational”. The point of departure was the incompatibility of the interactive value formation as described in S-D logic with the G-D logic approach of research in the servicescape literature. In the words of Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) or Asplund (1970) this could be described as a “breakdown” or “mystery”, which I took on in order to solve. I did so by dividing the research project into several parts; three empirical studies which lead to five research articles. Dividing the research project into several parts is suggested for reflexive research by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009).

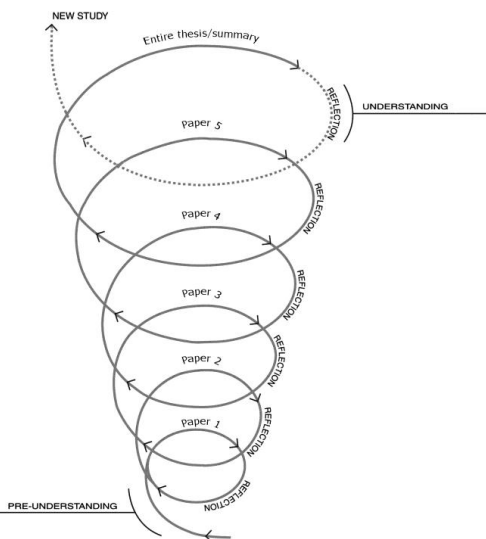


Figure 1 The reflexive research process and the links between the appended papers (adapted from Stenbacka (2001))

Conducting the research sequentially enabled me to reflect on each paper and the empirical material used in them, retrospectively, as described in figure 1. All papers revolved around the initial “breakdown”, focusing on different aspects which eventually lead to the initially formulated research question, as I extended my repertoire of theories and vocabulary. Before I provide a more detailed account of this process – especially with regards

to research aim, methodologies and methods used in the individual papers – I will present the empirical context of the study. The content and contribution of the individual papers will be presented in the subsequent chapter.

### 3.2 Empirical context

The empirical context of public transport (PT) was given from the start, as my PhD position was partly financed by SAMOT – the service and market oriented public transport research group at Karlstad University. This is obviously not the best argument in order to choose an empirical context for one's research project. However, the context is very suitable in order to study customer resource integration activities. In fact, public transport can be described as a form of self-service process in which customers integrate their own resources as well as resources external to them in order to create value for themselves (Grönroos, 2011). Examples of resources in the context could be the various bus or urban railway lines, bus or urban railway stations with their many signs and layouts, homepages of the service provider, information points, paper-based timetables, but also social resources such as other customers or staff. Hence, public transport has been described as being dependent on the servicescape to a large extent (Fellsson and Friman, 2008). Moreover, it is of functional character or a rather ordinary, day-to-day experience (Carù and Cova, 2003). What is more, customers spend an extended period in the setting, enabling me to capture process dimensions of customer interactions with the servicescape. Consequently, the setting offers a rich source of empirical data. The environment is complex and involves factors outside of the control of the service provider; e.g., the weather, other customers and the functioning of public infrastructure. Moreover, demand varies greatly over time, which places significant pressure on the service.

Finally, public transport is often regarded as crucially important in order to reduce the negative effects of private car use and to achieve sustainable development in today's society (Gärling and Steg, 2007). What is more, only few studies are conducted that investigate customers' perceptions of the provided public transport service (Friman et al., 2001). The few exceptions that exist focus mainly on attributes that influence customer satisfaction, such as reliability, frequency, comfort, information, driver behavior, and cleanliness (Andreassen, 1995; Bates et al., 2001; Edvardsson, 1998; Fellsson and Friman, 2008; Friman et al., 2001). These studies contribute significantly towards our understanding of which factors influence customer satisfaction with public transport. However, the studies do not explore resource integration activities of customers.

### 3.3 The research process

In this section, I will present a short summary of the empirical studies and how they have evolved during the research project. The purpose is to provide an overview of the process which led from the construction of the mystery, to the formulation of the initially raised aim of the thesis, and to its solution. I will also reflect on the different methodologies and methods used in each study.

#### 3.3.1 *Experience room dimensions*

The point of departure for this thesis and the first project was the “break down” of research on servicescapes and its dissonance with the view of interactive value formation, as highlighted in chapter 2. So far, empirical studies concerning the role of the servicescape for customer experiences had predominantly focused on the effects of single variables on customer behavior, like music, scent or signage. Consequently, further empirical research with a more holistic approach is needed. The experience room model (Edvardsson et al., 2005a; 2010) with its six experience room dimensions extends the service environment to include more than the physical, built environment and is more attuned to interactive value formation. However, the model was developed conceptually, only illustrated with empirical data from retailing, for the prepurchase experience. Whether the model is applicable for “online” customer experiences in a context such as public transportation was not known. It was also unclear whether the different dimension would be of equal importance for the customer experience in this context. This led to the first project, which was separated in two empirical studies drawing on the same convenience sample of 24 and 26 business students, respectively.

The first empirical study was designed as a focus group interview and was conducted during October 2007. In three focus groups a total of 24 students discussed the guiding question “What is important to *you* when using public transport?” The focus group was special in that the respondents analyzed their responses themselves as used and described by Björlin Lidén and Edvardsson (2003). More specifically, after having introduced the main question, we described how the participants would create a visible chart of their perceptions, with the help of the moderator. The informants sat around a table facing a large whiteboard and were prompted to represent themselves only. In a first phase, the aim was to describe the most important aspects for using public transport,

which was developed through four steps: first of all, the informants were invited to take a few minutes to reflect on their last experiences using public transport and what they deemed to be the most important dimension. The moderator then wrote the most important dimension of each participant on a flipchart. Secondly, any additional dimensions that had not been raised during the initial round were noted on another flipchart. A separation to differentiate between generally important dimensions and crucial ones was made. In the third step, the group discussed one dimension first after all participants had contributed. In total, four to six dimensions were discussed in each focus group. In doing so, the informants described and characterized each dimension. Finally, the characteristics were analyzed by the group in relation to the six experience room dimensions and categorized into one of the dimensions. In a second phase, the aim was to report the informants' own assessment of how important the different characteristics are and how well the service provider performed on these. This was achieved in two steps. First of all, the informants were urged to select the three most important characteristics and grade them as 1, 2, or 3, according to their importance, with 3 being the most important. All importance scores were recorded on the whiteboard. In the second and final step, all participants individually graded all characteristics that received at least one importance grading on a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest grade. Consequently, each focus group interview resulted in a visible chart, or experience map, with characteristics of each experience room dimension and their importance for the customer experience. The study was an initial attempt to understand which dimensions are of most importance for the customer experience and is probably best described as a pre-study to get a first feel for the empirical context.

