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Lived experience of a place - A phenomenological exploration of place brand creation by consumers

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study sheds light on co-creative place branding by approaching place brands from the grassroots level of lived experiences upwards. A place brand is seen as negotiation between culture, identity, and image that are simultaneously constructed and consumed in the level of lived experience. This identity-based view brings more dynamism to place branding by highlighting the power of actors and networks in constructing and consuming meanings. Place is understood as an ecosystem where different groups co-creatively build and negotiate place identity and the place's brand. The study shows how experiences in our everyday environment contribute to the experienced sense of place as place identity, and further to a wider place brand experience.

METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative, and conducted in Helsinki Airport within a research period of three weeks. A total of 50 interviews were carried out. The interviews followed phenomenological interview methods. In addition, ethnography as a method was utilized in studying the environment.

FINDINGS

The findings display how sense of place is negotiated in the multidimensional system of a place through its specific experiential dimensions, that in the airport are specified as competence, regulation and control, people, time, space, and experienced agency. These dimensions incorporate enabling and constraining features that guide the formation of experience, and thus of an airport's sense of place. A positive sense of place on a pre-reflective level is established when the environment supports the nature of human being-in-the-world. The conditions of successful place branding deal with optimizing the goals of a place ecosystem to support this nature of being, by understanding a place as a field of affordances that should maximize the possibility to redeem positive experiences. In practice, this study gives implications on how an environment should nurture and support the directed, temporal and inherently embodied nature of being. It also portrays the co-creative nature of the place ecosystem an airport hosts, showing how consumers co-creatively participate in the value creation and determine the actualized value-in-use phenomenologically in the surface of lived experience.

Keywords place branding, place co-creation, place identity, sense of place, place ecosystem, phenomenology, embodiment

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1. Introduction

Due to the highly globalized and mobilized world of today, the relevance of, and interest in place branding has grown vastly in recent decades (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013; Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2010). It is no longer enough that a place, such as a nation, region or a city, has its own identity: the boundless world created through e.g. explosion in means of communication technologies has turbulently changed the world to a global, interconnected arena of competitive forces (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2010; Govers & Go 2009). Not only does this affect businesses operating in the new environment, but also countries, regions and cities trying to manage the insecure surroundings. The attempts of assuring the evermore-moving masses of possible investors, tourists, employers, employees and inhabitants to consider residency or visitation have become a dominant phenomenon in the global bid to gain access to resource flows. (e.g. Kotler & Gertner 2002; Papadopoulous 2004; Gertner 2011.) Just as important it is to assure the current inhabitants, whether businesses or citizens, that the place they are located in is satisfying (Kavaratzis 2005; Colomb & Kalandides 2010).

Place branding poses marketers with multiple challenges: the variables and determinant factors are not, unlike in traditional marketing, under marketers' direct control (Papadopoulous & Heslop 2002) and it is difficult to define the "ownership" of a place and its brand. The unique challenges of branding a geographic entity stem from its interconnectivity with its surroundings: one can think of multiple seemingly uncontrollable factors jumbling the balance at a quick pace, on any given moment (e.g. natural disasters, politics and media). Building a coherent place brand requires extensive co-operation among multiple actors and organizations, such as governments, tourist organizations, businesses and residents in order to create streamlined communication as well as efficient, cohesive delivery of the brand promises. (Balakrishnan 2009; Moilanen & Rainisto 2009; Warnaby 2009; Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2010.) Although this need for communication between different stakeholder groups has been noted in the literature, place branding is still considered rather top-down controlled (Aitken & Campelo 2011; Warnaby & Medway 2013).

Top-down projected place brands have in practice proven to be perceived as vague and forced, and have resulted as inauthentic projections of a place (Aitken & Campelo 2011) and led to

perceived "sameness" of places (Warnaby & Medway 2013). A recent contribution towards answering the challenges in place branding has been to, in a multidisciplinary manner, tie concepts from other areas of research to place branding in order to make sense of how meanings are co-creatively built among different stakeholder groups. One such interesting effort is combining the ideas of service-dominant logic and co-creation to place brands. Warnaby (2009) for instance attempts to answer to the challenge of "place products'" and place branding's complexity through interweaving notions from service-dominant logic of marketing (originally developed by Vargo & Lusch 2004), suggesting places form their own unique product where different actors in an ecosystem collaboratively produce value propositions that are realized in lived experience, where consumers determine the actualized value-in-use of a place. Identity-based place branding (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013) is also a recent contribution to place branding literature, closely dealing with co-creation and encouraging multi-stakeholder dialogue in understanding how place identity iteratively and dynamically develops, concurrently thus developing and shaping a place brand. These viewpoints bring depth to place branding literature, as place identity as a starting point shifts the power in creating a place brand from place brand managers to a larger group of actors: consumers, citizens, institutions and corporate actors in a place (Govers & Go 2009, 3).

As the perspective on place branding is revised to reflections rising bottom-up from the grassroot level upwards, it makes sense that different groups and actors co-actively build, negotiate and develop a place's culture and image and thus identity in the lived environment (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013). Including the notion of place identity as a central concept in place branding brings more dynamism to attempted theorizations, as it shifts the power in place branding to the systems of networks of actors residing in a place, and highlights these networks in the creation of meanings (Govers & Go 2009, 3). The difficulty, however, proves to be in actually studying this co-construction: the gaps noted in current place branding literature deal with the vagueness surrounding co-creative and participatory place branding. As place brand, place identity and the notion of place itself are rather fuzzy and interwoven concepts, it is difficult to accurately pin down and separate their formation. Current literature has also promoted a rather static view on place identity (Kalandides 2011; Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013). Further, there is little empiric research attempting to display how the negotiation and interwoven dialogue in constructing meanings in a place occurs in reality. When considering how sense of place as place identity (Kalandides 2011)

forms, practical evidence of constructing and consuming meanings in lived experience and environment would bring depth and clarity to the concepts still difficult to define. Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) for instance assert that it would be useful to understand how place culture is collectively created and lived in a place, as this understanding would advance the perception of place identity formation through place culture, calling for further elaborations on co-creative place branding theory and the roles of stakeholder groups.

Places are much like services, in that they too are simultaneously produced and consumed (Govers & Go 2009, 7; Rakic & Chambers 2012). In order to gain a deeper understanding and new perspectives on how different stakeholder groups actively participate in the dialogic discussion and negotiation of constructing and consuming sense of place and place meanings (Govers & Go 2009; Rakic & Chambers 2012), the viewpoint on philosophical underpinnings and methodology must also be re-thought. At the moment, literature mainly focuses on the reflective, cognitive level of meaning making. It displays e.g. what kind of meanings or identity factors are attached to a place (Kalandides 2011) and how place branding should shadow this reflected identity (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013). Literature however fails to point how these reflections come about. Therefore, a further gap for my research, still left unfilled, is what *informs* these reflections that take place on the level of cognition.

1.1. Research objectives

Thus, an elaboration on the *phenomenological level of lived experience* is needed when considering how places are experienced, more accurately how lived experiences in a place inform the sense of place, and the reflections people have of places and their meanings on the cognitive level. Attention in the empiric part of this research is turned to analyzing experiences from the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology (Heidegger 1927/2002; Pernecky & Jamal 2010), observing the pre-reflective, embodied level of experiences (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008; Merleau-Ponty 1962) of a place. This gap needs to be filled in order to answer how the experiences in our everyday environment are interwoven to a wider place brand experience: to understand how

successful place branding is established, one must gain understanding on how a successful experience in a place forms.

By utilizing airport as a research context, this study observes a place of experience that is both very service intensive, as well as generally seen as a through-way, a place of transfer to other locations that seemingly lacks deep meaningfulness or identity (Augé 1995). Nevertheless, airports actually host a vast array of individual actions and points of social interaction, as well as generate feelings such as belonging, security and movement (Merriman 2005). Therefore, the idea of airports as places of meaninglessness can be criticized and studied further. Airport as a service ecosystem also provides an interesting context due to the lack of service perspective in most of place branding literature, although one could argue the perspective's relevance due to any places' (but especially tourism-centered places) high dependency on services (Hankinson 2010), and due to the airport service ecosystems' networked nature, where small subsystems all contribute to a larger, overarching goal. Airport acts as the site of this study in an attempt to understand the lived, grassroots level experiences of place consumers, and how and under which conditions they are lived through in the place ecosystem.

Information of how a positive place experience is established is useful in further learning about how these experiences inform how a place is felt and understood, that is, how a sense of place established. By understanding what makes a positive experience possible in an airport, understanding can be gained on what informs successful co-creation in terms of place branding in the airport. The regulatory and service intensity of an airport highlight the dimension of 'doing', the embodied experiences in a place, which possibly makes the elaborations on the pre-reflective level more clear.

The research problems formulated are:

> **RP I: *How do people establish a sense of place in an airport?***
> **RP II: *What are the conditions for successful place branding in the airport?***

This thesis attempts to answer these problems by providing in-depth observations and analysis on the phenomenological, embodied level of experience of the airport consumers, and by attempting to understand the factors affecting their experiences in the airport environment. By

providing explications on how passenger experiences in this environment form, patterns and themes that contribute to shared conditions or dimensions of experience can be recognized. Through recognizing the enabling and constraining factors in the experiential dimensions of the airport, understanding can be gained on how sense of place develops in everyday places, in service ecosystems constantly around us. By accessing this embodied and pre-reflective level of experience of the everyday, signals that inform the reflective level of meanings produced by cognition can be found.

Through this analysis of the embodied way of being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1927/2002) affecting the experienced sense of place in an airport, theorizations on the conditions that make a positive place experience possible can be made. By understanding the conditions for actualizing a positive experience, we can further abstract the discussion to ponder how these positive experiences affect the co-creative establishment and iteration of successful place branding in an airport environment.

1.2. Structure of the thesis

The structure of this thesis is as follows: literature review is followed by chapters of methodology, analysis of the findings, discussion and conclusion. The first subchapter of the literature review gives a general overview on place branding literature, highlighting the unique features and challenges related to it. Place branding literature with a focus on participatory, co-creative approaches is reviewed in the second subchapter, with an emphasis on the identity-based place branding model (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013), also reviewing definitions of place identity as sense of place from a multidisciplinary sample of literature. The third subchapter goes through the foundational aspects of what an experience in a place constitutively is from a phenomenological point of view. The methodology chapter presents general underpinnings of interpretive research in qualitative research tradition, as well as the main methods utilized, ethnography and phenomenological interviews. In addition, the data collection phase is described in detail, and a general overview of Helsinki Airport as a setting for this research is provided. The findings chapter presents analysis of the collected data, exhibiting six experiential dimensions of the airport, and answering the first research problem of this thesis. The discussion chapter abstracts the findings

to the level of theoretical discussion of place branding and answers the second research problem. The concluding chapter summarizes the thesis, discusses future research areas related to the topics and considers the possible limitations of this study.

2. Literature Review

The following subchapters will cover insights from literature in the fields of place branding, tourism studies, phenomenology, humanistic geography and environmental psychology. First, definitions of a place brand and place branding are introduced, and unique features and challenges highlighted. Subsequently, place brands and place branding are analyzed with an emphasis on various actors and service systems occupying a place, shedding light to co-creation of value and co-creative processes in place branding. Further, in an attempt to add depth to identity-based place branding as a recent contribution in place branding research, literature on place identity as sense of place is reviewed. In order to clarify how co-creative processes appear in the grassroots level of lived experience, the fourth subchapter focuses on defining an emplaced, lived experience through phenomenological perspective, and acts as the sensitizing framework through which the collected interview data is later analyzed.

2.1. What are we talking about? Definitions of a place brand and place branding

Place branding research has struggled with a lack of empiric research and theory-based evidence, testable models or hypotheses (Gertner 2011). Further, it has been difficult to distinguish the division and differences between place marketing and place branding (Gertner 2011). Therefore, it is challenging to find a unilateral conceptualization of a place brand or place branding as an activity from the existing literature. Positive for place branding as a research area is that it is a constantly growing activity, stemming from the academic community's grown interest in recent years. Therefore many of the relevant theoretical contributions are quite new (Moilanen & Rainisto 2009: 4; Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013), and studying meaningful issues in today's dynamic environment. Place brandings multidisciplinary nature is commonly agreed upon in literature, requiring altered, adjusted brand and branding theory development for the complexly formed 'place product' (Warnaby & Medway 2013), as opposed to traditional branding of goods (Hankison 2010).

In their extensive review of place branding studies, Lucarelli and Berg (2011) have distinguished three dominant perspectives in the field of place-related marketing and branding efforts. The first perspective *branding as production* deals with issues related to creating and managing a place brand as well as organizing place brand construction as a process. The second perspective, *branding as appropriation*, is focusing more on the consumption of a place brand and dealing with issues linked to the public acceptance and use of a place brand. The third central perspective is formed by *critical studies of place brands and place branding*, in which the varying influences of place-related branding efforts on "economic, social and cultural environment" are under investigation (ibid. 2011). The first perspective, branding as production, clearly involves an implication of a 'brand governor' or an owner, someone who takes charge of a place branding process and manages its different components. In many ways, this standpoint for place branding is outdated, overly simplified and positivistic, as will later be validated. The second perspective focuses more on the consumption of a place brand, and is thus closer to the perspective this study adopts, and attempts to contribute to.

A place brand is something created in the consumers' minds as varying combinations of associations (Zenker & Braun 2010; Moilanen & Rainisto 2009). Intangible and tangible features can be attached to a brand by an actor formally governing or managing the place brand, but they are nevertheless subjectively rephrased by the recipients (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013; Zenker & Braun 2010). As it is impossible to, with certainty, know how different user and stakeholder groups adopt or perceive different signals and symbols ascending from a place, place branding must be understood as a dynamic and multisided construct (Zenker & Braun 2010), with no straightforward answers or solutions. Earlier literature has seen place brands as affected by multiple factors, such as geography, places history, culture and well-known cultural figures and famous citizens. Media has also been seen to play a largely contributing role in creating an image, especially when communicating politics and social flaws. (Kotler & Gertner 2002.) Furthermore, place branding literature has discussed how places are attached with imagery related to products and services, especially in the extensive area of country-of-origin and product-country identity literature (Papadopoulous & Helsop 2002).

These viewpoints contribute to the associations and perceptions a place arouses in its various users, but they alone are incapable of clarifying the foundations of a place brand, that is, how a

place is perceived and what kind of associations are linked to it. The most competent overaching definition for a place brand so far has been the conceptualization of Zenker and Braun (2010, 5), stating that "a place brand is a network of associations in the consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, behavior and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design". This inherently displays place branding as a wider and more public activity, including politics and power negotiations in a place.

Place branding attempts to leverage both functional values and symbolic meanings. "That means that for the purposes of branding the place, whether a country, a region, a city or a neighborhood, is understood and treated as a brand or a multidimensional construct, consisting of functional, emotional, relational and strategic elements that collectively generate a unique set of associations with the place in the public mind" (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2010, 4). Kavaratzis (2004) notes three levels through which a place communicates to its consumers, i.e. different user groups: the primary level of the physical surroundings and available service systems, architecture and the "city's behavior", for example functioning of the infrastructure; the secondary level of official communications and PR; and the tertiary level of word-of-mouth from people residing in a place. This inherently displays issues in managing the complexity, overlap and conflict of the different levels of communication of a place (Kavaratzis 2004), affecting the emerging associations.

Place brands are always a negotiation between the internal and the external: user groups inside and outside a place are both relevant audiences in creating, building and managing a brand (Ashworth & Kavaratzis 2010). On one hand, internal satisfaction with a place expresses desirability to external groups, and on the other hand, external groups reinforce the internal appreciation of a place (Therkelsen et al. 2010). In the same vein, place branding poses challenges unknown to product or service branding due to the fact that these diverse stakeholder groups important to a place often have conflicting agendas (Warnaby 2009; Zenker & Braun 2010). A typical starting point for place branding has been to highlight unique features attached to the location, as most of the strategies utilized have been drawn from traditional product branding. These methods however are lacking the consideration for the multidimensional system network a place entails. (Moilanen & Rainisto 2009.) Opposed to product brands that often have clearly

defined segments they seek to serve, place inherently entails various user groups and individuals (Kavaratzis 2005), as well multiple different types of service and product providers (Warnaby 2009) which all need to be understood in managing a brand of a place.

Problematic from the point of view of the multiple stakeholder groups is place brandings top-down controlled nature (Warnaby & Medway 2013), where government and area officials form marketing programs and implementation strategies to diffuse a place brand (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013), unequally incorporating stakeholder groups to the formation and construction of the brand (Aitken & Campelo 2011; Braun et al. 2013). Often emphasis is put on strategic corporate partners, whilst the larger community, such as inhabitants are left out of shaping and creating the place brand (Aitken & Campelo 2011; Braun et al. 2013). In practice, place branding efforts are often contracted to a campaign-style approach of communication and promotion, mainly utilizing visual material such as logos and slogans, and expecting immediate results, much less paying attention to the long-term value and consistent dynamism of the brand (Kavaratzis 2012), which has been argued to ultimately lead to the "sameness of places" (Warnaby & Medway 2013). As brands that fail to identify themselves with systems of shared meanings and value have only gained weak appreciation due to their inauthentic nature (Aitken & Campelo 2011), place branding research has started to identify more inclusive ways of shaping a place brand, by incorporating the ideas of co-creation to constructing a place brand.

Through this general introduction to the current stance in place branding literature, we can conclude that:

- "A place brand is a network of associations in the consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, behavior and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design" (Zenker & Braun 2010, 5).
- In earlier research, place branding has been seen rather top-down controlled (e.g. Warnaby & Medway 2013). This viewpoint of branding as production (Luzarelli & Berg 2011) has by large neglected the shared and complex structure of place ownership and the need to engage different user groups into ongoing dialogue as a part of place brand construction.