The second empirical study had a different design from the first study, but still related to the same theoretical reasoning. Before conducting the focus group interviews, we asked the 26 students to conduct four trips using public transport in a given week. The students were provided with a blank paper transport diary and were encouraged to keep as detailed notes as possible about their customer experience. No further instructions were given, in order to ensure the informants would not be guided in any particular direction and that their own view was represented. Data was collected *in situ*; that is, while customers were using the service (Edvardsson et al., 2012). Consequently, it can be argued that what the informants reported in their diaries was important to them. The method suited the aim of the study well, which is to identify and

describe important dimensions of the service process as defined by customers, and to compare the results from a specific use context with the recent conceptualization of the experience room.

Qualitative diary research is often neglected and is rarely mentioned as a research method in marketing. This is rather surprising, as it holds several advantages and its use was recently suggested for the study of interactive value formation (Baron et al., 2010). The method enables one to examine customer experience in its natural, spontaneous context and offers “the opportunity to investigate social, psychological, and physiological processes, within everyday situations” (Bolger et al., 2003, p. 580). Consequently, it has been argued that diary research should rank higher in the qualitative research toolbox (Patterson, 2005). The diaries from the 26 students resulted in narratives of exactly 100 service episodes, covering a variety of local and regional buses, and local and regional trains.

For analysis of the customer experiences the transport diaries were transcribed into NVivo8, in which the qualitative analysis, as well as memo writing, was conducted. A constant comparative method and techniques from grounded theory (Glaser, 1978) were applied. The coding process started with substantive coding of the first four diaries, or 16 customer experiences. Indicators, also termed descriptive codes (Glaser, 1978; Miles and Huberman, 1994), were created, such as “driving style”, or “activity during trip”, which were based closely on the informants’ notes. Descriptive memos were written in parallel, which accounted for the properties of the indicators. At this stage, the first refinements were made regarding the labels of the indicators, before the coding process was extended to the remaining diary entries. Within that process, selective coding was started by comparing the different indicators with each other. The writing of memos continued and this led, together with the selective coding, to codes or dimensions, by way of grouping various indicators with similar meaning. For example, the indicator “attitude” and the indicator “driving style” were grouped to the code “contact personnel”, as both referred to the staff of the service provider and their interaction with the customers. The obtained six dimensions were then related to the experience room model (Edvardsson et al., 2010).



### ***3.3.2 Measuring the customer experience***

In the first studies, I focused on the experience room dimensions that played a role in the customer experience. In study 2, I shifted the focus to the overall dimensions of the experience construct itself. A quantitative methodology is appropriate in order to achieve this. From chapter 2 we also understand that measuring the concept has been discussed and considered as an important research theme. Developing a measurement instrument for the customer experience construct has been argued to be particularly difficult (Palmer, 2010). Moreover, Churchill (1979, p. 67) reminds us that “researchers should have very good reasons for proposing additional *new* measures given the many available for most marketing constructs of interest”. Consequently, my ambition was not to develop a new measure, but to apply an existing one that is as closely related to customer experience as possible. Subjective well-being (SWB) is such a concept and is linked to customer experience as described in chapter 2. SWB (Bergstad et al., 2011; Diener and Suh, 1997; Diener, 2000; Diener, 2009; Ettema et al., 2011; Myers and Diener, 1995), which is defined as an individual’s cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives, is subjective and resides within the experience of the individual; it includes positive as well as negative emotional and cognitive measures; and although it usually refers to a global assessment of all aspects of an individual’s life, it can be applied to a specific context of life such as work, marriage or commuting. As a result, the overall aim of the second study is to present and apply an instrument that measures customer experience based on research in human well-being. More specifically, the paper utilizes the Satisfaction with Travel Scale (STS) (Ettema et al., 2011) that measures customer experience as context-specific well-being.

Data was collected during January to March 2010, when recruiting respondents for study 3, which will subsequently be presented. A random sample of 1000 respondents was obtained from Statistics Sweden, which consisted of residents between 18 and 70 years-of-age who were living in Karlstad and Gothenburg, Sweden (the populations are approximately 80,000 and 550,000, respectively). Questionnaires were mailed to each respondent’s home address with a reply-paid envelope. Respondents were told that every fifth questionnaire that was returned would entitle the respondent to receive two lottery tickets, in order to increase the response rate. No reminders were sent out.

A total of 361 (36.1 per cent) usable questionnaires were collected. Of these, 189 (52.4 per cent) were public transport customers (they had used public

transport at least once the week before) in Karlstad (92) and Gothenburg (97). The respondents were fairly evenly distributed among age classes. The majority reported 5 to 10 trips being made during the last week. The participants mean age was 44.1 years, 72 per cent were cohabiting, 83 per cent were employed, and 61 per cent were women. Thirty-one per cent were earning more than 300,000 SEK per year and 51 per cent were earning less than that.

In order to measure the customer experience of public transport, the Satisfaction with Travel Scale (STS) (Bergstad et al., 2011; Ettema et al., 2010; 2011) is applied. The scale builds on previous research in subjective well-being and captures both the affective and the cognitive dimension. More to the point, it combines cognitive judgments of travel satisfaction with measures of the activation and valence dimensions of affect. For example, it is consistent with measurement of affective well-being based on the affect circumplex model (Russell, 1980; 2003). Although previous customer satisfaction measures generally also include affective and cognitive scales, they are usually more specifically aimed at the evaluation of characteristics of a specific product (Oliver et al., 1994; Swan and Trawick, 1981).

STS consists of nine items that are all rated on nine-point bipolar scales ranging from -4 to 4 where a positive score corresponds to a positive affective experience and a higher quality experience, and a negative score corresponds to a negative affective experience and a lower quality experience. The first three items – *Travel was the worst/best I can think of*, *Travel had very low/very high standard* and *Travel worked very well/very poorly* – relate to the cognitive/quality dimension, termed cognitive evaluation. The remaining six items relate to the affective dimension in combinations of the valence and activation dimensions. The first three of these six items distinguish between positive deactivation and negative activation (positive deactivation), which are addressed as *Very hurried/Very relaxed*, *Very stressed/Very calm* and *Very worried/Very confident*, and the three remaining items distinguish between positive activation and negative deactivation (positive activation), which are addressed as *Very tired/Very alert*, *Very bored/Very enthusiastic* and *Very fed up/Very engaged*.

Furthermore, the participants' car-use habit was measured by the Self-Report Habit Index (Verplanken and Orbell, 2003), which is an instrument that contains 12 statements that measure the strength of a specific habit. Responses were made on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (completely disagree)

to 6 (completely agree). The response to each item was then averaged to yield a car-use index for each participant. The higher the values were on the index, the stronger the car-use habit. The participants in this study had a mean score of 1.45, which is a much lower value of car-use habit as was reported in previous research among habitual car users (Pedersen et al., 2011). This reflects that the participants in this study are devoted to and frequently use public transport.