- As places are "multidimensional constructs" (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2010), strategies and simplified toolkits from the side of product branding produce weak results in terms of authentic place brands.

- For this reason, the most prominent and current studies in place branding research understand the complex nature of place as a concept, and develop new place branding theorizations with a more participatory, co-creative approach (e.g. Warnaby 2009; Warnaby & Medway 2011; Aitken & Campelo 2011; Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013), thereby integrating the notion of multiple stakeholder groups collectively consuming and simultaneously constructing places (Rakic & Chambers 2012) to place brands.

2.2 Co-creating a place brand

Place branding has in recent years evolved towards a more consumer-oriented direction, research covering areas connected to ideas of co-creation, a field of interest that within marketing started to develop in service marketing research. Considerable emphasis has been placed on e.g. greater involvement of diverse user and stakeholder groups in place branding efforts (Braun et al. 2013; Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013); on the dynamic nature of a place brand (Kalandides 2011); and on understanding place as hosting multiple contesting dialogues between actors (Aitken & Campelo 2011).

Various interpretations of co-creation have been presented, especially in the field of marketing, the most relevant elaborations (e.g. Warnaby 2009) for this research stemming from the original service dominant logic-theory developed by Vargo & Lusch (2004, 2006, 2008): customer always being a co-creator of value with the provider. In line with this, co-creation deals with undetermined offering and subjective, phenomenological determinations of experienced value; providers can only offer value propositions and actual value is co-created with joint efforts from both the customer and the provider side in the given context (Vargo & Lusch 2004; 2006; 2008). In dealing with a place brand, many of the original foundational premises of service-dominant logic apply with slight alterations (Warnaby 2009).

The next subchapter will display how different studies within place branding approach co-creation and co-creative practices, and how the ideas of co-creation can be applied to place-related concepts, such as place identity.

2.2.1. Co-creation and multilogue inside a place ecosystem

Vargo and Lusch (2004) defined co-creation of value as customers' participation in determining and creating value: a company provides an offering, leveraging insights on how the offering can be used (i.e. value proposition), but a customer is ultimately the one determining value creation for the product or service by deciding when to use it, why to use it and how to use it. Similarly, in place branding the notions of co-creation clearly point to the direction of involving a greater number of actors in the process of creating a brand (Warnaby 2009; Warnaby & Medway 2013; Aitken & Campelo 2011; Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013). Further, and most importantly, co-creative models in place branding have begun understanding the unfixed and dynamic nature of place brands – that is, the difficulty to define and pin a place brand down in a concrete and stable manner, and the need to understand its changing and iterative character. In other words, in accordance with the idea of phenomenological value determination of service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch 2004), place brands and their value is something collaboratively created in an iterative interplay of multiple actors, and ultimately realized in the place consumer interface.

Warnaby (2009) puts effort in arguing how service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch 2004; 2006; 2008) of marketing has multiple similarities and points of resonance with place branding, and how the SL-logic could be utilized in creating a deeper understanding on place brands. Just as tangible products and (often intangible) services are on one hand seen to merge into each other more and more, a place can similarly be seen to embody multiple service systems and networks within a 'place product', that through their operand (physical resources) and operant resources (knowledge, skills, competences) offer more suitable platforms to some stakeholder groups, than others.

Place as a product is the merger of the "city of words" (the symbolic representation of a place) and the "city of stones" (the physical reality of a place) (Therkelsen et al. 2010). This means that

a place not only entails the landscape, geographical features and material realm such as architecture, infrastructure and the aforementioned service systems of a place, but also the ways in which a place is experienced, perceived and sensed, how some places are more important to us than others, how some places are avoided and how these are expressed internally and interactively (Therkelsen et al. 2010). Place products thus combine the physical realm and the realm of meanings (Warnaby & Medway 2013). This constitution of a place as physical features and as symbolic features essentially suggests constant co-creative and participatory action involving different groups and dimensions, such as governmental and institutional actors and the people consuming the place, as well as the physical characteristics and structure of the systems in that place.

The merger of the physical factors and competences, such as service systems in a place, and the symbolic factors, such as place image and identity and attached meanings constitute the value offering of a place. This interwoven combination creates the value proposition of a place's physical and social reality it is able to offer through its network of systems (Warnaby 2009). The value propositions cannot be realized without service systems functioning in an organized manner, offering the components of the propositions by organizing their operant and operand resources. The recognition of needed integration between organizational mechanisms and place product is thus essential for enabling place branding's successful assembly of value propositions. Different place actors responsible for the creation and maintenance of the service systems should have a functioning network of relationships that would enable them to in some sense reach a consensus of what the nature of that place and its offering in essence is (Warnaby 2009).

Value propositions are effectively realized only in the surface of lived experiences, which is, when the place consumers redeem the value propositions of a place and actualize them, determining the actual experienced value-in-use in a phenomenological manner (Warnaby 2009). Experience of a place can thus be described as complex interplay of different service and product systems integrated to a place, public policy controlling the systems, different user groups and stakeholders collectively creating the places ambiance, and consumers as individual experience constructors picking the bits and pieces they wish to incorporate in their personal realization of the place experience, that is inherently a combination of "physical and social resources and attractions" (Warnaby 2009). This displays the complex nature of a place product, as it includes

fundamentally "both the physical dimensions (…), and equally what goes on within them" (Warnaby 2009).

Through value co-creation with place consumers, value propositions are shaped, realized and redeemed, which Warnaby (2009) argues influences the image of the place, an important factor in developing a place brand. The service systems within a place should be able to organize their parallel offerings to serve a somewhat shared goal and to resonate with the targeted place consumers' needs, in order to maximize the positivity of the experience of a place (Warnaby 2009) and in order to create image benefits and contribute to the foundations of the place identity in a constructive manner.

Kavaratzis (2012) also marks the touchpoints between service-dominant logic and place branding, especially in regards to the notion of co-creation and of the search for a more holistic and dynamic view of the surrounding environment. Kavaratzis (2012) calls for deepened understanding to the complex social and cultural environment surrounding and forming place brands. The demands for more inclusive stakeholder involvement are present in the environment: place branding is evolving to be more and more a public and political activity, involving multiplicity of actors, and the online world is also contributing significantly to co-creation, if not only by making an arena of dynamic interaction available. In order to gain interaction and improve and assert authenticity to the meanings place brands convey, stakeholders should be active participants in the brand building process, instead of passive targets of top-down branding efforts. (Kavaratzis 2012.) Therefore the same idea of phenomenological determination of value-in-use is present in Kavaratzis' (2012) determinations, supporting the idea of a dynamic multi-actor network collectively creating value propositions and offering possibilities for their satisfying redemption.

In the same vein and in an attempt to shed light on the different stakeholder groups, Aitken and Campelo (2011) propose that at the core of a place brand, an integrating force are the people who live through and create the culture of the place. A collective ownership of a brand is suggested, where a place brand is "tied to its ecosystem, both human and natural, and is dependent on the relationships between people, communities, place and experience" (Aitken & Campelo 2011, 917). Co-creation of a brand is thus a process where intentional directions

towards which to diffuse brand meanings are not specified, but rather a network of relationships and shared experiences create *open-ended* meanings (Aitken & Campelo 2011). In their study, Aitken and Campelo (2011) constitute a system of place brand co-creation comprising of rights, roles, responsibilities and relationships that signal a sense of shared ownership of a place brand and display communal involvement and commitment to the sense of place. This co-creative, ongoing process of a place brand also highlights the importance of relationships in nurturing the co-creative iteration of a place identity (Aitken & Campelo 2011).

Similarly, Braun et al. (2013) support the notion of people creating the ambiance and social structure of a place, and especially focus on the original inhabitants of a place, distinguishing the three roles residents play in place branding efforts: *residents as integrated part of a place brand*, *residents as ambassadors* for their place brand and *residents as citizens*. Residents are integrated in a place brand as they are what make the place a place: without people, a geographic entity would only be empty space. Residents give a place its ambiance and a local feeling, and constantly construct it further. Residents also act as ambassadors for their place brands, as they are the authentic source of insider information of a place, which is spread through word-of-mouth, nowadays both offline and online. Finally, residents co-construct the place further through their role as citizens, as they participate in electing governments and decision makers, and have political power themselves in taking part in the place making. Residents as citizens can in fact be seen as contributing to the embodiment of a place brand, either accepting it as coherent with their experience of a place and reinforcing it with everyday actions, or resenting it as false or inauthentic. (Braun et al. 2013.) The contribution of Braun et al. (2013) is easily applicable to smaller place sub-ecosystems, such as the airport, where the role of 'residents' is very similar to passengers, apart from political power in elections (that nevertheless can be thought to be replaced by the power of consumers in shaping for instance the service selection in an airport).

As shown, places are not static physical environments, but ecosystems of different power relations, interests, institutions, groups and individuals with evolving roles and preferences situated within a social, cultural and political context, also in constant change. By involving a larger variety of stakeholder groups in place brand creation, collective authenticity that creates sustainability for a brand could be achieved (Aitken & Campelo 2011; Braun et al. 2013). Value creating brands are in essence harnessed to act as platforms for cultural material, enabling and

encouraging expression (Holt 2002), i.e. co-creation of value jointly with the brands and the community around them. This in place branding could be achieved by turning the focus to the grassroots level when constructing and shaping a place brand. By looking into the dynamics of the everyday environment and the relationship structures it holds, one could more clearly see the ingredients of the interplay that create meanings and feed the cultural systems, and that affect the experienced sense of place as informing place identity.

2.2.2. Identity-based place branding

One of the most interesting and recent contributions to co-creative place branding theories has been the identity-based place branding model created by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013). Place identity holds seemingly evident similarities to place brands, as Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013, 76) elaborate: "In general, there seems to be an agreement that both the place brand and place identity are formed through a complex system of interactions between the individual and the collective, between the physical and the non-physical, between the functional and the emotional, between the internal and the external, and between the organized and random".

Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) propose that the concept of place identity is the central component in place branding that has the possibility to clarify the theory basis, as the notion of place identity highlights essential characteristics, such as co-creation, in place branding theory. One of the key aspects is the understanding of identity not as an outcome of a process, but rather as a constantly and dialogically evolving concept (as noted in the literature reviewed previously, e.g. Kalandides 2011), much like place branding and place brands. The static view of conceptualizing identity in relation to place branding has led to incompetent strategies of distilling a place's image and transferring and leveraging it in communication efforts, forcing projections of what a top-down controller sees as the place's image to the public. However, considering identity as something easily defined and traced leads to simplified, inefficient efforts and ignoring the its dynamic nature (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013).

Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) doubt the insights on place identity being an easily distinguishable source of material to be manipulated and utilized in place branding, and thus propose a

framework that interweaves the shadowing processes of identity formation to an ongoing discussion between multiple stakeholder groups residing in a place. A dynamic model ties together identity conversation sub-processes, place branding shadowing the formation of place identity. With the model, Kavaratzis & Hatch (2013) suggest that effective place branding is resonant with, and shadowing the sub-processes of expressing, mirroring, reflecting and impressing in a place's ongoing identity iteration.
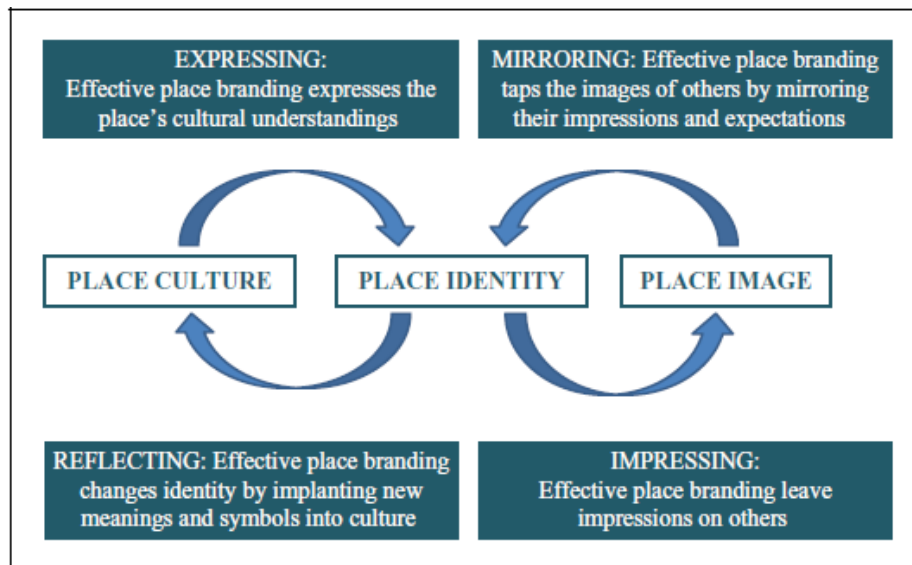
Picture 1. How place branding shadows the identity process. (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013)

The processes are not linear or clearly structured, but rather take place simultaneously in an interwoven manner. Culture and image are the internal and external definitions of identity, culture creating the environment for internal identity definition and image reflecting the external meanings of identity. Basically place identity formation is thus a balancing negotiation between the internal and the external. Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) follow the work of Hatch and Schultz (2002) by utilizing their model of identity-formation, where culture makes itself evident in an identity, identity expressing shared cultural traits and on the other hand culture evolving through identity building processes; and image evolves through identity on one hand creating impressions for 'outsiders', and on the other hand mirroring those impressions back to identity (Hatch & Schultz 2002). If place branding is in its part thought as a facilitator in the identity-building process, the presented circulation shows place branding as a multi-stakeholder model of constant "dialogue, debate and contestation". (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013, 82.)

If understood through this model, place branding would thus allow discussion between multiple groups residing in the place, by on one hand expressing the local culture and leaving impressions on others and on the other hand further feeding raw material to an ongoing identity process by mirroring the impressions of outsiders and reflecting the feedback from outside to the internal culture (ibid.). Internalizing this model and leveraging it to practical actions in place branding could thus potentially answer many of the challenges raised in the reviewed literature (in e.g. Kavaratzis 2012; Braun et al. 2013; Aitken & Campelo 2011; Warnaby 2009).

The model of identity-based place branding is interesting in that it shifts the attention to the real life occurring in a place, in contrast to creating top-down managed programs to promote readily defined place brands. However, the conceptualization lacks clarity in terms of distinguishing clearly how place identity is established. Further, as place is a unique construct, a theorization explaining place identity through an organizational identity model (Hatch & Schultz 2002) might not be sufficiently underlining its distinct features. In an attempt to advance the understanding of place identity, literature from other fields, such as environmental psychology, phenomenology and human geography is reviewed next.

2.2.3. Place identity as sense of place

As mentioned earlier, place branding literature has long promoted a rather static view on identity, claiming that identity is something that can be controlled and communicated, and asserted on internal and external audiences (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013). Kalandides (2011) recognizes multiple variations in descriptions of place identity: place identity can be seen as an individual identity, or as a formative of group identity, and it can mean the mental representations of a place by an individual, as well as representations shared by a group. Place identity has also been used to describe groups' attachment to a territory. The standpoint most congruent with this thesis sees place identity as *sense of place* (Kalandides 2011), as some kind of character or distinctiveness, "the local structure of feeling" (Gustafson 2001), and the spirit of a place. This conceptualization rejects the notions of identity as fixed and turns attention to social sciences in defining place as a construct and understanding the constituents and nature of a place identity as sense of place in a more dynamic manner. Dimensions and characteristics of places

and their effect on how a place is experienced are reviewed in order to understand how a sense of place essentially forms.

First, place is *experienced personally*: places mean different things to people (Arefi 1999; Cresswell 2004), and groups or individuals echo different kinds of identities to place (Cresswell 1996). Places entail socially shared expectations, norm-obeying behavior and communication; one knows what to do in a place, and if actions do not fit into these expectations, they are "out of place" (Cresswell 1996, 5). Places thus inherently contain features of both in-placeness and out-of-placeness: meanings are assigned to places in congruence with the prominent norms of the society but places are also venues for breaking boundaries and for assigning alternative and conflicting meanings that clash with the normative image of a place (Cresswell 1996, 13). The negotiations of inserted and accepted meanings create the various interpretations of a place (Cresswell 1996, 13.) The width and depth of one's sense of place also differs depending on the perceiver and the context: some pay close attention to their surroundings and the experiences they encounter, whereas some foreground other things and fade surroundings to the background (Relph 2009); some sense the place intentionally in conflict with others and some seek for resonance with a group by complying with collectively shared meanings (Cresswell 1996). Further, some feel at home in places that others view mundane (Seamon 2011).

Place is thus never a purely geographical concept, but rather a concept in the intersection of geography and social world (Therkelsen et al. 2010; Rakic & Chambers 2012). Similarly, place should not be viewed as purely objectivist, nor subjectivist: on one hand individuals afford things in the world, but on the other, the world also affords individuals (Seamon 2011; Heidegger 1927/2002). One observes a place both with inward and outward orientation: a place is an entity itself, and has certain rules, norms, expectations and typical actions that connect to it, but it is also a part of a larger whole and thus quite inevitably has some kind of a relationship with the wider context of e.g. social and cultural powers (Seamon 2011). Places are thus never experienced in isolation (Massey 1994; Gustafson 2001), but as a part of the world (and in times of exceeding mobility and globalization, exceedingly so (Gustafson 2001)).

Second, this personal creation of meanings takes shape *in the dialogic system* of dimensions places naturally entail. Seamon (2011) suggests that places interweave three dimensions: *the*

geographical ensemble, in other words the material existence and physical environment of a place, *people-in-place*, the social dimension including actions of individuals and groups as well as the meanings assigned to a place, and *genius loci*, the "spirit of place", the personal character or uniqueness of a place. Warnaby and Medway (2013) and Gustafson (2001, both following Agnew 1987) describe the same threefold division with slightly different terms of location, locale and sense of place. Similarly, Cresswell (2004) sees place as the interplay of location, locale and sense of place; location and locale depicting the physical position and surroundings of a place as well as actions in a place, and sense of place tapping into the individual experience of how a place feels and what kind of meanings it holds within. This complies with the division proposed by Relph (1976) of the components of place and its identity as the physical setting, the activities and the meanings.

The interaction of different elements in a place is also articulated by Läpple (1991), who sees space as combining four important elements (as explained in Kalandides (2011): the material-physical substrate of social relations; the structures of social interaction; the regulatory system; and the spatial system of symbols, signs and representations. These constitutive elements interact with each other, as humans inhabit a material environment, and appropriate objects in that environment; do so in a situation that is controlled by regulations and legislation, and through and within the appropriation deal with the space as consisting of symbols, signs and representations. As Kalandides (2011) notes, the material-physical environment and the regulations controlling it are the more permanent and stable components of sense of place and place identity, and social interaction and symbolic elements the dimensions that constantly develop and change.

Third, this notion of place as on one hand the setting and background for events and experiences, and on the other hand as raw material for meaning making implies that places are simultaneously *consumed and constructed* (Rakic & Chambers 2012). Rakic and Chambers (2012) argue that these processes of consumption and construction are simultaneous and interwoven, and produce affective meanings in dialogue with each other. As the authors display in their study of Athenian Acropolis, different user groups simultaneously and in dialogue with the physical surroundings and the material system, as well as each other, consume and create meanings of and for a place through embodied performances (ibid. 2012).

Places thus essentially hold an idea of humans being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1927/2002; Gallagher & Zahavi 2008; Seamon 2011; Pernecky & Jamal 2010), assuming an immersed and diffused relationship between people and the environment, place being the locus of intentional action and assigned meaning, and human actions molding the place and its meanings further (Seamon 2011; Rakic & Chambers 2012). An environment itself is embodied, in that people occupying it sense it through various senses, inhabit it with their bodies, and constantly present and express themselves through their bodies, all of which inherently contribute to the feel and meaning of that space (Crouch 2000). The essence of a place is thus its ever-present nature in our experience, "the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of human existence" (Relph 1976, 43).

As mentioned, this thesis takes a stance on sense of place being a dialogically evolving concept. This is also clearly displayed in the aforementioned propositions of the constitution of place as a three-fold structure (e.g. Cresswell 1996; Seamon 2011; Relph 1976). The negotiations between the material-physical environment, the people and social conventions in the place, and the personal meanings and inner constructs attached to the place create its unique feeling and spirit. It can be thus concluded that regardless of the difficulty in finding a clear, theoretically stabilized conceptualization to sense of place as place identity, the concept nevertheless includes dimensions of personal experiences of a place, social interaction and inhabiting a place with others, and interaction with the physical environment, as well as all of these dimensions' interplay and dialogue. Noteworthy in the literature reviewed earlier is that the majority is concerned of and focuses on sense of place and place identity on the reflective, cognitive level of meaning making (especially in terms of place identity models and conceptualizations in place branding literature). This does not however describe how the reflections on a place are brought about.

In order to understand what informs the cognitive level and how the positive meaning-making develops, attention should be paid to the pre-cognitive level as well, that is, the level of embodied experience that informs the construction of meaning and attachment. Because the empiric data of this research is analyzed through sensitizing concepts from phenomenology, the next chapter reviews how phenomenology as a philosophy sees human experience, always emplaced

(Heidegger 1927/2002). The following characteristics of phenomenological experience explicated are further used in analyzing lived experience of the airport and in establishing a sense of place.

2.3. A phenomenological account on experience in a place

Phenomenology as a philosophy attempts to tap into the lived experience and create a holistic description (Pernecky & Jamal 2010). It holds experience as a first-person account of lived experiences situated in a context: experience, as it is lived, cannot be observed separate from the environment it takes place in, neither can it be generalized: objective descriptions portray matters from one side only, and as perception is always perspectival, individual interpretations vary (Thompson et al. 1989).

Thompson et al. (1989) present three metaphors in explaining existential phenomenology: the metaphors of pattern, figure and ground and seeing. First, the pattern metaphor relates to the contextuality of phenomenological approach (Thompson et al. 1989): subjects are residing and living through changing situations in a world that is hosting multiple beings (Heidegger 1927/2002). A phenomenological account does not provide an objective description, but rather a description injected with its contextuality. Therefore phenomenological descriptions are descriptions from lived lifeworlds. (Thompson et al. 1989.) Second, the metaphor of figure and ground connects to perception and perspectivalness: our perception has a skill of lifting some aspects to the center of our attention while simultaneously fading some to the background. Third, the seeing metaphor states the levels of pre-reflection and reflection in lived experience. (Thompson et al. 1989.) All of our experiences first take place through embodiment, and thus on a pre-reflective level (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Most of our everyday experiences also stay on that pre-reflective level, and are only brought to the foreground when through narrative movement the agent looks for meanings or symbols in them (Thompson et al. 1989).

The next subchapter reviews phenomenological literature in order to distinguish key issues in lived experience and later in this thesis analyze how they affect the simultaneous consumption and construction (Rakic & Chambers 2012) of an airport as a place, and the creation of its sense

of place. This subchapter begins by explaining how phenomenology sees perception, consciousness and intentionality of humans as living subjects. Next, inherent characteristics of intersubjectivity, directedness and embodied existence of our experiential life are addressed. The final subsection will explicate the concepts of agency and affordances, mostly from the point of view of affordances theory created by Gibson (1979).

2.3.1. Humans as living subjects

Although in many ways a scattered field of philosophy of the mind, almost all major figures within phenomenology agree that all consciousness holds self-consciousness within; there is no experience that is not inherently experienced as one's own (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 46). This kind of intuitive, inherent self-consciousness present in all experiences is accounted for as *pre-reflective*: it is not processed in one's mind through introspection or objectification in encounters, but it rather exists naturally in the core of a primary experience (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 46). It colors all human experiences implicitly: everything I experience is experienced by me, it is mine. This pre-reflective consciousness is non-observational and invisible, that is, we do not pay attention to it, but it nevertheless colors cognitive reflections of experiences (ibid., 54).

Experiences are not lived through in isolation: rather, they are tied together with our ability to intuitively remember similar situations in the past, as well as our ability to anticipate possible results of actions or events in our experiences (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 85). Without an inherent time-consciousness, ongoing experiences would be seen as isolated, unconnected points. (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 75; Zahavi 2007) Humans are essentially beings in constant connection to time with a past, present and future (Heidegger 1927/2002). In other words, to understand where we are going, we must have intuitively retained a sense of where we are coming from, where are we now and towards what we are heading. This temporality is fundamental to human existence and affects the possibilities we perceive and the potential we redeem (Heidegger 1927/2002).

Living body "inhabits space and time" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 161) and the longitudinal understanding of our chain of events enables us to have experiences and tie them in the temporal

stream of our being. The objective duration does not, however, necessarily tell about the actual experienced temporal process. The feel of time differs subjectively, depending on varying factors, such as the mood of the person, emotions and feelings, and the surrounding environment (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 83; Wyllie 2005). Human lives are not just a collection of passing experiences (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 85), but rather coinciding streams of temporality, passing moments and passed moments retrieved from memories and used in understanding and sense making (ibid., 86). This sense of *historicity* (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 86) – one's understanding of being a part of an ongoing history as an individual, with past experiences and memories and a future horizon – shapes our understanding of the world and of the experiences we encounter (Pernecky & Jamal 2010).

2.3.2. Intersubjectivity

Although phenomenology is concerned with first-person accounts of experiences, individual experiences are not purely labeled by subjective perception. A lot of what appears to me in a world, appears to others as well, in other words, my perception of something always has a counterpart of someone else's perception, "a horizon of co-existing profiles" (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 101).

This does not deny the subjectivity of an experience, nor the fact that perception is actively 'created' by an individual. Rather it explains how individuals involuntarily and by nature enlarge their perception through e.g. their cultural context and acquired social and cultural knowledge (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Nothing is experienced within a vacuum: as we share the environment with others, we are similarly also sharing influencing factors that determine subjective perceptions. Other living subjects are enlarging the focus of our world views as we do not alone determine perceptions of the world, but rather have to share that space and somewhat resonate with those who we share the space with (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008; Cresswell 1996).

This shared way of perception, *intersubjectivity*, has a lot to do with learning: although the environment is a subjective field of affordances, everything we perceive and the knowledge of what to do with what is perceived is acquired from others. Perception evolves through the

physical reality, surrounding environment and individual horizons, but also through the social context and shared social world we are embedded to. (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 103). Being immersed in a social world, we accumulate our skills by learning from others. Through this acquiring of skills our bodies learn to cope in different situations, and naturally strive towards maintaining a balance (Dreyfus 1996). When a skill is internalized, there is no external motivation or conscious decision making behind our actions (Joy & Sherry 2003), but rather "one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 161).

Intersubjectivity essentially deals with the fact that by recognizing ourselves as embodied subjects we must recognize others doing the same; that is, understand that we live in a shared world that features other living, embodied subjects. Therefore, when I observe my own body, I basically observe things visible to others. Due to the fact that my body and behavior carry meanings and express my mental states, my behavior is an embodied language that allows others to understand my actions because it is also a language they have themselves learned. (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 184-185.)

2.3.3. Directedness

If intersubjectivity is described as being conscious of the world, sharing beliefs and certain experiential aspects, consciousness alone can also be depicted as goal-oriented, "consciousness-of-something" (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 107). This would imply that consciousness comprises of two features that supplement and actualize each other; intentionality and experience (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 109). Intentionality as a concept is closely connected to the mental, psychical side of humans, specifically to our proneness to *directedness* (Pollio & Thompson 1997, 7). This is not to say that everything we do is goal-oriented but rather that our consciousness has a feel for leaping beyond our inner self, a tendency to seek for a target (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 109), target being sought from the world we are situated in (Pollio & Thompson 1997). In other words, "acts of consciousness and objects of consciousness are essentially interdependent" (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 113): an intentional act has an object, and an intended object has a subjective, intentional act. There is no experience without a world that the experience takes place in, and

thereby human beings seeking to actualize experiences are constantly attuned towards this world (Pollio & Thompson 1997, 7; Heidegger 1927/2002).

Intentionality and its objects are always perspectival: each experiencing subject is conscious of the intended object in a personal way, depending on factors such as the objects determinations and givenness (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 114), that are affected by our way of being immersed in the world (Heidegger 1927/2002). In other words, phenomenology suggests that perception is meaningful and colored by subjective points of reference, feelings, sensations, emotions and individual historicity to name a few (Pollio & Thompson 1997, 7); "experience is always structured as a relation between some experience and something experienced" (Pollio & Thompson 1997, 15). An intentional object does not have to be physically present and existing at the time of perception; it can also be e.g. imagined or remembered (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 115-116).

Consciousness, intentionality and directedness are also colored by existential moods, such as boredom, depression and overwhelming joy that tint our internal ambiance and experience of the world (Ratcliffe 2008). Ratcliffe (2008) calls these affecting moods existential feelings, and connects them closely to the possibilities (which Gibson (1979) calls affordances) one experiences present in an environment. Ratcliffe (2008) claims that our existential feelings affect how we posture ourselves in-the-world that other beings inhabit, and constitute to our sense of belonging in that world. This sense of belonging influences to the field of possibilities we perceive (Ratcliffe 2008).

2.3.4. Embodied existence

Cognition and experiences are shaped by our *embodied presence*: the shape of our bodies, the abilities of our bodies and the sensations in our bodies (Merleau-Ponty 1962). The capabilities a body entails shape the set of affordances and possibilities we perceive (Gibson 1979), and enable us to alter and manipulate the environment we are in (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 132). What we experience, we experience first through our bodies: how we are positioned in-the-world and how our bodily abilities answer to the stimuli from the world affects how we perceive and thus make sense and think of the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962). In other words, our bodies direct themselves

towards the world, ushering events through them (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 161). The concept of embodiment is intrinsic to phenomenology, as experience is not possible without an experiencing body that guides our observation of ourselves and others in a shared world (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Joy & Sherry 2003; Dreyfus 1996).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes embodiment in three levels: in the physiological level of one's bodily form, such as height and weight and distinctive physical features; in the level of skill acquisition; and in the level of people as embodied subjects embedded in a social world (Joy & Sherry 2003). If indeed "every habit is both motor and perceptual" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 175), everything we encounter is always encountered through our bodies as the primal mediums of facilitating experience. Everything is also contextual and affected by culture: skill acquisition is advanced and mediated by others sharing the environment and social code and by observing and imitating others we accumulate our collection of skills, and therefore accumulate our possibilities to skillfully adapt and answer to changed circumstances (Joy & Sherry 2003). Body is a dynamic whole that does not have a ready set variety of skills and abilities, but that rather develops and learns to adjust to different situations. Through repetition acquired skills turn into habits that are beyond mental control, that become embodied in one's actions and that later on help to adapt to new circumstances (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Dreyfus 1996; Dreyfus & Dreyfus 2004).

From a phenomenological point of view, one's body is both lived and objective (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 136), this conceptualization articulating the difference between a first-person experience of a body, of *my* body, and an objective observation of *a* body. Embodiment is how one is postured in the world, how one responds to the impulses from the world, and how one's body pre-reflectively senses the incoming and surrounding stimuli (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 137). However, not only do we enact through our bodies in our daily environment but we also interpret others through their bodily behavior. Living bodies are an extension of language; they carry meanings that are shared within the social environment and context. Therefore every encounter we have with others is an ensemble of mental and bodily actions, and essentially interlinks embodied presence with the concept of intersubjectivity. (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 148-149.)

Embodiment is thus the pre-reflective form of a reflected experience. Our bodies do not only pre-reflectively make sense of the environment we are in, but also entail our existential feelings and moods (as elaborated by e.g. Ratcliffe 2008) that influence our experiences and the affordances and meanings granted by the environment (Gibson 1979). Therefore, a body is integrated to the environment as much as the environment is to a body; our internal environment, meaning e.g. our feelings and sensations, reply and adjust to the external environment in a way that the current situation calls, but also in turn can significantly influence how the environment itself is experienced (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 138).

As human beings we have a built-in feature of self-centeredness in terms of space of experience and experiencing space. We perceive ourselves in the heart of an experience; I am the zero-point of me perceiving and experiencing the environment, so naturally I am the reference point to all of the objects in the perceived environment (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 142). This is to say that our bodies are in normal situations 'invisible' to us; although everything is experienced through embodiment, our bodies and our consciousness of our bodies is not foregrounded, but rather there is no intentional object-consciousness of our bodies at all (ibid., 143). The invisibility of the awareness of one's body helps to direct the attention to functioning in a meaningful way, e.g. fulfilling tasks or projects (Dreyfus 1996), and the awareness of one's body is mostly apparent when phasing deviant states, e.g. pain or disabilities (Ratcliffe 2008).

2.3.5. Agency and affordances

Gibson (1979) describes affordances as objectively immeasurable, situative 'qualities' an individual perceives from the environment. These qualities are not descriptive qualities of objects, but rather the practical 'qualities' or opportunities they grant (Jones 2003). Gibson (1979) claims that affordances are a matter of both physical and psychical, without a clear distinction, and supports an interactionist view in seeing agents and situations as an interactive combination affecting perceived field of affordances. Opposing the view of people creating and self-constructing the lived world and its meanings, he argues that "people and animals are attuned to variables and invariants of information in their activities as they interact as participants with other systems in the world that we inhabit". This *situativeness* shifts the focus

from pure individual agency to the interaction of agents with each other and with the environment, that is, the "material system". (Greeno 1994.)

A simple definition of Gibson's theory of affordances is that if agent-situation interaction is supposed, both the situation and the acting subject influence the interaction (Gibson 1979). In other words, when situated in the world and perceiving the possibilities an environment grants, the process is influenced by both the environment (with other living subjects) and the agent. An environment shows itself to us as a practical one: actions are not guided by theoretical concerns but by practical affordances (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008). We seek to utilize what is available and afforded to us by the environment we are situated in (Gibson 1979), and use the objects and artifacts the environment holds in ways that are, more often than not, socially acceptable and guided by shared norms (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 154).

An affordance is a possibility that the agent interacts with (Greeno 1994; Jones 2003): "The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill" (Gibson 1979, 127). To be counted as a possibility, however, the possibility must be appearing in the group of possibilities that somehow interact and resonate with properties of the agent. The requirement of perception implies that "to see things is to see how to get about among them and what to do or not to do with them" (Gibson 1979, 223). Affordances are an enabling condition for action, but do not directly imply an action: an agent decides, in the situation, on the basis of motivation and perception whether or not to 'redeem' the possibilities (ibid.).

As mentioned before, actions we engage in happen in an environment that is both physical and social. In sync with this pragmatic approach to an environment, we perceive what others in the same environment are doing. Through intersubjectivity we are able to recognize gestures, signs and symbols that carry meanings, such as sadness, joy, anger and enthusiasm, in other agents behavior (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 179, 182), without having to go beyond the embodied behavior in order to understand them (ibid. 182). For example facial expressions and bodily gestures transfer these meanings efficiently; they submit the subjective experience through and beyond the body. We naturally view other people as a unified whole of mind and body, occupying the environment in a situation and a context (Gibson 1979; Greeno 1994).