The data analysis started with a Principal component analysis (PCA) as suggested by Gerbing and Hamilton (1996). PCA is a useful strategy for recovering an underlying model that can then be evaluated with confirmatory factor analysis. The aim of PCA is to identify items belonging to the different dimensions in the customer experience. Consequently, the next step was to perform a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in order to test and confirm the dimensionality of customer experience in public transport. In CFA, the structural relationship between the items (observed measures) and dimensions (latent variables or factors) are postulated *a priori* and then statistically tested.

### ***3.3.3 Resource integration activities***

So far, the empirical studies have focused more on the customer experience than on resource integration activities. A central aim of the thesis was to understand how customer resource integration activities take place in practice. This was the focus of the next study, which can also be described as the main study of the thesis. In this study, which was conducted during the spring of 2010, a microethnographic research approach has been applied (Carroll et al., 2008; Echeverri, 2005; Streeck and Mehus, 2005; vom Lehn, 2006). This approach combines different methods, such as observations, interviews, and think-aloud protocols that are captured on high-definition digital video; all filmed by me. Twenty informants were recruited using purposeful sampling and asked to travel to two public places in their home town (a more detailed account of the recruitment process is described in paper 4). Of the informants, 11 were women and 9 were men, with an age between 20 and 76 years reflecting the gender distribution and age groups of Swedish public transport users. Eight informants primarily use their car as a mean of transport; five informants primarily use public transport. The remaining seven informants have no dominant mean of transport. After establishing contact via phone, a time was scheduled at which the informants were asked to travel to two public places. The starting point was either the workplace or the home of the

informants. I highlighted repeatedly that the aim of study is to capture the informants' experiences with and perceptions about traveling using public transport and that there is no right or wrong behavior; this was done in order to reduce the procedural consequentiality of the camera and the researcher (Speer, 2002). The informants were followed and filmed by me when doing their travels. Moreover, the informants were equipped with a small microphone and were encouraged to "think aloud" in order to capture their thoughts, experiences and responses according to common think-aloud practices (van den Haak et al., 2004). The choice of public transport mode (bus, boat or tram) and the line and route to be taken was decided by the informant. On average, conducting the two trips took about one-and-a-half hours.

Using this methodology enables one to study resource integration activities *in situ* (Edvardsson et al., 2012); that is, in real-life customer use situations. Moreover, the video-based method seems appropriate in order to investigate interactive processes of services (Echeverri, 2005; Heath et al., 2010) and enables marketing research to be "more attuned to the lived realities of everyday consumption" (Belk and Kozinets, 2005, p. 128). In order to mitigate the influence of the camera on informants and to improve the quality of the video data I followed the strategies that are outlined by Haidet et al. (2009); filming started around five to ten minutes before the actual trip, in order to move beyond an initial period of self-consciousness of the informants, enabling one to capture more "natural" behavior (Rosenstein, 2002). In addition, a small camera was used in order to reduce the obtrusiveness of the recording device. Moreover, before the fieldwork with informants a few practice sessions were conducted where I followed a couple of colleagues using public transport. During the fieldwork, I kept a distance of a few meters away from the informants as suggested by Belk and Kozinets (2005). Nevertheless, the presence of the camera and the researcher influenced behavior of the informants to some extent. In particular, verbalizing their own actions and experiences initially made some informants uncomfortable. However, these effects were reduced substantially after the first minutes and the informants seemed to behave in a relaxed manner for the remaining part of the trip; an observation made by several researchers in other video-based studies (Echeverri, 2005; Haidet et al., 2009; Heath et al., 2010; Latvala et al., 2000). I interpret this perception of being relaxed as that the informants were displaying behavior normal to them when using public transport services, when it comes to specific procedures, pattern of movements, information search, etc. Due to

the above measures, the informants were not biased because of the presence of the researcher, the camera, or the fear of looking foolish to other customers.

Based on the empirical material two analyses were done, resulting in paper 4 and paper 5. In the first one, practice theory, as described in chapter 2, was used as a sensitizing concept (Layder, 1998) for data analysis. In the second one, script theory guided the analysis. The qualitative analysis for both papers, including memo writing, was conducted in NVivo 8 by applying the constant comparative method according to the Grounded Theory data analysis approach (Glaser, 1978; Starrin, 1997). Initially, a specific journey was chosen that was regarded as representative for the entire material. The complex process of this journey – including interactions with servicescape elements, typical and context specific activities, striking think-aloud quotes on subjective cognitive and emotional experiences, and regarding more or less critical incidents – was outlined. This could be regarded as a reduced, yet concrete, description of the experienced interactive process. Based on this description I conducted an open coding procedure. Descriptive codes (Miles and Huberman, 1994) or indicators (Glaser, 1978) were created, such as “ticketing”, or “searching”, which were based on the think-aloud information and what was observable in the video recordings. At this stage, relatively descriptive memos were also written, which accounted for the properties of the indicators. Also, the first refinements were made concerning the labels of the indicators, before the continued coding of other video recordings. These were directly coded in the software, by marking short sequences of one to several seconds of film with the label of the code. The marked sequences of the various codes were then watched repeatedly and within that process, selective coding was initiated by comparing the different indicators. Memo writing continued and this led, together with the selective coding, to the codes or dimensions by the grouping of various indicators that had a similar meaning. For example the indicator “reference point” and the indicator “searching for right bus” were grouped to the code “identifying”, as both referred to the customer processes of searching for resources. As the qualitative analysis continued, theoretical codes were developed that were sensitive to the substantive codes developed initially. Here, it was elaborated on how the codes of identifying, sense-making, using, ticketing, and navigating relate to each other (Starrin, 1997).

### 3.3.4 Overview of the studies and the appended papers

An overview of the five appended papers with regards to research aim, approach, methods, analysis and empirical base can be found in Table 1.

	Paper I	Paper II	Paper III	Paper IV	Paper V
Research aim	To identify the relative importance of design dimensions and their characteristics.	To identify and describe important dimensions of the service process and to compare the results from a specific use context with the experience room model.	To present and apply an instrument that measures customers' service experience based on human well-being research.	To explore customer interactions with service-scapes and to explain in more depth the internal mechanisms that form the customer experience.	To use script theory in order to explore customer interactions with servicescapes, to explore resource integration activities of customers and to explain customer experiences.
Research approach	Qualitative	Qualitative	Quantitative	Qualitative (Microethnography)	Qualitative (Microethnography)
Methods	Focus groups	Transport diary	Paper-based survey	Interviews; Think aloud protocols; Video recordings of situated action	Interviews; Think aloud protocols; Video recordings of situated action
Data analysis	Experience map	Inductive and deductive	Principle component and confirmatory factor analysis	Inductive	Inductive
Empirical basis	3 focus groups with a total of 24 students	100 diary entries of 26 students	192 randomly chosen PT users	Purposeful sample of 20 PT users	Purposeful sample of 20 PT users

Table 1 Overview of the five appended papers and the empirical studies

### 3.4 Credibility of the research

In the following section, I will present a short discussion concerning the credibility of my research. Silverman (2006) suggests that reliability and validity are the two main ingredients for a credible study. Although these concepts have been suggested to be unsuitable in the context of qualitative studies, belonging to quantitative methodologies (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), I agree with the former. Reliability and validity can be assessed in qualitative research; the means of conducting that are simply different to those in quantitative studies.

Reliability refers to the extent to which the findings of a research project do not depend on accidental circumstances of their production (Silverman, 2006). Moisander and Valtonen (2006) present two standards for judging reliability in qualitative studies: (1) a transparent research process through descriptions of the research strategy and data analysis methods in a detailed manner, and (2) making the theoretical stance from which interpretation takes place explicit and showing how this produces particular interpretations and excludes others. I am confident that my research process and data analysis has been described very transparently in the appended papers as well as in the summary. Regarding the validity of the study, the comprehensive data treatment is suggested (Silverman, 2006) and was applied in the data analysis. This means that all empirical cases in the different qualitative studies were incorporated in the data analysis.

However, credibility can be argued to be more complex than this. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009, pp. 304) suggest five criteria for good empirical research revolving around the earlier described aspects of reflexive methodology:

- *empirical “arguments” and credibility*
- *an open attitude to the vital importance of the interpretative dimension to social phenomena*
- *critical reflection regarding the political and ideological contexts of, and issues in, research*
- *an awareness of the ambiguity of language and its limited capacity to convey knowledge of a purely empirical reality and awareness about the rhetorical nature of ways of dealing with this issue (the representation-authority problem)*
- *theory development based on the mentioned issues.*

I do not wish to argue that I followed the criteria in each and every step of my PhD project. Quiet naturally, the major part of reflection and interpretation

work was done in the process of writing the summary given that I had gained a little distance to the appended papers. Nevertheless, I want to argue that the theory that will be presented in the final chapter was developed around the four other criteria to a reasonable extent. In the following, I would like to present a few examples. The first criterion refers to rigorous procedures for gathering and processing the empirical data and grounding the theory in it. An account of my efforts is described in the summary as well as in each paper. The aim of this thesis was to provide an empirical based understanding, so I certainly tried to make several empirical arguments without being an empiricist. The second criterion refers to the primacy of interpretation, that is, acknowledging that all empirical material – be it interview statements, answers on questionnaires, or observations – are constructed, to a certain extent, by the researcher and therefore an interpretation. I made “interpretations” and decisions about what is interesting; which destinations would lead to interesting results; before choosing informants; while observing the informants; by choosing “interesting” examples; and by interpreting the empirical material. Here, I also want to comment on the combining of qualitative and quantitative approaches in the thesis. I do not regard the quantitative results as “hard facts” of an undisputable truth “out there”. Rather, the inclusion of quantitative methodology, as in paper 3, shall be regarded as a strategy to add breadth, complexity, and richness (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Regarding the third criterion of critical reflection, I am aware that marketing research can have an ideological dimension that focuses on prescribing rather than researching marketing (Carù and Cova, 2003; Skålén et al., 2008) and I try to free myself from this. I also “questioned” the given framework of servicescapes (Bitner, 1992) and try to provide an alternative perspective that is more attuned to a view of interactive value formation. Regarding the fourth criterion of the ambiguity of language, I am aware that I can be steered in my text production by prevailing discourses, such as the one on S-D logic, which is also why I use the term interactive value formation, for instance, instead of only using value co-creation.

Reconnecting with the notion of validity, Moisander and Valtonen (2006) take the stand that ultimately, validity of research is decided upon by the readers of the study. Hoping that this is done with a positive outcome in the case for my thesis, I am generally convinced that I present a valid as well as credible study.



## 4 Individual contributions of the appended papers

In this section, I will present a short summary of the findings of each appended paper and highlight the contributions made in each.

### 4.1 Paper I

#### **The role and design of the service environment in creating favourable customer experiences**

The first project within my PhD studies resulted in the article “The role and design of the service environment in creating favourable customer experiences” and was presented at the *11th QMOD Conference Quality Management and Organizational Development Attaining Sustainability From Organizational Excellence to Sustainable Excellence*, on 20–22 August 2008 in Helsingborg, Sweden. The paper was co-authored with Prof. Bo Edvardsson and Prof. Bo Enquist. Each author conducted a focus group session and I was responsible for the main part of the writing process.

From this paper it becomes apparent that core service attributes – such as reliability, price, frequency, safety, and competent staff – were highlighted by the informants. As the context of this study is a functional service, the most important dimensions are related to functional goal fulfillment; having a transport opportunity that transports customers reliably, cost effectively, at times that the customers want the service, in a safe way, and is partly delivered by competent staff, such as the bus or tram drivers. These findings confirm earlier research using stated preference and customer satisfaction surveys (Eriksson et al., 2008; Fellesson and Friman, 2008; Kingham et al., 2001). The study was an initial attempt to understand which dimensions are of most importance for the customer experience and is probably best described as a pre-study in order to get an initial feel for the empirical context. Moreover, the paper indicates a need for more inductive research, based on customer experiences of real-life use situations.

## 4.2 Paper II

### Exploring the role of the service environment in forming customer's service experience

From the inductive analysis of the transport diaries in paper 2, six important dimensions emerged which form the customer experience of public transport (see Figure 2). These are of different character from those derived from the focus groups and do not center on service attributes. The dimensions predominantly reflect those of the experience room model (Edvardsson et al., 2005a; 2010). The dimensions customer processes (customer involvement in the experience room model), the activities and interactions customers undergo during the service; other customers (customer placement in the experience room model), interactions with other customers; and physical environment (physical artifacts in the experience room model), or servicescape elements, were mentioned most frequently, and can be regarded as especially important for the customer experience in this context.

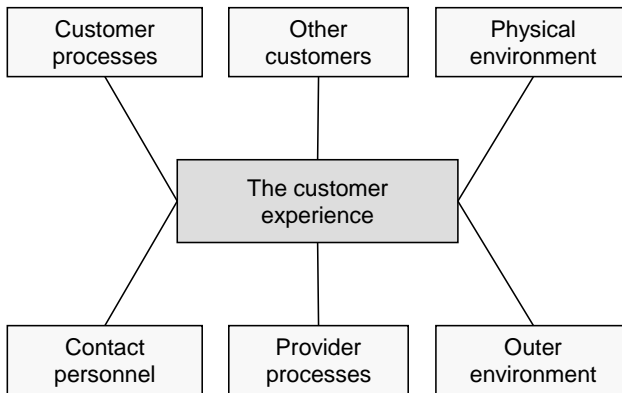


Figure 2 The experience room dimensions forming the customer experience

The paper contributes by acknowledging the importance of dimensions such as interactions with other customers (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2003) as well as the physical environment (Bitner, 1992) on the customer experience, and the applicability of the experience room model in a “real” service context. Moreover, the paper demonstrates the interdependencies between dimensions and their impact on the customer experience. Finally, the empirical data highlights a forgotten perspective in the study of the interaction between the customer and physical environment: the customer use perspective (Turley and

Fugate, 1992), that is, the extent to which the service environment is designed for use and around the customer. This perspective appears to be promising in its potential to contribute to the understanding of resource integration activities of customers. It is also emphasized by the increasing focus on self-service environments such as in retail banking, in retailing, and at airports.