As we perceive affordances, these expressive phenomena are the spice in our interaction (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 191). However, we are again faced with the importance of shared understanding of the context; intersubjective understanding requires mutual social and cultural grounds or social and cultural understanding (Joy & Sherry 2003), i.e. empathy to others (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008). The peak of sophistication for intersubjectivity is language: it enables us to interact and converse, ask for explanation and understand how the other sees oneself in the larger, shared narrative of a world we both belong to (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 193). We interpret and make sense of actions of others through shared narratives. Not only do socially or culturally shared narratives enable us to have a deeper understanding of a context, but they also mold our understanding of norms. By shaping norms and expectations they most likely shape our actions (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 194), and therefore the affordances we perceive.

2.4. Synthesis of the literature

This review has explained the important concepts and ideas from a multidisciplinary sample of literature, ranging from place branding to phenomenology, human geography and environmental psychology. In clarifying this wide shot, I have attempted to form a sound basis for my research and set the basis for answering the challenges raised in previous place branding literature, and rephrased in the research problems of this thesis. The foundational and underlying logic is this: places can be seen as ecosystems, combining different actors and group of actors, different encounters and experiences, different power relations, different interests and different meanings (Warnaby 2009; Aitken & Campelo 2011; Warnaby & Medway 2013; Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013; Braun et al. 2013). This evidently poses immense challenges for effective management of place brands: with such a messy, tangled and dynamic organism, how is it possible to determine any kind of clear place brand nor its factors or motives?

Still, the clear need of doing so is evident in the environment, not less due to increased mobility of important groups of visitors, investors and inhabitants (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2010; Govers & Go 2009). If wider resonance between place brands and the public is desired, more actors need to be involved in the place branding process (Aitken & Campelo 2011; Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013;

Warnaby 2009; Braun et al. 2013). It can be questioned if it is even possible to separate place branding to a manageable process, or whether one should accept it's organic and dynamic, co-creative nature and focus on facilitating exactly that.

Co-created sense of place as place identity (Kalandides 2011) is in this research seen as the strongest influencing power in constructing successful place branding. This is why attention is turned to identity-based place branding, a concept developed by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013). However, the construct is still quite vague and lacks empirical studies. It does not consider the *actual roots and informing grounds* of the formation of place identity, that is, the lived experience that has not yet taken implicit form as meanings as it has not been shaped through reflection - the level before the cognitive meaning making. It also does not consider how experiences that take place in scenes that at first glance lack strong identity and meaning function and resonate as parts of a place brand experience.

For this reason, phenomenological explication of an experience in a place is provided, highlighting the profound aspects of experience as it is lived, especially intersubjectivity, directedness, and embodied way of facing the world (e.g. Gallagher & Zahavi 2008; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Heidegger 1927/2002) that, by giving structure to our lived experiences, on their part determine the possibilities we observe as agents and possibly realize as affordances granted to us by the experiential environment (Gibson 1979), incorporating the physical and the social world (e.g. Therkelsen et al. 2010; Läpple 1991). The anticipated findings could suggest that places that in themselves are lacking strong identity nevertheless function as scenes of a dynamic co-creative structure for experiences, where the physical surroundings and shared social interaction create spaces of affordances that are redeemed and put into action through the interplay of operand and operant resources of the multiple actors in that service ecosystem (basically displaying in practice the service-dominant logic point of view to place, elaborated by Warnaby (2009)).

3. Methodology

This chapter is designated to ensure readers of the rigor and validity of the methodological choices of this research. Chosen research approach and methods are explained and evaluated in regards to the approach that this thesis adopts. This research is of *qualitative* nature. The first subchapter will present the basic ontological and epistemological underpinnings of interpretive research. The second subchapter goes through the particularities of (auto-)ethnography and phenomenological interviews as methods. The third subchapter will describe the process and depth of data collection, and its sorting and analysis in this research. The fourth and final subchapter will introduce the location of data collection, Helsinki Airport.

3.1. Interpretive approach in qualitative research

Interpretive research sees the world as constituting of multiple realities constructed subjectively and socially. These multiple co-existing realities are not static but rather evolving constantly, and they are to be viewed in a holistic manner, interacting and affecting each other in a shared world. A researcher should thus note that although the realities are often bound to their contexts, they nevertheless require understanding of a greater whole in order to be understood. (Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Denzin & Lincoln 2003.) One cannot isolate a single experience or practice from its surrounding experiential environment, neither is it possible to define only certain kinds of accounts of experiences as meaningful. A researcher engaging in an interpretive study should be open to accounts stemming from multiple realities, and focus on covering the multitude of these realities present in a given context (Denzin & Lincoln 2003). The *ontological stance*, that is, the nature of reality in this research is seen as complex and varying, context-bound and socially co-created, as interpretive research focuses on the realities constructed by living subjects, i.e. people as individuals and groups that proactively shape meanings (Hudson & Ozanne 1988.)

As interpretive research is attempting to uncover prevalent phenomena in the context and social environment of their studies, research is "data-driven". In implementing interpretive research, an important aspect is the lack of an absolute truth: the empiric results are open to different renditions. From an *epistemological* point of view, a total focus on facts and figures should be

put aside, as interpretive results give a picture of an event in the specific context and time and deepen the understanding of the prevalent conditions and behavior in the situation. (Moisander & Valtonen 2012.) Therefore, interpretive research aims at understanding different phenomena in the world, rather than trying to form valid predictions of conditions and causalities – the *axiological goal* is to understand and to accept that the understanding is never complete, but open to different interpretations and developing in a hermeneutic manner (Hudson & Ozanne 1988). From a paradigmatic point of view, this research follows constructivist conventions (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, 34).

3.2. Methods

As the next subchapter describes the used methods, a few basic underpinnings should be clarified. Neither of the used methods, ethnography or phenomenological interviews provide straightforward answers that apply at any given moment or context; rather they are contextually and temporally bound glimpses of the individual experiences of the respondents, and thus provide no objective truth. What they do provide, however, is a thick description rooted in participating and observing the lived experience, and thus a rich, descriptive narrative of the phenomena this study is interested in. As Goulding (1999) elaborates, despite interpretive methods' lack of objective, immutable results, they nevertheless understand and take into consideration the impact of cultural dynamics, the meaning of language and symbolic gestures and signals and the meaning of context and time. In addition to this, interpretive methods' strength is their view of consumers as interactive and proactive actors that on their part co-constitute the coinciding realities (Hudson & Ozanne 1988).

3.2.1. (Auto-)Ethnography

Ethnography as a method is targeted to encompass the grey area that is difficult to cover purely with other research methods, such as interviews. By observing and participating in actual lived situations and inhabiting the real environments of the events a researcher is better able to map out and answer the gaps that are easily left unanswered. By observing events and phenomena in their actual environment the risks of misinterpretation and on the other hand misleading or

flawed answers are reduced. In consumer research, where the "attitudinal, emotional and behavioral aspects" of an individual are tied to a wider social and cultural context, ethnography serves as a practical method of observing the 'real', or at least the nearest form of real possible. (Elliot & Jankell-Elliot, 2003.)

Ethnographic methods require understanding of and immersing oneself to the researched subjects' cultural and social environment, noting the underlying rules, norms, symbolic and shared meanings. It is impossible to get a thorough sample through ethnographic methods; the size of a sample tends to be small. However, by selecting informants likely to provide deep information, a researcher paints out a picture, and in an interpretive manner reflects on the made observations. (Elliot and Jankell-Elliot, 2003.) An ethnographer immerses oneself in the studied phenomena and the culture surrounding it, in order to form a holistic understanding of how and from which components it is constructed. Ethnography as a method withholds various types of data collection, typically diaries, interviews, photographs and recordings to name a few. (Goulding 2005.)

Autoethnography is a method involving deep introspection from the researcher. Hackney (2007, 98) describes the typical features of autoethnographic research writing as to "include the explicit and reflexive positioning of the author within the text, the use of biographical material as social research data, and a subjective, first-person tone in writing". Similarly, Anderson (2006) defines analytic autoethnography as research where the author is a member of the group under researcher, attempting to shed light to social phenomena by including oneself in the literal analysis. This research employs an approach combining autoethnographic observations and immersion in the phenomena under study, as well as phenomenological interviews, as the data is collected not only through participating in the shared space of experience and being a subjective observer of others, but also by being a subjective observer of myself, my own experience acting as an introspective source of data, a true first-person phenomenological account. Through this kind of introspective narrative, the text itself gains depth and richness and places the experiences of the author as a additional source of data (Hackney 2007), complementing the phenomenological interviews of the respondents. The decision to include autoethnographic narration to the analysis is informed by the willingness to display the embodied nature of human existence in a clear manner by providing first-person account on the

experience of a place: sometimes it is difficult to access the bodily sensations of others, as they are commonly neglected in reflection due to their "naturalness".

3.2.2. Phenomenological interviews

Phenomenology as a philosophy sees people as being-in-the-world, as subjective experiencing individuals (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008). Phenomenology as a method is interested in covering these subjective, first-person accounts of lived experience that emerge in a social world inhabited by other experiencing subjects (Thompson et al. 1989; Thompson et al. 1990). Most common tool in conducting research with phenomenological methods is the phenomenological interview that enables respondents to elaborate on experiences in their own words. In order to shed light to the experience of interest from a first-person point of view, the respondent is the one largely determining the direction and vocabulary of the interview. The researchers' task is to encourage the respondents' narration, rather than to ask questions prepared beforehand. Due to the open-ended, loosely defined approach, phenomenological interviews tend to have a circular structure, where meanings emerge throughout the interview as the discussion gradually deepens. (Thompson et al. 1989.)

Phenomenological interviews require open-ended questions and probes that give freedom to the respondent to describe their subjective experiences as elaborately as possible. A researcher must be on guard for not employing concepts that are too theoretical, and rather guide the respondents to tell about their lived experience with commonly used, everyday terms that bring out descriptions that are not too abstract and that describe the experience with terms and vocabulary characteristic to the respondent. The central idea of a phenomenological interview is to be a "non-directive listener", which is attained by avoiding questions that ask the informants to tell 'why' something is, and rather employing questions or comments that spur longer and more detailed elaborations from respondents. (Thompson et al. 1989.)

According to Thompson et al. (1990), when applying phenomenological methods, central concepts to be understood are *intentionality, emergent dialogue* and *hermeneutic endeavor*. *Intentionality* in a methodological sense implies that a researcher must note that their mental

categories do not necessarily match the ones of the respondent, and that categorizations emerging from respondent's elaboration should be favored as it represents the subjective individuals' personal life-world and thus stays loyal to the goal of understanding experience as lived. *Emergent dialogue* is to be understood as an attempt to feed the respondents description by employing the same language and accepting the unpredictability and circulating nature of the interview. Interpreting phenomenological interviews requires *hermeneutic endeavors*, that is, circular interpretation moving back and forth between single interviews and the whole mass of interviews, advancing further as understanding of the collected interview material deepens, and thus providing a justifiable interpretation transparent to others. (ibid.)

3.3. Data collection, respondents and analysis

In total, I spent three weeks at the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport, observing and interviewing the passengers, and writing detailed notes and diary entries about my own feelings, emotions and acts in the airport. I tried to decentralize the time spent at the airport to different times of a day, to gain as diverse material as possible and to observe how the airport "lives". My time at the airport was not only spent on observation and interviews, but also on thorough introspection to gain my own first-person account, i.e. an autoethnographical elaboration, on airport as a space of experience.

During the data collection period, fifty interviews were conducted. Forty of these interviews were done on an ad hoc-basis, in practice by approaching random passengers and asking them for personal interviews. The length of these interviews varied from eight to thirty-five minutes, and they were conducted in multiple locations throughout the airport, mostly in the place a respondent was located in when approached. Ten interviews were conducted by recruiting informants from the departure halls where check-ins are located, the researcher subsequently following them throughout their entire experience in the airport. In practice, I walked through the respondents' service path with them, from the check-in hall to the departure gate, being a bystander in all of the possible service encounters along this route. These interviews on average lasted about forty-five minutes, the lengthiest ranging up to over two hours.

Sampling for the interviews was random. However, as this study is conducted in a closed experiential environment of an airport, I could be certain that all of the respondents were actually engaging in a lived experience of the researched topic. This ensured that the sampling was "purposive" (Goulding 2005), in other words that all of the respondents were participating or had participated in the experience under study. The material collected consists of interviews (taped and transcribed); a field diary of my own experiences, feelings and emotions as well as observations; and visual material such as photographs from different locations in the airport.

After finishing the research period in the field, the interviews were transcribed from the recordings. The interpretation phase subsequently begun by reading the interviews multiple times. First step of the analysis was to identify certain key words or images in individual interviews, as well as to perceive different 'parts' of the whole experience in the airport. After going through the individual experiences with the mentioned methods of coding and categorization, the whole body of interviews was read and similarities and differences in patterns between individual interviews were recognized. Through and within these processes of categorization and comparison (as elaborated by e.g. Spiggle 1994), abstractions in regards to higher order themes of experience constructs were made. This complies with Thompson et al.'s (1990) suggestion of hermeneutic endeavor, where interpretation of transcribed interviews proceeds iteratively, moving back and forth, and accumulatively advancing interpretation.

3.4. Helsinki Airport as a setting

Helsinki Airport is quite a small airport compared to many of its giant cousins abroad. Due to its compact size and slightly remote location in Northern Europe, it does not host as many legends or play a central figure in as many stories as its larger equivalents, but nevertheless acts as an important link especially between some major Asian cities and Europe. Helsinki Airport has two terminals and around 540 departures and landings daily, granting access to 111 international and 19 Finnish destinations. On average, Helsinki Airport serves around 1 200 000 passengers monthly. The airport is located in Vantaa, about 23 kilometers away from the center of Helsinki.

The area surrounding the airport itself is quite empty, apart from a few business parks hosting offices, and airport hotels nearby.

The busiest hours at the airport are from 6.00 to 8.30 in the morning and from 14.00 to 17.30 in the afternoon. Helsinki Airport, as most modern airports, has put effort in advancing self-service in check-in, and both terminals host multiple self-check-in kiosks. The check-in halls in terminals also have airport personnel to assist travelers in the use of the self-check-in kiosks. Worth noticing, are the monitors displaying estimated queue time to security check, calculated by machines observing Bluetooth signals from passengers' mobile phones. As an airport, Helsinki-Vantaa prides itself on its in-transit services: it has multiple restaurants, lounges, different shops, and varying art exhibitions spread throughout the airport. To a passenger, the airport has many functioning practicalities: the whole airport has a free Wi-Fi and multiple free mini-lounges, called Suvanto, designed to serve as alternatives to the larger lounges offering services for charge or for membership. (Finavia traffic statistics 2013; Helsinki Airport web page.)
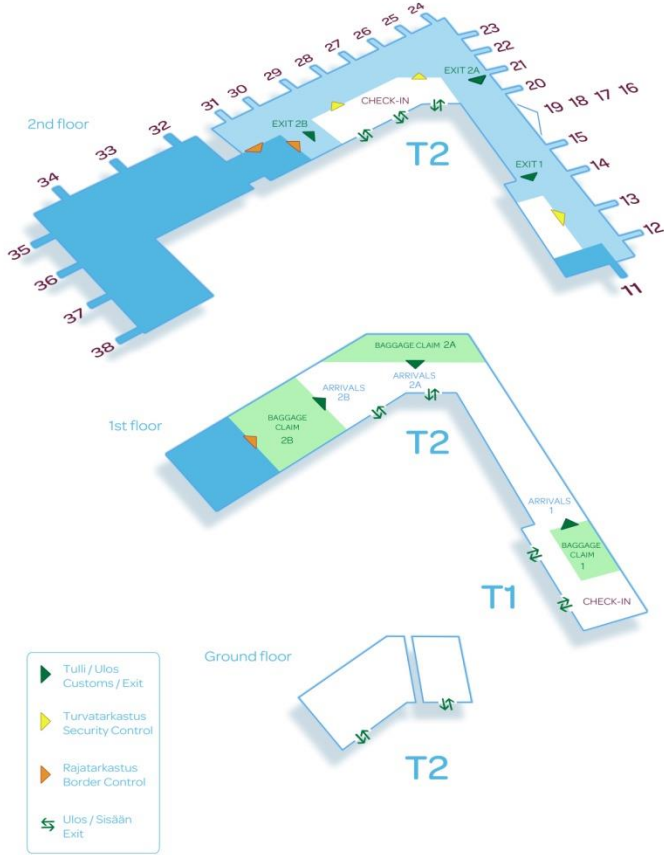
Picture 2. Helsinki Airport floorplan (source: Finavia Oyj, www.finavia.fi)

4. Findings: establishing a sense of place through an airport experience

The following chapter will present the data collected during the research period. The data has been sorted to themes and interpreted according to the methodological choices explicated in the previous chapter. I will analyze my findings with regards to the crucial areas of a phenomenological explication of an experience as stated in the literature review: embodiment, directedness, intersubjectivity and affordances. These features of a lived experience have acted as a sensitizing framework in my analysis, guiding the construction of the six experiential dimensions of the airport experience on the basis of the social and material affordances the environment grants. The experiential dimensions recognized are competence; regulation and control; people; time; space; and experienced agency. I see these six experiential dimensions as important factors in internal negotiations of establishing a sense of place in an airport, and therefore contributing to how the place identity of an airport forms. Therefore, the research problem answered through this section is *RP I: How is sense of place established in an airport*.

This chapter is organized as follows: all subchapters include autoethnographic observation as well as analysis and excerpts of the interview data collected. The subsections describing the six experiential dimensions are loosely organized to follow an actual airport experience, from entering the check-in hall to boarding a plane. However, important to note is that all of these dimensions are present throughout the whole airport experience and the linear structure of this analysis is employed to give the narration more structure, not to imply that each of the dimensions would only be linked to certain stages of the experience.