This paper was co-authored with Prof. Bo Edvardsson and Prof. Bo Enquist. The empirical data was collected and analyzed by me, and I was also responsible for the main part of the writing process. The paper was presented at the *12th QMOD International Research Conference* in Verona, Italy in 2009 and is published in the *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences* (Paregis et al., 2011).

### 4.3 Paper III

#### Measuring service experience: Applying the STS scale in public transport

The confirmatory factor analysis in paper 3 tested customer experience as a multi-dimensional construct composed of the three dimensions: cognitive evaluation, positive activation and positive deactivation (see Figure 3).

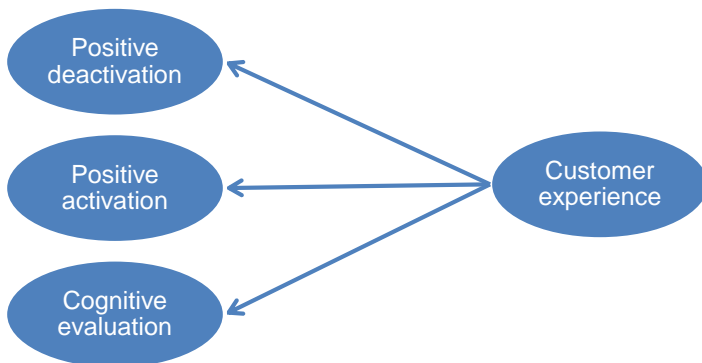


Figure 3 The multi-dimensional customer experience construct

The contribution of this paper is the validation of the Satisfaction with Travel Scale (STS) for measuring the customer experience in PT. Moreover, the results confirm a multidimensionality of customer experience consisting of a cognitive dimension related to the quality of the service and two affective dimensions related to positive activation, such as enthusiasm or boredom, and positive

deactivation, such as relaxation or stress. As a result, the paper answers calls (Brakus et al., 2009; Nysveen et al., 2012) to include valence into the measurement of customer experience. Furthermore, the instrument constitutes a reliable measure of customer experience on a comprehensive level, which is in line with the holistic nature of the construct (Johnston and Kong, 2011). Consequently, it complements measures of service attributes and characteristics of the offering, while covering both the affective as well as the cognitive dimension. Although the scale was only applied empirically in one context, it is general enough to be applied in other industries.

The paper was co-authored with Prof. Margareta Friman, Dr. Lars E. Olsson, and Prof. Bo Edvardsson. The survey was administered by me, whereas the analysis was conducted by Prof. Friman. The writing process was a joint effort by the four authors, to which I chiefly contributed in the introduction, the method section, the discussion, and the future research part. The paper was presented at the 12th *International Research Symposium on Service Excellence in Management (QUIS12)* in Columbia, USA in 2011 and is published in the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* (Olsson et al., 2012).

#### **4.4 Paper IV**

##### **Exploring internal mechanisms forming customer servicescape experiences**

The results from the empirical study in paper 4 reveal three constellations of activities and interactions, which I will refer to in the following as resource integration activities: identifying, sense-making, and using (ISU). Identifying refers to the customer searching for different resources, sense-making, to the customer giving meaning to and comprehending the different resources, and using refers to the customer integrating and using the different resources. Although presented as a stage model in Figure 4, the resource integration activities are better understood as an iterative process that forms in the empirical context of public transport two practices; navigating and ticketing (which is referred to as interactive value practices in the following). The interactive value practices lead to either value co-creation or co-destruction and thus form the customer experience.

Identifying	Sense-making	Using	
Searching for bus stops, time-tables, maps, or buses; approaching staff or other customers to ask for the way.	Giving meaning to and comprehending maps, time-tables, or information received from staff or other customers.	Integrating and using resources for the task of finding one's way.	Navigating
Searching for information about payment options or ticket machines.	Giving meaning to and comprehending ticket machines, instructions for payment or payment plans.	Integrating and using resources for the task of ticket payment.	Ticketing

Figure 4 Resource integration activities forming interactive value practices and the customer experience

The paper contributes with the identification of the three resource integration activities of identifying, sense-making, and using as the building blocks for the two interactive value practices of navigating and ticketing. These complement the interactive value practices that are identified by Echeverri and Skålén (2011) and the value co-creation practice styles of McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012). Moreover, the paper contributes to the servicescape literature by providing a veritable customer perspective of what takes place in and with servicescapes, rather than what servicescapes do to customers.

The paper was co-authored with Assist. Prof. Per Echeverri and Prof. Bo Edvardsson. The empirical and analytical work was conducted by me. The actual writing of the paper was a joint effort divided between the three authors and the contribution of each is roughly represented by the order of the authors. An early version of the paper was presented at the *6th SERVSIG International Research Conference* in Porto, Portugal in 2010 and is published in the *Journal of Service Management* (Pareigis et al., 2012).

#### 4.5 Paper V

##### **Interactions with servicescapes: A script-theoretical study of resource integration**

Finally, in the last paper “Interactions with servicescapes: A script-theoretical study of resource integration”, I continue the focus on interactions between customers and servicescapes. In particular, I investigate what role customers’ skills and knowledge have for resource integration. Drawing on script theory (Abelson, 1981; Bateson, 2002; Eichentopf et al., 2011; Leong et al., 1989;

Schank and Abelson, 1977), I identify four script types that customers can acquire in each interactive value practice, namely generic, incongruent, rigid, and transformative scripts. Customers with generic scripts have not acquired a specific script concerning the particular service; that is, they have no knowledge about the steps involved in order to use the service. Instead, customers with generic scripts for the service in question rely on generalized scripts from other services or contexts. Regarding the resource integration activities, customers with generic scripts focus more on identifying and sense-making and tend to integrate social operant resources (that is, staff, other customers or friends) rather than operand resources (such as timetables, maps or signs). Customers that have acquired an incongruent script have developed a script that is not in line with the service process, either in part or entirety, as designed by the service provider. Similar to customers with generic scripts the resource integration activities of identifying and sense-making are in the foreground for customers with incongruent scripts. That is, customers with little and/or wrong conceptions about the process of the service make more effort to search for resources and to give meaning and comprehension to those. Another similarity to generic scripts, for customers with incongruent scripts, is that the resources need to enable the basic usage of the service. This means that the customers must be able to easily understand how to use the service and to acquire relevant and update incongruent scripts.