 The first subchapter will cover passengers' first contact to the airport space in the departure hall and the initial phases of a service process; check-in and security check. It displays how the different levels of competence of the passengers and the regulatory ambiance affect how the environment is experienced. The second subchapter deals with the transitional space between coming from and going to somewhere, in this case the airport space open to passengers after security checks, covering the experiential dimensions of the social environment and how time is experienced subjectively. The third subchapter elaborates on the experience of the airport space and on how personal agency in this space is experienced. All of the presented dimensions display how the experience forms as a negotiation between the constraining and the enabling elements

in the environment. This dynamic negotiation between constraints and possibilities to redeem potential shows how a place includes dialogue between the physical environment, social environment, and oneself as the experience constructor, and how this dialogue affects the forming sense of place. The analyzed phenomenological accounts on establishing a sense of place in an airport will act as the raw material that link the findings to broader place branding discussion and insights on how to facilitate successful place branding in environments such as the airport, therefore contributing to answering the **RP II (the conditions of successful place branding in an airport)** in the discussion section.

4.1. First stages of the airport experience

The airport lives through different stages depending on the time of the day, and the day in question. The busiest times on both weekdays and weekends are the mornings and afternoons. During rush hours, the large, hall-like departure terminals are filled with people and noises, the air thick with a mix of emotions: excitement, joy, anxiety, and frustration are all visible in various combinations in the faces of my co-passengers. One can almost inhale the cacophony of voices telling stories of business trips, long-anticipated holidays, hopes of reuniting and quietly creeping feelings of longing and homesickness. During the more quiet hours between the morning and afternoon rush, the space and its materials take center stage by displaying their features: the hard floor materials echoing from the occasional clatter of shoe heels and the glass wall surfaces illuminating the space with light, ATM-like self-check-in kiosks and hollow security check isles waiting to take passengers in.

4.1.1. Competence

Strictly defined, systematic airport environment challenges its users with intensive stages. Embodied skills and routines enhance the chances for a smooth experience and enable preparation beforehand.

A division of people based on their level of skills is visible in both terminals' entry halls: on the one hand you have the important looking and busy, suited businessmen and women with determined gazes rushing through the formalities, and on the other hand the bustling groups of holiday goers anticipating the awaiting relaxation, some with cheerful enthusiasm, some with anxious jitters. The odd ones out, not belonging to either one of these categories, are notably passengers travelling solo.

Only with a few minutes observation in the check-in terminals, levels of practical know-how can be identified. There are people who have a clear structure of tasks: determinedly approaching a check-in kiosk, pushing through touch screen buttons in an accustomed manner, efficiently printing out the tickets and stickers needed, striding towards the baggage drop counter if necessary, and exiting to the back left towards the security check isles. Then there are others, who enter the hall and freeze: fidgety motions are accompanied with eyes seeking for clues of the next logical step. Approaching the self-check-in kiosks hesitantly, they simultaneously grope for their travel documents from purses and backpacks, squeezing passports tightly in their hands. Assisting officials' friendly questions are met with a sigh of relief, as personnel's instructions guide their moves at the kiosks. Sometimes smiles are exchanged and thankful passengers continue their process towards the bag drop, sometimes the helping officials get their portion of the frustration caused by the insecure passengers' feelings of incompetence and being lost.

The ones with a purposeful, systematic plan in mind approach the situation pragmatically and with ease and fastness in mind. They have done preparations beforehand and know exactly how to make this phase of the process run smoothly from their behalf:

"Kind of when you're used to it and you only have your backpack with you and you've done the check-in beforehand, you have nothing else left to do but to walk through the security check. It's pretty quick these days.(…) It depends on the time of the day, so you can somehow estimate how long of a queues are facing you. For example now there were long queues for the check-in but you could basically walk straight through the security check." M, 45, Finnish.

Goal-oriented, they have a determination to get through the needed points as swiftly as possible. The fact that they know what needs to be done before entering the other side of the terminal helps, as it removes the need to ponder which steps to take before entering the security check. The confident passengers are familiar with the details of a check-in and dropping possible bags

off before entering the line to a security check. The experiential process of being in the airport starts beforehand, by returning to previous experiences in for instance estimating the queues, and thus knowing how to prepare oneself when engaging in the formalities that as a rule belong to the beginning of a journey. In other words, the service environment is tackled through accustomization achieved by repetition, embodying a skill through learning by doing (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 2004), and by thus being able to form routines and strategies to skillfully master a situation.

The ones that do not have a structured path of events in their head when entering the airport may experience feelings of confusion. Some are taken aback by the notions of not being able to cope with new conditions, and feel like they are not in harmony with the service environment or the personnel.

"I did the check-in at a self-service kiosk. And then I took my bags to drop box, or drop bag what is it. But where the check-in was, the service wasn't very friendly. The kiosk didn't recognize my passport and when I asked for advice and there was this airline official, the treatment was quite rude. It annoyed and confused me, and when I went to take the bag they started shouting that they have a labyrinth and that we should go that way not this way. And there were no signs or guidance. I didn't even notice there was a labyrinth because they instructed us to go there to put our bags and we went straight to where they showed us. And then one officer started shouting. I mean those who understood Finnish understood (what they were saying) but still didn't know where to go. That kind of got to me. (…) You get the urge to say something but then you just choose not to." F, 53, Finnish.
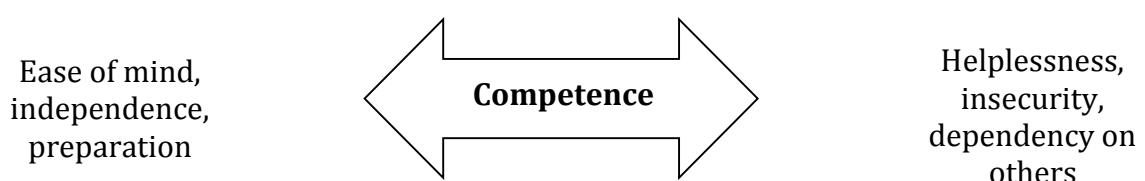
Lack of proper guidance for an altered space in an already confusing situation causes tension and conflicts between the informant and the service personnel, leaving the informant feeling disappointed with repressed anger and dissatisfaction. This could be seen as an example of a situation where value is co-destroyed (see Echeverri & Skålen 2011; Plé & Cáceres 2010), as misunderstanding and incongruence are evident from the excerpt. The fact that the informant chooses not to give direct feedback to the service employees leaves the situation most likely undiscovered to the service provider, as well as unresolved to the customer. This emphasizes the experienced gap between the informant and the personnel, as lack of intersubjective resonance (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008) is evident in the description of conflicting messages and aggression of both parties.

By adjusting themselves to the conditions of the situation, some informants successfully manage new or confusing situations by engaging in interaction with the personnel. These successful service encounters engage both the customer and the personnel side in productive interaction:

"It (self check-in) was really new to me. I didn't have the courage to go to the kiosks myself, even though I'm sure I would have understood it, in Finnish or in English. But a young girl helped me. (…) Next time I can surely do it by myself! Immediately when I stopped the girl noticed, it (the hall) was full of people and there were no free kiosks. Then she asked me and I told her that I wasn't sure I knew how to do the check-in. But then it went really fast, in a few minutes I suppose." F, 40, Ukranian.

The informant in question feels like her needs were noticed and catered to, and that interaction with personnel resulted in a learning experience, helping her to cope with similar situations in the future. Whereas in situations of unsuccessful communication between the employees and passengers, where dissatisfaction and conflicts of interests with the employees and confusion of the requirements asserted to the passengers was implied, this informant feels that the assisting provided her with the help needed to move forward in the service path, and that she gained knowledge to be applied in the future. This description of a successful check-in displays co-creative behavior in a service encounter (Vargo & Lusch 2004; 2006; 2008), where personnel not only assisted a customer to fulfill a task to proceed in the service path, but also facilitated learning that will create benefit for both parties in the future.

Varying levels of competence thus affect how the situation is experienced. Being able to anticipate and strategize enables travelers to tackle the feeling of uncertainty prevalent in the check-in and security check phase, and helps them to orientate themselves towards the trip about to begin. Having internalized the needed steps in many cases removes the feeling of anxiousness. On the other hand, approaching the situation without practical competence causes stress to many. In some cases the stress is relieved by the interaction with the service personnel or other passengers, in other cases the stressful situation feeds conflicts within the social constructs.

| Ease of mind, independence, preparation | ⟵ **Competence** ⟶ | Helplessness, insecurity, dependency on others |

An airport is a service intensive environment where a successful experience requires multiple, obligatory touchpoints. Competence helps in passing through the sequential stages. A repetitive theme in the elaborations of experienced passengers is routine and ease: when the experiential stages and their requirements are internalized, it is easier to face the situations without stress or hesitation. Skills and competence are embodied (Dreyfus 1996; Dreyfus & Dreyfus 2004): they appear without conscious thinking and coping in the situation is automatic. The passengers lacking this routine have to manage feelings of insecurity and confusion. Insecure situations turn attention to the personnel, and behavior that does not match passengers' expectations is easily experienced as belittling. Lack of practical competence also brings the elements in the material environment to the foreground of perception. Many passengers however cope with the lack of practical competence by utilizing the available personnel to accrue skills for future use.

4.1.2. Regulation and control

Regulation, surveillance and control are dominant factors in an airport as a service environment. This has varying effects on passengers: on one hand it challenges personal agency, on the other it creates notion of security and enables the foregrounding of other experiential aspects. Security check acts as a transformative phase of directedness to many, by changing focus in figure and ground.

During my research period, I evolve from an airport rookie to an accustomed traveler, and in that way *learn* just like many the informants of this research. Entering the busy terminal hall in the first time for about a year, I notice I am nervous: my stomach fills with butterflies as I start to hesitate what to do next. Looking around me I search for clues from more accustomed passengers, stealthily glancing what others are sorting out from their hand luggage. As I approach the security officials and scanning gates I find it difficult to control my facial expressions: in a situation of surveillance and control, I find myself bewildered, feeling anxious and almost guilty: as I try to look like a decent citizen with no harmful intentions, I imagine myself looking more and more suspicious by the minute.

Placing the plastic box containing my purse to the conveyer belt, I simultaneously observe both the passengers in front of me and the officers monitoring the scanning screens with stern

expressions. My inner tension lifts as I go through the scanner gate without off-going alarms. The emotions and sensations I experience when going through security reveal two crucial aspects of human experience: first, my anxiousness and inner tension are embodied (Merleau-Ponty 1962), that is, my body responds to the stimuli from the environment and facilitates my experience; and second, as I am surrounded by a socially-embedded context, in moment of hesitation, I search for clues from others and attempt to imitate their behavior (Joy & Sherry 2003; Gallagher & Zahavi 2008), and thus strive to adjust myself to the shared conventions in that environment (the social system of symbols described by e.g. Läpple 1991; people-in-place by Seamon 2011).

I spot a young women sitting in the row of benches framing the sides of the hallway. As I approach her, we start to discuss about her experiences in the airport today. She reveals her anxiety regarding the initial stages of the airport experience, especially the security check, and the contentment and relief of everything going well this particular day.

"I mean it was wonderful (that everything went well), I always panic about them (the check-in and security check) so much, like what if I get caught somewhere and miss my plane. It's somehow really oppressive, it was wonderful that everything went so smoothly." F, 20, Finnish.

When I ask her to elaborate more on her anxiety she continues:

"It's just…how would I even describe it? I mean my knees literally start to shake, it's horrible. And then I might, if asked a question, I might start to stutter. Especially if I'm at an airport I don't know, I mean I don't know any German (she's switching planes at a German airport to get to her final destination), and if they start to talk to me in German and I'm just like 'No, I don't speak German'. (…) In general airports are a bit oppressive. Not the spaces necessarily, but all the controls and inspections, is your luggage the right size, do you have too much stuff with you…these kinds of things. I mean otherwise this is quite a relaxed place. It's not even any hustle and bustle here, like it usually is in bigger airports."

Her anxiety in airports is caused by the surveillance and outside control that are causing worry of being able to handle the situation appropriately. It seems that for her the space is occupied by varying levels of intensity of experience, as she elaborates on the oppressiveness of the initial stages and the progress to a more relaxed environment, when reaching the departure area after check-in. The informant also reflects the embodied, pre-reflective emotions caused by her inner tension in the security check, describing the bodily felt emotions: how her body starts to shake

and how words are lost. Continuing, she describes her relief of the fact that the expectations of disorder were not met:

"I expected there to be a chaos and that then I would start to panic. But I was wrong, there was no chaos, everything went great, I didn't panic, and I'm here now! Woohoo! I survived."

Although she expresses stress caused by the mandatory security and surveillance, her elaborations imply that the control and monitoring are not necessarily oppressive themselves, but rather that *she* has to take a part in them. It seems that she mostly holds herself responsible for the fluency of her experience, by reflecting on how she should be prepared with the right sized luggage and with needed language skills. The initial stages of her airport experience are colored by foregrounding her own presence, and once these stages are carried out, self-consciousness fades to the background and relief sets in. The tense and anxious feeling is linked to the experienced sense of responsibility and accountability of responding to the requirements of the space, which are especially present in the intensive stage of a security check, and show how unusual or stressful situations can emphasize one's bodily presence (e.g. Gallagher & Zahavi 2008), opposing to the normal sensation of one's own, invisible body. The actual supervision that takes place in airports itself is rather comforting and soothing, and brings her a notion of being secure:

"It's kind of all so controlled that it makes me feel safe. Basically there are counters for everything where you can ask things and that makes me feel good. And there are the speakers and announcements - I heard the same people being called to their flights three times already, like they really make sure you make it to your plane. That kind of control gives the feeling that you're being cared for, looked after, or monitored even but it's…It's a good thing in an airport, in my opinion. This place needs control, after all there's a mass of people moving around so someone has to at least in some way oversee what's going on in here."

The informant feels satisfaction in the fact that e.g. calls for flights are repetitive actions that seem to go on as long as they need to, in order to get the late passengers on board. After taking so much personal responsibility to manage the check-in and security check that causes her to get nervous, she gains comfort from the fact that someone else is looking after her and others in the transition period between entering the departure area and boarding the plane. These shifts in her perception on surveillance imply that the context of an airport stimulates her to lift certain

aspects figural in one stage of the experience, and fade them to the background in others (Thompson et al. 1989).

Similar insights on the calming effect of surveillance are shared by other informants as well:

"These people are inspecting us so that I don't have to worry if someone has something dangerous on the plane. So I mean I think they have taken care of it in a trustworthy way." F, 61, Finnish.

"You can feel safe. Because you know there's a lot of security, so if anything happens, you know the security will be there. There's a lot of CCTV's so they are watching everything all the time. I think, for me, it's safe. It makes me feel like I have to act like that. Like really quiet and on low profile." M, 28, Mexican.

As someone else is taking the responsibility of maintaining order, the passengers can direct their focus to other things. This knowledge of strict surveillance in an airport is shared and commonly known, and enables the passengers to focus on other things than security. However, airport security also binds passengers to follow certain rules and boundaries throughout the space. The environment thus affords (Gibson 1979) the passengers a possibility to feel safe, but also obligates them to act according to shared norms (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008), as passengers are not only individual actors responding to signals from the environment, but also actors residing in a shared system with other actors (Gibson 1979; Greeno 1994).

Some passengers feel that the atmosphere of monitoring and control is disturbing and invading their personal space and agency. Although they understand the heightened needs for stricter security, in the light of security threats brought on aeromobility by international terrorism, they feel that the sensation of being watched and observed and the strict restrictions on allowed objects is limiting their freedom and affecting their mood when travelling:

"Well…It's somehow pure…I mean it makes you feel silly when, this is quite ridiculous, but I'm going to tell it anyway since it is my point of view and not anyone else's. But you know when you have to take of your belt and everything and your pants are falling off and then that they really search you thoroughly because you forgot your tooth paste in your bag. Then again I can't…I mean I kind of know the rules with which we all play so it's ok. (…) I kind of feel that this self-tormenting on airports it's…I mean you have to wait long, you have to be there early, there are rush hours. I'm usually quite good at adjusting but still it kind of causes anxiety. Somehow the security check feels like, even though I consider myself as a decent citizen, I still feel kind of watched. You think like 'how am I walking now, am I

somehow suspicious'. The whole setting is perhaps causing anxiety. I can't concretely blame anyone for it, like these are the shared rules, of course we need them; I understand that - I just have a hard time accepting them. But I have to accept them. We all play by the same rules, but everyone knows how frustrating it is, like when today with the toothpaste and the officer was like 'well these rules are what they are', like he understands that it's only toothpaste but he still has to take it away. Which is like…we both understand it's a ridiculous situation, but he just has to take it away from me." M, 31, Finnish.

One is in the center of attention, being watched when going through security checks (Adey 2008). The architectural and spatial arrangements ensure that each passenger can be measured, one by one. Being evaluated individually under the watching eye, being in the center of attention for a brief moment arouses self-doubt and suspicion - one feels guilty without having done anything. In addition to expressing the anxiety caused by surveillance and monitoring, the preceding excerpt from a male informant also portrays the interaction and the loss of understanding between him and the service personnel. The informant feels like there is resonance, transmitted through everyday conventions and common sense (e.g. Merleau-Ponty 1962; Gallagher & Zahavi 2008) between him and the security official, but that it is ruptured because of the strict rules the other is forced to comply with. The informant presumes that the service encounter is plagued by mutual feeling of ridiculousness that nevertheless is, by force, suppressed from the service employee side due to the regulations controlling his work and the airport space.

Similar experiences are described, amongst others, by another young male passenger, when asked about his expectations at the airport that day. He seems to have an internal attitude of being prepared for the worst, not to phase disappointments along the way, as well as a desire to challenge the idea of every passenger being a possible security threat. Although he has an urge to fight the conventions and prevalent mindset, he simultaneously gives in with the necessity to submit to the rules.

"Trouble, maybe you always have a little hunch about delayed airplanes or long lines to get your tickets or to get through the customs and the security. (…) I mean it's ok if I'm prepared. But I think it's a little, as with so many other things, there's very much control…yeah, controlling everybody, every individual should be checked. I think it's a little, you know, they have a mindset about people that they're bad or up to something bad. But yeah, I mean that's the way it is." M, 32, Swedish.

He continues by expressing miscommunication and misunderstandings between the airport personnel and the passengers. The informant states dissatisfaction in the unbalanced power-relations between passengers and security personnel, by implying the personnel can impose arbitrary power to customers. This can be seen as hindering the experienced agency (Gibson 1979) and control of the respondent.

"Also very unpleasant people who take their job way too seriously, you know, security guards that think they can treat people however they want just because they have some kind of belief they can be assholes without any reason or any bad stuff happening." M, 32, Swedish.

The same insight of facing authority when passing through security checks is present in the elaborations of others as well, like in this excerpt where a young female informant describes her feelings when passing through security:

"I mean I feel like I'm on their mercy at that stage. Like I don't get a say if I walk through and there is something they want to check, they can basically stop me for any reason. I mean if they suspect I have something in my bag, I just have to let them have a closer look, or if they want to do a body search I can't say no. In itself there's friendly service and so on, but in a way it's not like 'well hello miss, please put your belongings here thank you' but rather 'here, box, put them here'." F, 24, Finnish.

This particular stage in the service path is not seen in the same way as other types of encounters, such as patronizing a café or a restaurant, where the situation is often more interactive and does not give one-sided permission to assert power on the other party. Rather, many informants describe a notion of being subjected to control and authority that they themselves cannot influence. Security check is one of the rare service situations where the customer is actually being evaluated, measured and categorized, instead of the other way around.

An airport experience for many is divided to sequential stages. Security check seems to be the stage of an airport's service path that acts as the separating bridge between the everyday and being in transit. Many describe a sense of release after getting through this experiential stage:

"I kind of feel relieved, kind of like as I would have had more baggage until then, although there's exactly the same amount of things…But the atmosphere is sort of tense before it, and there's a lot of people around you, which I don't

in general like because I get anxious. And after that you can start to relax, especially if you are going on a nice trip you can start to get excited of that." F, 25, Finnish.

The words used to describe the notion that one gets when entering the actual departure area describe physical, embodied reactions of a sense of relief, extra baggage being lifted off of one's shoulders, and an ability to focus one's thoughts to the forthcoming trip. In this sense, security check is the transitional encounter, where one's thoughts and focus, in other words inner directedness (e.g. Gallagher & Zahavi 2008), is shifted towards the goal. This might be brought about by the need to focus on security check because of its intensity, therefore causing many to lift it as figural (Thompson et al. 1989) in the early stages of the airport experience. After successfully managing the security check, other things are brought to foreground, as the feeling of being lifted as the focus of observation is receding to the background. Interestingly, for many, the mind seems to have a tendency to think ahead to the actual destination, rather than getting on the plane. Getting on a plane is only another transitional phase before reaching the final goal of the actual destination. This reinforces the notion of an airport as a space between things (Augé 1995), as a throughway, as plans are directed towards a target further and more abstract in the future.

Notion of security, shift of focus — **Regulation and control** — Lost agency, invasive authority
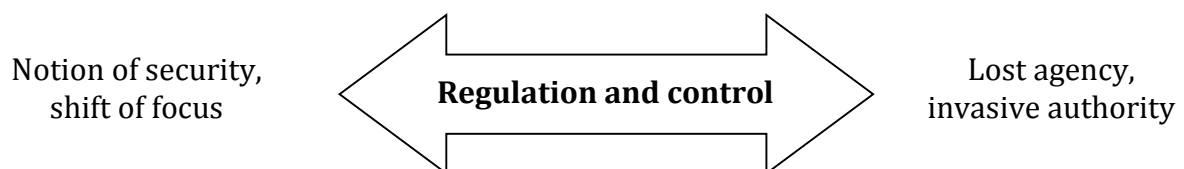
The enabling and constraining factors in regulation and control as a dimension of an airport experience are on the one hand the notion of security and on the other felt invasiveness of asserted authority that leads to a weakened sense of personal agency. Nearly everyone understand the need for heightened security, but frequently express discomfort in the one-sided arrangement of power in the situation. The sense of asserted regulation and control tends to force one's own bodily presence being lifted figural (see e.g. Gallagher & Zahavi 2008; Ratcliffe 2008), as centre of attention. When the stage of inspection has been passed, the body relaxes, starts to fade itself to the more invisible background, and directs attention back to future events, evident in descriptions of embodied emotions such as baggage being lifted off. Regulation and control also act as an enabling dimension through its securing presence and by affording the

passengers the possibility to direct their attention to other things. This portrays well the constant subjective negotiation of the constraining and enabling elements of the experiential dimension.

4.2. In the transitional period between coming from and going to

The first days of this research carry similar feelings as when going on a holiday for the first time in a long time. Once I have passed the security check and entered the departure area excitement takes over: I am one step away of taking off to the unknown and the airport space is granting me the feeling of limitlessness, separating me from the everyday and preparing me for leaving. The cafés seem inviting, the duty free shops with their endless arrays of perfumes alluring, the vast space of clean and shiny surfaces and cold light liberating. I spend the initial days wandering around the, then seemingly endless, hallways; observing other passengers and playing a guessing game with myself, pondering the possible destinations of the different characters present.

4.2.1. People (me and others)

An airport space is a container holding people before they are sent to their destination. During the stay, social surroundings such as the physical density and embodied interaction of people impact how the experience forms. Airport space is occupied by social conventions that dictate the kind of behavior deemed acceptable.

In an airport space, most people express some level of directedness through embodied action to fulfill a purpose. Most evident and distinct group are business travelers, who commonly treat their time at the airport space as a part of their daily work; as soon as they find a seat, whether it is a coffee shop table or a free spot in the bench lines occupying the gate areas, the laptops, tablets and smartphones come out of their briefcases or suits' pockets. Their actions in the airport are tuned to functionality: e.g. electricity-company sponsored charging stations throughout the airport are often occupied by these people talking on the phone or tapping their keyboards while charging the devices. On the other hand, groups of holiday goers occupy the cafes and restaurants with beverages at hand, tuning in to the holiday mode and chatting away.

Despite evident differences between passenger groups in transit, they all have a common goal of catching a plane.

The airport is a container of people leaving and arriving, and for an external user, a passenger, it is not a place to merely wonder around. Everyone is there for a reason: the employees going about with their daily work, the business travelers efficiently executing their daily to do-list while waiting for a plane, and the holiday goers anticipating all the new about to face them. Many experience a need to blend into the crowd occupying the airport at the given moment. An informant elaborates on the need to find harmony with others, when describing her actions in an airport:

"Airport is sort of a place that is…not the same when you're out on the town or in a shopping mall, because in here you know everyone is going somewhere, but you don't exactly know where they are going. I don't know, I maybe see my routes somehow beforehand at the airport. People are like ants, all going to different directions, I think it's more visible here than anywhere else. So when you walk around here you try to do it as fast as possible to get to yours (direction).(…) I just simply play this role of being a very important person who has a mission to accomplish" F, 25, Finnish.

The airport is a venue for events that all in the end target towards a goal or a direction, in this case getting on a plane to fly to a destination. In between of arriving to an airport and boarding the plane, there is a need to be in sync with others, aiming towards the same goal of going *somewhere* determinedly and thus the informant acts on an imaginary "mission" that has to be accomplished. This can be interpreted as an indicator of attempting to adjust one's own movements to the rhythm of others, in order to get a sense of belonging to, and to remain in balance (Dreyfus 1996) with the social structure present in an airport. Even though the informant is alone in the airport, she has a desire to 'fit in', to act in the same way she assumes others act, as she continues:

"Co-passengers affect it a lot (the atmosphere). If there are a lot of holiday flights leaving there's a lot of holiday goers and then again on other times there might be a lot of business people. So that naturally has an effect, if everyone around you is moving fast, it makes you move fast, in the same pace. It's a different atmosphere than when people are drifting and wondering around." F, 25, Finnish.

Strive towards shared rhythm is evident as she describes the pace of others influencing her movements in the airport. She elaborates on how the movements and actions of others have an effect on how she experiences the atmosphere, comparing the opposites of people busily rushing around or lounging care-free. Other passengers thus communicate with the subject through movement and pace; a non-verbal, embodied language that carries messages (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008; Merleau-Ponty 1962). Similar indications of other people's influence through embodied language, especially in situations of queuing, on one's own mood and bodily orientation are evident in other informants' reflections as well:

"Immediately when I walk in I look around me to see how many people there are, that affects the mood as well. Like now it was really calm so I could just go and sort some things out. But then like on a Christmas holiday, you walk in and it's crowded and you already see the queues crawling and zigzagging – that for sure has an effect on your feeling. It's the panicking, your blood pressure rises and you get hot and start to sweat. You watch your clock and cell phone and become irrational, do stupid stuff, become frantic." M, 26, Finnish.

Airport space is usually large and open, and thus it appears different whether it is hosting only few or on the contrary masses of people. High consumer density, if experienced as crowdedness, decreases individuals' perceived control, which often leads to negative evaluations of the situation (Hui & Bateson 1991). This is because the experienced personal power to influence things in the space is hindered by others (Tuan 1977, 59). However, it has also been shown that experienced connection between crowdedness and control depends on the situation at hand (Hui & Bateson 1991). The preceding excerpts from informants display how negative evaluations stem from situations of crowding, where other people are experienced as blocking and delaying one's movements forward, thus blocking directedness, and therefore weakening one's perceived control and possibility to influence things.

In these kinds of situations, especially in an airport where the end goal of the service path is tied to schedules, crowdedness creates the feeling of rush and impatience to many. However, interestingly many informants seem to only link crowding in a negative sense to the initial stages of entering the airport space, check-in and security check. Once one has passed the stages that have to be completed in order to be granted the permission to enter the actual departure gate area, high density of people are in general seen as a positive thing. This complies with previous findings of divergent evaluations of the effects of crowding (Hui & Bateson 1991), where some

spaces even demand a high density of people in order to function in a satisfactory way. The changing effect is evident in the following excerpt, where an informant describes her progress in the airport service path. In the check-in and security check stage crowds and queues are perceived as irritating, but after these stages the fact that an airport holds different kinds of people within is intriguing and exciting:

"Afterwards you feel relieved. Like "Yess, now I can calm down for a bit and do all the stuff I want to do and then enter the plane". Only then you kind of feel that the trip starts (after the check-in and security check). (…) I like airports, I don't know why but I like them. I like to hang around here and walk around, there's a good vibe. You see different nationalities and you get this international feeling. It's nice. Everybody's just sitting around, having coffee and stuff. It's nice." F, 18, Finnish.

Generally, people view the departure terminals in a more positive manner when there are others around; the spaces feel less controlling and more alive when they are shared with other passengers:

"I like it when there's people here. It doesn't feel like you're going somewhere alone, you see that other people are travelling too. I get a more relaxed feeling, because usually when you're going on a business trip, you are at the airport the same time as all the other people who fly for business as well, and they always seem so tense. It's nicer to have holiday goers here as well." F, 28, Finnish.

"When you come to the airport you get the feeling, you know when you look at people coming and going, you get this feeling of…like being alive, life is somehow really present here! Anticipation and excitement. You're going on a trip and you're wondering what it will bring, like wonderful new experiences, new people…it's like you break free from everyday! You break away from the routines and see people from different countries and hear different languages. It's a nice feeling, it makes the world feel smaller." F, 48, Finnish.

The fact that a space hosts different passenger groups and nationalities is viewed positively, as many feel it creates the unique atmosphere and ambiance of the airport. Therefore, airport could be hosting a collective gaze, a concept Urry (1995, 138) occupies when describing a mode in consumption of tourism and tourists, that requires a place to be occupied by people in order to feel normal or complete. The people in a space like airport for a large part create the feeling and ambiance, and thus are important to the formation of the experience.

Commonly, differences between groups are noted from their embodied behavior. Common themes are the elaborations on the clear differences in how people dress and act, which displays that airport hosts certain feel of spectatorship (Adey 2007) of watching, observing and evaluating other people. The fact that the atmosphere is experienced as international also strengthens the notion of expanded mobility and globalization, as one informant mentions, "it makes the world feel smaller".

However, despite a shared drive towards harmonious co-existence and friendly ambiance, airports also commonly host feelings of mismatch between passengers, personnel and the environment. As the restricted space acts as a temporary container for individuals with a multitude of interests, collisions are hard to avoid:

"I get annoyed by people who don't understand that we are all in the same situation and they somehow imagine that they are above the rest of us and act accordingly in like lines or something. You know jump the queue or start to nag about something irrelevant or...I don't know, just those kinds of arrogant people who think they own the place, you know." ..."It makes me angry, I would like to bring them back to the ground. I don't get those people at all. I don't actually know what I would do with them, it's just that sort of silent hatred. It kind of just bubbles inside of you, maybe I through a grim glance at them at some point, but obviously they don't get it." F, 20, Finnish.

"Some people, when travelling, tend to lose courtesy. They want to get somewhere fast and they just, they have a determination of where they are going to. Often it's just a determination to join another queue. Or sit and wait somewhere for another hour. They very much, they have a goal in mind, they want to get there. So these people tend to be, sometimes, a bit discourteous." M, 48, English.

A recurring theme in the interviews is the irritation caused by people who 'break' the prevailing, socially co-created ambiance and harmony by expressing self-centeredness through their embodied action, i.e. gestures and movements, that is the language they speak with their bodies (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008; Merleau-Ponty 1962). Many feel that people who express their presence too powerfully, especially in conflict situations, are selfishly trying to take over the space, disturbing and trying to supersede the goals and directedness of others, in order to fulfill theirs. Informant excerpts reveal a feeling of being overpowered that causes aggression, often released only through contemptuous looks rather than verbal communication. Although no words are exchanged, communication through our bodies is present (Merleau-Ponty 1962;

Gallagher & Zahavi 2008), influencing one's own feelings and emotions and hindering the experienced resonance with others.

In general, airport as a venue for forces of globalization and global politics, social conventions, and shared rules creates an ambiance where conservative and considerate behavior is usually sought after:

"I always think that airports are so political buildings, because it's international space so everything is surrounded by the rules of the world. So it's really, I haven't seen any loud people or messy people, trying to do something out of the normal. I think everybody is trying to keep calm and it's because if security sees that something is wrong they can take you into a room and you could miss your flight. So that's probably why everybody…I mean now it's really like a psychosis, because everybody is watching everybody and also they say in the speakers that you have to keep your belongings with you and you can't accept anything from anyone, so I think the airport is really…quiet.(…) I've never seen anything, like a fight, I haven't seen anything different. " M, 27, Mexican.

Airports tend to host a certain 'code of conduct' for human behavior: moderation and subtle courtesy are favored, and strong expressions of emotions, such as loud aggression are frowned upon. The elaboration of the airport as an international, political space displays well the inward and outward orientation of a place, meaning that a place is experienced as an entity itself, but also in relationship to the larger, surrounding environment (e.g. Seamon 2011; Massey 1994).
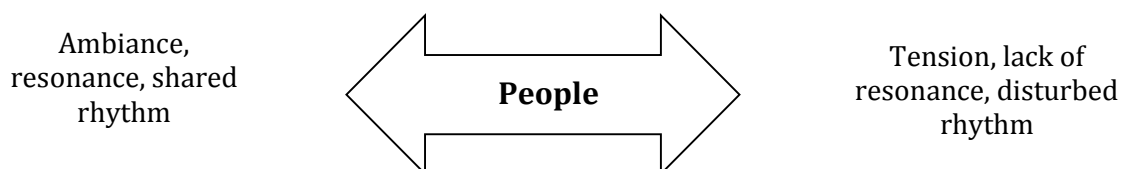
Social environment affects how material environment is experienced. Many state that people create the signature-like ambiance of an airport and bring the place to life. This is especially evident when the informants feel that they are in same rhythm with others, supporting the actualization of each others' goals. People also attempt to adjust their rhythm to the rhythm of others. The ambiance of the airport depends on the density of passengers and on different passenger groups present. When lack of intersubjective resonance is surfacing in e.g. situations of conflict, others are disturbing the subjective sense of being, through for example hindering

internal directedness by crowding and blocking movement, or by creating tension and unbalance in the social/physical environment. Again, both the constraining and enabling elements are constantly present in the environment, affecting the experience in a simultaneous, negotiating manner. The presence of oneself and others affects the actions and reactions of a subject, and thus internally shapes the bodily sensations as well as the embodied interaction. Experience in an airport takes shape against a socially shared system of norms that is used to evaluate one's own and others' behavior.

4.2.2. Time

Time at the airport is time between things, and the sensed duration of lived time depends on the experiencing subject. Different passenger groups occupy the wait in varying manners, all however sharing an internal orientation towards the future.