A rigid script has been acquired by customers directly through partaking in interactive value formation. However, customers use only a fraction of the service offering of the provider. Customers with rigid scripts focus more on using previously identified and comprehended resources. However, customers with this type of script do not use all resources that are available to them, but mainly those which they are familiar with. Customers acquire transformative scripts through frequent interactive value formation with the service provider. Customers have developed numerous “if-then” branches and “float” through the servicescape. Customers that have acquired transformative scripts focus more on using the different resources that are available for integration. For customers with rigid and transformative scripts, the servicescape can enable service augmentation (Berry, 2002); that is, offer additional services like wireless internet access points, on board or at bus stops, in order to enhance their experience or to make the process more efficient or effective. Table 2 summarizes the four script types.

	Script types			
	Generic	Incongruent	Rigid	Transformative
Distinctiveness	Very low	Low	Medium	Very high
Contingency	Non-existent	Very low	Medium	Very high
Hypotheticality	Non-existent	Very concrete	Medium	Very abstract
Implications for resource integration	Focus on identifying and sense-making	Focus on identifying and sense-making	Resources not used to full potential	Integration of diverse set of resources
Role of the servicescape for the service experience	Highly dependent on servicescape for co-creating core service	Highly dependent on servicescape for co-creating core service	Servicescape enabler for service augmentation	Servicescape enabler for service augmentation

Table 2 Customer script types in resource integration

The paper answers calls for empirical studies of customer resource integration (Arnould, 2008; Baron and Harris, 2008; Baron and Warnaby, 2011; Hibbert et al., 2012; Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012) and highlights the importance of regarding customers as being engaged in different practices with different knowledge and skills in each.

The paper is single authored by myself and is submitted to the journal *Marketing Theory*.

## 5 Combined contributions and reflections

In the final chapter of the thesis I want to reconnect to its aim, which was to present an empirically grounded understanding of how customer resource integration takes place in practice and how customers experience their resource integration. I will do this by combining the five appended papers into one model and as such will reframe the notion of servicescape towards the perspective of interactive value formation. The chapter concludes with methodological reflections, a discussion about practical implications of the research project, as well as an outlook on future research on the topic.

### 5.1 Customer experience of resource integration

It is widely acknowledged that value can be regarded as being interactively formed through the integration of a variety of resources (Baron and Warnaby, 2011; Echeverri and Skálén, 2011; Edvardsson et al., 2012; Eichentopf et al., 2011; Etgar, 2008; Fyrberg Yngfalk, 2011; Grönroos, 2008; Hibbert et al., 2012; Kalaignanam and Varadarajan, 2006; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b; Ramírez, 1999; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Vargo et al., 2008). However, how this takes place in practice is empirically under-investigated. This thesis contributes to this end by providing an empirically grounded model of customer experience of resource integration (Figure 5).

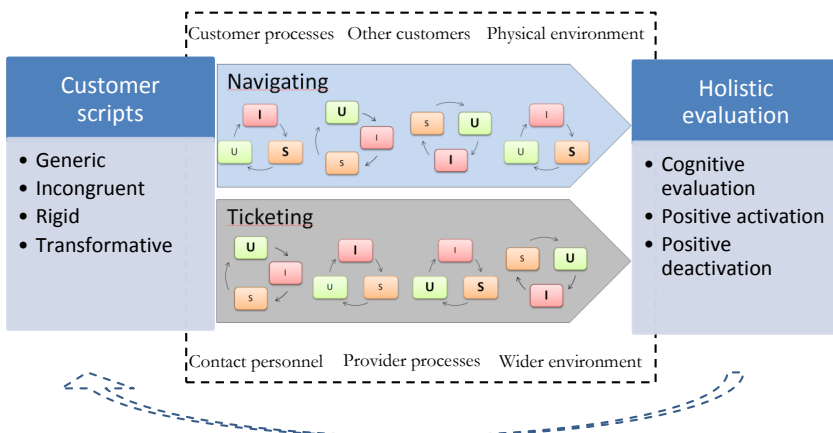


Figure 5 Customer experience of resource integration



The customer experience of resource integration model can be summarized in six propositions which I will discuss in relation to other research, in the remainder of this section: (a) customers can acquire four different types of scripts: generic, incongruent, rigid, or transformative; (b) the script types are implicit parts of interactive value practices, which emerge as navigating and ticketing in the empirical context of public transport; (c) the interactive value practices are constellations of the resource integration activities of identifying, sense-making, and using, which customers focus on to varying extents, depending on their acquired script; (d) during or after interactive value formation customers potentially update their scripts; (e) customer processes, other customers, the physical environment, contact personnel, provider processes, and the wider environment all form the context of the service, but can also be resources that the customer integrates; and (f) the customer experience is a holistic evaluation of the interactive value formation and can be understood as consisting of three dimensions: a cognitive evaluation, and two affective evaluations: positive activation and positive deactivation.

The first aim of this thesis was to present an empirically grounded understanding of how customer resource integration takes place in practice. Two interactive value practices in which customers engage in are identified in this thesis: navigating and ticketing. These complement findings of McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012) who identified five interactive value practices in health care and those of Echeverri and Skálén (2011), who identified five interactive value practices in public transport. Others identify as many as 12 practices (Schau et al., 2009). A few explanations for the small number of identified practices could be due to the following: first of all, the previously mentioned studies focus mainly on social interactions. In the case of Echeverri and Skálén (2011) and McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012) the focus is on interactions between customer and staff, whereas Schau et al. (2009) investigate value co-creation in web-based social communities; that is, customer-to-customer interactions. These could be thought of as more diversified than the interactions between the servicescape and customers. Secondly, the analytical focus on resource integration could have led me towards focusing more on the co-production of the core service itself and less on value co-creation in a phenomenological sense (Helkkula, 2011). In doing so, I focused less on “activities on the move” (Vilhelmson et al., 2011); that is, what customers do while using public transportation, such as window gazing, relaxing, working and/or entertaining themselves. These could also be interpreted as interactive value practices and it

seems very likely that the resource integration activities also would appear in these; for instance, while customers try to find and read free-of-charge newspapers or connect themselves to the company provided wireless network. The interactive value practices are constellations of the resource integration activities of identifying, sense-making, and using (ISU). These are comparable to understandings, procedures, and engagements used by Schau et al. (Schau et al., 2009) and Echeverri and Skålén (2011) and have been described as the anatomy of the corresponding practices. However, ISU are empirically derived similarly to the value co-creation activities of McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012). Identifying, sense-making, and using impart on a certain semantic alteration and are consequently more relevant in order to understand customer experiences of resource integration.

It has been argued that value is co-created and evaluated “in-context” through integration of resources (Arnould et al., 2006; Baron and Warnaby, 2011; Vargo et al., 2008) and has lately been extended to “value-in-social-context” (Edvardsson et al., 2011). However, these terms are often left at this very abstract level and are rarely contextualized empirically in relation to customers. The experience room dimensions identified in paper 2 can be regarded as such a contextualization, meaning that those dimensions form the context as well as the resources that customers draw upon in their interactive value practices. Customer processes could consequently be understood as other practices that the customers engage in (Reckwitz, 2002). Other customers, the physical environment, contact personnel, provider processes, and the wider environment all form the context of the service, but can also be resources that the customer integrates.

The perspective of the customer as resource integrator emphasizes the knowledge and skills of customers in order to accomplish the interactive value formation process (Arnould et al., 2006; Baron and Harris, 2008; Hibbert et al., 2012). Knowledge and skills can be conceptualized as organized in scripts. By drawing on script theory, I identify four different script types that customers can acquire. Customers can acquire generic, incongruent, rigid, or transformative scripts, which have different implications for their resource integration activities. For customers with generic and incongruent scripts identifying and sense-making are of primary importance. Customers with these types of scripts also tend to integrate predominantly social operant resources (that is, staff, other customers or friends) rather than operand resources (such

as timetables, maps or signs). This is in line with findings of Harris and Baron (2004), who found that customers draw on resources of other customers in situations where they lack personal resources themselves. Customers with rigid scripts focus more on using previously identified and comprehended resources. However, customers with these scripts do not use all resources that are available to them – only those that they are familiar with. During or after interactive value formation customers potentially update their scripts, which has recently been described as customer learning (Hibbert et al., 2012). The newly acquired scripts have implications for future resource integration activities. Customers with transformative scripts combine even more resources and integrate them in order to create their individual customer experience, which leads us to the second aim of the thesis.

The second aim was to present an empirically grounded understanding of how customers experience their resource integration. This aim goes hand-in-hand with the question of what customer experience is and how it is formed. My view is that customer experience is a holistic evaluation of the interactive value formation including the resource integration activities described above. Consequently, it is individual and subjective, and is an evaluation of a process and an outcome. This is in line with other conceptual writings on the subject (Helkkula et al., 2012; Johnston and Kong, 2011; Verhoef et al., 2009). The customer experience can be understood as consisting of three dimensions: one cognitive and two affective dimensions – positive activation, such as enthusiasm or boredom, and positive deactivation, such as relaxation or stress. The majority of earlier research has, to a large extent, focused on the factors influencing the cognitive dimension, or customer satisfaction. In the context of public transportation, for instance, these studies focus mainly on attributes that influence customer satisfaction or service quality, such as reliability, frequency, comfort, information, driver behavior, and cleanliness (Andreassen, 1995; Bates et al., 2001; Edvardsson, 1998; Fellesson and Friman, 2008; Friman et al., 1998). Affective dimensions receive less focus in empirical studies on the subject (Stradling et al., 2007). The resource integration activities and the scripts that customers acquire, form these dimensions. Identifying, sense-making and using require more or less cognitive, emotional or behavioral effort; for instance, getting stressed over not being able to identify an important and needed resource or feeling enthusiastic about the many resources that one is able to integrate. Consequently, the resource integration activities contribute to value co-creation or co-destruction, or a positive or negative customer experience.

Similarly, congruent customer scripts with those of the service provider, lead to a positive customer experience. Incongruent customer scripts lead to a negative customer experience. Moreover, depending on which script customers retain, different resource integration activities are of primary importance as described above. For customers with generic or incongruent scripts, easily accessible and meaningful resources would certainly contribute to positive customer experiences. For customers with rigid or transformative scripts, easily usable resources would seemingly contribute the most towards this end. Additionally, the extent to which the experience room dimensions are present or missing and in which way they are perceived also contributes to the customer experience.

Finally, reconnecting with the concept of servicescapes, the above portrays a different perspective of how we can perceive servicescapes. Instead of regarding them as the physical environment that impacts employees as well as customers of service providers and that can be used as a managerial tool for marketing purposes, the servicescape can also be regarded as bundles of resources that the customer can potentially integrate and in which interactive value formation takes place. As such, I have achieved the last aim of this thesis, which is to reframe the notion of servicescapes that is more attuned to the perspective of interactive value formation.

In concluding, I will briefly discuss the generalizability of my findings. Superficially, the identified interactive value practices of navigating and ticketing seem rather specific for the empirical context of public transport. Yet, it is possible to imagine customers being engaged in the task of finding one's way or being engaged in the purchase and payment of one's ticket as well as checking its applicability in a variety of other settings; for instance, in amusement parks, health clubs, supermarkets, or hotels. Other researchers in other contexts are likely to identify additional or different interactive value practices, such as those identified by McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012) in a health care setting. Even so, understanding customer experience of resource integration through the lens of practice and script theory should be valuable for other services. Value has been described as being formed by resource integration of customers (Arnould, 2008; Baron and Warnaby, 2011; Edvardsson et al., 2012; Grönroos, 2011; Hibbert et al., 2012; Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). These conceptualizations have been made in an all-encompassing way, not limited to services. On the contrary, it has been argued that this perspective is applicable in all marketing contexts (Vargo and Lusch, 2011). Consequently, the resource

integration activities of identifying, sense-making, and using can be thought of to be applicable to a wide variety of settings and not only to services in which the main intended interaction is between customer and servicescape. Customers in most service settings need to search for, comprehend, and use one or several resources in order to co-create value. Furthermore, the script types are of such general character that they should be applicable to a number of contexts. As scripts are implicit parts of practices (Reckwitz, 2010) the same line of arguments would apply regarding scripts as compared with those to practices. Also, the three dimensions of customer experience – cognitive evaluation, positive activation, and positive deactivation – are of such general character that they should be applicable in different settings. This is not to say that the model of customer experience of resource integration represents a universal pattern of a reality “out there”. However, I am convinced that the model can be generalized analytically (Yin, 2011) to a wider set of empirical contexts in which the focus is on customer experience of resource integration.

## **5.2 Methodological reflections and contributions**

Reflecting on the five appended papers, in which I applied different methodologies and methods, I can also make some methodological contributions. Although it has been stated that quantitatively measuring customer experience is problematic due to the complexity of the construct (Palmer, 2010), the use of the STS (Ettema et al., 2011) in this thesis provides promising results. The STS builds on extensive theory of subjective well-being which is closely coupled to the customer experience construct. The instrument contributes with a measure of both experience strength and valence as called for by Brakus et al. (2009) and Nysveen et al. (2012), who measure brand experience strength only. Although the validity of measuring affect retrospectively has been questioned (Nysveen et al., 2012), Kahneman et al. (2004) have found high correlations between immediate and retrospective measurements. Consequently, the STS constitutes a reliable measure of customer experience on a comprehensive level, which is in line with the holistic nature of the construct (Johnston and Kong, 2011). As a result, it complements measures of service attributes and characteristics of the offering (Klaus and Maklan, 2012; Witell and Löfgren, 2007), while covering both affective as well as the cognitive dimensions. Although the instrument is empirically applied in the context of public transport, it is presumably general enough in order to allow application in other service contexts. Consequently, by applying the STS it

should be possible in the future to compare customer experiences in different services.