Time, I find, is an interesting dimension in an airport: it is not given as slow nor as fast but rather rests on my internal ambiance, appearing as dragging or as rushing depending on my mood and orientation towards things. For example, if I am aiming towards a certain space or place in the airport, time is more likely to flow in a faster pace than when I am static, sitting in a departure gate area, just watching the world go by. This is typical to lived time, one's subjective experience of time and its duration (Wyllie 2005), that appears differently depending on e.g. our emotional states (Ratcliffe 2008; Gallagher & Zahavi 2008), experienced potential of the environment (Tuan 1977), or the embodied potential and capacities of ourselves (Wyllie 2005).

My time at the airport is also largely controlled and determined by the social interaction I have with others, or simply by the presence of other social beings in the environment. When I idle in the departure gate areas on silent hours with no others in sight, time seems to stand still: it is just me and the clean, empty surroundings. The only things pacing my existence are occasional sounds from the speakers informing passengers of changes, drone of a floor waxing machine, or the clunky sound of shoe heels on the aisles. On the opposite, during a busy time of the day, the airport seems to be full of life, movement and noises: people roam through the hallways in masses, stores and cafes are full of customers enjoying a spare moment, and the speakers

constantly urge passengers to their gates and give final calls to those late. The latecomers run through the halls with a hovering panic in their eyes and dodge people blocking their routes having formed lines to the gates before the doors to the planes open. Long rows of benches in front of departure gates are occupied by travelers. Shops and boutiques are full of customers looking to spend money on souvenirs and presents. Time seems to move faster as my field of vision is flooded with movement and action. This displays how my lived time is synchronizing itself with the lived time of others, the intersubjective time (Wyllie 2005).

The experiential feel of time is personal and depends on multiple factors, unlike objective time that is measured with common scale of hours, minutes, and seconds. Humans as embodied beings direct themselves towards potential actions and experience duration not only subjectively, but also in regards to intersubjective time, the lived time of others (Wyllie 2005). One of the most common things affecting informants' sense of time is whether they are leaving on a travel or returning home. It seems that anticipation colors the time spent on an airport and makes it more enjoyable, than when you are travelling back to 'normality' or the everyday, as the informants mention the effect of *where* one is directed towards on one's own internal mood and atmosphere towards time:

"It depends on whether you're coming or going. When you're going, it doesn't disturb me even if I spend three hours at the airport, because you know something nice is coming, you're going somewhere where you've wanted to go. But then when you're coming back home you feel kind of nostalgic and sad. It's pretty rare that you don't get the feeling when coming back from holidays. Like you could have stayed there for a couple of more days. So then when you're coming back, the time at the airport irritates you, you just want to get home then." F, 25, Finland.

A recurring theme is how longer transfers affect the experienced sense of time. When one has a shorter wait, time goes by faster and is more easily managed. When the waiting time stretches to multiple hours, a feeling of numbing inertia is common. Time seems to stand still, one loses track of time, and plans on how to speed up the wait by occupying oneself with different tasks are common:

"For example last night I had to spend the whole night at the airport, because my plane left at 7.30 in the morning. And I waited for five hours at the airport. It was not the first time but every time you do that, it's rough. You have to

wait, and you do something that you think takes an hour and then it's twenty minutes. Time is really slow." M, 28, Mexican.

"Airports can be very stressful, if you're in a hurry and for example transferring from plane to plane. But then again also the times when you have to wait really long tend to be grinding.(…)Especially if you're tired, you can't concentrate on anything, like reading or working so it's just kind of numbing." M, 28, Finnish.

One's own orientation towards time affects the experienced duration of lived time - if there's a rush to catch the plane, time seems to fly in an accelerated manner, and when there's a long transfer, one feels paralyzed by the wait. These implications of a "numbing wait" and attempts to chop the wait to smaller pieces by engaging in tasks portray not only the subjectivity of lived time (Wyllie 2005), but the human tendency to be directed towards a goal (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008) and to reach actualization, to redeem the potential the situation offers (Heidegger 1927/2002). In an airport, passengers direct their intentionality towards an intentional object, the departure or the destination. If this is delayed, the options in their horizon seem to narrow themselves down, as the goal of directed intentionality moves further in the open horizon. In an airport, that is a closed environment where moving backwards in the service path is often impossible, efforts to leap towards future events is natural. This is the essence of lived time, which in itself has no content; rather lived time is the distance, the duration of the leaps between fulfilled potential, between one experience and another (Wyllie 2005).

Vacant time at the airport is spent differently: some see it as a refreshing possibility to do some self-pampering by e.g. shopping or wandering around in the shops. Many of the informants describe airport as a space where one is free from the limitations of the everyday life, and where freedom to do impulsive purchases is granted by the notion of being at an airport, in transit. Most of those describing small-scale shopping in airports are women, who often check the cosmetics departments in Tax Free shops and indulge themselves with smaller purchases that mark the trip as begun. Although many state a lack of an actual need to buy anything, wondering around shops and looking at different products, buying magazines and books, and small snacks for the plane is mentioned as almost routine-like behavior:

"I usually always go to at least one of the Tax Free's. That's a part of my route. I usually check out the Chloé's and the Chanel's. I don't really even need anything, I'm just looking. You come here and spray some perfumes around a

bit so when you go to the plane you smell nice (laughs). Usually when I come here I'm in a hurry so I don't have that much time, but almost always come here and check out the goods." F, 28, Finnish.
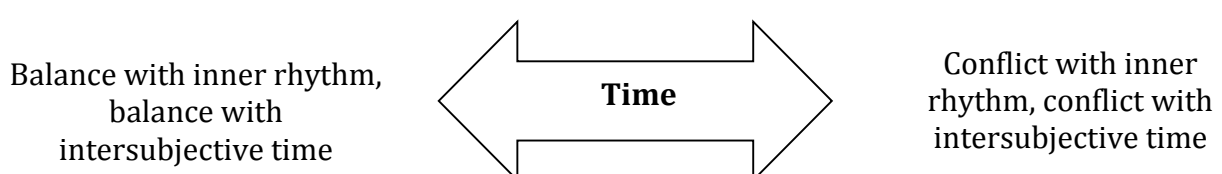
Whereas many travelling for holiday feel pleasure in engaging in service encounters that bring them immediate joy and release them from the pressures of normal life, business travelers commonly mention the feeling of time being wasted. For them, time at the airport is not strictly working time, but neither personal time. They attempt to make the best use of it, but face practical limitations and difficulties in orientating themselves towards efficient work of full weight. Almost all describe flying for work as a necessary evil that makes time management difficult, although the attempt to make up for the time put on travelling is evident:

"This is a waste of time that is necessary, there's nothing else you can do. So I'm trying to use my time as good as possible. It's good for e-mailing, you have the free Wi-Fi here so you can work. Trying to compensate for the waste of time is…I think it's a problem but there's nothing else you can do.(…)." M, 58, Belgian.

Similar insights are shared by many who travel for work. One of them even describes a feeling of being held hostage at an airport, due to the enclosed nature of the space, and the temporal requirements it sets to the passengers; the need to reserve time for all of the phases in the service path and the need to be there early because of the changing conditions. This conditioning to the socially shared thought of the value of time (Urry 1995, 5) is evident in the descriptions of time being wasted, and in the expressed frustration when the potential of its use is limited.

 Despite the fact that some passengers enjoy being at the airport and others don't, the feeling shared amongst all is an embodied drive towards the future, whether it be leaving to a destination or coming back home:

"It's this restlessness, you would like to move and do something but then you just have to sit still. Maybe because you're going somewhere, your mind is already there, so the idea of having to sit and wait feels boring. You would like to do something else than what is possible in that moment." F, 31, Finnish.

Balance with inner rhythm, balance with intersubjective time ⟨⟩ **Time** ⟨⟩ Conflict with inner rhythm, conflict with intersubjective time

Therefore, time as a dimension is enabling and facilitating a positive experience when it is experienced as a natural and harmonious component, that is, when a natural strive towards an aligned rhythm with oneself and others can be actualized. Time becomes a constraint and a hinder to an experience when it is in conflict with one's own internal ambiance and the surrounding environment. This is elaborated on e.g. situations of rush and hurry and situations where one is required to wait for a long time. Time is especially constraining experiential dimension when it clashes with internal directedness and fulfillment of goals: descriptions of wasted time are common especially with business travelers who often find it difficult to reach their full capacity of fulfilling tasks in situations of wait.

4.3. Airport space

Helsinki Airport is a opens up to a longish space after the security check, its newest addition being the side for flights to and from Non-Schengen area. Terminal 1, which used to be designated for domestic flights only, is smaller and hallway like space, with a small area for a few shops, kiosks and shops, otherwise filled with departure gates. Terminal 1 and 2 are separated by a long corridor with gates and a few pit stop cafes. Terminal 2 hosts the majority of services for passengers in the European flights' side, containing a boulevard-like "shopping street" that leads to a large hall with aviation themed glass-structure hanging from its' high ceiling. After the large, airy, hall-like space is the entering point for non-Schengen side with immigration control. The non-Schengen side is a large addition to the growing airport. It has a distinct feel to it; the halls are more spacious and the hallways larger, as if designed to host large quantities of passengers from and to outside of the European Union.

Airport architecture distinctively contains a feature of control (Adey 2008): as the spaces are designed to hold in vast masses of passengers, they, with subtle solutions, guide passengers through a somewhat predefined route. The spaces naturally grant conventional affordances: moving from one space to another through corridors; looking at how the airport infrastructure is maneuvered through the large, glass-covered windows; sitting at areas defined by rows of benches bolted to the floor. However, Helsinki airport has also tried to enrich the experience by

introducing alternative spaces, such as a Book Swap nook, where passengers can exchange books with others, free of charge; a space focusing on Finnish design in an un-used departure gate; and by installing pieces of art throughout the airport.

4.3.1. Space

Although airport architecture tends to be neutral and uniform, the physical environment is colored by the experiencing subjects' internal ambiance, emotions and moods, thus influencing and dynamically shaping how being in the physical environment is experienced.

"I think airports are in a way…kind of impersonal. I mean somehow the basic idea is the same in every airport. I think this is kind of like the one in Paris and does not differ so much from the airport in Frankfurt either, except they have the nice lounge with cool sofas. But again that's not personal either; I think these are all pretty much the same. I mean neutral buildings. The colors are so neutral, with all of them. I mean just like greys, white, they probably even have the same floors in every airport I've ever been to. Pretty much the same." F, 20, Finnish.

Airport as an environment for experiences and events, that is the physical surroundings, seems to be neutral in most views. Although the experiences that take place might be of high personal meaning or mark important events in one's life, the physical space is commonly described as impersonal and neutral. Notable on the elaborations on the environment is the 'sameness' of it compared to its equivalents elsewhere. People commonly describe many airports containing the same functions and features, and representing similar architectural style, in e.g. similar kinds of material choices in the interior design. Floors are of hard material, architectural lines are sleek and clean cut, and the color scheme of the spaces is muted. These descriptions comply with previous insights from for example Augé (1995) and Adey (2008), who define airports as rather abstract venues that lack a clear sense of place, and that as environments do not arouse excitement through their physical features.

"I see airport space as quite sterile. It's really clean, and sterile. It's not tacky but neither stylish. I see this place as pleasant but on the same time as nothing at all. In my opinion this is just a huge blank, the whole airport. When you come here in the middle of the night it's just a big, white thing. (…) People make this place, it's designed to have a lot of people in it. When it's empty, it's quite horrible" F, 28, Finnish.

The sense of placelessness and neutrality stemming from the environment is especially evident in the elaboration of the last informant, where she "sees this place as pleasant but at the same time as nothing at all". The physical surroundings in an airport do not irritate, but neither spur excitement. Constant presence of the social dimension is also evident, as the space is, according to the informant, brought to life by people. Airport is not a place where one comes for the place itself, but rather part of a process, a throughway to something:

This is not a place you come on for itself, you're always passing through it. It's kind of…like here we go, this is a part of something, either a beginning or an end. But it's not a place where you come and lounge, like you would do in a shopping mall." F, 25, Finnish.

The experiences of the airport space are labeled by impermanence and transition, as it is a space between a beginning and an end. The mind is already travelling to the final destination, as the body is still lounging around in departure terminals, looking to keep itself occupied during the wait. In a way, this is what airport architecture is designed to do as well: linear advancement in an airport process is encouraged by dividing the service path to different stages, and people are guided in the space with the help of physical objects, such as corridors and hallways, walls, seating arrangements and spatial design, which divide a large space into smaller units (Adey 2008).

The elaborations of the informants however reveal that a neutral physical space is often colored through one's internal emotions and moods (see for example Ratcliffe 2008 for existential feelings). Therefore, airport as a place of experiences could be divided to physical and psychic space. As elaborated earlier in these results, people attach strong emotions like joy, excitement, sadness and longing to airport, not to the physical environment, but to what airport as a space represents through how it is experienced. For many, airports are gateways to new adventures or to homecoming, which tends to color their experiences of the place. The emotions also stay in one's memory when later reminiscing on previous experiences, as they influence the way an environment or a space feels:

"When I left to my exchange for a year there were a lot of tears and wistfulness and that kinds of things. And now that I've come back from time to time, it's joy. So in that sense there are a lot of strong emotions present for me

here. Joy and sadness, and missing someone. It's not the airport itself but I attach them to the airport. These are the kinds of things I'll always remember." M, 26, Finnish.

Personal emotions
coloring the space

Space

Neutral space as exposure
to meaninglessness
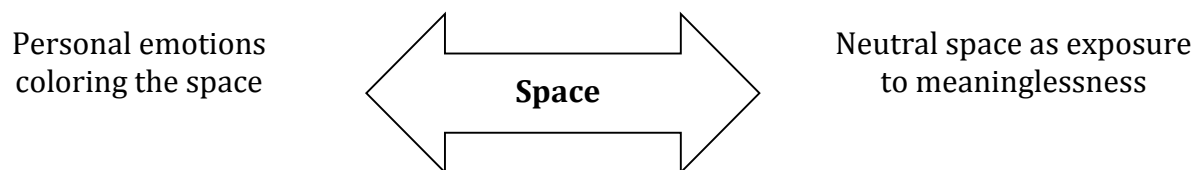
The experiential dimension of space in an airport is interesting for its presence throughout the experience, but also for its fluctuating nature. The neutrality strongly attached to the airport space acts as an enabling and a constraining element. The airport space and its perceived neutrality on one hand provides an 'unbiased' platform for subjective emotions and moods, and in this way affords the dynamic shaping of one's experience through emotions such as enthusiasm, joy, sadness and homesickness and through previous experiences and memories. On the other hand, the neutrality also constrains a positive experience by subjecting the space to be seen as a mere throughway without a personality, and thus making it difficult to describe the characteristics of the space or how the space feels, or to gain strong positive sensations of the space.

4.3.2. Experienced agency

Even a neutral environment can stimulate and grant atypical affordances. All of the affordances the environment stimulates are however secondary compared to departing the plane.

An environment signals different possibilities and thus grants affordances to its users. Perceived affordances are dynamic; an environment hosts diverse opportunities to users depending on the situation and user at hand. An environment and its users engage in an interactive dialogue, where social context affects the perceived affordances in addition to the physical objects and structures. Individuals choose which affordances are redeemed and acted upon. (Gibson 1979.)

Commonly, passengers perceive the airport space as granting the affordances readily injected to it by design, e.g. in different services. People are well aware of the different kinds of restaurants

and cafés, opportunities for shopping, and lounges. Most of them also seem genuinely happy with the service structure, although commenting on its homogeneity with other airports' service range. A common activity before entering the plane is to wonder around and look at things, whether they are products displayed on shop windows, other passengers, or departing and landing planes.

The respondents generally feel happy about how different possibilities for action are expressed in the space, with electronic displays and clear sign-system. Personal agency is mostly played out when redeeming the affordances that airport as a place provides in the spaces after the security checks. After a temporary compliance to asserted authority and control and acceptance of the loss of agency, the departure terminals build the sense of agency back up with their service selection.

Although both the airport architecture and the social dynamics and rules govern the airport space by creating e.g. the aforementioned, fairly conventional affordances its users perceive with a shared consensus, informant elaborations display that alternative, inventive possibilities arise from the surroundings as well. Although in most cases these perceived possibilities are only played out in one's imagination and not redeemed in reality, as they might clash with the intersubjectively shared mindset of what the space is for (Gibson 1979), they indicate that even a fairly neutral and conservative environment can stimulate ideas and inspiration to alternative usage. Despite this excerpt from a young informant being rather unconventional, it portrays how the neutral airport space is transformed in one's mind:

"I was thinking, if I had a skateboard with me, there would be a lot of space to go crazy with. And then I looked at this scooter that was left unlock, that I could take that and ride around, not that I would really do that, but in my mind I thought that would be really cool!." M, 31, Finnish.

This displays how subjective mindset and background is mirrored to the affordances a physical space grants.

Nevertheless, all activities and affordances are of secondary value compared to actualizing the ultimate goal; getting on the plane and leaving for the destination. Attention is constantly

directed to the departure gates and speakers giving notice to passengers. Many describe the airport as a venue hosting possibilities for different types of actions, but also mention that the considerations of redeeming the affordances are always affected by the end goal of boarding the plane.

| Redeeming personal agency | ⟵ **Experienced agency** ⟶ | Omnipresence of an overpowering goal |

Airport space grants its users varying levels of experienced agency. Different sequential stages necessary to the airport service path create a sense of fluctuating agency: when going through the security check, personal agency is weaker due to the strict regulation and control of the situation. After passing through to the departure terminal side, the sense of agency is gradually redeemed, and enacted often through the conventionally perceived affordances, such as by utilizing the service selection (restaurants, cafes, shopping) available. As the human mind tends to be inventive, unconventional affordances rise from the physical environment as well – however, they are rarely realized due to the social constraints, such as norms and rules related to the space. However colorful one sees the possibilities the environment offers, they are always overpowered by the overruling, superior goal of leaving the airport and boarding the plane. This is also somewhat disturbing the extents to which the perceived affordances are acted upon, as many choose to leave possibilities unutilized due to the worry of failing to actualize the ultimate objective.