Another interesting reflection is that the results of paper 1 and paper 2 differ to some extent, although both studies included the same informants; 24 and 26 business students respectively. Two different methodologies and methods were used in the papers. In paper 1 a special form of focus group was used, in which the students discussed what was most important when using public transport and interpreted the results themselves. In paper 2 a qualitative diary approach was used. In paper 1, the informants mentioned that price was most important to them. While this might be the case, the finding contradicts other research that states that price reductions in public transport has only a limited effect in increasing public transport demand (Goodwin, 1992). The methodology in paper 1 was inspired by Björlin Lidén and Edvardsson (2003), where it was used in the context of a design for service guarantees. When designing the characteristics of a product, the methodology might be valuable. For the context of this thesis, *in situ* methods (Edvardsson et al., 2012) seemed more appropriate, as in the qualitative diary method and the microethnography used in paper 4 and 5.

Especially the latter approach, with the combination of different methods, such as observations, interviews, and think-aloud protocols that are captured on high-definition digital video seems very useful in order to capture interactive value formation. During the observational study, instances of procedural consequences (Speer, 2002) occurred and informants thought that I tested them instead of the design of the servicescape. Researchers need to be sensitive to this and need to reassure that it is not about testing the informant but to understand his or her feelings, how they reason and that there is no right or wrong behavior. The video-based method seems appropriate in order to investigate interactive processes of services (Echeverri, 2005; Heath et al., 2010) and enables a very detailed analysis of the material. Although handling dozens of hours of video material can be overwhelming, modern qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo, eases this process and simplifies coding of the material. Towards this end, more observational studies have been called for (Tronvoll et al., 2011), which is an often required aspect of practice theory studies (Korkman, 2006; Warde, 1996) and hopefully will be seen more often in future studies on interactive value formation and resource integration.

### 5.3 Practical implications

Finally, this thesis has clear practical implications – not only for managers but also for others in the empirical context of public transportation and service designers, for instance. On a managerial level, this thesis shows that understanding customer experiences and their formation is a complex phenomenon. No single method alone – be it focus groups, observations, interviews or a survey – will give an all-encompassing answer to this complex phenomenon. Rather, applying different methodologies and methods, as done in this thesis, seems necessary if one wants to obtain an understanding of their customers. In particular, a focus on customers' interactive value practices seems fruitful and probably less applied in service development. More to the point, the measurement instrument could be combined with observational studies. The instrument could enable managers to evaluate the attractiveness of the service offering or of the service environment regarding the three dimensions of cognitive evaluation, positive activation, and positive deactivation. As an example, applying the scale could highlight that customers experience that the service is of high standard, but that they feel stressed using it. As a result, managers could direct their efforts in order to provide a more relaxed atmosphere. What is more, due to the general wording of the scale, managers could compare the service experience of parts of the service process with each other. For instance, it would be possible to compare the “waiting experience” in at a train station with the “on board experience”. Again, this would help practitioners with limited budgets to identify in which parts of the service to invest. Concerning decisions regarding what and how to improve in particular, decisions could be based on video-based microethnographies as presented in this thesis. In relation to the different script types, managers need to understand that not all customers have the same knowledge and skills in order to use their products or services. They could also ensure that customers with generic and incongruent scripts have the opportunity to approach staff or encourage customers to help each other.

The thesis also has implications for service design (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2010). The microethnography described in paper 4 could be included in the toolbox of service designers. Moreover, designers of services and servicescapes should focus on the extent to which the environment enables the resource integration activities of identifying, sense-making, and using and how intuitive (contributing to identifying), meaningful (contributing to sense-making) and, easy to use (contributing to using) resources are.

A focus on the concept of customer experience could be fruitful in relation to the empirical context of public transport. This is not to say that public transport should become an exciting, memorable, fun experience. Rather the focus could be on resource integration in terms of achieving positive activation and positive deactivation next to providing a service that is evaluated as being of a high standard. What is more, the thesis adds to the suggestions of Dziekan (2008) as regarding bus stops as an entry points into the service. Each entry point should provide sufficient information as to the use of the entire system regarding the customer practices of navigating as well as ticketing. Specifically, each bus stop should provide information not only in regards to the bus lines departing from the stop in question, but also an overall line map in order to encourage customer learning. Moreover, information about different payment options should be provided. The information should be intuitive, meaningful and easy to apprehend – even for first-time customers. Signs and symbols should be easily recognizable by customers. When the public transport system consists of bus lines as well as tram lines, the mapping of the different modes should be meaningful for customers. That is, trunk bus lines are likely to be categorized by customers as buses and not as tram lines even if traffic planners regard them as equivalent and map both of them on tram lines instead of on bus line maps.

#### **5.4 Future research**

This thesis provides an empirically grounded understanding of how customers experience their resource integration and describes how these are formed. Research on this subject is in the early stages as the numerous calls for empirical studies suggest (Arnould, 2008; Baron and Harris, 2008; Baron and Warnaby, 2011; Hibbert et al., 2012; Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012). I regard the following areas as especially interesting and fruitful.

First of all, the thesis has been conducted in one empirical context – public transportation. Other recent studies on interactive value formation and resource integration have been conducted in the same context (Echeverri and Skálén, 2011) or in health care (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012). Although these are two important settings in contemporary society, it would be of interest to conduct more empirical studies in different contexts. More to the point, an extended application of practice theory in resource integration is of interest and



has been called for (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012). Similarly, it would be fruitful to apply and validate the STS (Ettema et al., 2011) in other settings.

Secondly, customer learning (Hibbert et al., 2012) has recently been highlighted as an important future research topic. The findings of this thesis, in particular the incongruent script types, raise the question as to whether customers are motivated and willing to learn in order to use products and services. Consequently, it would be of interest to critically investigate the role of the “prosumer” (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008).

Thirdly, although the application of practice theory seems very fruitful in the context of interactive value formation and resource integration, additional theoretical frameworks should be drawn upon. One such example could be the IMP school with their focus on resource interaction (Ford, 1997). It would be worthwhile to investigate, if, for example, the ARA model (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995) is applicable in the business-to-consumer context. This holds especially true as it has been argued that everything is business-to-business now (Vargo and Lusch, 2011) and as connections to S-D logic have been recently discussed in the IMP literature (Baraldi et al., 2012; Ford, 2011).

Finally, as touched upon in the previous section, it would be of interest to apply the microethnographic methodology, as employed in this thesis, in related contexts. The field of service design (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2010) and service innovation (Sundbo and Toivonen, 2012) seem particularly receptive and promising as both fields emphasize the involvement of customers in order to develop new or improve existing services.

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