4.4. The experiential dimensions in establishing a sense of place

The experiential dimensions I have defined in the previous section are thus to be concluded as competence; regulation and control; people; time; space; and experienced agency. These dimensions display the elements through which the experience in an airport service environment is, according to my study, formed through dynamic negotiation between the enabling and constraining constructs. The experiential dimensions encompass fluctuation within them: on one

hand phenomena inside them act as enablers for and on the other hand constraining the formation of a positive experience. All of the dimensions contain the basic elements of a lived experience: intentionality and directedness (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008) towards redeeming potential of the affordances granted by the environment (Gibson 1979), intersubjective resonance and strive towards balance with others, and an embodied way of being and participating to the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962) as an inherently temporal being (Heidegger 1927/2002; Wyllie 2005). The dimensions are not sequential, but all present throughout the experience, and in interaction with each other. These needs and the manner of facing the world are brought about by our embodied existence and constant interaction with the surrounding environment (Heidegger 1927/2002).

The experienced positive, enabling sensations in the dimensions make things possible in a flowing manner: embodied practices that help with coping with an experience that is formed of several, consequential and controlled actions in the experiential path comprising of multiple service touchpoints can be carried out; regulatory system enables the environment to be experienced as safe and secure; other people are experienced as co-creating the unique ambiance of an airport and adjusting to the aspired intersubjective harmony and resonance of social and physical behavior; time is experienced in rhythm with one's internal orientation; and the space enables the actualization of positive experiences by allowing one to undergo personal emotions and to claim experienced agency on the affordances perceived.

The experienced constraints hinder the subjective directedness and flow and affect the natural strive towards moving forward: lack of competence may represent itself as feelings of helplessness and being lost; regulation may weaken experienced agency and result in oppressive sense of patronage; other people may block the personal directedness in the chain of experiences by causing social clashes or physical blocks; the experienced time may be moving in a too accelerated or too dragging manner compared to one's internal orientation and rhythm; and the space may seem as too neutral and impersonal to afford the actualization of personal agency and result in feelings of meaninglessness.

An individual thus acts as an active being in-the-world, proactively perceiving and seizing the opportunities it grants, but on the other hand is also influenced by the world and its displayed

opportunities. According to Heidegger (1927/2002) this is a basic principle of being-in-the-world: people are directed beings with inner potential, and constantly attuned to and in interaction with the surrounding world. The results of this research suggest that a positive experience in an airport is possible when the environment supports this directedness and temporality, and thus grants possibilities and supports redeeming those opportunities through one's own potential. An experience is perceived negatively when this interaction with the environment is blocked for some parts. The embodied, pre-reflective and pre-cognitive experience of an airport is positive if the environment (the physical-material environment; the social, embodied, dialogically created environment; and the interaction of these two) supports the orientation to actualize goals and redeem opportunities, sustaining a suitable experiential pace for an individual.

The enabling and constraining factors in the experiential dimensions affect the formation of the airport experience, and thus the formation of the sense of place of the airport. This experience forms dynamically in the interaction of three interwoven factors: passengers as individual experience constructors with presuppositions, skills and personalities, the material reality of the environment, and the social environment created by interaction of people are all linked to establishing a sense of place. This complies with previous theorizations on how sense of place is simultaneously consumed and constructed forward (e.g. Cresswell 1996; Seamon 2011; Läpple 1996; Rakic & Chambers 2012). The results display in practice the triadic nature of a place (Seamon 2011; Läpple 1991; Cresswell 1996): the physical-material airport environment, the social environment of interaction between oneself and others, and the signature-like features and norms of an airport, such as the regulatory system, are all central themes in the findings of this research, that are inherently the physical and the symbolic dimensions of a place (Therkelsen et al. 2010).

As mentioned, Kavaratzis & Hatch (2013) talk about place culture as the internal power in identity conversations of a place in their identity-based place branding model. Internal culture is seen as expressing identity in lived experience and reflecting shared meanings and conventions back to it as raw material. They define place culture as the way of life in a place, asserting that culture is something people create and sustain. However, they call for a clearer, more empirically justified elaboration on place culture and how it is lived (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013). The results of this study in certain measures display this lived culture and its creation in the discussion and

negotiation between the sense of place, material environment, rules and regulations, and social conventions, norms and symbols (Läpple 1991).

5. Discussion

The first research problem (how sense of place is established in the airport) was answered in the last subchapter of the findings section. It was concluded that sense of place is being negotiated in the triadic system of place through its specific and personal, experiential dimensions that in the airport were specified to be competence, regulation and control, people, time, space, and experienced agency. These experiential dimensions were seen to incorporate enabling and constraining features that guide the formation of the sense of place in an airport. This chapter discusses the second research problem, and attempts to formulate an answer to *RP II: what are the conditions for successful place branding in the airport*, also shedding light on the practical implications this has. This chapter also contributes to theory development in place branding, and discusses previous literature on airports as places of meaninglessness (e.g. Augé 1995) with points of criticism based on the findings.

The conditions for successful place branding

In practice, the conditions for successful place branding in an airport deal with understanding the interlinked structure of the airport as a combination of physical environment, social environment and different passenger groups with specific features and traits. Thinking of one the most important stakeholder groups of an airport, the passengers, the environment should enable smoothness of the experience and enable it to proceed in a flowing manner. This means that effort needs to be put in optimizing the relationship between the characteristics of being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1927/2002) and the place: the airport environment should support one's internal goal-orientation and directedness and provide opportunities for its users in a suitable experiential pace. In this sense, the airport should be viewed as a field of affordances (Gibson 1979) that grants possibilities to redeem positive experiences. A successful airport experience transfers a passenger forward smoothly in the chain of events, enables one to experience a sense of belonging and gain positive impressions, strengthens and supports internal strive towards redeeming potential, and does this in a way that supports the notion of movement forward in a desired pace.

Thus, carefully thought out design solutions for space and service architecture can help to create a richer environment, where the existence of individuals and groups or masses of people are thought in relation to the material and social space, and for example with regards to situations with challenging conditions (e.g. crowding, queues, conflicts, delays, intensive service touchpoints). When dealing with services and service paths in an airport comprehensively, the experiential aspects should be taken as a starting point. This requires changing one's viewpoint closer to the actual lived and embodied level of experience, because many factors dealing with for instance power relations between actors, or the relationship between individuals and groups may be left unnoticed in reflection because of their 'obvious' nature.

This research has portrayed how, in the lived grassroots level, experience in a place "feeds" the sense of place, affecting how a place is experienced, what it is identified as and how it is identified to. Successful place branding in an airport starts from the embodied, lived experience because as a place it is mostly a functional throughway. By accessing the pre-reflective level of experience and understanding how impressions and conceptions on that level come about, we access the level that affects the cognitive meanings reflected on a place. Therefore, when studying place branding, one should pay attention not only to the level of reflected meanings, but understand that the roots of those reflected meanings are in lived experiences and encounters, and in the sensations and impressions in those encounters that inform the cognition and reflection of a place and in place.

A successful airport experience enhances the positive sense of place in an airport. This has affects not only as more positive passengers at the point of experience (impacting one of the contributing factors, social environment) but also later as a positive image, feedback and for example word-of-mouth from consumer to consumer. This portrays in practice the roles of residents in place branding, described by Braun et al. 2013 (*residents as integrated part of a place brand*, *residents as ambassadors* and *residents as citizens),* although one must keep in mind other 'native' groups of the airport environment, such as airport personnel as well. Nevertheless, all of the different roles of residents can be applied to the roles passengers play in an airport environment: the passengers create the ambiance of the airport by participating in the creation of shared experience, they spread word of their experiences to other potential passengers, nowadays likely both online and offline, and they on their part use power in determining how

the structure of the airport's service selection develops. These roles in participation and communication also match the dialogic relationship between culture, identity and image Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) describe. Airport consumers create the culture of the place in the experiences and encounters on the surface of lived experience, which inherently affects the forming sense of place. On one side, the sense of place expresses shared meanings but also reflects meanings back to the culture, as for instance the highly regulatory characteristics of an airport asserts social norms to the user of the place. On the other side the sense of place is transferring impressions outwards through e.g. word-of-mouth, but external images are also mirrored inwards because of e.g. aeromobility's globally relevant and political nature. Seeing airport as a place that is a part of a wider place experience for e.g. tourists and visitors, positive first and last encounters with the metropolitan area and Finland through the airport experience can on their behalf also affect the forming wider and more comprehensive place experience, and thus a wider place brand experience.

On co-creative place branding

In relation to co-creative place branding literature and theoretical advancements, this research displays how the co-creation of a sense of place takes place in the place ecosystem (Warnaby 2009) on the level of lived experience of consumers and other stakeholder groups and displays in practice how value propositions' realized value-in-use is determined phenomenologically. In addition, this study provides empiric proof on how the construction of a place brand is reflected from the grassroot level upwards, instead of the dominating top-down approach (Aitken & Campelo 2011; Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013). The main focus has been on attempting to reach deeper understanding on the lived experience in the everyday interface that precedes and informs the deeper meanings and reflections on a place. This research has in practice strengthened the idea of places as venues for negotiation of power relations and regulations, politics, differing interests, groups, individuals, corporations, and institutions, which supports the notion of place as an ecosystem where lived experiences and changing roles create a multilogue driving the place (Warnaby 2009) and the iteration of its sense of place and identity (Kalandides 2011; Aitken & Campelo 2011; Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013) forward.

Warnaby's (2009) idea of bringing notions from service-dominant logic's foundational premises into place branding was previously mentioned in this thesis as one of the most interesting insights on recent place branding literature. The suggestion of seeing places as ecosystems (Warnaby 2009) combining different dimensions (the physical environment and the environment created socially) (Therkelsen et al. 2010; Warnaby & Medway 2013) are supported by my observations from a "mini-place ecosystem", the airport. Thought through this logic, places at a larger scale (cities, areas, nations) are logically constructed of multiple subsystems residing in them: e.g. a city often has districts and neighborhoods with differing profiles in terms of demographics, service systems, and cultural characteristics. Similarly, places hosting complex systems and service structures such as an airport can be seen as small ecosystems of their own comprising of the physical and the psychical dimensions of place (Therkelsen et al. 2010; Warnaby & Medway 2013). The physical and the psychical levels can be thought of as the operant and operand resources a place product entails: operand resources lying in the physical environment and operant resources situated in the psychical level, co-created by individuals and groups residing in the place.

In an airport the co-creative resource integration and value creation (Warnaby 2009) displays itself in the service encounters, as well as in the defined period of time the space is occupied for. This discussion has already settled that a positive experience is the possibility to actualize one's being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1927/2002). As displayed, this takes place through the interplay of the physical environment and resources a place has to offer, and the human interaction it encourages and hosts. Therefore, a positive airport experience of an individual is an excellent example of value co-creation in an ecosystem hosting service systems and networks (Warnaby 2009), as it requires active participation both from the service systems and from the individuals, and links together multiple subsystems and functionalities striving towards a shared goal. Thus, airport as a place in practice shows how a place brand is "tied to its ecosystem, both human and natural, and is dependent on the relationships between people, communities, place and experience" (Aitken & Campelo 2011, 917).

On the particularities of airports as places of experience

Previous literature on airports and airport experiences deal with airports as a venue of meaninglessness and as non-spaces (Augé 1995). Augé is known for his work on non-spaces and on studying supermodernity, the era of the new modern that is reflected by speeding simultaneity of events such as exceeding communication and constant flood of information. Augé (1995) posits that the accessibility of vast amounts of information is contracting the world to a smaller unit and thus opening new social horizons, but at the same time a notion of 'watching the world go by' and being a bystander. Augé (1995) argues that this new modern exposes individuals to, in growing amount, draw back from social interaction and rather gravitate towards solitude, non-places mediating communication through instructions and texts on screens and devices rather than interpersonally.

Although Augé's insights have been criticized for being too strict on declaring certain places as venues of solitude and meaninglessness, by for example neglecting employees experience (see Merriman 2005), the elaboration on non-places still provides an interesting exploration to places of weak identity by depicting a typical journey of an air traveler in a place of "nowhereness". However, one can claim that places like airports also host social structure and interaction between actors, for example in the complex systems through which passengers are guided in places of transit. As Merriman (2005) argues, places with weak identity are a sort of a combination of place and placelessness, the physical environment perhaps reinforcing the notion of neutrality but the social dimension of the place nevertheless acting as a source of emotions and feelings, and therefore meanings.

Agreeing with the insights of Merriman (2005), my findings (although complying with Augé's autobiographic work for some parts such as by recognizing the neutrality of the airport space, as well as the prevalence of machine-mediated communication) display that the elaborations of individuals' experiences on airports do not one-sidedly converge with the notion of airports as venues of solitude and meaninglessness.

First, although airport is largely controlled by necessary checkpoints that are streamlined and thus do not host straightforward, colorful interaction between the personnel and the passengers, nor passenger-to-passenger interaction, it is nevertheless a venue of embodied interaction (e.g. Merleau-Ponty 1962; Gallagher & Zahavi 2008; Joy & Sherry 2003). Although one would go about

the airport with no words exchanged, communication through bodies is still present. Evident in the experiential dimensions is how personnel and other people collaboratively create the ambiance of the airport: informants note that the space feels different depending on the amount of people present, observations are made on different traveler groups and their style of behavior and movement, and elaborations stem from the perceived social rules and conventions that regulate acceptable behavior. Therefore, opposing Augé (1995), this research acknowledges the evident effect of the social nature of embodied presence in an airport environment.

Second, Augé (1995) comments on the seeming atmosphere of 'nowhereness' of an airport, and suggests that this neutrality attached creates a sense of meaninglessness. Although my findings comply with the sensed neutrality of an airport environment and in some accounts to the meaninglessness (mostly in business travelers accounts of airport experience), they also display how neutral space can be colored with personal meanings and feelings attached to a place. The findings suggest that although a neutral environment itself might predominantly host functional and utilitarian means to an end, it is often colored by our personal histories and future horizons (see e.g. Gallagher & Zahavi 2008; Pernecky & Jamal 2010 on historicity; Heidegger 1927 on the temporal nature of being). This is displayed in the findings by multiple elaborations of the airport as an exciting place, as a place hosting positive feelings because of an anticipated future, as well as as a place hosting memories that bring feelings from the past to mind and create meaning to the place. I also claim that airport is rarely a venue for total meaninglessness: even in accounts stressing the functional nature of and lack of attachment to the airport, pre-reflective, embodied emotions inspire reflection and meaning making on the place – be it simply described a waste of time. Opposing the argument on meaninglessness, airport could actually be seen to host quite a strong genius loci, that is, "spirit of a place" (Seamon 2011), as its function is clearly established and gives it a distinct meaning.

This is an important observation of the everyday activities and experiences that at first glance lack a strong emotional connection or deeper meaning, but that nevertheless function as necessary parts of larger processes. Majority of the time we spend in our daily lives is not focused around special, extraordinary experiences, rather a lot of our time today is occupied by faceless activities, often facilitated by machines and occurring "between" places (as Merriman 2005 elaborates on Augé's claims of non-places); filling our cars with gas on our way home, stopping

by on an ATM to draw cash, commuting to our jobs or waiting at an airport for our flights to leave. It is worth noticing that these experiences nevertheless take place in physical environments and ecosystems of different scales that serve as platforms for service structure and design, social interaction and affordance-agency negotiations. By occupying the place of experience and living through the experiences with our bodies as the main facilitators, even environments of low-involvement or meaning affect our cognition through the pre-reflective sensations that arise through are bodily being, complying with the centrality and ever-present nature of places in human experience (Relph 1976, 43).

6. Conclusion, limitations and future research

This thesis has attempted to answer the foundational research questions of how sense of place in the airport is established, and what are the conditions for place branding in the airport. The findings display that sense of place is created in the level of lived experience, in the multidimensional system of a place (the material surroundings, the people and social conventions in the place and the spirit of the place). The sense of place in an airport is established in the negotiation of the experiential dimensions: competence, regulation and control, people, time, space and experienced agency. A positive sense of place on a pre-reflective level can be established when the environment supports the nature of human being-in-the-world, as a directed, temporal and inherently embodied agent.

The conditions of successful place branding deal with supporting these features of positive experience by optimizing the multiple goals of a place ecosystem to all support the nature of being, by understanding the airport as a field of affordances that should maximize the possibility to redeem positive experiences. In practice, this research thus displays the co-creative nature of the place ecosystem an airport hosts, showing how consumers co-creatively participate in the value creation and determine the actualized value-in-use phenomenologically in the surface of lived experience.

The recognized limitations of this study deal with the sample of informants and the consequences of methodological and philosophical choices. First, the sample is random, and the durations of the interviews are varying. Further, the sample of informants is not balanced, in that it stresses Finnish respondents. These limitations are however quite natural, as the interviews were conducted on an ad hoc-basis on a Finnish airport. Second, studying embodied experience and the pre-reflective level of experience preceding cognitive meaning making is difficult, and requires sensitivity in data analysis. I have attempted to sort my data with sensitivity towards signals of experience as a bodily lived phenomenon, and justify my findings in the analysis in as clear manner as possible.

In terms of future research in place branding, any empiric studies attempting to discover what co-creative place branding in lived experience in practice is, and how it is experienced would be

useful in clarifying the theoretical basis. It would also be useful to pay more attention to the lived experience in a place when further developing co-creative place branding theory, by for instance utilizing hermeneutic phenomenology as informing the philosophical underpinnings and methodological choices.

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